



The Eagle

Advent/Christmas 2023

Dear Associates, Oblates and Friends,



Sr. Elizabeth

After a lovely fall, winter is just around the corner. Most of the leaves have fallen, including the brilliant yellow “fan-shaped” leaves of the Ginkgo tree in front of the lobby at the convent.

A week ago I was meditating in the Guest House Courtyard, appreciating the colours of the leaves and blossoms that

were dying. It had been a difficult week but I found myself focusing on the word “hope”, knowing that new life was hidden under the carpet of leaves and would appear again next spring.

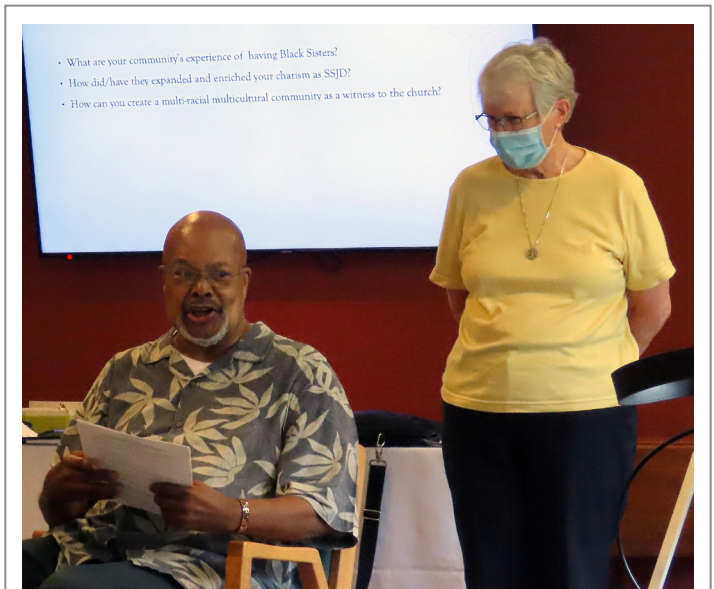
In August we had our Annual General Chapter. We began each day with the Holy Eucharist before starting the business of the day, stopped for the noon office at 12:15 and ended with Evening Prayer so our days were wrapped in prayer. We began by hearing reports by the Reverend Mother, reports on those in formation and reports about each of our ministries: Associates, Oblates, Companions, Guest House, St. John’s Rehab and of course the Capital Campaign Committee chaired by Archbishop Fred Hiltz and Sr. Constance Joanna. We are so grateful for the help of each member of that committee. As of November we have raised a little over \$4.3 million. We have agreed that we need \$4.8 before we can begin construction so we hope to raise another \$500,000 by the beginning of February.

We had four major topics at our Chapter. One of them was our chemical footprint. Our goal is to reduce, replace or remove 20% of the hazardous chemicals we use over a period of three years. We heard an excellent presentation from two sisters. Part of our Baptismal Covenant is to safeguard the integrity of God’s creation and respect, sustain and renew the life of the earth. We were all encouraged to become “label readers” and learn to recognize

the pictograms on all products containing harmful chemicals or causing health hazards. One of our Oblates on residential time in October was given the task of listing products with hazardous chemicals in our laundry room and housekeeping cupboard. I would encourage each of you to also become aware of products in your homes that contain harmful chemicals or cause health hazards.

Another major topic was Anti-bias/Anti-racism training led by Br. Reg of the Order of the Holy Cross who spent three days with us giving us a workshop each day and showing a video in the evening. He provided us with many handouts, a list of videos that we can watch during the year, and a display of books. Br. Reg is a dynamic speaker and available to do similar training for parishes in the Diocese of Toronto.

Our training was interrupted by the funeral of Archbishop Michael Peers who had been a much-loved friend of the community for many years along with his wife Dorothy. Several of us attended the funeral at St. James’ Cathedral and were so glad we could be there.



Br. Reg and Sr. Elizabeth

As always, our Chapter was followed by our Long Retreat. This year we were delighted to have Bp. Mary Irwin-Gibson, bishop of the Diocese of

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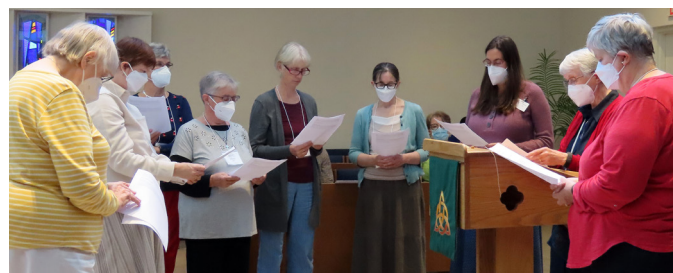
Montreal, as our retreat leader. She was so warm and open in sharing from her own personal experience, especially around the theme of healing.

