

Charity Alive



Joyful Witness

Sister Marie Sorenson with a guest
at St. John's Bread & Life, Brooklyn, NY



Nuns Build 2019

Sisters Theresa Joseph Kramer and Ruth Ann Brighton participated in 12th Annual Nuns Build (November 18 - 21) at the House of Charity in New Orleans.

From the Nuns Build website:

“When you volunteer with SBP in New Orleans you will be helping to build new homes on abandoned and blighted properties to serve as affordable housing for first-time home buyers and renters such as the Reese family. Mr & Mrs Reese, both native New Orleanians, were displaced for many years as teenagers post-Katrina. In March of 2018 they became first-time home buyers through SBP’s Opportunity Housing program and were able to provide a safe, stable home for their three small children in the city where their roots and family run deep ... Thirteen years after Hurricane Katrina, one of its largest remaining impacts is the affordable housing crisis left in its wake. There are still approximately 35,000 abandoned and blighted properties where homes once stood before the storm.”

Highlight for Sister Theresa: On the plane ride home, she met Maura Healey, Attorney General for the State of Massachusetts. Sister Theresa told her about Nuns Build and the great work that happens at the House of Charity.

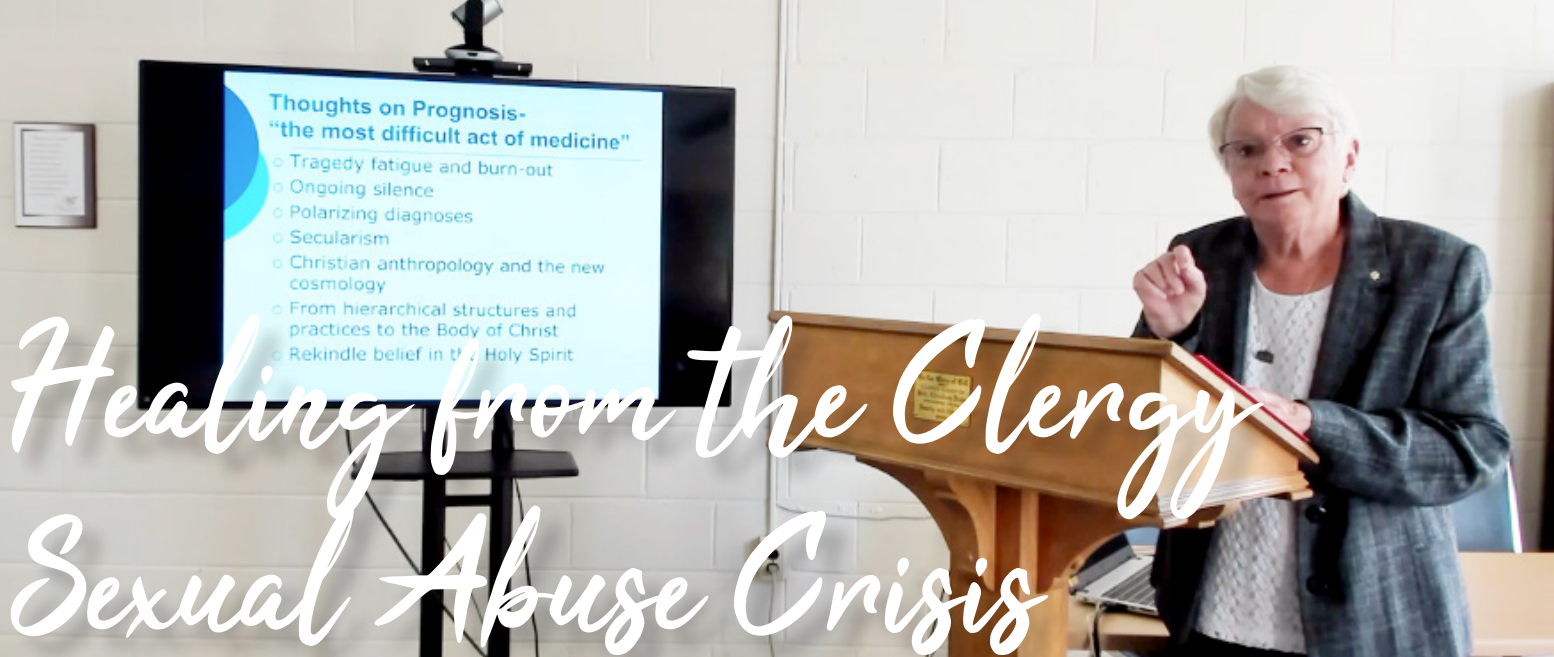


Sisters Ruth Anne Brighton and Joyce Richter, SCC



Sister Theresa Joseph Kramer:

