


# Charity Alive

Sister Cecilia Hudec was one of the facilitators at the Blanket Exercise program in March at St. Pat's High in Vancouver, BC.



## Joyful Witness





*For creation awaits  
with eager expectation  
the revelation of the  
children of God*

Jn 10:1

*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

Rom. 8:19

by Sister Roberta Kerins

Christian hope and promise are rooted in the belief that each of us, and in fact all creation, are called into greater and greater fullness of life. Though limitations and finitude are inherent in the human condition, we believe that our journey together is a process of mutual growth and healing in bringing about the fullness of God's creation.

If that be the case, then the ministry of healing is central to Christian identity. It encompasses the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of the individual and society as well as the health of our planet and ultimately all creation.

Healing is about the restoration of wholeness, not just the absence of disease. It is about relationships to self, to the other, to all that comes within one's orbit. The articles which are part of this issue allow us to enter into the lives of Sisters and Associates who, in unique ways, have been healers to those to whom they minister.

*May the following stories inspire the reader to  
consider her/his own call to be a healer in our  
broken world.*



# The Why of their Extraordinary Lives

by Sister Kati Hamm

In the section of the *Constitutions* on service, we find the ministry of the Sisters of Charity described as a mandate to bring the compassion of Christ to those whose lives we

touch. There are so many ways to do this but one thing is clear; when broken bodies, broken spirits or broken hearts show up, a response is called for. In contemporary times, we understand that this cry of the poor is one with the cry of Earth.

In 1985, at the age of 69, Sister Laure L'Esperance, (Francis Louise), received a certificate from a correspondence course in Reflexology. Reflexology is a technique, which believes that there are certain points on the foot or hand that align

with organs in the body, and when pressure is applied, healing may occur. Sister Laure spent her remaining years sharing her passion for this new form of healing throughout the congregation. One of her early visits took her to North

Sydney, Cape Breton Island, NS, and numerous thank you notes indicate that her visit was greatly appreciated, and she in turn was inspired to share her gift and continue her work.

Another pioneer in this work was Sister Ellen Donovan. Ellen wrote an article in 1989 on palliative massage for *Island Echoes*. Her love of nature, her generosity, musicality and passionate defense of the vulnerable provided Ellen with

all the prompts she needed to pursue this work. Ellen described touch as love, care, kindness, balance, harmony, physical reality and awareness. Besides the dying she worked with patients with AIDS, women, adult children of alcoholics, suicidal people, victims of violence and sexual abuse. She articulated her philosophy with these words, "Be gentle when you touch a body. Let it not be uncared for or unwanted; too often flesh is taken for granted. There is such beauty in the body; beauty of sun and soil..." In Oct. 1994 in *Changing Times*, Ellen spoke of her ministry as healing



Sister Laure L'Esperance



Sisters Melda Comeau and Ellen Donovan



the vital connection between an individual and the planet when we respect our global connectedness and help heal the alienation that cuts off the individual from the natural environment.

Sister Melda Comeau, who currently lives in Glace Bay, NS, remembers Laure's visit. Melda had her own reasons for pursuing training in reflexology. With a cough that had been with her for three decades, she applied a technique which she read in a book Ellen gave her and within weeks it disappeared. Convinced that there was something to this, she pursued this course of studies. Today, Melda visits a Glace Bay nursing home weekly to offer treatments to patients there. For many of them it is the highlight of their week. Melda wonders who would take this ministry over were she to leave the Island.

