



# The Eagle

Eastertide 2025

Dear Associates, Oblates and Friends,



Sr. Elizabeth

This is my last letter to you as the Reverend Mother of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine. It has been an enormous honour and privilege to act in this role for the past ten years, but I'm glad my second term has come to an end. The past five years since the beginning of Covid have been incredibly

stressful. More than once I've said to God, "I'm too old for this!" It is perhaps not surprising that on October 31<sup>st</sup> I was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a lump removed at the end of November. This was followed by two weeks of radiation during the last two weeks of January. I am well and very grateful for all who have upheld me in prayer over the last few months.

I will be going away on sabbatical on May 9<sup>th</sup> to visit family, friends and two religious communities: The Order of the Holy Paraclete in Whitby, England, and the Society of the Holy Cross in Seoul, Korea, who will be celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on September 13<sup>th</sup>. Sr. Prisca, the Reverend Mother, lived with us for two years while she learned to speak English.

The election of a new Reverend Mother took place on February 11<sup>th</sup> when Sr. Elizabeth Ann was elected as the eighth Reverend Mother of our Community. For the first time, we had the election all on one day. Traditionally the voting took place over several days, so this was much better. We started the day with the Eucharist, but stopped after the Prayers of the People. We then had the nominations' ballot. The process took a little longer than it would normally have taken because Sr. Jocelyn was in St. John's Rehab. Sr. Brenda was our "runner" and because of all the snow it took several minutes for her to take the ballot to Sr. Jocelyn and return with it. Meanwhile, Sr. Connie had a prepared a list of hymns for us to sing.

After Sr. Elizabeth Ann was elected we gathered around her and sang a new hymn we had just learned: "Sister, carry on" by Carolyn McDade.



Sisters singing a hymn

It begins: "Sister, carry on. Sister, carry on. It may be rocky and it may be rough, but Sister, carry on." It is such an appropriate song for us at this time. In March Sr. Elizabeth Ann began her sabbatical, most of which will be with the Order of the Holy Paraclete in Whitby, England. She will return to the convent on April 27<sup>th</sup> and be installed as our new Reverend Mother on May 6<sup>th</sup>. At that time I will give her Mother Hannah's cross to wear—the cross which she gave me in 2015 when I became Reverend Mother.

Many other things have happened since the last *Eagle*. In early November we welcomed a confirmation class from Christ Memorial Church in Oshawa. Sr. Brenda and I talked to them about the Sisterhood. I showed them the labyrinth and explained its use.



Confirmation group on the labyrinth

November also brought a postal strike which especially affected both donations and the exchange of Christmas cards not just for us but for all Canadians. December was a very busy month as usual. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> we had our first Giving Tuesday. Several people had asked why we hadn't taken part in this event before and so with the help of two of our staff members and Sr. Kathryn in the Fundraising Office, we were able to advertise it on our website and had a successful event raising over \$90,000 in one day.

The other happening on December 3<sup>rd</sup> was Sr. Jocelyn's fall; she broke her femur above the knee. This led to a total of 11 weeks in hospital: two weeks at

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Sunnybrook (Bayview campus) followed by rehab next door at St. John's Rehab. It was made worse by some terrible rashes caused by allergies. Sr. Jocelyn is now back at the convent; her broken leg has healed but she is still needing regular wound care for wounds partly caused by her hospitalization.

In December we welcomed a young Canadian girl, Megan Rasmussen, to the convent for two weeks. Megan had spent several months living with the Society of the Sacred Cross, an enclosed Anglican community in Tynmawr, Wales, and was now wanting to test her vocation there. She came to stay with us while she did her paper work for a special visa to allow her to live in England for up to two years.

In early December we had our annual Budget Meeting followed by a Corporation meeting to approve the new By-Laws required by the Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act. We also enjoyed seeing the new windows being put into the Guest House; it now looks more like an extension of the convent.

December brought the annual staff party, house decorating, a Christmas Eve Service at St. John's Rehab and a Christmas Day Eucharist here at mid-day followed by dinner with over 20 guests. The was followed on December 27 by the Feast of St. John in Christmastide, our Patronal Festival, and then by the funeral of Helga Elliott who had been an Associate of SSJD for over 60 years. On a sad note one of our regular presiding celebrants, the Rev Canon Eric Beresford died very suddenly on New Year's Eve. He will be greatly missed by many, many people.

