



The Eagle

Summer 2024

Dear Associates, Oblates and Friends,



Matheson office trailer at entrance to Guest House

The big news is that **the renovations have begun!** On July 16 Matheson Constructors Ltd. moved onto our property. As I was doing some gardening in the Guest House courtyard, I could hear the hammering and drilling and “it was music to my ears.” The waiting was finally over. As with any renovations, there are many surprises, especially in the crawl spaces, but there is now progress.

Bishop Riscylla was with us for Holy Week which was lovely. She managed to fit in with all the different ways we do each of the major services, including having her feet washed on Maundy Thursday.

After Easter Sr. Dorothy began a weekly outreach ministry at St. James’ Cathedral drop-in centre which provides a hot lunch plus footcare, clothing, spiritual care and boxes of fresh vegetables. Br. David Bryan Hoopes, OHC, had been doing this ministry for many years but was now letting go of it as he was moving to Holy Cross Monastery in West Park, NY. When Sr. Dorothy heard this she told Br. David that she would love to take his place. This worked out well for the Cathedral and for all concerned. When the Companions came to the Convent at the end of June for their residential weekend, they were able to experience helping out at a drop-in centre and really appreciated the experience.

Two other sisters are now helping out at another drop-in centre at Cummer United Church just a few blocks from the Convent. Sr. Louise goes on Wednesdays and Sr. Brenda joins her when she’s

available. It has been good to add these ministries to the Sisterhood.

We had a wonderful Fundraising evening of **MUSIC AND MURDER** on April 13 in Snell Hall at St. James’ Cathedral. It was a sellout event and raised approximately \$18,000.00.



Jazz trio: Alex George, Chris Banks and Nathan Hiltz

Photo: Michael Hudson

The jazz concert, led by Nathan Hiltz on the guitar with Chris Banks on the bass and Alex George on the fiddle/violin, was a tremendous success. During the intermission everyone was talking about how much they enjoyed the jazz; everyone enjoyed delicious edibles in the “library” next to Snell Hall.



The cast of Still Life

Photo: Michael Hudson

The intermission was followed by a radio play based on Louise Penny’s book, *Still Life*. The narrator and director was the Rev. Michael Burgess

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and several other clergy took major parts, including Colin Johnson, Margaret Rodrigues, Peter Wall, Geoff Sangwine, and Michael Coren. It was a great performance and got some good laughs from the audience.

On the south wall of Snell Hall there were some displays and a small Silent Auction. One of the items in the Silent Auction was a bread-baking workshop by Sr. Elizabeth Ann. This was won by a family with three young people. Sr. Elizabeth Ann did a full-day workshop at the Convent on Friday, August 16. She taught them to make sourdough bread, focaccia, cracked wheat bread and *pain de mie* sandwich bread. They also learned how to make butter.



All hands on deck for bread baking

In April Sr. Brenda visited People's Church to meet with refugees and newcomers who worship there about a community project at the Convent. As a result of this visit, six people came to the Convent to do some volunteer gardening in the Guest House courtyard. It was a rather damp day but they were a tremendous help in weeding and pruning the cotoneaster plants. If any of our Toronto readers enjoy weeding or deadheading plants and shrubs, there's always work to do in the gardens except in the dead of winter.

Another major event for the sisters was the Visitation, June 27 – 30. Our last Visitation was in 2014, prior to my election in 2015. As I am retiring as Reverend Mother in May, 2025, it was appropriate to have another Visitation to assess the physical, financial, spiritual and mental health of the community. We had a four-member Visitation team with Archbishop Linda Nicholls, our bishop visitor, as the co-ordinator. We are so grateful for all the time and energy she was able to give us. The other members of the team were Srs. Jocelyn and Dorothy Stella from the Order of the Holy Paraclete

in Whitby, England, with whom we have had a long sister-ship relationship going back to WW II. The fourth member was Br. James Koester, SSJE, from the Monastery in Cambridge, MA.

