



The Eagle

Fall 2026

Dear Associates, Oblates, and Friends,



Sister Elizabeth Ann

September is already upon us. Since the last issue of *The Eagle*, we've had celebration upon celebration! May 1st was Sr. Jocelyn's 50th Profession Anniversary, and the day was full of joy and festivity with lots of people coming and going.

It was another kind of celebration when Sr. Anitra died in June. She experienced a lovely day in the infirmary sunroom (including ice cream), and reading with Sr. Beryl. Shortly after going to bed after that ideal day, she died peacefully. It was a good end.

This year's Women at a Crossroads program had nine participants. It was a lively and diverse group of women who quickly formed their own community. Several of the women have already come back for services and to volunteer their help! The sisters enjoyed their time with the Women at a Crossroads, especially having them swell our numbers in choir for the singing of the Divine Office.

In August we held our annual General Chapter. We enjoyed having Archbishop Anne Germond, our Episcopal Visitor, with us for several days to



Archbishop Anne Germond

help facilitate some of our discussions. She has committed us to continue the conversations through the fall and winter as she will be back in February to see how we are progressing. Archbishop Colin Johnson also joined us to facilitate

several other discussions. We welcomed as an observer, Br. Desmond Alban, from the Society of St. Francis based in San Francisco, CA. He shared his insights with us at the end of Chapter, giving us good feedback to help us improve our meetings together. We enjoyed our conversations together,



Br. Desmond Alban

and although we did not make any major decisions, we did make some minor changes to our life. One was to end our practice of the talking Sunday suppers, and move these to our Sunday noon meal instead. We want to give the opportunity for weekend groups to have a time of conversation with the sisters at the end of their retreats with us.

At Chapter we also received reports from all the Sisterhood's ministries and departments. We heard from the Guest House that the work of the renovation is almost complete and we are receiving guests. However, there is still work to be done to ameliorate the problems with the heating and cooling system.

On August 24th we celebrated with Sr. Margaret Ruth the 50th Anniversary of her Life Profession. It was a quiet celebration with just the Sisters. The very next day we began the Sisters' Long Retreat with Bishop Susan Bell, from the Diocese of Niagara (where the sun always shines). We were joined by two Sisters of the Church and one Brother from the Order of the Holy Cross. On September 8th we celebrated our Foundation Day which marks 142 years this year! The final celebration I'll mention is one we are looking forward to on November 1 for Sr. Anne's 25th Profession Anniversary.



Archbishop Colin Johnson

May God bless and keep you all. Please continue to pray for the Sisters as we continue to fulfill our vocation in this Sisterhood of prayer, community life and service.

Sister Elizabeth Ann Eckert, SSJD
Reverend Mother

Sr. Jocelyn's 50th Life Profession

May 1, 2026 was a very memorable day for Sr. Jocelyn Mortimore, SSJD, as she celebrated her 50th anniversary of Life Profession in the Sisterhood of St John the Divine.

Sr. Jocelyn said the day was, “all I could have asked, and more.” Among those on hand to mark this special anniversary Eucharist and festal lunch were four sisters of the church and Br. Reg from the Order of the Holy Cross. Also present were friends from all stages of her life,

In a toast to Sr. Jocelyn, Sr. Margaret Ruth described her as “a woman of great courage and perseverance, lover of people and the Church, with an outstanding memory for faces and names; she makes friends with almost everyone.” If you need information about a date in SSJD history or the name of a priest who presided at a certain event, Sr. Jocelyn can usually provide it.

Sr. Jocelyn is warm, welcoming and friendly. Her journey to the Sisterhood began with a meeting with Sr. Teresa, SSJD, in the '60s, on a flight from Toronto to the U.K. Sr. Teresa invited Jocelyn Mortimore, as she was then, to visit the SSJD convent on Botham Road. On her return to Toronto, Jocelyn took her up on this invitation, and after several visits decided to try her vocation in the religious life in SSJD.