January brought the purchase of a new car and new computers. We had to replace our oldest car, the Dodge Journey, which was no longer safe for highway driving. We bought a Honda CRV (a hybrid) which is working out very well. In January we also began the process of replacing our computers because our old ones would not support Windows 11 and would be obsolete by September 2025.

We were delighted to have our Annual Epiphany Tea for Associates and Oblates, attended by over 25 people. Other special events included a retreat day for the Diocese of Toronto Momentum group and another retreat day for the Diocese of Toronto postulants. We're glad that we are still able to host day retreats and look forward to the time we can have overnight retreats once more.

January also saw two more sisters beginning a spiritual direction course on zoom: Srs. Kathryn and myself. This course comes from Benet Hill Monastery,

a Benedictine Community in Colorado. Both January and February brought snow (a total of more than 100 cm), the most we've had in years. In mid-March there were still large patches of snow on the ground, but the combination of rain and sunshine got rid of the last of it. The aconites are in full bloom as are the snowdrops and daffodils are in full bud.

For several years we have been hosting the Fellowship of St. Alban & St. Sergius during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We particularly enjoy having the Orthodox Vespers in our chapel, led by the Rev. Geoffrey Ready, an Orthodox priest. The special speaker this year was Tiffany Robinson who spoke about "The Shape and Architecture of Sacred Spaces". It was a wonderful evening.

We began Lent with a new seating plan in the chapel suggested by our organist, Dan Norman. Dan set it up, with the help of our maintenance staff, the



*New seating in chapel*

Monday before Ash Wednesday when we were all in retreat. We are much closer together this way which enables us to hear one another better. There have been many "thumbs up" for the new seating on Facebook. We also had 2 Taizé evenings, one in March and one in April, in the Lady Chapel, where the acoustics are much better.

Sr. Dorothy and Shannon Epp, our Companions Coordinator, accepted an invitation to visit the Diocese of Nova Scotia for two weeks where they have had many speaking engagements beginning with an Open House at the Cathedral in Halifax. Sr. Dorothy and Shannon are spreading word about SSJD in the Maritimes.



*Sr. Dorothy speaking at the Cathedral in Halifax*

**Sr. Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas, SSJD**  
**Reverend Mother**



## Reflection on journeying

A few months ago, during a community meeting, my sisters and I were asked to share a biblical image which expressed our current situation. I couldn't help but notice how many of us turned to journey metaphors. It's not surprising, really – the Bible is full of journeys.

The Exodus story may be the most famous journey of all but there are many others, including the journeys of Abraham and Sarah, Joseph's journey to Egypt, Mary and Joseph travelling to Bethlehem, the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, and all the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul and the other apostles as related in The Acts of the Apostles. Even Jesus himself always seemed to be travelling somewhere.

It's easy to imagine our own spiritual lives as a journey. Journey metaphors are rooted in our experience of time as linear rather than cyclical. Realistically we can only live our lives in one direction. We are currently in the season of Lent and even the Book of Alternative Services speaks of "our journey to Easter".

Journey is a wonderful metaphor. It is useful and comforting and familiar. Journeys are inherently about movement. A journey by definition has a beginning and an end. As I was comfortably trundling along my own mental journey about this reflection, we sang *Transform Us* by Sylvia Dunstan, a hymn about the Transfiguration. My comfort was disturbed by this verse:

Transform us as you, transfigured,  
Would not stay within a shrine.  
Keep us from our great temptation—  
Time and truth we quickly bind.  
Lead us down the daily pathways  
Where our love is not confined.

"Time and truth we quickly bind". These words speak to me, convict me, if I'm honest, of how we "capture" moments. We tame and confine our experiences, label them neatly and place them safely on a shelf in the archive of our lives. Or maybe that's just me?

There is nothing wrong with imagining our spiritual life as a journey but what do we do when we don't seem to be getting anywhere or when we reach what we thought was a desired destination and we don't feel anything? If you're anything like me, you respond by trying harder. Albert Einstein is alleged to have said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. It can be hard to stop, to let go when we are committed to



something whether it is a journey, a spiritual practice, a relationship or a job.