The Visitation Team made several recommendations that we need to work on in the next few months and beyond, but they also told us that our Chapel worship was beautiful: a gift to the Church and the wider community. We learned that there is a deep appreciation for the life of the community and the Sisters from the Oblates and Companions. After the Visitation was over we had a barbecue on Canada Day.

We are very grateful to the team for their time and energy and their lengthy final report. Srs. Jocelyn and Dorothy Stella were here for almost two weeks to enjoy some holiday time following the Visitation.

In July we had the Associate/Oblate Barbecue and book sale. It was lovely to see so many Associates and Oblates here in person. Many picked up some good summer reading.

In August we learned that Amy Joy wanted to



Archbishop Linda Nicholls, Sr. Elizabeth and Sr. Dorothy Stella

leave the community and return to Hong Kong which is where her heart is. She left us on August 16. We will miss her joy and lovely smile.

It's hard to believe the summer is almost over and we will be back to a "new year" of activities. As a former teacher, the new year always began in September and I think that is somewhat true for church and community activities.



Sr. Amy Joy

So may God bless all of you in your various ministries and activities in the months to come.

Sr. Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas, SSJD
Reverend Mother

Snapping on a clothesline: God in the Ordinary

Psalm 51

*v2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquities and
cleanse me from my sin*

*v10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a
new and right spirit within me*

Reaching up for the line as I hung the laundry out at Deer Hill last Tuesday, every part of me was kissed by the sun radiated with deep heat, the morning sun glorious in its blinding light. Grabbing a peg, all went into shadow briefly as I pinned up another damp shirt. The slow work was an experience in rhythm. Bask in heat and light, then move, bend, reach, pin, repeat...repeat...repeat. With the slow process complete, every piece in the long chorus line of beauty danced its own, playful way in the southwest breeze. The silence was broken only by birdsong and tree leaves waving. The heavenly scent of the wild roses of summer, nearby pines, and new-cut hay wafted all around. In a rush of true peace and love blown in by Spirit, awe and gratitude suddenly washed over me doing an ordinary activity on an ordinary day. That's God's way.

I couldn't help but reflect on another memorable clothesline I'd encountered last year at the Convent. I wasn't happy about the laundry-drying image that appeared in my meditation. I'd just rolled my eyes! Let me share the story.

As I write, I've just returned to my Deer Hill home in Nova Scotia after my ten-month adventure in Ontario at St John's Convent. As Companion-in-residence with the Sisters of St. John the Divine in North York for 2023-24, I was truly blessed and welcomed into that household of God under the Sisters' patient community in a marvellous place of peace, prayer, and worship.

I arrived as guests often do, a bit tired and frazzled. But it was as though Spirit met me at the door. With an open heart and beginner's mind I could continue my search for silence, spiritual discernment, time and space to understand my being and calling, and retreat from the world. For me, being a Companion in-person at the convent was a rare opportunity to take a challenging, restorative look inward to discover new, creative ways to face outward to seek and act on whatever God has in mind for me. Convent daily life and work in monastic community ways is often just



Clothes flapping on a clothesline

as ordinary as my life here, but I never felt Spirit working so present and powerful all around me.

Before all the Companions met together in the initial in-person gathering mid-month, I was doing my best to settle into chapel worship four times daily: Morning Prayer, Eucharist, Evening Prayer and Compline. Already I'd found the SSJD monastic style compelling: the Sisters' worship in chapel, regular prayer, the spirit of quiet, the community's range of daily work as well as interactions with the collective of Sisters and convent guests every day.

I asked Spirit my best questions and kept listening for response. What's on the path, God? Fidgeting through a half-hour contemplative prayer service one Thursday, an answer arrived in a less than heavenly image. A clothesline. Yep, a clothesline! "C'mon!" I said. How ordinary... how disappointing. How could an old-fashioned clothesline contribute to my spiritual development?