The journey to Life Profession is a long one, with several decisions along the way. First, six months as a Postulant, then three years as a Novice, and three more years in First Profession. This is followed by Life Profession. Golden anniversaries are rare, a testimony of dedication and service to Christ and the religious life over many, many years. They are occasions of great joy.

Sr. Jocelyn has lived in several SSJD branch houses—Church Home/Cana Place, Edmonton, St. John's Rehab, and Victoria. She particularly enjoyed her time in Edmonton, and the dogs Freya and Simon. Like most sisters, she has worked in several departments.

Needlework has been a very important part

of Sr. Jocelyn's life and ministry. In the '70s while convalescing from an illness, she was encouraged to “try her hand at needlework”. She did, and found she had a calling within a calling. She enjoyed needle-work and became very skilled at it. For many years she devoted herself to white work – the making of purificators, corporals and altar cloths all from white linen, with patterns embroidered in white thread. Many Anglican churches across the country still have purificators made by Sr. Jocelyn. Unfortunately, in recent years she had to give up the work due to failing eyesight and the increased cost of linen.



Sister Jocelyn sewing a purificator

The ministry which brought Sr. Jocelyn the most joy was the ministry of healing. She firmly believes in the power of Christ as a healer, along with medical care. In Edmonton she helped to set up the first training of a pastoral care team in the diocese and was commissioned for that work.

In the '80s Sr. Jocelyn was part of the archbishop's Committee on Healing, which investigated the best way to reintroduce the healing ministry in the Diocese of Toronto. Today, many churches in the GTA offer prayers and anointing with holy oil for healing by licensed lay anointers who require special training. Sr. Jocelyn knows the history of healing in the GTA and for many years shared this knowledge as part of the lay anointers training team.

Sisters of St John the Divine do not retire. As they advance in years their ministry becomes focused on prayer—for sisters, associates, oblates, clergy and the world. Sr. Jocelyn has a lively correspondence with many with whom she has met over the years and is presently in charge of “Prayers Please,” which invites anyone to email her if they need special prayers.

Sr. Helen Claire, SSJD

Sr. Anitra Hansen, SSJD
October 25, 1936 – June 27, 2026

Sister Anitra Hansen died peacefully at the Convent at the age of 89 and in her 42nd year of Life Profession. She was born in Regina and moved with her parents, Donna and Thor, and brother, Conrad, to Toronto in 1938. Her father was a staff artist for BA Oil, and his paintings and interior design schemes can be found in Vancouver, Montreal, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Ottawa, among other places. Her parents were Danish. Sister Anitra was very proud of her heritage and maintained communication with her Danish relatives, visiting Denmark several times during her life, both before entering the convent and after on holiday. Influenced by her father, she attended Central Tech for a commercial art course, where she learned a variety of art – pottery, sculpture, weaving, and metalwork. She attended the University of Toronto in Arts and then switched to teachers' college.



Sr. Anitra in 2012

Anitra and family attended a Danish Lutheran Church until 1949, and then Bloor Street United. While at University she began attending the Anglican Church and was confirmed at St. John's Norway in 1961. While working at a summer camp as craft instructor met Sally Saunders, who became a life-long friend. Nancy Wright, an Associate of the Sisterhood, artist, and member of St John's Norway, introduced Anitra to the convent, and after some years of personal discernment, she entered the convent on her birthday in 1977, bringing with her these many gifts.

During her time in the convent Sr. Anitra spent many years in our branch houses – St John's Priory/House in Edmonton, Cana Place in Toronto, St. John's Rehab in Toronto, St. John's House in Montreal, and St. John's House in Victoria. She worked in most of the areas or departments of the convent. She was spiritual director to many people, led retreats and quiet days, was Associate Director,

Archivist, Librarian, Novice Director, and Guest Sister.

Sr. Anitra worked on committees for the national Anglican Church of Canada, translated some of the hymns in the *Common Praise* hymn book, was an Assessor on ACPO several times, and had a wide range of friends in both the art world and the church.