In mid-September Sr. Brenda visited the Diocese of Caledonia where she was the keynote speaker at their synod. She also preached at the cathedral in Prince Rupert on September 17th.

Meanwhile we were welcoming six of the 2023-2024 Companions to the Convent for an Orientation weekend so that they could get to know one another before going online, experience the life and prayer of the convent, and meet individual sisters. Two of the Companions were unable to be here in person, so they joined us online. Some of



Bp. Mary Irwin-Gibson



Companions at their orientation weekend at the convent

was spent in school, college or university either as a student or teacher. We have had several groups and many individuals staying in the Guest House and requests for spiritual direction or for a sister to preach or lead retreats. Sr. Constance Joanna returned to Trinity College to teach a course on Anglican Spirituality.

On the negative side, Sr. Brenda went to Sunnysbrook Health Sciences Centre for what she thought would be minor surgery and discovered she needed a triple by-pass. Her surgery went well and four days later she was sent to St. John's Rehab, next door to the convent, for rehabilitation. Sr. Amy Joy has asked for a year's leave of



Sr. Brenda, Bishop David Lehmann and Scott Brubacher

the highlights were the sessions on Art as Prayer, walking the labyrinth and a visit to the Marc Chagall exhibit at Wycliffe College where Svetlana Panich shared some of her knowledge and enthusiasm for the artwork of Marc Chagall. It was a great beginning to the 2023/2024 Companions program.

Later in September we had a different kind of special event, the baptism of Annie Dowling. Her mother Jess had been on the Companions Program of 21/22 so we were delighted when she asked if Annie could be baptised at the convent.

It always seems as if September is the beginning of a new year, perhaps because so much of my life



Baby Annie Dowling with her parents and godparents

absence for reasons of health and will spend that time in Hong Kong with her family. Sr. Suzanne Marie will be joining the Society of St. Margaret in Duxbury, Maine, early in the New Year. Both Sisters Amy Joy and Suzanne Marie will be sorely missed. Please pray for them.

May all of you have a Blessed Advent and Christmas.

Sr. Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas, SSJD
Reverend Mother

Guest House Report

2023 has been a very busy and fulfilling year for the Guest House as we seek to *serve Christ in all whom we meet* through our Guest House ministry. Although a few COVID-19 cases meant we had to cancel the 2022 Christmas and New Year's Eve retreats, by January 2023 we were back up and running. "Running" is the operative word. We have been busy.



Susan Murphy, Sr. Wendy Grace, Judith Milne and Jeanette Strong

We began the year with several Diocese of Toronto events as well as several other large groups from the wider community. We continue to host many Diocesan events, from both Toronto and Huron dioceses including pre- and post-ordination retreats, Diocese of Toronto Momentum and other Diocese of Toronto events which combine aspects of retreats, meetings and workshops.

In 2023 we have also been able to welcome groups from many other denominations including Baptist, Christian Reformed, United, Presbyterian, Catholic and a variety of community churches.

SSJD also hosted a number of Food for the Soul events this past year including a very popular John Bell retreat called "The Engaged Spirituality of Jesus", a Lenten Quiet Day with Sr. Elizabeth Ann, the Holy Week Retreat with Sr. Anne, a Julian of Norwich retreat led by Sr. Elizabeth and a handful of Quiet Garden Days led by various sisters including Sr. Amy Joy and Sr. Suzanne Marie.

Many guests expressed their joy at being back with the community again after the long gap created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The sisters were also delighted to return to what felt like "near normal".

This July, for the first time since 2019, we were overjoyed to offer our Women at a Crossroads program. We welcomed nine women for a three-week program "that helps women discern where God may be calling them, through engaging in classes

and discussions about Christian life and vocation, receiving personal guidance in deepening their prayer life and sharing the life of a Christian community committed to a balanced life of prayer, service, study, rest, and recreation."

Several years ago we decided as a community to reduce the number and size of groups we accommodate so we can more regularly welcome individuals who are also looking for silence, solitude, rest and refreshment. This decision has worked well, however, our hospitality remains affected by the continuing presence of COVID-19 in the world. We still limit seating in our Refectory which of course affects the number of guests we can welcome at any one time. We still screen guests for COVID-19 when they arrive, and ask guests and sisters to use hand sanitizer in the Refectory and Chapel but masks are now optional for guests, staff and sisters.

We are planning to close the Guest House for renovations as of January 1, 2024. Looking ahead to the end of 2023 we will offer our usual Advent Quiet Day on Saturday, December 2, 2023, as well as our regular Christmas and New Year's Eve retreats. Keep checking our website for more information about these.

Guests often comment admirably on how well everything seems to work together during their time with us. We receive compliments on the food, the cleanliness, the comfort and the quiet. These remarks make me think of the image of a swan gliding serenely along the surface of the water while paddling furiously beneath the surface. The Guest House is supported by many different people in many different roles. We are grateful for the assistance of staff in Housekeeping, the Kitchen and Refectory, Maintenance, and Administration. We are also grateful for the prayerful and practical support we receive from so many people including many volunteers.