When I was a kid in the early 1960s, one week each year Mom, Dad and my brothers headed east for a summer vacation week, piling into Dad's ancient 1953 blue Chev sedan before dawn for a very long drive and vacation adventure on Nova Scotia's eastern shore. Hours later, we'd pull into Aunt Dot's laneway. At the top of the hill was Auntie's clothesline, already heavy with clean, wet clothes dripping in the sunshine just after 7 am. This was the clothesline I'd seen in my meditation! Her basic, practical contraption was no modern city thing, just a long rope line strung between two wooden poles, driven into the ground deeper than you'd imagine, with laundry's wet weight held up by a single, sturdy Y-shaped pole set centre span.

Mesmerizing and extraordinary, patterns and colours of each shirt, skirt, and pair of trousers

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SACRED SPACE:

An Update on Resurrecting our Home for the Heart

I have been thinking a lot recently about sacred space, and about how to create spaciousness in our lives. Sometimes we think of sacred space as a church building. But Jesus said to his disciples (including us) “wherever two or three are gathered in my Name, I am there in the midst of them.”

So sacred space is not a particular building. Some places that were intended to be sacred have become places of abuse, and when that happens, they are no longer sacred (or holy – another word for sacred) – even if they are church buildings.

A sacred or holy space is wherever we gather recognizing the presence of Jesus in our midst as well as perceiving the holy in one another. It can be around a kitchen table, sitting by a campfire on the beach, with a group of friends serving other people in a soup kitchen, or kneeling with a young child to say their prayers at bedtime.



I had an experience of sacred space in mid-August when Matheson Constructors (the General Contractor we chose for the renovation of the Convent Guest House) took a couple of us on a tour of the completely empty building. I had been there during all the stages of deconstruction since we closed the Guest House last January. First the guests disappeared. Then all the furnishings disappeared – either given away, sold, or put into storage. Then the building stood “empty” for several months while we worked out a construction contract, got city permits, and all the technical things you must do in order to renovate a building. In mid-July, the actual physical deconstruction began. The demolition teams took out walls, doors, closets, old plumbing (including asbestos



abatement), wiring, flooring, ceilings.

When I had my tour four weeks later, in mid-August, I was impressed by what I saw – huge empty spaces – some walls still standing but many gone, and a bare concrete floor. I felt like I was in sacred time – between the ending of one building and the beginning of something very new. I dreamed about the return of our guests to a greener building with heating and air conditioning that each person can adjust in their own room, about slightly more spacious bedrooms with the old cumbersome closets gone, about new casement windows

that are easy to open and close, about a new breakfast/lunchroom that will double as an art room, about more security for

guests with rooms that lock from the outside as well as inside, about a new roof, dependable wi-fi, and so many other features.

But most of all I thought about the possibilities. The Guest House exists for people who are looking for sacred space – not only physically but mentally and spiritually, where they can share in worship with sisters as they desire and encounter





God in the depth of their own soul, sometimes on retreat with other people, sometimes with a spiritual director, sometimes with God alone. And I thought about guests who stay for other reasons – one of the most important being family members of patients at St. John's Rehab. The generous donation we received from Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre has enabled us, among other things, to create a breakfast/lunch room for guests who need to leave early in the morning, or need a late-night snack, as is often the case for SJR-related guests and others who come to the city to attend, for example, a church or university conference, or who are guests of the Diocese of Toronto or other church organizations. A large and generous donation from the Diocese of

Toronto is key to our continuing and enhancing our hospitality to many church organizations and individual parishes.

But it isn't just the large donations like those from the Diocese and Sunnybrook. Even more important are the large and small donations from individual donors like you, which add up to the millions that we have raised. A number of foundations, including the Anglican Foundation of Canada, have also made a significant impact.

The dream that began several years for a renewed "Home for the Heart" – the spiritual name for our Guest House – is now happening before our very eyes. And by sometime next May we hope to invite you to a grand opening celebration of our new sacred space!

