

Charity Alive

March 2024

Ministry of Prayer
by Sister Kati Hamm



Last month, in the February Contemplative Conversation follow-up to Assembly 2023, I was in the group that focused on this question:

As we encounter the suffering of the world how do we deepen our capacity to witness to joy?

One of the ways that helps some people is prayer. What that looks like is as varied as the individual or group that pauses to take stock of the well-being of their heart and its relationships.



CELEBRATING

175

YEARS OF JOYFUL WITNESS

1849 - 2024

One Franciscan I knew would often start a conversation by asking “How’s your heart?” It didn’t take me long to realize that was a part of me I wasn’t thinking about. I didn’t have time. When I did take the time, it allowed me to be present to what else was happening around me as well as within me.

Paying attention to the present moment for me, that is the beginning of prayer.

In *Constitutions* 48 we begin the section on prayer with the words: “The Holy Spirit moves us to walk in the presence of God all the days of our life.” How lucky we are to know that we are not alone! We are reminded of God’s presence in friendly greetings in the elevator, in the newcomers who help shovel snow, in our everyday encounters. We are filled with gratitude. We also find confirmation of this accompaniment in lighting a candle, breathing with intention, walking in the forest and sitting in quiet in our room or chapel.

As we age, a benefit of slowing down is the opportunity to respond to the call to prayer as a gift. We have the time, the support and the desire to connect with the needs of Earth and all its people. For many this prayer is how we serve and how we are built up in love. To raise up names and causes, to pray for peace, conversion and transformation,

to engage with others in liturgy, contemplative conversations or just to be still—all become active ways to serve the world. We are “called to share in the life of the Trinity (the Divine, the Ageless One, the Source of Life ...) we seek to make our love for others real and active” (*Constitutions* 52, adapted).

Mary Oliver begins the poem *I Happened to be Standing* with the words “I don’t know where prayers go or what they do.” I’d have to say neither do I. But I know that whenever I have asked for prayers of friends, of our Congregation through our round robin, I often feel a profound gratefulness. I know that I have a community’s arms around me (a communion of saints, in fact) taking up the cause and lifting a name or intention before God. However that prayer is answered I feel there is nothing more I can do but to believe that God hears the cries of the poor. What confidence that brings!

To assure someone of the Sisters’ prayers is a gift that brings comfort to those in a place of fear or darkness. For the Sisters it is an act of solidarity.

In this issue of *Charity Alive* the focus is on the Ministry of Prayer. The topic is as multifaceted as there are people who engage in it.

Mother Mary Bonaventure Kennedy: Far-Sighted Pioneer in Retreats for the Laity

by Sister Kathleen Kull

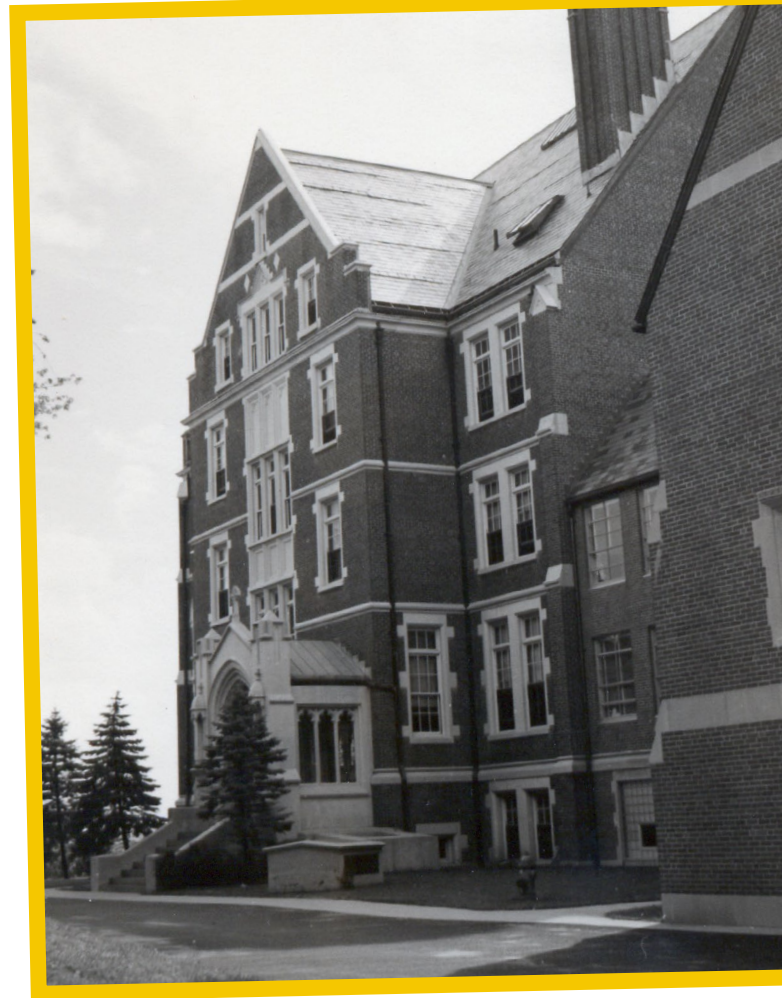
Words such as far-sighted and pioneer have frequently been used when talking about Margaret Kennedy. We see this in her trip of at least five days in 1866—by rail and stage coach—that brought her from New Brunswick to Halifax, to join the fledging community of Sisters of Charity who then numbered less than 30.