Currently the Guest House Team is Jeanette Strong, Administrative Assistant, Judith Milne, Residential Companion, Susan Murphy at Reception and Sr. Wendy Grace, Guest House Coordinator.

Sr. Wendy Grace, SSJD
Guest House Coordinator

St. John's Rehab Spiritual Care

The current St. John's Rehab spiritual care team is comprised of Sisters Louise, Florence, Kathryn, and Amy Joy and me. We are pleased that Sr. Suzanne Marie has been able to re-join us some Sundays to support the visiting and any needed bed communions for patients. I am happy to say that the COVID-19 outbreaks or any kind of respiratory outbreaks were almost zero through the late spring and summer of this year (2023). We saw more outbreaks in the autumn but we are prepared with good protocols and good understanding of living with the virus and how we will care for the patients. We have worked to clarify who we are and communicate what we do in Spiritual Care.

Sr. Florence created a useful new brochure to share with patients and families and even with staff who want to learn more. The brochure is a single paperback-sized sheet, with text on both sides, but well-spaced and easy to read with great clip art and diagrams. The brochure also brings together a sense of assurance to the Sisterhood and me in this ministry, giving us a common language and foundation to work together to provide care.

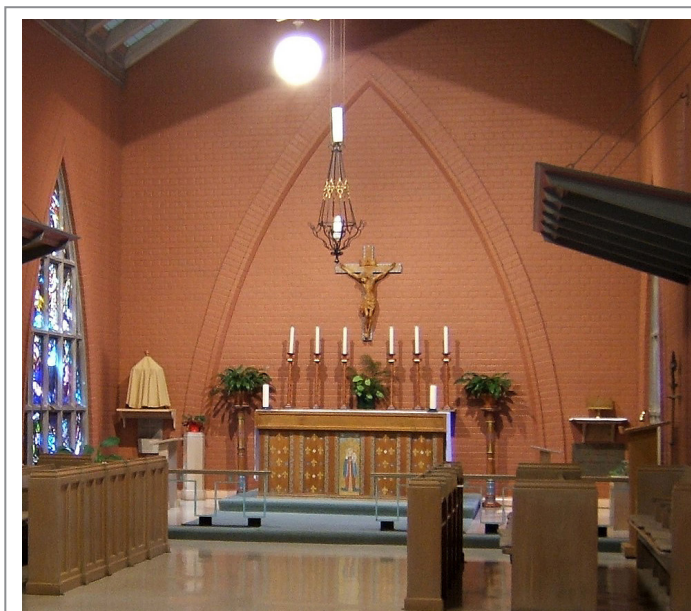
There were more encouraging changes in the hospital as of this summer. Volunteers are slowly returning. Our three library volunteers, Gwynneth, In-Ing and Geoff, staff the Bigwood Patient Library during the week. It's not only open for patients to browse in, but the volunteers take the book cart to the units for patients who are not mobile enough to go to the library. Our Angel Cupboard of therapy clothes and toiletries for patients who have none, or not enough, is ably cared for by Jane Winstanley, a long-time volunteer and SSJD associate. In September our healing Eucharist returned to our chapel on Sunday mornings to the joy and gratitude of all.

We had 10 wonderful students in SJR for the Advanced Pastoral Care course this past year, including Sr. Kathryn. Alongside visiting patients on her unit, Sr. Kathryn joined all student groups with me at SJR as well as attending a weekly class. This is vital learning, deepening her excellent natural skills in pastoral care.

One of the students, Patricia Rocco, needed a placement to fulfil the field work required for her Master of Divinity. I was pleased to invite her to remain with us till September to complete the requirements with me as her supervisor. Patricia was

a true blessing to our department, visiting patients, sharing ideas, and filling in full time on units when sisters were away. Patricia was required to develop an educational project for her placement and so for SJR she created a wonderful Art Project that provided spiritual support and sowed the seeds of spiritual growth for patients. It was also an activity that engaged patients' imaginations and alleviated boredom.

The Chapel of Our Lady and St. John remains open 24/7. This is especially important to the staff and patients, and for families and friends who visit patients. Every day, visitors from all faiths,



The chapel of Our Lady and St. John is open all day

and none, stop by for a time of quiet, solace and prayer. I change the linens, frontals, and flowers according to the liturgical seasons to remind us all that God's time is with us, accompanying and comforting us. In our entrance hall we always keep our battery candle "lit" beneath our beautiful icon. We ask patients to respect each other's space upon entering. And they do. The patients and many of the staff invite new admissions on their unit to see the Chapel, even providing tours. Life at St. John's Rehab has so many God-filled moments. I remain, as always, grateful to be here and to work with the sisters.