Our Capital Campaign Committee has worked tirelessly over the past

year and a half to raise these funds. Committee members are:

Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Co-Chair, Archbishop Colin Johnson, Marilyn Box, Associate, the Rev Marilyn Newport, the Rev Connie Nicholson, and the Rev Catherine Barley. Sandi Patterson,

Oblate, was on the committee. We will wrap up the committee with our last meeting in September, although all the members will be available to respond to new possibilities. We are extremely grateful to them. And to Sr. Doreen and Sr. Wilma, who process all our donations, write thank you notes, keep the Fundraising office going, and graciously receive your donations.

And by the way: for those of you unable to attend the special celebration on September 8 of the Sisterhood's 140th anniversary, you might want to watch the recording of the service at this link:

<https://ipickart.com/stream/140years/>

Former Archbishop of Toronto, Colin Johnson, will preside and preach, former Primate Archbishop Fred Hiltz (our Capital Campaign Co-Chair) will thank our donors, and Dr. Stephanie Martin will play the organ – with the splendid sisters' choir assisting of course!



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

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moved independently in the morning breeze, yet seemed coordinated by an unseen hand. Even the centre pole danced and swayed elegantly as shirt arms inflated in praise and lacy pillowcases on the far ends ballooned in celebration. To us city kids, it was a happy part of a playday hiding in the tall grass, running down the hill to the rocky beach, and picking wild blueberries in the field, all while auntie's clean wash dried, softened and smoothed in the ordinary breeze.

Every life experience contains at least a fleck of theological learning. What was this image saying to me? I hardly had time to stop pouting over my small, lackluster vision before I found myself in a Companions class later that week, oil pastels in hand, making Free Art/ Arte Divina, creating an image while musing on what God wanted us to know on our spiritual journey, looking at questions and answers from all angles. My clothesline vision became a rendering on paper, a series of abstract photos, and a painting on a tall candle for our Companions meetings every Saturday. It even became a prayer.

Huh? How? You see, we are all together in a collective unity on that path, God's narrow line we



are invited to follow. Like every piece of clothing pegged on a line, each of us is a much loved, distinct, and precious soul with holy potential, made in God's image. But along the way, we've lost our newness as God's children. Maybe we see ourselves as failures, separated from God, suffering in a world that mirrors the sad way we've twisted ourselves. We've forgotten the divine excellence of our creation, forgotten we've been cleansed and made new again.

Yes, we may think we've hung ourselves out to dry, but our creative hearts know deeply that we are endlessly loved and always forgiven. Salt Atlantic breezes sting sometimes; we suffer but then we change, adapt and become resilient, then maybe fall off the line and fail again. Maybe we hold on tighter next time, discover we are never alone and learn to lean on others in unity, as Jesus's church. As He told us, love God, love neighbour and work on loving ourselves so we know how to love others well.

This clothesline is good news. In the brightness of God's good sunshine and fresh air, Spirit snaps us awake again and again. We are God's: the amazing, loved ones we were designed to be, cleansed and renewed.

Judith Milne
Companion, SSJD

The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine

www.ssjd.ca

St. John's Convent

233 Cummer Ave., Toronto, ON M2M 2E8

416-226-2201 FAX: 416-226-2131

email: convent@ssjd.ca



The Eagle is published three times a year by the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, St. John's Convent, Toronto, ON M2M 2E8. An annual donation of \$10 to help cover the cost would be greatly appreciated. Please let us know promptly of any changes of address. The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine is a registered Canadian charity.

Liminal Time and Facing the Unknown

On September 8th this year, 2024, the Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine will be 140 years young, a journey just begun. It is also the birthday of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Over the years both occasions have had highlights of liminal time and facing the unknown. Along with these feast days and celebrations, each of us in our own lives know liminal time and facing the unknown.