Sister Mary Christine McDonald began learning about the benefits of healing energy methods in the 1990s after taking Reiki workshops in Cape Breton. In 1996, she returned



**Sister Christine McDonald**

to Halifax with a desire to pursue learnings in other healing modalities. While working at Seton Spirituality Centre she began workshops in Reflexology and Healing Touch. It answered a call to be a wounded healer reaching out with compassion and care to others. A foundational belief to this kind of healing is that there is a universal life energy that is all around us, in all of life and there for all of us. In energy work, the intention

is always for the highest good of the person. Christine

notices treatments produce deep relaxation, reduce tension, stress and allow the energy to flow more freely. For ten years, Christine had an office on Bright Street, Halifax, NS, where she gave Reflexology and Reiki treatments and taught the three levels of Reiki. Today you might find her in the Sunshine Room at the Victoria General Hospital, Halifax, where as a volunteer Healing Touch therapist, she gives treatments to cancer patients and their caregivers. When Christine thinks about the different healing modalities, she thinks about how they could make a difference to children. She envisions children would grow up feeling more compassionate and empathetic. The healing human touch might be the antidote to the machines, computers, cyber-world that take children away from others. It might help them to be more conscious of others and draw them closer to nature.

I asked Sister Mary Anne Foster how she got interested in this work and for her it began with visiting folks in the hospital. The calling within the calling speaks to the person's core. Listening is required and then maybe courage to trust your inner knowing. Besides giving individual sessions, Mary Anne participates in instruction related to *Full Spectrum Energy* five weekends a year. The foundational principle is that energy flows through us and sometimes

blockages occur. This can be where pain begins. The goal is for the energy to flow and release pain. People who come to her classes are often middle-aged women who are involved in personal growth and development. The invitation is to come and discover your life's purpose to be your best self.

Many more people within the congregation have been and are involved in alternative healing therapies. Their calls are all different but somehow it is a willingness to be at the service of another and to affirm that we are not spirits who inhabit bodies but that we are very complex whole persons who are connected to Earth and each other. The connection to the Universal Life Energy sounds very much like the connection to Love. The words that inspire at least a few of those interviewed are from Sister Teresa of Avila, "Christ has no hands but ours."



**Sister Mary Anne Foster**



# Welcoming the Stranger

Sister Martha Loo with Vicentinas. Vicentinas are our Associates in Peru.

Front row (l to r): Lida Pimentel, Esther Morales, Macaria Márquez, Roxana Córdoba

Back row (l to r): Rosa Moran, Leonidas Márquez, Sister Martha Loo, Sofía Perez, Vigilia Caycho.

by Sofia Perez, Vicentina

*In the 1980's many Peruvians crossed the border to Venezuela to escape the violence in Peru. Now it seems the tables have turned. Since 2015 over 500,000 refugees have entered the country of Peru. Peru for its part has been welcoming of the newcomers and has offered up to 11,000 work permits so that the refugees are able to create a life for themselves and their families in their new country. The Vicentinas in Peru made a commitment to reach out to these refugees in a variety of ways. [Editor's Comments]*

The origin of this life experience occurred after the celebration of the 50 years of evangelizing mission of the Sisters of Charity - Halifax in Peru in October, 2018. In his presentations during the celebration, Bishop Robert Prevost, Bishop of Chiclayo, spoke about the context of evangelizing within a globalized world, the connection through technology, the challenge of climate change and the reality of forced migration. He underlined the importance of evangelizing within the living community. We also heard the story of dedication, simplicity and service given to us by Archbishop Martin Currie, Archbishop of St. John's, Newfoundland, who had ministered in Chiclayo sharing his life in faith and the radical change he experienced when he saw God in a real and living way in the poorest.

We remained captivated and returned to Lima with the ideas and concerns of how to respond to the reality in

our neighborhood. During the meeting of the Vicentinas with Sister Martha Loo, we decided to have a Christmas celebration to welcome our Venezuelan sisters and brothers. We agreed to prepare some Christmas baskets with essential provisions ... purchasing needed articles, requesting donations and contributions, armed with baskets and food needed for the preparation of hot chocolate.

The great day arrived. On December 16, 2018, the 20 families who were invited each came with a life story. Many left everything behind, especially their families. However one Venezuelan family brought a guitar and they sang songs which they usually share at the table on Christmas Eve. Many tears fell as they remembered. It was an unforgettable night.