We see it in her early teaching years in Halifax, Meteghan and Stellarton, in her serving as Superior of the seven pioneer Sisters at our first US mission at Saint Patrick Parish, Roxbury, MA in 1887. We see it in her call to Congregational leadership.

Margaret, now Sister Mary Bonaventure, was elected eighth Mother Superior in 1889, at the age of 45, when there were 102 professed Sisters. By the time she completed her second term in 1895, the Congregation had expanded geographically and numerically, with a total of 168 professed Sisters.

We see it in her influential start of the lay retreat movement in Boston. How did this happen? After finishing as Mother Superior in 1895, Mother Bonaventure returned to the US as Superior at the Academy of the Assumption in Wellesley, MA. In 1906, Boston high school teacher Margaret Brawley asked to spend an occasional day of prayer at the Academy.

Mother Bonaventure's affirmative response to this simple, yet prophetic request, had long lasting results!



Academy of the Assumption, Wellesley, MA

In the summer of 1906, Mother Bonaventure and Margaret Brawley gathered 97 women for a four-day retreat led by Father Elder Mullan, SJ. The group soon became known as the "à Kempis Circle" after Thomas à Kempis, author of *The Imitation of Christ*.

Their program included a monthly day of recollection and an annual retreat. S. Mary Michael Devereux, as directress, gave all the spiritual instructions the first year. Father Mullan carried on the work for the ensuing three years when the program

was entrusted to the Jesuits, who eventually established similar groups in other Eastern cities.

Throughout subsequent generations and even now in 2024, the “à Kempis Circle” still provides retreat opportunities! Their monthly days of recollection were held at Marillac Residence, Wellesley Hills until COVID prevented such gatherings there.

As a novice in 1949, S. Rose James McCarron said it was an honour to serve dinner for the à Kempis Circle. She recalls S. Bernadette Marie Comeau was in charge of the group at one time and S. Katherine O’Toole was the speaker at their 75th anniversary celebration in 1981.

S. Esther Plefka remembers the à Kempis Circle since the day she entered in 1966. They met at the Academy of the Assumption each month, under the guidance of S. Marion Anthony Donovan. In later years S. Esther arranged their monthly Masses. “They were an amazing group and their commitment to their monthly retreats was truly inspirational!”

Margaret Harrington—Mother Mary Bonaventure—truly was A Far-Sighted Pioneer—in so many incredible ways!



Mother Mary Bonaventure Kennedy



House of Prayer, Wantagh, NY

House of Prayer, Wantagh

by Sister Joan Dawber

The House of Prayer ministry in Wantagh, NY opened on June 29, 1973. Sisters Carol Swan, Carmen Foley and Marianne Therese Boehm were the original community. S. Miriam Helm joined them in 1976.

If the truth be known, I think this house and this group of Sisters were gathered together just for me, in 1977.