“My experiences at the House of Charity have all been wonderful. It was nice this time, because we were helping first home buyers build a new home. They saved their money since Katrina and the St. Bernard Project helped them finance it to suit their budget. The best part, though, is being with the Federation Sisters. We enjoyed one another’s company and had many laughs. We met up with old friends and made new ones. We went home exhausted but felt good about every minute.”



by Sister Nuala Kenny

Sexual abuse of children and youth by Catholic clergy is the greatest scandal of the modern Church. It has caused devastating, life-long physical, emotional and spiritual harm to victim-survivors, their families, communities, and to the whole Body of Christ. It has resulted in the loss of trust in the Church as a place of holiness, care and justice, and in the credibility of its leaders as disciples of a loving and merciful Jesus. For many, it has precipitated a crisis of faith causing them to leave the Church.

Responses of policies and protocols or public reporting of cases are necessary but not sufficient for long-term prevention which requires conversion to the mission, words and witness of Jesus, the Christ. Religious women have a special role to play in naming and witnessing to the deep spiritual and ecclesial issues underlying the crisis. However, many Religious seem to have abandoned hope in renewal because of hierarchy and exclusion of women from many aspects of Church life. I believe this is a time to recall Elizabeth's words "be children of the church", and act courageously and prophetically to heal the wounds.

[Still Unhealed: Treating Pathology in the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis](#) (Novalis, 2019) presents a summary of the history of the crisis. I identify the key personal and ecclesial pathologies underlying the crisis which

require prayerful discernment as we move toward healing and conversion including:

1. Abuse of power, authority and status in the Church, contrary to the radical equality of the baptized and the Body of Christ, has harmed the most vulnerable among us.
2. Silence, secrecy, denial, and protection of image and institution to avoid scandal understood as reputational loss.
3. Moral theology that was judgmental, sin-centered, act-oriented, and rule-focused; not virtue and conscience forming.
4. Christian anthropology, sexual theology and sexual morality in need of revision in light of beliefs in human dignity and advances in science.
5. Polarizing divisions regarding the nature of the underlying pathology causing dis-unity in the Body of Christ and impeding healing.

The prognosis for healing depends upon all in the Church taking up these challenges as the focus of ongoing work and prayer. Religious women have a unique contribution to systemic and cultural transformation.



Honoured and Blessed

Members of Saint Alive

(back row, l to r): Gladly Ascah, Kathleen Norris, Jean Pace

(front row, l to r): Barbara Barrett, Dinah Simmons, Sister Sheila Moore, Lynda Tyler

by Gladly Ascah, Associate

My relationship with the Sisters of Charity began when I started school. I was born in Halifax to a Welsh mother and Chinese father and we were five children in all. We were raised with high expectations to excel in school. Daily Mass at the Basilica was part of our lives. No wonder the Sisters liked us!

At 18, I entered the Congregation and stayed three years. As a Sister, I learned to love silence, prayer and music. I'm blessed to share good times and Scrabble with women in my 'band' and we gather at the Chalet whenever Sisters from our group are visiting. All of these women hold a special place in my heart. They shared three years of my life in community with its unique focus and intention.

Soon after returning home, I married and adopted three children. My marriage ended and for the next 33 years I taught children with special needs and raised my little family. Very late in life I remarried and with David, my life is full and happy with five children and 11 grandchildren. We are expecting our first great-grandchild. Despite David's precarious health, we travel and find joy in every day together.

Sister Elsie Martin invited me to join Saints Alive and in 2006 I made my commitment.

Saints Alive is made up of 12 Associates and four Sisters. Our group doubled in number this past year. The Holy Spirit was busy and we are delighted and amazed! Each month, two members lead the group meeting. We pray and sing (sometimes dance), deal with business items, offer intercessory prayer for special intentions, share news and make decisions about our outreach project. Our outreach has been varied: for several years we supported an Innu community in northern Labrador with baby clothes, food and personal care items. Other projects have included gathering personal care items for a women's shelter and a youth facility, providing coffee shop cards to the homeless and donating money to support former women prisoners who struggle to raise their families. Part of our monthly meeting may include a book study, film review, or guest speaker. We conclude our gathering with treats and conversation.