Sr. Anitra was an artist at heart, and we have several examples of her artwork around the convent. She loved animals, especially dogs and cats, beautiful flowers, and delighted in watching the birds at the birdfeeders outside the windows of the convent. She spent her last few years in our infirmary, lovingly cared for by our nursing staff. She will be remembered by friends, Associates, and guests who benefitted from her pastoral skills. Sally Saunders died a few days before Sister Anitra.



Sister Anitra in the Refectory

A requiem Eucharist was held in the convent chapel on July 4, 2026 presided over by the Reverend Michael Burgess, who also gave a moving homily – Sister Anitra as a friend, spiritual director, and companion traveller in the Way. We said our fond farewell as we buried her ashes in North York Cemetery on August 13, 2026, giving thanks for her long years of life and ministry amongst us. May she rest in peace and rise in glory.

Sr. Doreen, SSJD

Oblate Triennial 2026 a rousing success!



Sisters and oblates in chapel

Every three years the oblates of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine come to the convent for the Oblate Triennial. We pray, worship, study, renew our Promises, and commune together in deep fellowship as oblates and with the sisters. This year, May 4-11, was special to us, because it was the first time since the Covid pandemic and the Guest House renovation that we were able to meet in person. Our last Triennial was on Zoom in 2022, so imagine our joy at getting to see everyone in all dimensions, instead of the little, tiny Zoom boxes.

Oblates come regularly to the convent for their own residential time, and we carry out our own ministries, meet monthly on Zoom, and live our individual Rule of Life throughout the year. But it is so wonderful when we can get together and share our care, support and love of one another and SSJD.

We are busy during this conference-like time, and do a variety of things as part of the Triennial. We have meetings about the Advent Booklet we write annually; we make edits and changes and additions to our Handbook; and we meet with the sisters to develop ways to share the programs and activities of the convent and to enliven and grow the community.

We also do different kinds of learning and formation. We enjoy studying and experiencing different faith practices. In the past, we studied the Coptic Church and New Monasticism. This last year, we had a book study on *Holy Silence: The Gift of Quaker Spirituality*. Oblate Cate McBurney gave us a presentation that was a deeper dive, responding to questions about the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) we had

asked throughout the last year. As our “field trip”, we attended a service at the Toronto Meeting House.

Oblates are monastics who live in the world, who support and are supported by a monastic community. We are pray-ers and take the study and practice of praying to our hearts. This year, Martha Bartlett shared the process of *Lectio Divina* (praying deeply with text), but as a collage process, and we displayed our collage work in the refectory for sisters and guests to appreciate. We sang Holden Evening Prayer as part of St. John’s Day, had a full silent retreat day ending with a lovely Taizé service for evensong, and of course, loved every minute of sharing the rhythm of daily prayer with the sisters.

And don’t forget all the fun! We barbecued, ate snacks, watched movies (*Peace by Chocolate* was a favorite), went out to eat at Swiss Chalet, had a full-on sing-along with dancing, and celebrated our lives, our oblation, and the sisters.

Looking toward the future, we talked about ways to support each other, and the Associates in our regions, how to carry the message of hope and light of Quiet Days, spiritual retreats, Women at a Crossroads, and Home for the Heart; and how to grow our spirit of hope. Plans for our next Triennial include studying the book: *All Christians are Monks*; the monastery, the parish, and the renewal of the church, and to better equip ourselves as we face the challenges of the 21st century together.

We were grateful to have a new oblate and 8 oblates renewing their annual Promises. Elizabeth Walker joins our tribe from the Companions program. There are, of course, many more oblates who have made Life Promises, and discerners, as well, and we all reaffirmed our commitment to the SSJD community in the service of oblation. As we look to the future, I paraphrase the words of our dear oblate, Jean Gandon (d.2024): We are part of a wonderful circle of women, both sisters and oblates, who pray for and sustain each other and welcome each other into the fellowship of love.

You can be sure we are all eagerly anticipating our next gathering – look out, 2029!

Maggie Grace,
Oblate SSJD

What we love about working in the Guest House



The Guest House Team L– R Greg Kennedy, Emmanuelle Christie, Jeanette Strong, Sr. Constance Gefvert)

The Guest House team wanted to share this reflection in their own words rather than one voice speaking for them all. As they wrap up their first full summer since the Guest House renovations, each of them shares what makes this ministry such a blessing to them.