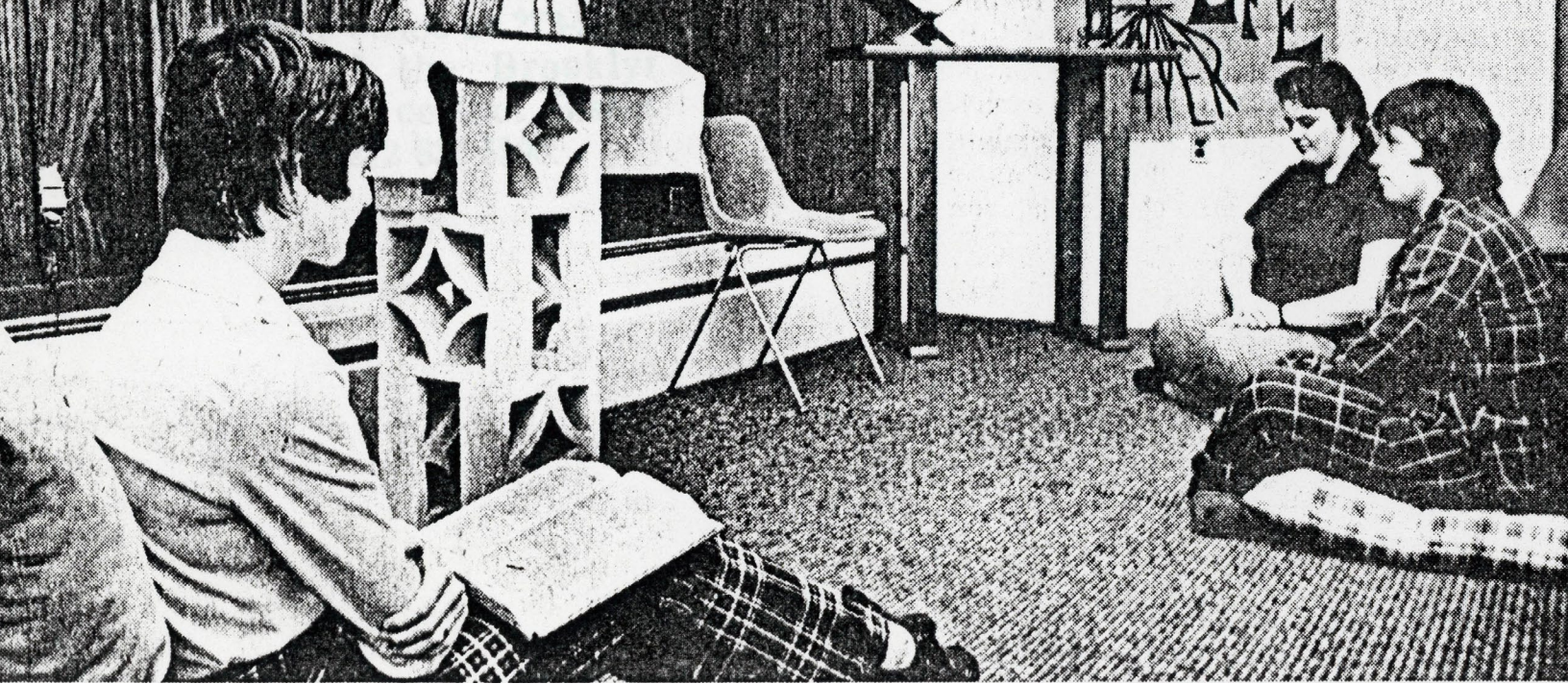
The house, although it was situated on Jerusalem Avenue in Wantagh, a very busy road, was in itself a warm and welcoming home. It had a lovely back garden with a delightful shade tree. Inside the house on the ground floor there were a couple of bedrooms and a bathroom. There was also a family kitchen, dining room and living room. All very conducive to forming

a community and a ministry of prayer. Central to this House of Prayer was the garage (yes, the garage!) which had been turned into a chapel.

By 1974 the programming at the House of Prayer focused on the laity and Sisters. The laity programming was designed around faith formation in areas such as spiritual direction, at home retreat, high school CCD program, six week program on prayer for teachers, afternoons of reflection for parish communities, Life in the Spirit seminar and home visiting with the elderly.

For the Sisters the focus was: directed and private retreats, spiritual direction, weekends at Quogue, five week directed prayer experience, days of reflection and afternoons and evenings of prayer.

As noted in an archive report: "Another part of our service, though less well-defined,



Sisters Pam Oatway (former member), Carol Swan and Marie Gruebel (former member)
House of Prayer, Wantagh

involves prayer for the Sisters and their ministries, and for those recommended to us. Much of our ministry is intangible and immeasurable, but we believe in its value and necessity.”

I loved this House of Prayer because it was for me the very beginning of my life of prayer and call to religious life.

In 1977, I was working in Bermuda. I had connected with the Sisters of Charity who lived at Rose Valley and was volunteering with them as a catechist.

In a conversation with S. Roberta Kerins I was talking about my life and how much I was enjoying it but how I was feeling quite restless. We talked about getting off the island and going to Halifax or New York to make a retreat.

In November 1977, I arrived in New York for the first time ever and S. Pat Wilson drove me to meet S. Carol Swan at the House of Prayer in Wantagh. I had never made a directed retreat before but I was so ready to be in silence and talk with S. Carol.

There was one very special day when I was in the chapel praying and I became so aware of the presence of the Trinity of persons with me. Their love was surrounding me and I was filled with awe. That moment of prayer totally changed my life.

At that very moment I knew I was to enter religious life.

I have been a Sister of Charity now for 43 years. I would go to the House of Prayer often during my formative years and for my annual retreat every year. It was indeed a sacred place for me, as I am sure it was for many others.



Elizabeth Seton Centre

Elizabeth Seton Centre, Quebec

by Ronnie MacDonald, SC Associate

Responding to the needs of God's people in 1979, Elizabeth Seton Centre on Avenue de Bougainville in Quebec City, QC was established as a House of Prayer and spiritual support. The pioneers who opened it were Sisters Joan White and Margaret Murphy.

The house had been a private home and was located in a quiet suburban area with lovely surroundings. Pepita took care of the housekeeping and quickly became a welcomed member of the team.

The mandate was to provide days of retreat, spiritual courses, scripture discussion groups and to host weekly prayer groups.

The setting, complete with a chapel, was perfect.

Over the years of its existence, the following Sisters served in this ministry: Sisters Frances Timmons, Blanche White, Paule Cantin, Georgina Christie,

Joan DeGrace and Melda Comeau. When the time came to close the house in 2009, Sisters Joan DeGrace and Melda Comeau assumed this duty. An era had passed. Another reminder to read the signs of the times called out and as always, the daughters of Vincent, Louise and Elizabeth were open to hear where and how they were next to spread the love and presence of God among us.