The Rev. Canon Joanne Davies
Priest-Chaplain
Spiritual Care Coordinator
St. John's Rehab Program
at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre

A HOME FOR THE HEART

WE'RE GETTING THERE!

The Guest House (as mentioned in Sr. Wendy Grace's article) will close for major renovations at the end of the New Year's Retreat on January 1, 2024, and will (we hope!) reopen in January 2025.

We want to stay in touch with all of you during that year. For those of you in the vicinity of the convent we hope you will join us for chapel services and meals when you are able. We will continue our "Food for the Soul" program with online quiet days and retreats. Depending on how noisy construction may be at various times we might be able to have quiet days at the convent as well.

COMING UP – FOR MYSTERY FANS

For those of you who enjoy amateur but great theatre, and especially mysteries, we will be performing "radio play" in person, based on the novel *Still Life* by popular Quebec mystery novelist and New York Times best seller, Louise Penny. We are grateful to Louise and to the script writer Eric Alexandre for permission to perform the play as a fundraiser. It will be performed on a date still to be firmed up in April. We also have permission to live-stream the play, so those of you across Canada can also purchase tickets to help renovate our "Home for the Heart." Our very own Rev. Michael Burgess (formerly artistic director of Stage in Toronto) has graciously agreed to direct the play. And Nathan Hiltz, a well-known jazz guitarist, will play. Watch for an update on our website and in our monthly "Home for the Heart" newsletter.

SSJD SUNDAYS

A number of "SSJD Sundays" have been and will be celebrated in various parishes in support of the Home for the Heart campaign: St. Matthias Church in Toronto (September), St. Paul's Cathedral London (November), St. Thomas Huron Street (January), and St. James Cathedral (February). Sisters will preach and there will

be opportunities to learn more about the beautiful renovations we have planned. Other months are open!

AND NOW – WHAT ABOUT YOU?

We cannot sign a construction contract until we have pledges and payment totaling 80% of the total project cost (\$6 million). We are at about 70% as of November (\$4.3 million). We thank you all for your generous donations, and we ask you to help us make the push to \$4.8 million before Christmas.

Once we begin construction, we will still need to raise the additional \$1.2 million to bring us to the full \$6 million we will need to complete the project. In addition to the exciting events just mentioned, and more to come, we have a great team of sisters and friends who are submitting many grant applications to foundations that support religious causes. If you cannot make a special Christmas donation

to the project, would you be willing to ask for help from your parish – with the possibility of a fundraising event in the parish? And by all means PRAY!

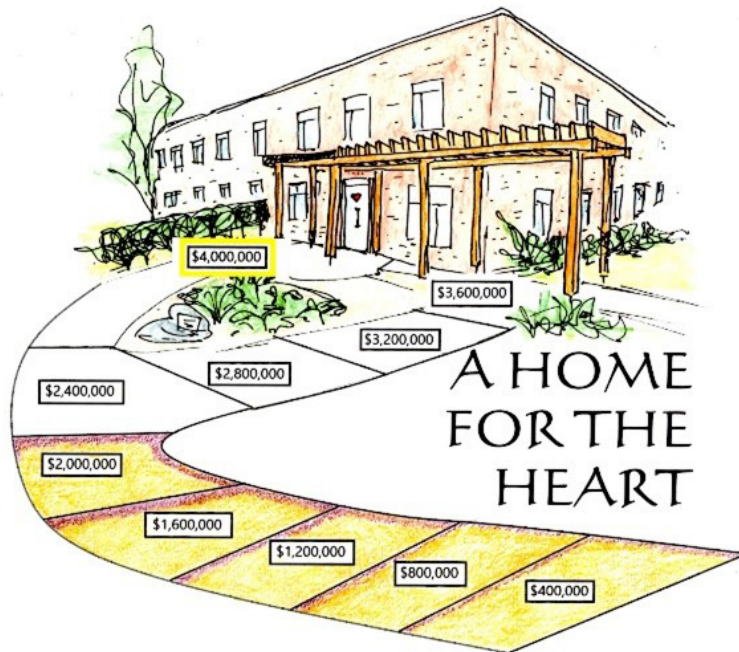
VISIT OUR WEBSITE

For more information, go to www.ssjd.ca and click on the green button on the top right.

THANK YOU

For you our donors, for our Campaign Committee (Archbishop Fred Hiltz co-chair, Archbishop Colin Johnson, Dean Peter Wall, Rev. Catherine Barley, Rev. Marilyn Newport, Rev. Connie Phillipson, Marilyn Box, Sr. Elizabeth, Sr. Kathryn, Judith Milne) and for all God's gracious gifts we give thanks from the bottom of our hearts.