Sr. Constance Joanna Gefvert, Guest Sister:

One of Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of God contains a tiny seed that grows into a large bushy tree. The tree's purpose seems to be sheltering hundreds of birds seeking a safe place to nest. It's a wonderful image of holy hospitality and nourishment that I see in the sisters' courtyard nearly every day in the summer.

A tree in the courtyard looks like the one Jesus describes. It's so large and bushy that the sparrows who shelter there are almost undetectable except for their joyous chattering. It's a rich image of our Guest House – just a small place with an extraordinary reach across the country and beyond – offering shelter and nourishment, both physical and spiritual, to those who desperately need it.

Just as I love being a hostess and welcoming all who come, I also find myself welcomed by our guests who honour me by sharing their stories. I gain so much more than I give. Who wouldn't love working in the Guest House?

Jeanette Strong, Guest House Manager:

The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine's Guest House is truly a "Home for the Heart."

One of the greatest joys of my work here is listening

to our guests share how their time at the Guest House and convent has touched and changed their lives. For some, it is simply finding a quiet place to rest and sleep. For others, it is discovering answers, direction, or a renewed sense of purpose. And for many, it is a place where they encounter God in ways they may not have expected. Hearing these stories reminds me of the importance of this ministry.

I am especially grateful to see returning friends come back year after year for guided and self-directed retreats, while welcoming new guests from across Canada and around the world. To witness people find peace, renewal, and connection in this quiet oasis within Toronto is a gift. I feel privileged to be part of it.

Greg Kennedy, Spiritual Direction Coordinator:

For as long as I remember, I've simply loved working. Although the words came later, I always had an innate sense that meaningful work dignifies a human being. (Meaningless work too often has the opposite effect; one summer under the suspicious scrutiny of unsmiling, teenage managers at a McDonald's in Germany convinced me of that).

What makes the Guest House extra lovely is the significance of the work. People come here to meet and converse with their truest selves. As a spiritual director, I enjoy the privilege of exploring what matters most to guests sufficiently intentional about their inner life as to dedicate extended time to deepen it. The pleasures of slow, yet spirited conversation, punctuated by occasional flashes of insight and liberation, gild my "job" with a kind of divine richness. All this in the context of care, hospitality and kindness of the Sisterhood gives me work that I not only love but also makes me more loving (the best of all employee benefits!).

Emmanuelle Christie, Communications and Reception Coordinator:

How does one discern a vocation? Faith teaches us that vocations are discerned in a variety of ways: active listening, prayerful reflection, self-awareness, and engagement with the community. I am so fortunate that my work in the Guest House is endowed with the grace that also discerns vocation. It is discernment not only for myself, but for everyone who comes to rest in our "Home for the Heart."

One of my greatest joys of working in the Guest House is seeing how people come alive in the space the sisters have created for spiritual nourishment. Guests often talk to me about how peaceful they feel, and how they are able to connect to the Divine in ways they had never thought possible and deeply needed.

Whether I am helping out with a coffee break or just answering an email, I feel deeply connected not only to the discernment of my own vocation to reflect divine love to the world, but to the discernment of our guests as they uncover what they truly need in peace and silence.

Upcoming retreats for 2026

Date	Type	Topic	Leader
September 26, 2026	Garden Quiet Day	Garden Quiet Day	Anita Djokorvic
October 8-16	8-Day Individually Directed Silent Retreat	Silent Directed Retreat	Greg Kennedy
November 13-15	Retreat	On Thomas Merton	Dr. Michael M. Higgins
November 17-19	Individually Directed Silent Retreat	Mid-Week Silent Directed Retreat	Greg Kennedy
November 27-30	Retreat	Enter Advent Quietly	TBD
December 5, 2026	Quiet Day	Advent Quiet Day	TBD
December 23-25	Retreat	Christmas Past and Present	Sr. Constance Joanna Gefvert
December 31-January 1, 2027	Retreat	New Year's Retreat	Sr. Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas

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Three weeks in summer



Women at a Crossroads 2026

This past summer I was pleased to participate in Women at a Crossroads, an annual discernment program of the Sisterhood of St John the Divine, Toronto, which invites women to come apart and listen to God. During three weeks at the convent I discovered new ways of praying, listening, discerning, and being still before God. But it was walking the labyrinth that gave me a profound picture of life, grief, the people we meet along the way, and the different times at which our journeys come to an end.