Sisters Georgina Christie, Frances Timmons, Joan White and Margaret Murphy



Pepita and Sister Frances Timmons



Sister Blanche White



House of Prayer in Bermuda

Bermuda Mission-Generations of Blessings

by Sister Kathleen Kull

The Sisters of Charity first arrived in Bermuda on February 15, 1890. The ministry of education begun then continued well into the 21st century!

In 1975, Sisters Virginia Blend and Roberta Kerins established Elizabeth Seton Centre, a new ministry outside of the school setting, which provided various opportunities such as adult faith formation, leadership preparation and catechist development. One significant offering was the At Home Retreat. S. Mary Sullivan, RC and Dot Horstmann, the creators of the At Home Retreat, came to Bermuda to train teams of Sisters and laywomen. These retreats, based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, included prayer and discussion sessions. The retreats were also offered to the Portuguese community, thanks to the assistance of Portuguese speaking Dina Wells.

After the departure of Sisters Virginia and Roberta, several laywomen continued

to facilitate the retreats. Over the years retreat directors, including Reverend Bob Bolanos, SJ, worked with the leaders to enrich their personal spiritual development. Guest speakers regularly came to Bermuda to deepen and enhance the lives of the broader community.

Building on what had preceded, S. Carol Swan arrived as a spiritual director. S. Pat Wilson also served on the island as a liturgist. Opportunities were present for spiritual development, both personally and communally, through liturgy and other forms of community prayer.

The last two Sisters of Charity to live and serve on the island, Sisters Judith Marie Rollo (principal of the high school) and Dolores Michael Sullivan (principal of the elementary school) continued the prayer ministry years later after they retired from Mount Saint Agnes Academy. Besides visiting patients in the hospital, they provided retreat days from their home,

which was blessed as a House of Prayer by Bishop Robert Kurtz, CR on the feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, January 4, 2006.

For the ensuing 14 years, Sisters Judith and Dolores provided numerous prayer opportunities for the people of Bermuda: weekly days of prayer, monthly retreat days, Lenten gatherings and yearly prayer weekends with guest presenters—including some Sisters of Charity. The weekly recitation of the Rosary they hosted at their home on “Quiet Wednesdays” now continues at St. Patrick’s Church. These two retirees also put their faith into action as volunteers with the mobile soup kitchen.

The first four Sisters of Charity arrived in Bermuda from Halifax in 1890; the last two left their beloved island in 2020.

Over 200 Sisters of Charity ministered in Bermuda over these 130 years, influencing thousands of people from all over the world—through the incredible educational experience provided by Mount Saint Agnes Academy as well as through the numerous occasions for theological education and training, growth in spirituality and prayer for the local church.

In keeping with the true Vincentian spirit, when Sisters Judith and Dolores moved to Marillac Residence, Wellesley Hills, MA, they entrusted their prayer and retreat ministry to Sister of Charity Associate Patricia Rodrigues. Even now, 14 years later, this prayer ministry continues to flourish!



Sisters Dolores Michael Sullivan, Judith Rollo, Roberta Kerins, Mary McGowan and Kathleen Crowley
Father Vladimir Sobolewski, Bishop Robert Kurtz and Father Joe Morley
125 years in Bermuda, 2015



Sister Maryanne Ruzzo
Boston Medical Center

Hospital and Parish Ministry

by Sister Kati Hamm

Although S. Maryanne Ruzzo now works in parish ministry at Saint Teresa of Calcutta Parish in Dorchester, MA, I asked her to share any experiences where she shared the gift of praying with and for others.

A ministry that was near and dear to her heart was her work as a chaplain in Boston Medical Center from 2004–2014.

She always had a soft spot in her heart for working in health care settings. As a science major and a person whose mother had health challenges throughout her life, S. Maryanne knew early on the call to bring healing and hope to those who were in pain.

It's also a time when a lot of the "why questions" come up. Being able to pray with people in these times was a grace.

S. Maryanne shared a story of a young man who came into the emergency with severe head trauma after a motorcycle accident. His chances of recovery were slim, so when the family asked her to pray with them she prayed for healing and also for acceptance and trusting of whatever might happen. She left the hospital that night not knowing whether the young man would be alive in the morning.

S. Maryanne came into the room the next day and the young man was still alive and the family again asked her to pray with them. Before they started, the mother put

in a request, "This time could you pray with a little more hope?" S. Maryanne was happy to share that after a hospital stay of six months the young man went home, resumed his life, eventually got married and had a family. For herself, that mother's question reminded her that God was in control and her role was to be God's instrument in a time of need. "Miracles" were not uncommon in this work.

The Vincentian charism and way of praying is very much alive for her in her present ministry in the parish. Each day in the parish she has the opportunity of meeting people who live in poverty, who are longing to meet God. She sees an elderly disabled woman who comes to weekly Mass and manages to get up the church stairs with a walker because other people, including a homeless young man who stands at the back of the church, rush to her aid. She prepares a RCIA candidate with special needs. As they talk about God, S. Maryanne learns from her when the young woman uses the phrase "Jesus is a work in progress."