In *A Midwinter God* Christine Valters Paintner writes, "In different spiritual traditions this is called *attachment*, and much meditation practice is centered on freeing ourselves from these attachments in our lives to things, beliefs, goals, outcomes, and expectations. It is an act of letting go of control of what happens." We are invited to let go rather than hang on.

The great Spanish mystic John of the Cross believed that we are already where we need to be; our work is to recognize it. We don't journey towards God, we recognize we are already in union with God, held in God's loving presence and attention. John of the Cross wrote that "the soul is making the most progress... through the deepest darkness, knowing nothing." The difficulty many of us have is in letting go all the things, the attachments, which prevent us from recognizing the reality. It can be scary to stop, to be in the unknowing darkness.

We read in T.S. Eliot's poem *Little Gidding*,  
'We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time  
...Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.

What if we just stopped for a moment? What if we just let go and rested in the "deepest darkness" and "the stillness between two waves of the sea"?

**Sr. Wendy Grace, SSJD**

## The Guest and the Host

When I first came as a guest to St. John's Convent on Botham Road more than 50 years ago, I encountered a depth of hospitality I had never experienced before, even though I came from a close extended family where we were always welcome in each others' homes.

At the convent I discovered a spiritual hospitality. In the simplicity of being welcomed at the guest wing door by Sr. Faith or Sr. Beryl or Sr. Anitra – all those beautiful women who seemed to live their lives for the rest of us – I knew a love and care which went beyond family love and loyalty into a place where I could “be still and know” that God was God, that the sisters' welcome was Jesus' welcome.

When I joined the Sisterhood as a postulant, years later, and was assigned to help Sr. Nonah in the Guest House, I found myself a host, one of the sisters who shared Jesus' welcome with others. It was the deepest joy of my religious life to be able to share with guests the perfect love of God through my own imperfect welcome and hospitality.

The funny thing is that when I was a guest I found myself being welcomed into the lives of the sisters but when I became a sister and a host, I still felt myself being welcomed – now into the lives of our guests, who honoured us with their stories, their joys, their pain and their healing.

Who is the host and who is the guest?

In Luke's gospel, he shares the story of Jesus meeting two disciples on the road to Emmaus on Easter Sunday afternoon. At first Jesus seems to the disciples to be a stranger who doesn't know about the crucifixion, much less about the resurrection. The disciples become his host, inviting him to walk with them and sharing the story of the last few days. Then Jesus becomes the host, the teacher, as he opens the scriptures to them, sharing the true meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection. Soon after that the disciples become the host again, inviting Jesus to stay for supper when they reach their destination. Quickly, however, Jesus changes roles again. He breaks open the bread, as he just broke open the Word on the road, and the disciples finally recognize who he is.

The Sisterhood has tried for more than 140 years to share this kind of hospitality. As in the Emmaus story, guests become the host, and as I have learned over and over again in my life as a religious, a priest and a sister, every time I think I am welcoming someone, teaching them, sharing the bread and wine of Christ's

love with them, they are the ones who are welcoming me. When I pray with someone, they always pray for me. When I offer support in their journeys, they always offer their prayers for my own journey. The great miracle of God's love is that we all are both host and guest, just as Jesus is.

Even though our current Guest House has been closed for some time, partly due to COVID and then due to renovations, we continue to welcome guests who come to us for day retreats or simply to share worship with us. We long for the time when we can open the Guest House again, so that our ministry of hospitality can be shared with many more.

We can see the finish line now, but it is still a long way off. We have learned that a complete replacement of our heating system is necessary – something we had not anticipated at the beginning of our Guest House renovation. We have learned that it is going to cost us \$800,000 and will delay the opening of the Guest House until October. We have been able to get as far as we are because of the incredible generosity of you – our donors, guests, volunteers, Associates, Oblates, and friends who helped us raise \$4,500,000 over the past two years. You have welcomed us into your hearts with your gifts, and our guests have become our hosts. And now we need to return once again to invite your participation in raising that additional \$800,000. We have a lot of detail we would be happy to share with any who ask – financial detail as well as detail about the physical project itself.

There are no words that can describe how deeply grateful we are to you, and please know that any further gift you can spare will help to make the Guest House much more comfortable in the winter.