We are a diverse group with many interests and opinions. What unites us is our desire to express our charism as a group and individually, in our embrace of the charism of the Sisters of Charity.

I feel honoured and blessed to be an Associate of the Sisters of Charity. This relationship informs and supports the way I live my life.



Sister Marie Sorenson with a
volunteer at St. John's Bread & Life

Joyful Witness to Love in Action

by Angela Rafuse, Sisters of Charity Centre

St. John's Bread & Life, located in Brooklyn, NY, has been helping its neighbours since 1981. Recognizing the need for people to enjoy a meal in a warm and comforting place, St. John's Bread & Life (SJBL), evolved from one small act of generosity from loving hearts, into an innovative resource centre to address the growing demand of food insecurity. We caught up with Sister Marie Sorenson, Chaplain and Associate Executive Director, on the great things happening there.

Sister Marie, tell us how you got involved with SJBL.

I joined the staff in 2014 as Chaplain. Sister Judy Park was leaving the position and put a bug in my ear that I might be a good fit. I was transitioning from my position as Director of Advancement for the Congregation and wanted to go back into direct service. As I learned, there is not a more direct service experience than SJBL!

There is a great history to the place. We were established in 1981 by the Daughters of Charity, the

Vincentian Fathers and the parishioners of St. John the Baptist Parish in Bedford Stuyvesant. They began giving one sandwich to one person, which quickly evolved to offering more substantial food and support services. Soon a large volunteer group was formed to meet the growing needs and finally in 2008 we moved from the parish facility to a stand-alone soup kitchen/social service agency 10 blocks from the parish.

Last March I was asked to take on an additional role as Associate Executive Director. In March 2020 I will begin my seventh year.

How many people are served each day?

We serve 1000 meals a day between breakfast and lunch. There is a mobile soup kitchen that goes out to underserved areas in Brooklyn and Queens. We also serve three senior centers in the area.

Do you see that need growing?

Right now, the neighborhood is in transition. It is heavily gentrified, so where there used to be

abandoned buildings and factories, there are now luxury apartments. Rents are rising quickly as well as food and local services. This is especially hard for seniors on a fixed income. We become their place to socialize and get a meal which helps to stretch their check. We have a digital food pantry that is innovative and convenient. A stock of our pantry is available on a touchscreen and people can choose what they want. The whole idea is to empower individuals and families to choose the food that will best suit their needs.

Where does the funding come for the soup kitchen?

We do get some funding from New York State for a grant to help people apply for food stamps, SNAP, (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). We also get funding from Food Bank for New York City and City Harvest, a food rescue organization. Many large kitchens or hotels will have excess produce and it will be shipped to us. Most of our funding is private, from individuals.

There seems to be more awareness around the philanthropy of reducing food waste. Do you see a cultural shift of motivating these types of donors?

For sure, we call it rescue food. We have many partners in the food industry who believe in the food rescue movement. We take their excess, especially of fruits and vegetables, and turn it into nutritious, balanced meals to feed and share with our shared community.

You mentioned the people that come to SJBL including seniors as part of the food insecurity demographic. Tell us more about the people coming there.

Bedford Stuyvesant historically is an African American working-class neighborhood. We have a diverse population of homeless street people who may have ridden the trains all night or slept in abandoned buildings in our area, and they come here for a meal. We also have many area shelters and often people living in shelters cannot stay all day so they will come to us. We have a growing immigrant population, especially day laborers who are working off the books and need a place to eat. Because we do not have a

membership card or you do not have to prove identity, they can just come in and we will happily serve them. In addition to the food, we also offer many more support services outside of meals. We help people get on food stamps or help them obtain Medicaid or health services. We make referrals to a shelter or detox centre.

How many people work here?

We have a paid staff of 34 and a volunteer program in the hundreds. We could not run SJBL without our volunteers. During the summer-time, we have a lot of different groups who come on mission trips from around North America and the world. We have a very rich variety of volunteers and I always ask; how did you hear about us? I mean, here we are in this little pocket of Brooklyn, and we have the world coming to see us. Wow, it is wonderful! We have a social media presence but there is a lot of word of mouth advertising that goes on for SJBL.