One last example occurs to S. Maryanne. She was bringing Communion to an elderly homebound man. A neighbor suggested it might be a good time to visit him. He was a former musician who was surrounded by music memorabilia, trophies from music competitions and a piano. After several visits of getting to know each other, she remembers this one time when she brought him Communion. As he lifted his head to receive the Eucharist, S. Maryanne for a moment saw in this man the innocence of a human person, a beauty in his desire for God, she saw God.

She says her prayer is seeing the face of God in those whom she meets, especially the poor and the vulnerable, just as Vincent calls her to do.

By example, she tries to help others pray this experience as well. S. Maryanne feels blessed and grateful to be in this ministry with these people from whom she learns every day.



Sister Maryanne, recipient of the Cheverus Award from the Archdiocese of Boston, 2022



Mount Saint Vincent Motherhouse

Renewal Center, Motherhouse

by Angela Rafuse, SC Centre Staff

The Mount Saint Vincent Renewal Center located at the Motherhouse opened on August 22, 1972 on the Feast of the Queenship of Mary.

The Renewal Center's mission was "to enable all persons to discover the creative action of God in their lives."

Originally, the Renewal Center opened to offer spiritual opportunities for the Sisters of Charity, but soon earned a reputation as an inviting space for men

and women religious and other laity as a place of prayer, spiritual direction, workshops and retreats.

As the name states, a Center of Renewal!

The Renewal Center guests were as diverse as the center's offerings. Participants included ecumenical brothers and sisters, not-for-profit organizations, women and senior groups, prison and pastoral chaplains, Alcoholics Anonymous retreats and vocation awareness groups.

Sisters Margaret Murphy
and Anne MacDonald
Renewal Center staff, 1977



The Renewal Center was also a tremendous resource center to others. Directors of novices and other various formation groups frequented the center for workshops, prayer resources and a quiet space for contemplation and deepening their spiritual life. At the time, there were limited venues for laywomen who wished to deepen their spirituality and improve their self-esteem in safe and supportive environments.

The retreats offered were specialized to the individual group's request and ranged from daily workshops to weekend programs and multi-day retreats. The Renewal Center customized retreat programs to meet the needs of diverse participant groups. Retreat programming also included evenings of prayer and meditation. The idyllic setting of the expansive, picturesque landscape

of the Motherhouse contributed to the holistic atmosphere conducive to prayer.

Conveniently located in the city, the serenity of the Motherhouse lands felt like an exclusive retreat far away from the demands of everyday life.

The enhanced hospitality guests experienced when they engaged with Sisters living and working at the Motherhouse heightened the guests' overall experience and fulfillment.

Retreat participants felt warmly received and welcomed knowing the grace of the Sisters' ministry of prayer happening around them was also directed towards their overall retreat experience.

Several Sisters of Charity responded to the call of their ministry and worked at the Renewal Center, extending hospitality and care to guests young and old. The Sisters valued their ministry at the Renewal Center, regarding it as a privilege and honour to serve all those seeking enlightened spiritual experiences.

With the changing needs of religious life, the needs and expectations of the Motherhouse and the Renewal Center were evolving too. A committee was struck to evaluate the Renewal Center's purpose, effectiveness, and future. After careful consideration, a decision was made to move the Renewal Center to the Star of the Sea Convent, Terence Bay. In 1996, the move was complete, and it was renamed the Seton Spirituality Centre. Just as their mission pledged when the Renewal Center originally opened, guests continued "to discover the creative action of God in their lives." In 2006, a 10 year celebration of the Seton Spirituality Centre was held, and despite a hurricane passing through the region, over 200 guests attended. Retreats continue to the present day.

Thank you to Sisters Nancy Brown and Evelyn Williams for their reflections and resources for this article.



**Sisters Maureen Regan, Mary Alfreda Comeau, Laura Brennan and Anne MacDonald
Renewal Center staff, 1981**

Some of the other Sisters involved in the Renewal Center were Sisters Agnes Burrows, Clare O'Keefe and Katherine O'Toole



Sisters John Margaret O'Kelly and Thomas More MacKinlay with guests



At Home Retreat, 1981



Seton Spirituality Centre, Terence Bay, NS

Seton Spirituality Centre, Terence Bay

by Sisters Lorraine d'Entremont, Sheilagh Martin and Evelyn Williams

In April 1995, we began the process of remodeling the former Star of the Sea Convent in Terence Bay, NS. After major deconstruction and restoration, we had room for seven guests and five Sisters who were committed to the ministry. Founding members included:

Sisters Sheilagh Martin, Evelyn Pollard (former member), Marie Gill, Mary Lavers, Pat Wilson and Evelyn Williams. The Centre officially opened in October 1996.

During our first number of years, we ran a three-month Spring and Fall Sabbatical

Program, gathering folks from Australia, New Zealand, the US and Canada.