In one of the Iona liturgies for Holy Community, there is this beautiful reference to Jesus as both guest and host, and I trust that it may help you realize how deeply we are all entwined – with one another as well as with Jesus, with our Creator, and with the Holy Spirit:

*He was always the guest.*

*In the homes of Peter and Jairus,*

*Martha and Mary,*

*Joanna and Susanna,*

*he was always the guest.*

*At the meal tables of the wealthy*

*where he pled the case of the poor,*

*he was always the guest.*

*But here, at this table, he is the host.*

*Those who wish to serve him must first be served by him,*





Artist rendering of the Welcome Centre



Artist rendering of St. Peter Meeting Room



Artist rendering of a single bedroom with new radiator and window; desk, wardrobe and sink out of picture range.

those who want to follow him must first be fed by him,  
those who would wash his feet must first let him make  
them clean.

For this is the table where God intends us to be nourished;  
this is the time when Christ can make us new.  
So come, you who hunger and thirst  
for a deeper faith,  
for a better life,  
for a fairer world.  
Jesus Christ, who has sat at our tables,  
now invites us to be guests at his.

**Sr. Constance Joanna, SSJD**  
**Co-chair, Capital Campaign Committee**



Artist rendering of accessible ensuite bathroom



## Chaplaincy at a Rehabilitation Hospital



*Chapel with patients*

In 2012 I was a contented chaplain at Mount Sinai Hospital when I was surprised by a nudge to change! An email arrived from the diocesan centre in Toronto asking if I would preside at a healing Eucharist at St. John's Rehab. The sisters were looking for someone who would be comfortable in a hospital setting. I immediately said yes, because, as a hospital chaplain, it was for me such a blessing to preside at a Eucharist, in a hospital chapel. This joy has not left me, from that time till this moment of writing.

I was very pleased with the opportunity to know the sisters in the hospital setting, in a beloved place that they had built and where they lived their faith. I became embraced by their love for neighbour and lifted by their prayers for healing, encouraged to offer my life. At the beginning I became presiding celebrant every couple of weeks but soon found myself happily offering to come more often and being delighted to accept the invitation to preside at the Christmas Eve service that year. Then in the New Year, I discovered that the sisters, as the full amalgamation of Sunnybrook became apparent, in partnership with the Diocese of Toronto, were looking for a qualified hospital chaplain, with the hope that they could find one who was also an Anglican Priest. The Holy Spirit wouldn't give me any time to procrastinate, and I applied immediately. I was hired!

My first learning steps were about the difference between being a chaplain in acute care to being a chaplain in rehab. Both are about healing and journeying onward in God's arms but acute care work for me is about always knowing I will encounter death either imminently or in time; but in a rehab, it is about new life, new beginnings and change, change that may be forced or required. I have discovered, though I may have already unconsciously known this, that the latter is far more difficult and sometimes agonizing for the

patients and loved ones. And the staff are sometimes uncomfortably and even unhappily bound to a goal that cannot be met. The process of reflection and change is constant in rehab. Working with the sisters, who are the spiritual care providers, I applied all the skills I had learned in Clinical Pastoral Education and developed in experience, including the deepest generous listening and "being with". But there is more. I learned about stability, in what has joyfully evolved into my Oblate life in SSJD, something lying dormant in my soul and now birthed into my being as a chaplain and fully integrated with all I am. Intentional constant prayer permeates the air that is breathed in the hospital. The air is suffused with healing. One patient described it to me as the special sauce of the hospital. And always, love. For everyone. As God requires of us. This is what became my guide in the use of the skills I had learned. Meeting pain of body, mind or spirit, feeling it as Christ's pain, embracing it and caring for it.

I have so many memories. Like an old movie reel in my mind's eye. I remember a patient whose stay lasted for months. She was never able to walk independently, even at discharge. I visited her every day. She would always tell me she had hope. Then one day she said there was no hope. I named what she was sharing as lament. This began to be part of her prayers too. As she was discharged, she told me that hope, and healing, were not about a plan unfolding, but about knowing God is with her, loving her through lament, and helping her discover something new about herself. Being a chaplain is a life embraced in love and mercy and possibility.

Wednesday, April 30, will be my last day in the hospital. I am grateful for these past six months of intentional transitional time. I have been working part time, becoming quieter, seeing work as something very much of the moment, more content in spirit with endings, and all marked outwardly by the clearing of my office space which a few sisters might regard as a welcome action! My conversations with the sisters, engaged in the contemplation of the changes in their lives and their spiritual ties to the hospital and the changes in my life have readied me for something new, mixed lovingly, with what has been. My gratitude for these years in St. John's Rehab arises from more than I can ask or imagine.