What do you think is a misconception that people might have about SJBL?

I think a major misconception is that the folks who come to the food pantry do not want to change, they are looking for a free meal and that they brought this on themselves. In addition, what we acknowledge at SJBL is that for many of us, even our own staff, we can all be a paycheck away from homelessness. Those who are homeless or those going to a food pantry, take on a variety of different faces. I think people are working very, very hard but housing costs are so high in places like New York City, and sometimes people need that extra little bit of help that goes a long way.

What do you think attracts your staff and volunteers to be involved with SJBL?

People always say, "this place is so friendly". No matter who you are walking through the door, you get welcomed. So, you could be the guy who just got off the train sleeping in tatters, or you can be a donor. You are going to receive a nice welcome and be shown hospitality here. I think that is all part of the mission. It is respecting the dignity of each person who walks through the door, no matter what their background or story. The main attraction is the mission.

What advice do you give your volunteers, your staff when they start?

Do not judge the person coming through the door or coming to you for food. They may be having a rotten day and by your smile and your welcome, you may just make all that rotten day melt away. But do not judge, especially if people are being short with you. I mean, it is New York City and we are short by nature! Give people a chance and smile at them. I have learned a lot from the people coming to use our services. One man was homeless and sleeping in abandoned buildings. He told me one night he was walking down the street at dusk with his shopping cart filled with bottles and whatever else he had collected. He looked into the window and he could see people in the house and was aware of how much he wanted that. He knew that there was happiness in there, and that he was not able to have that right then, but he could come to SJBL and at least have a smile and a welcome. He just wanted to be acknowledged as a person. Smiling is a welcome. Everybody has a story and we do not know the half of it just looking at them. I am not romanticizing homeless people and I do not think homelessness is a great goal to achieve. But, Pope Francis is pretty clear, nobody is disposable. Wow!

What do you think is the future of SJBL?

My short answer: I like to say I hope we are out of business soon because that would mean there are no more hungry or homeless people. My long answer is I hope we continue to provide what the people need, that we continue listening to the people who come through our doors and accompany them to wholeness.

Anything that keeps you up at night when you think about SJBL?

On especially bad weather nights, I always think of the people on the streets. There is a 65-year-old Puerto Rican woman I am close to and think about often. She weighs about 99 pounds, and she is tough as nails. She often is looking around for a place to



Sister Elizabeth Bickar also volunteers at St. John's Bread & Life

live but remains homeless because she has multiple issues that are very complex and difficult. That is the kind of thing that wakes me up. I also wonder if we have enough hats, scarves, gloves, tee shirts and socks for people.

What else would you want people to know about SJBL?

The staff are amazing. Most of our staff have been there for quite a long time and are very dedicated to the mission. Some have come from being clients themselves. So they get where people are coming from. What a great witness. One of our staff members said that we are a happily dysfunctional family. They are amazing.

How has it changed you as a person seeing what takes place every day?

I am changed every day. I become very humbled by the people who come through the door; their generosity, their insightfulness, their intelligence, their willingness to tell it like it is. I have learned the importance of being real. People who are struggling know how to spot falseness right away.

Is there anything else that you want to say about SJBL?

The Sisters of Charity have been so generous and supportive. From ministry grants to the Sisters in the New York area who volunteer in the mobile soup kitchen, teach crochet, greet and receive guests, sing and pray, send donations. It is the support of the Congregation; that has been amazing.



Long time Charity Connection—Some members of Our Lady of the Cenacle Band (entered in 1962) met in New York for a reunion. We had a great time and wanted to share it with others.

L- R: Marcia Lucas, Carol Selleberg, Sister Noreen Cleary, Bea Fontana Ruisi, Janet Halloran, Sister Millie Schubert

Encounters

by Sister Helen Wallace

When I enter Heaven,
Will God give me a video,
Of many times when God was present,
When I helped someone,
Or someone helped me?

Will those I love be there to greet me?

But, most of all,
I am very curious about what God looks like.
Will God show Himself/Herself to me,
As one I love or helped?

I look forward to seeing God,
Not only in Heaven,
But in those who are present to me,
In daily life.
-In one of my refugee or immigrant students,
In one of my family,
In one of our dear Sisters,
In one of those who serve at Caritas.