Participants enjoyed daily programs of personal spiritual growth and development, reflection days, kayaking the coastline, visiting nearby islands, solitude retreat



Standing: Sisters Lorraine d'Entremont, Evelyn Williams, Vivian Mancini and Jeanne Cottreau
Sitting: Sisters Sheilagh Martin and Maria Sutherland circa 2008

times and opportunity to simply be in such a rustic, non-spoiled environment.

When these longer sabbaticals were no longer needed, we continued to offer thematic day programs, days of reflection, weekend and summer retreats and quiet days at the Centre. These programs gathered people from nearby and from various parts of Canada and the USA.

We continued to offer space and hospitality to various groups such as L'Arche Atlantic Leadership team, Anglican Formation, ACOA and other groups looking for space for retreat, planning or simply time to be quiet and restful.

Today with limited staffing, we offer weekend programs, quiet reflective days at the Centre and longer silent directed

retreats. Spiritual direction continues to be available to those attending Centre programs as well as to the wider community.

A welcoming environment, generous hospitality and home cooked meals all contribute to making this space a place of reflection, peace and nurturance for all who come.

We are conscious that one of our best offerings is the rugged, unspoiled beauty of the land and ocean around us. It opens many pathways to prayer and contemplation.

Thanksgiving

by Sister Mary Sweeney

For the last several years, I have led a group of women in a weekly Bible Study. Over the time we have been meeting on Zoom, we have expanded into what might be called Catholic Studies. After discussing the Sunday Scriptures, we might veer into liturgical/prayer practices, church history, Catholic biography, or literature that has been composed by Catholic authors. We conclude with prayers of petition.

In the autumn, for the twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the second reading was Philippians 4:6-9. I was struck by verse 6:

“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.”

I suggested to the group that our prayers of petition be preceded by prayers of thanksgiving. They agreed to incorporate that into our closing. It has been a wonderful practice.

So often our prayers of petition relate to the suffering and concerns of group members and of the world.

Putting such petitions in the context of thanksgiving serves

as a reminder of how blessed we are, even as we express our needs and remember the pain of our world.



Sister Mary Sweeney
Boston College, 2010



Sisters Gertrude McGovern, Doris McKenna, Anne Harvey, Irene Farmer and Lois Crowley

Seton House of Prayer, Summerland

by Sister Nancy Brown

In 1974, Sisters Irene Farmer, Doris McKenna and Anne Harvey were the pioneers for the initial establishment of the House of Prayer in Summerland, BC, appropriately called Seton House of Prayer.

Summerland is located on Lake Okanagan about 45 minutes south of Kelowna, BC. At the time, the community of Sisters in Kelowna were so delighted to have another community close by. Kelowna became a house of hospitality as the three Sisters prepared the house to welcome individuals for private prayer, retreats and spiritual programs.

What a beautiful setting, overlooking the lake and situated in the midst of an apple orchard, to offer

persons a place of quiet and peace!

My recollection was spending many weekends assisting in the preparations for the opening. S. Kathleen Crowley and I were teaching school in Kelowna but spent weekends in Summerland assisting. As we cleaned, scrubbed, hammered and gardened, there was always a joyous spirit of anticipation to provide a space for prayer for the people of Summerland and afar. The parish community was very excited about this new ministry.

I recall the opening prayer and celebration as a simple powerful moment in the midst of God's marvelous creation, overlooking the vineyards and sparkling lake. There was an excitement in anticipation of days ahead as the parish welcomed the Sisters. After Vatican Counsel II, Bishop Doyle,

Bishop of Nelson diocese, wished to establish three houses of prayer in his diocese: one in Cranbrook run by the Congregation of Notre Dame, one in Nelson run by the Sisters of St. Ann and one in the Okanagan run by the Sisters of Charity. Bishop Doyle, a friend and former classmate in Edmonton of S. Irene, wrote her in March 1973 asking her to open a retreat house in the Okanagan Valley.

After years of being in Congregational leadership, S. Irene was ready to shift her focus to minister to the spiritual and social needs of laywomen. "On the eve of opening the House of Prayer, S. Irene was contemplating feminism and what women had to offer other women in their social concerns. This would be uppermost in her mind as the basis for her retreat work with women. Asked her opinion of the ordination of women, S. Irene said, 'I see a place for them in pastoral ministry ... they are now co-pastors or assistants to parish priests in some parishes. And I expect there will be greater involvement in pastoral work.' Inwardly, S. Irene hoped that Rome would, some time in the future, agree to the ordination of women," *The Life of Sister Irene Farmer* by S. Geraldine Anthony.

The parish community of Summerland was very sad when Seton House of Prayer was moved to Kelowna where many of our Sisters continued the ministry of prayer especially for women. Over the years, Sisters Gertrude McGovern and Edna Walsh have served generously in many capacities to provide prayer experiences for the multitudes.