However, the smiles that came after the delivery of the baskets illuminated that night. Now we remember each other with a lot of affection and greet each other in the street. They are very grateful for the welcome they experienced in our community and said that this experience would never be forgotten. It was a sharing full of love and warmth that feed our lives and encourage us to continue working for the most needy.





# Sister Nuala Kenny

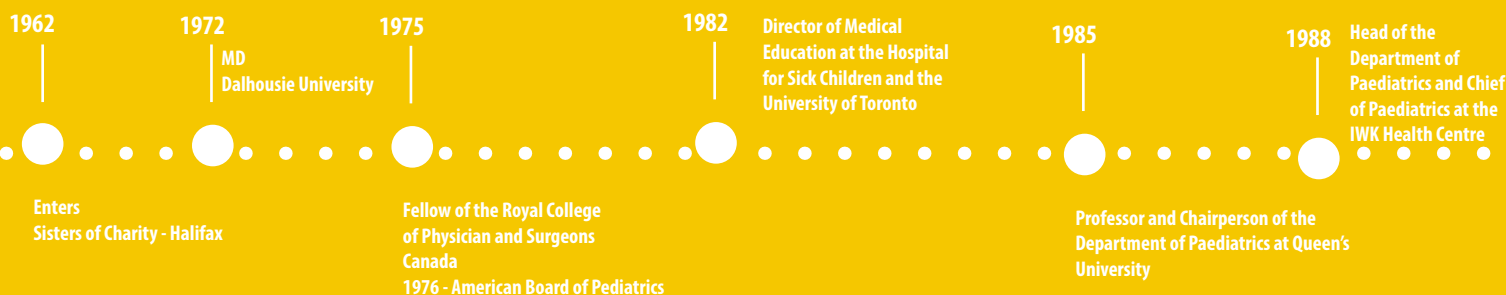
by Melissa Falle, Communications Specialist

As the Congregation's only medical doctor, Sister Nuala Kenny has an interesting life story that centres around healing. At 12 years old and a child of two hardworking Irish Catholic immigrants, Sister Nuala knew she had two callings but she didn't talk about it with friends and family just yet.

Like many soon-to-be Sisters of Charity, Sister Nuala attended the much-loved Seton Hall High School in Patchogue, NY. She's quick to point out that she did not belong to the Mother Seton Club or the Sodality of Mary. Instead, she was a varsity basketball player and a speech and debate person. "Sister Bernard Mary Tarpey was the Sister who was in charge of speech and debate and she is the woman who influenced me to become a Sister of Charity - Halifax. She also knew I wanted to be a doctor."

In the 1960's, you became a teacher or a nurse if you entered the Sisters of Charity - Halifax. Sister Nuala knew this and after sourcing out other congregations that did have medical ministry options, she still felt called to Halifax. She met with the provincial superior of the time, Sister Clarissa Conlon, who explicitly told her that if she joined the Sisters of Charity - Halifax, she would not be a doctor. So as the story goes, she accepted this reality and made her way to Halifax.

So how did Sister Nuala become an internationally-known paediatrician? That's where Mother Maria Gertrude (Sister Irene Farmer) comes into play. It was no secret that Sister Nuala was destined for higher learning so when Sister Irene Farmer asked to talk to her about furthering her education, becoming a doctor was mentioned. It was discussed then that Sister Nuala might become a psychiatrist as she had spent the summer before she entered as a recreational attendant at the state mental hospital in Islip, NY. She worked in a locked schizophrenia unit in the largest



psychiatric facility in North America and it was there that she learned about the pain and indignity of being marginalized.

However, after three months in first year medical school, Sister Nuala had an epiphany and decided to become a paediatrician. “If you can take care of a baby, a little child or a teenager, and if you can either cure a medical condition, or substantially improve it, so that their whole life is better,” she says, “what a fantastic way to spend your life!” Not only did Sister Nuala become a paediatric physician, she eventually became the Chief at the IWK Health Centre, Atlantic Canada’s only paediatric trauma centre.