Service Learning

Sisters Elizabeth Bickar (back, third from left) and Marie Sorenson (right) welcomed MSVU volunteers to St. John's Bread & Life

by Scott Daniels, Associate

As an Associate with the Sisters of Charity – Halifax and an employee at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU), one of my favorite things to do is provide service learning and volunteer opportunities to MSVU students. During the November 2019 study break, I had the opportunity to do just that.

From November 8-14, I travelled with 13 MSVU students, 2 faculty members and Melissa Falle (Associate and Communications Specialist for Sisters of Charity – Halifax) to New York City to engage in a volunteer tourism trip. Since 2011, I've organized five university credit volunteer tourism courses which exposes students to the importance of volunteering in both the local community and more broadly.

While in the Big Apple, the group took in the sights and sounds, while also giving our time to community organizations. We visited the River Fund where we served nearly 1200 clients in just over five hours who

were seeking groceries and household necessities. We also were welcomed later in the week by Sisters Marie Sorenson and Elizabeth Bickar at St. John's Bread & Life where we assisted in the food pantry and prepared hot meals for clients. Toward the end of the week we also volunteered at the Central Park Conservancy where we tackled the leaves falling to the ground from more than 20,000 trees.

Should it be connecting students to service learning and volunteerism through this MSVU academic course, or the Sisters of Charity – Halifax Living Charity program, I'm passionate about ensuring students get opportunities like this to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the needs that exist for so many. MSVU has a strong tradition of social responsibility and we know that service learning has benefits for both the students and community. These types of opportunities allow students to experience a new city and to build societal awareness in a hands-on way.



Right Relationships

Sister Margaret Coppenrath presented "Living in Right Relationship with the Earth" at Mount Saint Vincent Wellesley

Sister Margaret Coppenrath

The presentation focused on Right Relationship with the earth and why it is so important in light of the Climate Crisis. We listened to the wise voices of biologists, ecologists and climate experts with excerpts from *The Wisdom to Survive: Climate Change, Capitalism and Community*.

Roger Payne, a featured biologist, said that what is needed today is a new story ... a story that gets its priorities in order. We need a story of connection and communion, not one of separation and domination ... a story of Earth and us living in Right Relationship

To be in right relationship is a goal worth attaining. When we strive toward it, we put in place all the elements needed for it to grow and develop. Our hearts and minds are in the right place. Being in right relationship allows everyone and everything within its embrace to flourish and have the fullness of life. In John 10 Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Who and what are

encompassed in the "they"? That "they" may have life and have it to the full. Everyone and everything wins! In this case, it would be all of us and the earth itself. To live in right relationship is a personal and collective choice.

"The climate crisis is not just an environmental issue, but a challenge of civilization in favor of the common good." (video message sent by Pope Francis to the recent U.N. Climate Action Summit in NY, 2019) And the common good can never be realized without our acting out of being in right relationship.

The afternoon session focused on Pope Francis and his encyclical *Laudato si* and the theology of Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ found in *Abounding Kindness*. She asks a question based on a John Muir story, "Is God's Charity broad enough for bears?" The answer, of course, is a resounding yes! We then ask the question: Is my charity broad enough for bears? Are the bears part of the "they" that Jesus spoke about in John 10?



Sisters Ellen Boykin and Agnes Bell, SM

Pope Francis is well aware of the complexity and the far reaching effects of climate change. He knows that it is not just statistics that matter. What will matter for people to wake up to the enormity of this crisis will be a change of heart. "What they all need is an ecological conversion, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience." *Laudato si* #217

And "the external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast." *Evangelii Gaudium* #152 "For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion." *Laudato si* #217

"Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone." *Laudato si* #202

Being in right relationship allows everyone and everything within its embrace to flourish and have the fullness of life.

Remembering

A Remembrance Service was held at Elizabeth Seton Residence on November 17. Each Sister was asked to place a butterfly on the Remembrance Tree for a Sister who had died this year.

A Memorial Service was also held at Caritas Residence on November 27. Sisters, Associates and staff members were asked to place a rose for all those they wished to remember that had died this year.



Sister Anne Power at ESR



Sister Deanna MacDougall at Caritas



Involved

Sisters, residents and staff at Caritas Residence (pictured above) participated in the Terry Fox Run.



The Sisters of Charity bus was decked out for the Parade of Lights in Halifax on November 16. Our theme was Saint Lucia. Saint Lucia is known as the bearer of light and hope in the darkness of winter. She wore a crown of candles on her head to keep her hands free to bring food and supplies to people needing nourishment and someone to care.