Reflections on Summerland

by Sister Anne Harvey

Bishop Emmett Doyle, a good friend of S. Irene from Edmonton days, extended an invitation to her and the Sisters of Charity to establish a house of prayer in his Diocese. Having participated in the Vatican II Council, Bishop Doyle appreciated the value of a Catholic House of Prayer for lay ministry groups and the development of prayer and spirituality.

The land and the house belonged to the family of a priest who served in the Diocese. The pastor of our Summerland parish became a good friend and was very supportive. The local people were also helpful and generous, sharing fruit from their trees at harvest time. Sometimes in late summer we spent considerable time and effort putting up this fruit in preserves which we were glad to have through the winter months. There were also a few spots on the property where asparagus grew. It was great to go and pick some before supper and then eat it on toast with a cheese sauce.

My memories of the Summerland House of Prayer are of a wonderful quiet and blessed space with an exceptional view of Okanagan Lake. We were surrounded with God's bounty and beauty.

Experiences in Hospital and Parish Ministry

by Sister Kay Conroy

After returning from ministry in Peru, I volunteered at Boston Medical Center weekly as a chaplain, which consisted in visiting assigned Catholic patients on different floors, engaging in a bit of conversation and offering them Communion.

Among the more memorable patients are those mentioned below.

“Maria”, a mother of 7 children who was undergoing terrible pain trying to be rid of an addiction.

“Joe” who confided in me that he always asks the Virgin Mary for his needs since she would be sure to ask her Son for him and He would not refuse her.

“Rosa” saw Jesus sitting in the corner of her room, talking to her and that brought her great comfort. She asked if I believed her.

I loved that work, however, the pandemic curtailed that ministry.

Presently I volunteer on Sundays for the 8:00 am and 9:00 am paraliturgies at Suffolk Correctional Center with two excellent women, Jackie and Alicija, who both have Doctorates of Divinity.

In Peru, I worked with a Jesuit program “Espere” in prison ministry so it was a natural fit for me to volunteer at the correctional center.



Sister Kay Conroy

At the correctional center in Boston we had a team of seven people, and we had 13 services weekly with men and women. Mainly because of the pandemic we are only allowed to minister to four of the women’s sections in the chapel, thus reducing our team to three people.

The women who participate are grateful.

They listen to the readings and the homily, nod approval or nod off to sleep and feel free to ask questions.

I am struck by their prayer petitions which may be for their families, all the inmates, upcoming court appearances, help to begin a new way of life, etc. One woman said she would give up other programs to come to Sunday service which she said is her “lifeline.”

Seton House of Prayer, Quincy

by Sister Maryann Seton Lopiccolo

In 1976, Seton House of Prayer began its ministry of offering prayer programs, retreats and spiritual direction for Sisters in our own Congregation and other religious and lay persons in the area and also for parish groups, especially from St. John the Baptist Parish where we lived in the convent.

Sisters Frances Fay, Mary Cox, Barbara Higgins and Maryann Seton Lopiccolo formed the core community. The idea was to have two Sisters active in ministry, S. Barbara, teaching at Archbishop Williams High School in Braintree and S. Maryann teaching first at St. Kevin School in Dorchester and then at St. Mary School in West Quincy and two Sisters developing and leading the prayer ministry at Seton House, Sisters Frances and Mary, as a way to balance the contemplative and active lives we are all called to live.

We were blessed to have with us Sisters Mary Irene McVarish and Mary Dionysia Aucoin and then S. Blanche White to keep our home welcoming and refreshed in every way for all who came.

Together we offered Seton House as a respite of prayer and reflection for busy lives.

Sister Patricia Murphy
with L'Arche community

There were a variety of programs offered amid many times of scheduled silent directed retreats. Each person or group who came found space and quiet to meet God in her or his own way. Some groups came to use the space for their own programs. How often we welcomed S. Pat Murphy and her Faith and Light group from the L'Arche community for prayer and socializing. School children came for Lenten programs after school and a senior prayer group from the parish enjoyed a Scripture course.

As the years progressed, Seton House was more widely used and appreciated. Then Boston Province changes, and the need for better utilizing of available space for offices and living for the Sisters led to a new expression of the convent called Seton House. Yet the seeds that were planted there and the relationships formed have become valuable to so many who were part of us in any way.



Companion on the Journey

by Sister Kati Hamm

How easy it is to tell when someone loves what they are doing! I asked S. Cecelia Sacca to share a bit about her ministry of prayer with and for others. Within minutes she was ready to share how she got started on this path and what it means to her today.

Many years ago S. Cathleen Dunne recommended to her a summer program of contemplative spirituality at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington, DC. With that experience came a new understanding of how one might accompany others on their journey.

You don't choose the ministry. It chooses you. It is a gift that comes to you.

Your heart is touched when people reveal to you who they are. You might picture your role as a "Big Ear". God is the director. You are the listener, hearing what God is doing in people's lives. Often they're coming from dire situations, and they are revealing what is in their hearts, secrets and feelings they carry. As a listener you are oftentimes affirming that God is at work in this or what they are already seeing as the next step.