**Sr. Constance Joanna, SSJD
Co-Chair**



Western and Overseas Associate News

Since the last Associate report in the Advent and Christmas *Eagle* of 2022, COVID-19 has relaxed some of its grip on our activities, and while we need to remain vigilant and careful, times to gather and enjoy activities seem to be something that we can enjoy more and more. Indeed, this time since Advent 2022 has been a time of much busyness and change within our extended family of Western and Overseas Associates! You will be able to note the special anniversaries in the year 2023 of Associates for which we give thanks and celebrate, and to note the deaths that have occurred this year.



From left, the Rev Linda Varin and the Very Rev Peter Elliott face Sr. Doreen at the service of their admission as Associates

There have been five Associate Admissions: Jacqui Parker-Snedker, Vancouver Island; Norma Horrock and Colleen Doerksen, Winnipeg and area; Rev. Linda Varin and Ven Peter Elliott, Vancouver and area. These were all very happy occasions, and we welcome these new Associates.

We welcome also five new Discerning Associates: Carmen Chung of Hong Kong, Robert Mace of Sefner, Florida, USA, Bonnie McIntosh of Selkirk, MB, Diane Persson of Victoria, BC, and Elaine Chatwin of Langley, BC. They have our supportive prayers as they discern their call to become Associates of our Community.

We continue to offer Quiet Days via Zoom during Advent and Lent and these are well attended by Associates from across the Western and Overseas areas. Our Advent Zoom Quiet Days (offered on two dates) are November 25th and December 9th. With the relaxed grip of COVID-19 there have also been Associate get-togethers in

person or over the internet, and Associates have arranged quiet days in their own areas as well.



Sr. Doreen with a group of associates in Victoria

We continue to keep in touch with Associates by newsletters, anniversary cards, email, real mail, and phone. This year I was able to visit Associates in Vancouver (and admit Linda and Peter as Associates) and Vancouver Island while on holiday, and Sr. Brenda visited Associates in Edmonton and Victoria while she was on holiday. I greatly appreciate our Oblate Dorothy Dahli's assistance and give thanks for her help with the Western and Overseas Associates.

I am always pleased to hear any news, both of your Associate activities in general and of each of you individually with your own news, especially hearing your annual letter news around the time of your Associate anniversary. We also look forward to hearing any changes in address, phone, or email. Keeping in touch is an integral part of the relationship between the Associates and the SSJD Community.

I know that several of you have lost loved ones recently, several of you have had or are amid illnesses, falls or accidents that have caused significant changes in your lifestyles. Please know that you are kept in healing prayer and love.

As you all know, we are in the midst of a Capital Campaign for needed upgrades/renovations to our Guest House and can read the latest news that is in this *Eagle* about the Guest House project. Many of you signed on to receive the Saturday reflections that I post each week, and our website also has updates of the latest news of what is happening here at the convent. While COVID-19 has relaxed its hold, this year has

had its own fill of very difficult situations across the western part of Canada. Floods, fires, heat domes and drought ... spring and summer were a hard time for many people. I hope that in between the crises, you were able to enjoy some of the more relaxed respites that summertime brings. We are well into autumn, and on the cusp of welcoming winter, and looking forward

to Advent and Christmas. Time seems to go by very quickly! This brings Advent blessings, and this Christmas may you be cradled in Love, wrapped in Peace, and born to bring Hope. A very happy and blessed Christmas.



Sr. Doreen, SSJD
Director, Western and Overseas Associates

Central and Eastern Associate News

What a difference a mask makes! On one occasion early this year I greeted a masked woman I thought was an Associate with a very warm welcome. Later in the Refectory when she took off her mask I realized she was a complete stranger! She must have thought we were a very welcoming community indeed. In mid-May we removed the mask mandate at the Convent and we are delighted to be able to see smiles again.



Sr. Brenda, Patricia Fisher and Sr. Helen Claire

The world is living in uncertain times. Associates aren't sure if we are open or when the Guest House will close again; that restricts Associates or possible inquirers from visiting us. It has been decided that the Guest House will close after the New Year's retreat.

We had two admissions this year—Pat Fisher of Ontario and Julia Ford of Nova Scotia.

Associates are still phoning and emailing prayer requests for their family, friends and themselves. This can also be done by emailing prayersplease@ssjd.ca. I remain in contact through

phone calls, emails, snail mail and some personal visits. I recently met with an Associate who hadn't been to the convent since COVID began. It was so good to be able to welcome her in person. Some things are not caught in writing or transmitted in phone calls; in-person conversations can be so much richer.

I encourage everyone to check our website www.ssjd.ca regularly to keep up to date on what's happening at the convent. I've received very positive feedback on Sr. Doreen's ongoing reflections. Associates were also pleased to attend Sr. Wendy Grace's profession online; this was transmitted without problems.