Sister Nuala’s life journey as a physician has evolved from caring for sick babies and children into a well-rounded ministry of healing. She is a medical educator, an international health policy advisor and she is also involved in healing the church from the sexual abuse of children. She’s an author of several books including *Rediscovering the Art of Dying* which discusses providing end of life care in a way that is dignity preserving.

Sister Nuala learned early on that there is a difference between healing and curing. “Curing is the improvement in medical physical symptoms,” she says. “Sometimes healing is a deeper phenomenon. Some patients, children and definitely adults are not cured, but they’re healed, whether they have to deal with a handicap or death. Any cure that happens needs to be the healing of the patient as well.”

Sister Nuala also explains the difference between pain and suffering and that pain is a physical reality and suffering is an emotional/spiritual pain. “I have medication for pain,” she says. “I have no drug or injection that can take away



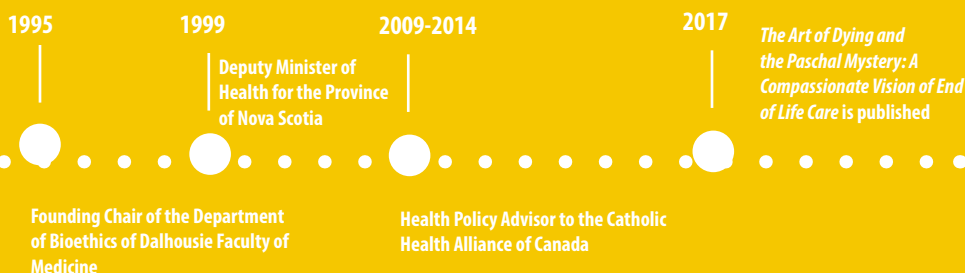
**Sister Louise Bray, General Superior, congratulates Sister Nuala on her honorary degree from MSVU on May 8, 1992**

heartache because most human suffering has nothing to do with a medical condition.”

It has been a decade since Sister Nuala surrendered her medical license but she is still actively involved in the ministry of healing. She lives in community at Caritas Residence in Halifax, NS. When you enter her room, there is a table filled with colour-coded chapters of her follow up book to *Healing the Church*.

She has come a long way since those early days in the Congregation where she prepared to give up her calling to be a doctor so she could live her religious vocation. Now, years later, Sister Nuala can offer this wisdom. “If you do what you think is being asked of you, even if it is difficult, even if it’s the opposite of what you may have wanted in your heart,” she says, “God winds up taking care of you in ways that are incredible.”

**Sister Nuala has received seven Honorary Doctorates for her work. She was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada for her contributions to child health and medical education. She is the recipient of numerous awards and distinctions and author of over 180 papers and three books. Dr. Kenny is nationally recognized as an educator and physician ethicist.**







# Joyful Witness

## Reconciliation BLANKET EXERCISE

Sister Cecilia Hudec works with a team of volunteers who offer the KAIROS Blanket Exercise to schools and parishes. She facilitated the Blanket Exercise with Grade 8 students at St Pat's High in Vancouver, BC on March 4th.

*"The KAIROS Blanket Exercise program is a unique, interactive and participatory history lesson developed in collaboration with Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers and educators."*

*Developed in response to the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996—which recommended education about Canadian-Indigenous history as one of the key steps to reconciliation—the KAIROS Blanket Exercise (KBE) covers more than 500 years in a 90-minute experiential workshop that aims to foster understanding about our shared history as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples."*

For more information, please visit: [www.kairosblanketexercise.org/about/](http://www.kairosblanketexercise.org/about/)

Charity Alive witnesses to the life and mission of the Sisters of Charity - Halifax, which is to make the love of God visible in today's world.

Please submit articles and photos to:  
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