Cathy Ward, Assistant to the Congregational Leader, was the person behind this initiative. "I am grateful for the relationship building that has taken place and the joy that it brought to everyone involved," she says.



Sister Joan DeGrace on her way to her weekly art class. Sister Joan is a part of the Atlantic Area Artist Association and showcases her work in the spring and fall.



The Sisters of Charity bus beside the tree for Boston.



Community life

Sister Beatrice Thompson welcomes
Sister Mary MacIntyre to Parkston Enhanced Care

“Community is established by the simple, gentle concern that people show each other every day. It is made of the small gestures, all the services and sacrifices which say ‘I love you’ and I’m happy to be with you.”



Sisters Margaret Coppenrath, Rose Annina Stehle and Noreen Cleary (Quogue picnic)



Sisters Barbara Buxton and Carmen Foley enjoying the Neighborhood Children's Theater Group performance at Marillac and ESR. They come every year at this time to spread their Christmas cheer!



Sister Blanche White with Sister Bernadette Murphy at Caritas Residence



Celebrating religious life

Golden Jubilarians
Sisters Esther Plefka,
Mary Anne Foster and
Mary Sweeney

Excerpt from Sister Judy Park's homily:

They have faithfully lived these 50 years using every gift God has given them ... and they each have sterling gifts to give ... as we all know.

In this Gospel reading Jesus says ... "You did not choose me ... I chose you"

God issued the invitation and they said yes ... because that call would not let go of them. Thus began an uncharted journey at a young age.

[Read the complete homily
on our website](#)



Golden Jubilarian Sister Elaine Biollo



Sister Evelyn Dobzanski celebrated her 25th anniversary

L to r: Sisters Doris Schoner, Margie Higgins, Evelyn, Theresa Kramer and Clare Romeo (Setonian Cluster)



Some time ago the Global Concerns Resource Committee sent each house copies of “Climate Change: Our Call to Conversion. A Four-Session Process for Faith Communities,” by the Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center. Although the document is a few years old it remains relevant to us today. The introduction calls for our conversion, “Our Earth is in peril, suffering the impacts of human-caused climate change. The bishops remind us of our responsibility to honor and protect our Earth Community, ‘at its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God’s creation and the one human family,’ US conference of Catholic Bishops.”

It could be used for education, analysis, prayer, a community reflection, cluster meetings, etc. Climate change is one of the four seismic shifts that we have been reflecting on since our 2018 Assembly. It continues to be top of the news and a major concern for more and more people. We live in a time when young people like Greta Thunberg and many many others are calling us to wake up to the emergency scientists are warning us of.

There are numerous other resources available on their website: <https://www.ipjc.org/climate-change-resources>.



Flashback from the Archives

From the 1965 St. Mary's Convent, Canton, NY annals:

"During the third week of January our new School Library was opened to the Parents and Friends of our children, who had so generously given donations for this worthy cause. At the present date, we have over 1,000 books neatly arranged on the shelves. Sister John of the Cross had planned well when she decided on a "Book Fair." From then on, money and books were received. Sister Francis Catherine has been most devoted as the new Librarian."

80 years



From Sister Martha Eileen Burrows on the 80th anniversary of Holy Cross Catholic Church in Glace Bay, NS in October:

"The celebration was lovely. Fr. Norman read all your messages during the homily. Thank you so much. The only other note was from Bishop Dunn.

After Mass most of us went downstairs to the hall where we enjoyed a lovely supper, some displays and a social gathering."

Joyful Witness



Closing of St. Stephen's Convent Halifax, NS

by Sister Alice Mailman

Many families from Africa arrived in Halifax NS in perfect timing for us to share the furniture from St Stephen's Convent as Sisters say good-bye to a long-held mission.

All were extremely grateful for our support.

We in turn were happy to be able to contribute to those with such great need.

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:
Melissa Falle, Communications Specialist
communications@schalifax.ca
215 Seton Road Halifax, NS B3M 0C9

STAY Connected

www.schalifax.ca
[@schalifax](https://www.facebook.com/schalifax) ([Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/schalifax), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/schalifax), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/schalifax))

Please share Charity Alive with anyone you think might be interested. If you're new to Charity Alive, please [click here to subscribe to our Charity Alive mailing list!](#)