Sr. Elizabeth Ann led the 2023 Associates Lenten Quiet Day: Seek, Love and Walk, which was held at the convent. The Associate BBQ for those in the GTA happened on July 22, 2023. More than 30 Associates and Oblates attended. It was lovely to see some Associates for the first time in three years and all enjoyed themselves. The weather was perfect.

The 2023 Associate Advent Quiet Day will be held on December 2, 2023, led by Sr. Doreen. The Epiphany Tea for the GTA will take place on Saturday, January 6, 2024, and we hope many Associates will join us to celebrate the occasion. Invitations will be emailed closer to the date.

I'm extremely grateful for Sr. Kathryn's assistance in the office. A special "Thank you" to all Associates and friends who upheld me in prayer this past year during my illness and recovery. I'm doing well.

Many blessing as you prepare for the return of the Christ Child.

Sr. Helen Claire, SSJD
Director, Central & Eastern Associates

Associate Milestones 2022 – 2023

Special Anniversaries (Calendar Year 2023)

25 years: Cathy Deacon, Ven Brian Evans, Florence Evans, Rev Hollis Hiscock, Rev Luanne Hrywkiw, Rev Cora Krommenhoek, Rev Joan Mitchell, Rev Wendy Murphy, Rev Elizabeth Nelson, Doris Piercey, Sandra Poile, Anne Reinhardt, Rev Nancy Rutter, Rev Karen Sandell, Jacquelyn Schmidt, Elizabeth Smith, Rev Yvonne Thistle, Rev Brian Webber, Jane Winstanley

30 years: Elaine Cassel, Yvonne Dodgson, Rt Rev Ken Genge, Ruth Genge, Patricia Maltby, Linda Maude, Rev Wayne McIntosh, Rev Joyce Mellor, Rev Lyn Oldale, Dawn Parker, Rev Jagdutt Singh, Mary Smith, Sharon Woodley

35 years: Phyllis Beach, June Coote, Rev Claire Goodrich Dyer, Bernice Johnson, Ven Pat Johnston, Margaret Kitching, David MacMillan, Margaret MacMillan, Kathleen Materie, Karen McKinna, Elizabeth Myles, Catherine Paxton, Billie Robinson, Rev Robert Ross

40 years: Rt Rev Dennis Drainville, Barbara Dyson, Joanne Forsyth, Deirdre Laidlaw, Heather Luccock, Rev Venice Guntley, Shirley Park, Rev Raymond Porth

45 years: Rev Dawn Gilby, Ven Dale Huston, Sam Moffatt, Anne Pulfrey

50 years: Rev Linda Cumby, Margaret Jones, Irene Rainsford, Christine Watt

55 years: Sallyanne Etherington, Marcia Hollis

60 years: Barbara Hicks, Mary Walker

61 years: Rev Joyce Hilton, Vivian Hilton, Ven Peter O'Flynn

63 years: Lois Powell, Rev Canon Frederick Roberts

64 years: Rt Rev Barry Curtis, Rev Canon Thomas James, Rev Canon William Rainey

65 years: Rev Donald Anderson

67 years: Rev Roy Nixon, Doris Saunders

68 years: Very Rev Duncan Abraham

70 years: Margaret Reid

71 years: Evelyn Rubie

Deaths

Christine Pletch, Thornhill, ON (Nov 27, 2003)

Rev Brian Freeland, Toronto, ON (Apr 5, 1956)

Rev Carleton Hayden, USA (Dec 27, 1978)

Shirley Tapley, Fredericton, NB (Sep 10, 1978)

Marilyn Black, Kingston, ON (Jun 15, 1987)

Barbara Reckord, Toronto, ON (Jan 8, 1977)

Joan Kristjansson, Winnipeg, MB (Sep 28, 1989)

Rev Isabel Healey-Morrow, Kamloops, BC (Mar 28, 1993)

Irene Mills, Toronto, ON (Apr 29, 1999)

Patricia Stokes, UK (Aug 30, 2016)

Mary Ann Graham, Corner Brook, NL (April 25, 1951)

Maggie Sherwood, Victoria, BC (May 6, 2004)

Rev Lynn Uzans, Wilmot Stn, NS (Oct 23, 1990)

Violet Grazier, Yorkton, SK (Jun 6, 1985)

Ruth Brown, Victoria, BC (Mar 19, 1977)

Lorraine Atkinson, Kitchener, ON (Oct 2, 2010)

Rev Alice Medcof, Toronto, ON (Jan 30, 2003)

Patricia Longworth, Surrey, BC (Jun 9, 2002)

Abp Michael Peers, Toronto, ON (Sep 29, 1960)

Catherine Hall, Nanaimo, BC (Dec 27, 1988)

Jeannie Kippax, Toronto, ON (Dec 7, 2019)

Rev Trudy Gosse, St. John's, NL (May 1, 1995)

Rev Lynda Downing, Bedford, NS (Apr 16, 2011)

Abp Bruce Stavert, Montreal, QC (Apr 10, 1976)

Ellie Bowerman, Sidney, BC (Nov 4, 1964)

Nora Dewhirst, Calgary, BC (May 23, 1974)

Ruby Faille, Wetaskiwin, AB (May 12, 2001)

Iris Campbell, Edmonton, AB (Oct 26, 2000)

Rev Anna-Claire Swingler, Toronto, ON (Jan 3, 2009)

My Oblate Vocation

My early life was nomadic. My father was in the Armed Forces and we moved from base to base, in Canada and overseas before settling in Montreal, the home town of both my parents.