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



## Everything old is new again



Sister Kathryn

**H**ello, here I am, Sister Kathryn, back again in the Fundraising Office.

Sisters Doreen and Wilma have made the difficult choice to retire from working in the Fundraising Office to focus on their other vital roles in the community and

hopefully have extra time in their day for a well-deserved contemplative life focusing on what they enjoy most.

Their help in mentoring me through the transition has been priceless and I hope to offer all our donors the same level of loving care that they provided over the years. If you need to contact me, the phone (416-226-2201 ext 303) and email address ([fundraising@ssjd.ca](mailto:fundraising@ssjd.ca)) remain unchanged.

I still have the valued support and cheerful help of Lynne Samways-Hiltz who regularly volunteers to keep the Fundraising Office in order. Please reach out to us if you have any questions or concerns.

What you will hopefully see over the coming months are some simpler ways of accessing our website for online donations, and updated planned giving instructions along with an annual appeal linked with the world-wide Giving Tuesday campaign.

Our first appeal in December 2024 was a wonderful success all due to your generosity of heart during what could have been a worrisome time for us during the postal strike. Yet, as always you came through in abundance.

In the next *Eagle* publication, you will see that our donor remittance card has been updated to make clearer the ways you can donate along with a quick response code should you decide to directly access one of our website donor platforms.

This is what a quick response [qr] code looks like as I am sure you have seen them frequently used. Aim your phone at the code and you will be directed to our website.

Our website will be updating the planned



giving instructions should you like to remember the Sisterhood in your will or estate plans. Alternatively, we also accept gifts of securities or life insurance policies. As always, this will require you to first discuss in depth these decisions with your financial and legal advisors and then contact us for the necessary documents to complete the transaction.

On December 2, 2025, we will host our second Giving Tuesday annual appeal. Look for information and details as we develop our theme of “Radiating God’s Love” in late autumn of this year.

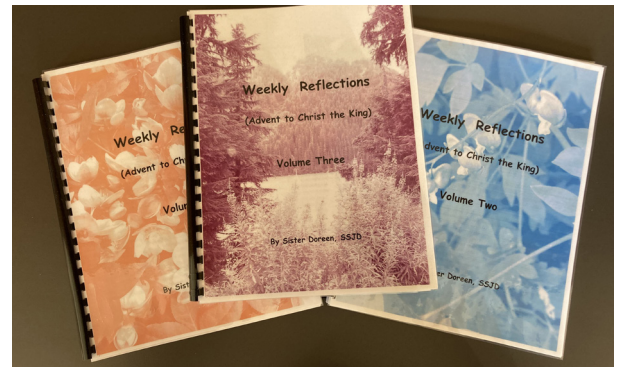
The Home for the Heart Campaign is still ongoing and details of the progress and ongoing appeal for funds continue. See the article from Sister Connie for details on pages 4 & 5.

Words often fall short when expressing the depth of our gratitude for your generous support. From the core of our hearts, we send our sincerest gratitude to all our Associates, donors, and friends.

**Sr. Kathryn, SSJD  
Fundraising Office**

### Sister Doreen’s Reflections

**Volume 3** (Advent to Christ the King) now available. \$25 each + postage



Volumes One and Two also available

- One book \$25 + \$10 postage
- Two books \$50+ \$20 postage
- Three books \$75 + \$20 postage

Place an order at [www.ssjd.ca](http://www.ssjd.ca) or send a cheque to Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, add “Creative Musings” to the memo line. Indicate on a sheet your address, how many and which volume(s) of the books you would like. Address envelope to Guest House, Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, 233 Cummer Avenue, Toronto, ON M2M 2E8.

# The Online Companions Program

## September 2025 – July 2026



### Application start and end

Opens January 1, 2025 – Closes May 15, 2025

### Cost:

**Online Companions:** suggested \$50.00/month.

*If cost is a hindrance, assistance is available.*

Open to women of all Christian expressions, Online Companions 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.

### To learn more about the program, or to apply:

Shannon Epp, Program Coordinator,  
[companions@ssjd.ca](mailto:companions@ssjd.ca)

or

416-226-2201, ext. 342

## The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine

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