God sends people and it has been a privilege for her to be in this place. These encounters are often spontaneous, nothing which she could have predicted. At this time in her life, a particular joy for S. Cecilia has been in working with the

dying. Often patients in the hospital are fearful. They have an image of a God who is waiting in judgment or heading up a tribunal. When, instead, she uses the words like "going home," there is great relief.

When she visits the hospital as a delegate of her parish, St. Joseph's, Needham, she feels the individuals have an added support and recognition that we are all in this together. Talking about dying and making this transition to a life where God is waiting for them comes easily to S. Cecelia. She sees her role as assuring them they are not alone on this journey home.



Sister Cecelia Sacca



Standing: Sisters Marie Gill and Theresa Corcoran
Sitting: Sisters Anna MacDonald, Sadie Henneberry and Patricia Mullins

Carmel Centre, New Waterford

by Ronnie MacDonald, SC Associate

Vatican II and the subsequent renewal of religious life had significant impacts on the ministries of many congregations, including the Sisters of Charity - Halifax.

As Sisters gradually left formal teaching and entered other modes of service, some convents adjacent to parish schools stood empty. Mount Carmel convent in New Waterford, NS was one such building.

In 1983, S. Louise Bray, Provincial Superior of Antigonish, had the idea to establish a

renewal centre. The Mount Carmel convent was perfect for such an undertaking.

In 1984, the Sisters who responded to the invitation to live and minister there were Sisters Mary Christine McDonald, Vivian Mancini, Anna MacDonald (treasurer), Johanna Hogan and Florence Patrice Nearing.

They offered multiple spiritual opportunities: days of retreat, scripture courses, personal days of prayer and spiritual direction. All



Sisters Jean Catherine Chiasson, Grace Hackett (former member), Margie Gillis and Gerry Lancaster
Justice Group, Carmel Centre

were welcomed, religious, priests and laity of the Antigonish Province. Being located next to the parish church was an added blessing.

They contracted a couple of women from the area for the housekeeping and cooking. Later Sisters Margaret Harvey, Ellen Donovan, Marie Gill, Agnes Burrows, Regina Marie McLean and Melda Comeau joined the staff. At one point it was decided a specific hospitality person would be an asset and so S. Sadie Henneberry joined them with her warm smile and welcoming ways.

This ministry lasted until 1996. At that time the Congregation discontinued the structure of provinces and the needs of the area had changed. In 1999, S. Margie Gillis began to use Carmel Centre for a community organization with whom she was working.

And so another group of God's people were made welcome and the building embarked on another new life.



175 trees to commemorate 175 years

On August 15, 2024, we celebrate our mission of 175 years to give joyful witness to love: the love of God, of one another, and of all persons, with our every breath. Our mission is far from over. We are committed to planting 175 trees in areas we have ministered.

We invite our Sisters, Associates, staff, benefactors and friends to join a legacy of hope and opportunity for future generations.

Every dollar raised enables us to plant a tree. Our hope is to plant more than 175 trees. Every tree will foster preservation and sustainability, community and socioeconomic development, heightened

food security, and overall love for our Common Home.

One Tree Planted was selected as our partner given their global reach aligned with the areas the Sisters of Charity have ministered throughout our 175 years. *One Tree Planted* is a non-profit organization based in Vermont; is focused on global reforestation with a vision to make it easy for everyone to help the environment through the planting of trees. They currently plant trees across 80+ countries in North America, Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe and the Pacific.

In 2022, they planted over 52 million trees, participated in the COP27 Climate Series and provided education support through environmental stewardship to teachers and students, as well as grant funding for youth activists.

One Tree Planted focuses on global restoration of forests. These efforts focus on supporting local communities through urban forestry; biodiversity to preserve salmon, orca whales and monarch butterflies; forest fire recovery; preservation of mangrove ecosystems; and restoration of National Forests.

How to Plant a Tree

Plant a tree with us by visiting the link below to donate online:

<https://forest-fundraiser.raisely.com/sistersofcharityhalifax>

For Sisters, Associates & Staff wishing to make a cash donation toward purchasing trees, please contact:

In Canada – Angela Rafuse
Massachusetts – S. Mary Burns
New York – S. Elizabeth McNeela



Your Generous Support of Celebrating 175 Years of Joyful Witness to Love

In 2024, we Sisters of Charity mark the momentous occasion of 175 years of joyful witness to love: the love of God, of one another, and of all persons. Through 175 years of responding to the cries of the poor, racial justice, and the climate crisis, collectively our ministries have been possible with the support and partnership of our generous benefactors.

From tuition support for first generation college students, to resources aiding migrants fleeing their troubled homeland, to water projects in areas ravaged by the climate crisis, and resources to support women and children fleeing domestic violence—our work is far from over and there has never been a greater need to continue our mission.

This year, we celebrate our 175 years of history by sharing stories of our Sisters and the Congregation, and the impact of our mission in Canada, the USA and globally. Stay tuned to our website and watch your mailboxes for more information.

Thank you for your continued support and enduring legacy to continue our mission together.

*You can donate online anytime at
www.schalifax.ca/donate*

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.

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