My mother was the youngest child born to parents who emigrated from Northern Ireland in 1911. My dad was the youngest of four born into the 5th generation of French Canadians. Between the two families, we were sixteen cousins. I am the youngest of three. Our family gatherings were large, loud, mostly fun, though there were occasional disputes over politics as you might expect, mixing feisty Irish and passionate Francophone blood. Despite the frequent moves, Montreal was “home” and the place we always roosted between postings.

Whenever we relocated, the first place my parents sought was the base chapel or the local Anglican congregation: places of welcome and “instant community”. While a teenager in Lachine, QC I was invited to Youth Synod, encountering young people excited about their faith. I was impressed they *knew* where things were in the Bible, all the words to the cool, up-tempo songs we sang; and so many of them *knew* Jesus.

When asked what I wanted to do with my life I would say “I want to be a Sunday School teacher – and get paid for it”. The ordination of women was “new” then (1970s) and to be truthful, the reaction by some in the church was not all that welcoming. I really didn’t want to fight any battles – I just wanted to get on with the work. My undergraduate degree from McGill is in Religious Studies with some courses in education and creative writing. Though not a “theolog”, I lived at Diocesan College where most of my roommates were postulants for ordination.

Eventually I was ordained a Deacon at St. George’s in Lennoxville, QC in 1982, and a priest at the Cathedral in Quebec City, in 1984. With my husband Paul, whom I met at Huron College, I’ve



The Rev. Frances Drolet-Smith, Oblate

served parishes in the dioceses of Quebec, Western Newfoundland and Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

The roots of my life as an Oblate were first nurtured by my mother, a long-time Associate. With her, I attended retreats and Quiet Days – she said it “was cheaper than a babysitter” to take me along. I don’t remember much about those events, except at one, Sister Anitra said of the Christian life, “Perfection is not the point: wholeness is.” Somehow, I knew I wanted that.

My mother, my companion in the faith, was diagnosed in 1998 with Alzheimer’s. One of her last gifts to me came while sitting in her kitchen. She told me of her diagnosis, speaking quite candidly about how good her life had been, how blessed she was – how she loved us, our spouses, her seven grandchildren and how she regretted she wouldn’t see them grow. She spoke about her own unfulfilled dreams and the things she had hoped to accomplish and then she asked me, “Are you sure you’re really doing what God has called you to?”

That question led me back to the same sisters who had supported her spiritual growth – the ones who had fostered in her a commitment to prayer, love and service. I applied for “Women at a Crossroads” and joined in the life and worship of the community at the Convent.

During Crossroads, I learned SSJD was exploring the notion of oblates and eventually I entered the Pilot Project, along with six other women. I began discernment on Epiphany, 2001 at Christ Church, Dartmouth, NS in a blizzard with Sr. Thelma-Anne and about sixty well-wishers. I made my Life Promises on September 18, 2006 at the Convent – in a flood of (happy) tears!

I have much to be thankful for. The Sisters have welcomed me, as have the other oblates, and here I have encountered family and a sense of belonging in a profoundly stimulating and life-giving way. A life of prayer and love and service is my oblation – and vocation.

**The Rev. Frances Drolet-Smith,
Oblate, SSJD**

Our Companions 2023 – 2024

It has been a busy summer and Autumn here in the Companions program! I am happy to welcome the Reverend Sue House, oblate, to the Companions Coordinating Team. In addition to being on the leadership team, Sue will be teaching various classes to the Companions throughout the year. Welcome, Sue!

Sr. Connie, Sr. Elizabeth, Sue House, and I excitedly prepared for a new Companions year. In mid-September, the 2023-2024 Companions program began. The new cohort met for the first time for an in-person weekend gathering at the convent. It was a weekend of introductions, learning, and fun.

Sr. Elizabeth led the Companions in an “Art as Prayer” series where we learned to pray with creativity: drawing mandalas and decorating candles. Sr. Connie introduced us to “movio divina” when we learned how to watch a movie as a prayer exercise. We talked and enjoyed getting to know each other. Thanks to Zoom, those who were unable to come in-person joined virtually.

Like last year, this year’s cohort is a hybrid of the residential and online streams. Seven women join together weekly from across the country. Six are in the online stream and one lives at the convent in the residential stream. I look forward to journeying with these fascinating women throughout the coming months.