I have been a Christian all my life, yet during those three weeks I became aware of just how much I did not know. I knew very little about monastic life or Anglican sisters, their way of life, their rhythms of worship and prayer, or the quiet discipline that shapes their days.

At the convent prayer was woven into the rhythm of everyday life. There were times of prayer throughout the day, sometimes three or four, and everything seemed to invite us to slow down and become more attentive to God. I learned about silence.

We had silent meals. We had moments of reflection. We had time simply to sit quietly and listen. One lesson that stayed with me was that sometimes listening to God is more important than constantly talking to Him.

As Christians, we can become so accustomed to telling God what we need, asking Him questions, presenting our worries, and filling our prayers with words. But those three weeks introduced me to another side of prayer: being quiet enough to listen.

Sometimes prayer is not about finding the right words. Sometimes it is simply:

Be still.
Listen.
Wait.

Another beautiful part of those three weeks was the people I met. We were nine women, coming from different places, backgrounds, cultures and stages of life. The youngest was 17 years old, the oldest 66. Yet despite all our differences, there was one thing that connected us: we were all at a crossroads. Every one of us was discerning something. In one way or another, each of us was asking God: what next?

That realization was powerful to me. There is no particular age at which we finally have everything figured out. Life continues to bring us to places where we have to stop, listen, discern, and ask God where He is leading us next.

During our time at the convent we prayed together, reflected together, ate together, sat in silence together, laughed together, listened to one another, and wrestled with questions about where our lives were going.



Candles made by Women at a Crossroads, 2026

Somewhere along the way, nine women who had arrived from different places formed a bond. A sisterhood. And I believe it is a sisterhood that many of us will carry with us for years to come.

During the sessions we were introduced to different ways of praying and connecting with God: Centering Prayer, Ignatian prayer, prayer through art, Lectio Divina, praying with a finger labyrinth, a Rule of Life, the Rule of St. Benedict, prayer using the Enneagram, and walking the labyrinth.

So much of it was new to me. It was a season of learning, but it was also a season of shaping. I began

to understand that prayer can take many forms. Sometimes prayer is speaking. Sometimes it is reading Scripture slowly. Sometimes it is creating. Sometimes it is walking. Sometimes it is sitting in complete silence. And sometimes prayer is simply making ourselves available to God.

Of everything we experienced during those three weeks, however, walking the labyrinth was the most profound for me.

Perhaps it affected me so deeply because all nine of us were already standing at crossroads in our own lives. We were discerning different things. We were asking different questions. I remember how we all entered the labyrinth at different times. Some women were already walking when I entered, while others entered after me. We were all on the same labyrinth, but none of us were at exactly the same place on the path.

The labyrinth was laid out in stones, forming a winding path that curved again and again toward the centre. At times, the path seemed to bring me very close to the centre, yet instead of arriving there, it curved away

again and took me around another section. That struck me deeply. Because isn't life often like that?

Sometimes we feel that we are almost where we are supposed to be. We think we are finally arriving at the answer, the opportunity, the destination, or the thing we have been praying for, and then life turns again. The path does not necessarily go where we expect it to go. But that does not mean we are lost.

On a labyrinth, even when the path seems to be taking you away from the centre, you are still on the path. And perhaps life with God can be like that too. There are seasons when we understand where He is leading us, and there are seasons when we do not.

There are unexpected turns, trials, delays, changes, and moments when what seemed so close suddenly feels far away again. Yet we continue walking. We know that while we are walking there is still something for us to do.

Flavia Nazziwa,
Crossroads 2026

The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine

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