- For 140 years our community has faced the questions of “when” and “what if” and “how” repeatedly: four moves; seven different Reverend Mothers; opening and closing of Branch Houses; closing of the Convent to guests during COVID; closing and renovation of our Guest House: receiving new Sisters, saying goodbye to Sisters who decide to leave, and the death of Sisters.
- All her life Mary the mother of Jesus faced the questions of “when” and “what if” and “how”: the Angel’s message and birth of Jesus; the prophecy of Simeon; the escape into Egypt; losing Jesus in the temple; Joseph’s death; Jesus’ ministry; standing beneath the Cross of her dying Son; her home with John; the Resurrection and the Ascension.
- Each of us in our own lives have faced the questions of “when” and “what if” and “how” in so many situations and seasons of our lives. When you look over your life, what transitions have happened that have caused you to ask these questions and move into the unknown?

It seems to me that we live all the time in liminal time, that space or pause between what is no longer and what is not yet! Life is always on the move and changing. Whether it is our own community of the Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine, or Mary the Mother of Jesus, or you and me, we experience separation from life as we have known it, journey into the unknown grieving what we have had to leave behind, challenged to find a new vision, new strength, and new wisdom in the unknown. We find ourselves, if we have had the courage and heart to make this journey, changed.

“Unfortunately, not everyone makes it through the gauntlet of the unknown. Some of us emerge traumatized, others embittered or depressed. Some don’t make it through at all.” (a quote from an article by Joan Borysenko of the WholeBeing Institute).



Sisters walking into the future

Photo: Michael Hudson

Joan Chittister coined a phrase in the title of the introduction to her book “*Between the Dark and the Daylight*”, that I believe is part of the challenge of liminal time and facing the unknown. She used the phrase ‘Thinking the Unthinkable’. She talks about the kinds of questions to which there is no one answer: those paradoxes and contradictions which we all face in life, but which, nevertheless, plague us for attention if we are ever to move through the dimness of life’s twists and turns with confidence.

One of the opportunities offered for reflection about liminal time is that it challenges us to look honestly into our own lives, to go down, deep down into unknown territory, into confusion, doubt, concern, worry and uncertainty. There we need to do honest hard work, to search where our strength is and to come to trust that we will be able to make it through to whatever the future holds for us. In a real sense liminal time is always asking the question: “Are you with me in this God?” And the echo back from God is always “I will never leave you or forsake you”.

We have all known the frightening uncertainty of COVID over several years, and now having gone through it, it leaves us with the task of trying to understand how it has affected us, and what possible gifts that the COVID time might be offering us. Have we taken the time to ponder this and to share it with each other? It is important, it has changed our way of life considerably.

We all know the alarming uncertainty of climate change, and have watched with horror the floods, the fires, the changes in temperatures, the drought

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... the food scarcity and starvation. We are faced with looking at our own 'footprint' and what we can do to help create a more sustainable situation for our country and our world.

We live amid a world that seems almost overcome by war, anger, violence and tension, so many people displaced, killed, and with no place to call home. How do we learn to live together with all our differences, to trust each other and to offer care for each other?

In a children's book (for grown-ups too!) "*The Boy, The Mole, the Fox and the Horse*" by Charlie Mackesy there is a very moving and poignant truth: "Everyone is a bit scared," said the horse. "But we are less scared together. Tears fall for a reason, and they are your strength not weakness."

Perhaps in each of these situations we are being called to the contemplation of possibility, to face the contradictions of life, to acknowledge or discover that God is present with us in the

commonplaces of life, in the very messes of life, and in the messes, to find also the richness of life. Those riches lie in our human connections, in realism, in a vision of what could be and with faith in what's possible, in creativity and helping others, and in our own self-care and discipline.

Perhaps a fitting ending to this reflection is Joyce Rupp's poem from her book "*Your Sorrow is My Sorrow*":

Kind and caring God, my once secure life now holds tremendous change.

Come into my turmoil and quiet my anxiety.

Be there with the gifts of your peace and guidance.

Let me not be overwhelmed with the fear of the unknown.

Grant me the ability to face what awaits me.

Take my hand and assure me that you will always be with me, no matter what the future holds.

Sr. Doreen, SSJD

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