I am pleased to introduce to you this year’s cohort:



Dawn Pretty has an early background in the United Church, and has more recently been drawn to Anglicanism. Her home church now is St Paul’s Bloor Street, Toronto. She is eager and thirsty to learn, and first experienced

the Sisterhood’s welcome and the opportunity for spiritual growth here through a personal retreat five years ago.



Elizabeth Walker is a wife, grandmother and retired nurse from Ontario, and is now living in Nova Scotia. She and her husband worked with CUSO, living in Nigeria for two years. She appreciates travel, the arts and quality time with family and friends. In her

retirement, Elizabeth likes to read scripture, pray and journal.



Gwedhen Nicholas has known SSJD for a while, having participated in Women at a Crossroads in the mid-90s, and has been an SSJD associate for 11 years. Gwedhen is drawn to artistic expression, with studies in church music, experience as a church or-

ganist, as well as enjoying painting, poetry-writing, and the creativity of sewing. She is a companion and caregiver to her mother, and lives in the Peterborough, Ontario area.



Judith Milne hails from rural Nova Scotia, and is retired from a career centred in heritage, culture, research, and intergovernmental culture policy. Deeply involved in her church with her husband before his passing, and recently exploring theological studies in retirement, she is discerning next steps. She shares her musical gifts at the convent, as she participates in the Companions program in residence.

Our Companions 2023 – 2024



Kate MacKeracher is a rural family doctor, doing both hospital work and primary care in a very small community on Manitoulin Island, Ontario. She is a practising Anglican with a lifelong

fondness for liturgical worship and a newfound interest in contemplative prayer.



Signa Strom has lived for almost a year now in a tiny cabin with her two dogs, deep in the woods of Maine, which has provided her a deeply valuable place and time for contemplative prayer, solitude, study of scripture, and discerning her path forward.



Magdalena Jennings is a voracious reader, and has experience studying and teaching in English, French, and German abroad. Growing up on a hobby farm in Eastern Ontario instilled a love of animals, and now she has a Newfoundland-St Bernard puppy. She currently lives in Nova Scotia.

Please keep the Companions and the coordinators in your prayers this coming year.

With thanks,

Shannon Epp
Companions Coordinator

The Companions Program September 2024 – July 2025

The **residential Companions** program is an immersive opportunity to experience a contemporary monastic community rooted in the Benedictine tradition. It is open to women aged 21 and up regardless of Christian denomination.

Companions live, work, and pray alongside the sisters, learning from them but also sharing each companion's own gifts with the sisters and their ministries. They will:

- Learn to cultivate peaceful and creative ways of living in a diverse intentional community
- Appreciate silence and solitude as well as community and service for a healthy life
- Put down deep roots of spiritual intimacy with God and each other
- Develop a personal path to ongoing spiritual growth
- Discern individual gifts and vocations.



Application start & end (both programs):
January 1, 2024 – May 15, 2024



Open to women of all Christian expressions, **Companions Online** is an opportunity to become "monastics in the world," living a Benedictine rhythm of prayer, work, study, and recreation. Online Companions learn to develop practices that support and nurture their spiritual life from the comfort of their homes.

They meet regularly for classes and discussion groups, and commit to times of personal prayer at home. They share in book studies, participate in online worship and screen films relevant to spiritual growth and self-understanding. Online Companions also develop spiritual disciplines that follow the liturgical year.

Cost:

Residential Companions: sugg. \$100.00/month.

Companions Online: sugg. \$50.00/month.

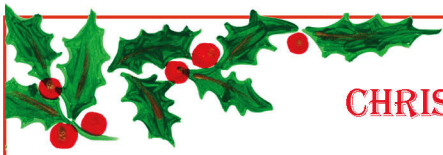
If cost is a hindrance, assistance is available.

To learn more about either program, or to apply, email

Shannon Frank-Epp, Program Coordinator, at
companions@ssjd.ca, or phone St. John's Convent:

416-226-2201, ext. 342

The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine



CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM THE SISTERS



Front row: Sisters Elizabeth Ann, Helen Claire, Kathryn, Amy Joy
Second row: Sisters Sarah Jean, Anne, Wilma, Jessica, Doreen, Beryl, Anitra
Third row: Sisters Brenda, Florence, Margaret Ruth, Constance Joanna, Dorothy, Jocelyn, Suzanne Marie, Elizabeth (Rev Mother). Sr. Wendy Grace is absent.

**WE WISH YOU ALL A VERY BLESSED CHRISTMAS.
MAY GOD'S LOVE, JOY AND PEACE BE
THE GIFTS THAT YOU OPEN ON CHRISTMAS,
AND THE GIFTS THAT YOU SHARE WITH THOSE AROUND YOU
AND WITH OUR WORLD.**



The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine

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