

# Charity Alive

October 2024

## Celebrating 175 Years of Joyful Witness

by Sister Kathleen Kull and Ronnie MacDonald, Associate

How do you put into words what we experienced on August 15, 2024?? What we experienced these past 12 months—since the year of celebration was proclaimed on August 15, 2023??

The walls echoed the joy expressed and felt by all from the very first moment of the day! We were enthralled by the powerful and inspiring opening prayer, the many moments of informal sharing, the arrival of the Caritas Sisters, the moving Eucharistic celebration, the reception and dinner and the enlivening, fun, awesome entertainment. What a day! Gratitude and joy were palpable.

**With hearts overflowing with abundant joy and gratitude, we rejoiced in our history and gave thanks for the people God brought into our lives, all those whose shoulders we have been blessed to stand on.**



Ronnie MacDonald, Associate  
and S. Kathleen Kull  
175th Co-chairs



CELEBRATING

# 175

YEARS OF JOYFUL WITNESS

1849 - 2024

The videos and slideshow revealed our kindred spirit, the passion for serving those in need, the warm hospitality which welcomes all, especially the least fortunate.

## **May that mark us—the Sisters of Charity – Halifax—FOREVER!**

On August 15, 2024, we celebrated—in person and virtually—these incredible 175 years!

- **The past**
- **The present**
- **The future**
- **Our rich heritage**
- **The lasting legacy of charity**

S. Margaret Mary Fitzgerald opens the celebration  
S. Kathleen Kull, Ronnie MacDonald and Heather Rankin  
Sisters Anita Gagnon, Maryann Seton Lopiccio, Kerry Rowland and Carol Verville  
Tish Hammond, Associate and Sisters Cecilia Mac Neil and Yvonne Theriault



# A Day Like No Other

by Ronnie MacDonald, Associate



**Sisters Maryann Seton Lopiccolo, Clare Fitzgerald and Roberta Mullin**

August 15, 2024 was a milestone for the Sisters of Charity - Halifax, Associates and all those they have worked with and served over the years. It marked 175 years since four Sisters from New York arrived at the port of Halifax to establish a mission in Canada. Little did they know they would grow in numbers, spread out to the North, South, East and West of their new country, Canada, the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The celebration at the Atlantica Hotel was historic. Our Sesquicentennial served as

a fitting prelude to our 175th celebration. However, the reality of the completion taking place within the Congregation added another layer of blessings and gratitude to the day.

**It was more than a party, it was a paean of thanksgiving for all the women past and present who responded wholeheartedly to God's invitation to serve as Vincent, Louise and Elizabeth exemplified.**

Every grand gathering has multiple high points. Celebrants of the 175th could look at days of yore via multimedia, exult in the present by just looking around and trust in the future by their shared acts of faith and hope. There could be as many highlights as persons present!

For me there was a very particular highlight. It began when two small buses pulled up outside the hotel and in came a parade of Sisters from Caritas. They added a precious dimension to the celebration. And, of course supporting them were their faithful nursing aides with their gentle manner and ministrations. All of them would be with us for casual sharing, Mass, dinner and entertainment. Their presence, plus those with us via Zoom for the same events, made the party complete!

Many of these Sisters were pioneers in their time, helping to open new ventures, ending others and moving in faith to wherever they were sent. After Vatican II they met multiple new challenges. New ways of living out the gospel and deepening personal and communal prayer were introduced.

A broadening of the understanding of the vows led to new freedoms in decision making and assuming personal responsibility for their choices personally and professionally. Adapting their dress to the modern era ensued. To all of these changes they responded in faith, believing that if this was what was needed to better serve and be an integral part of the present day missionary life of the church, so be it. It could not have been easy. But they did it to be relevant in an ever evolving church.

The joy that afternoon and evening was tangible. After a wonderful meal, Heather Rankin and her musicians brought the celebration to a precious peak. Faces in the audience were aglow with joy. The lively and at times moving music along with Heather's sense of humour filled the hearts of all present. This was yet another blessing from the God who loves us so.

With grateful hearts many accompanied the retired Sisters to help them board the buses for the ride home. It seemed the outing was worth every scintilla of fatigue that may ensue. August 15, 2024 was a day for the history books. It was a fitting cap to 175 years of sharing God's love and presence with all others generously and joyfully.

### **It was truly a day like no other!**



**Sisters Sylvia Bellefontaine, Ruth Anne Brighton, Cecilia Hudec, Jean Martell, Gertrude McGovern and Liz Bickar**



**Sisters and Associates watching the slideshow**

# Joy and Love

by John Fortini, Associate

As I reflect on the 175th Anniversary celebration a line from the 22nd General Chapter Statement comes to mind: "We will give joyful witness to love with our every breath." That was what I witnessed at the celebration in Halifax on August 15th. The celebration was a wonderful event and I feel very blessed to have been able to share it with the Sisters and other Associates.

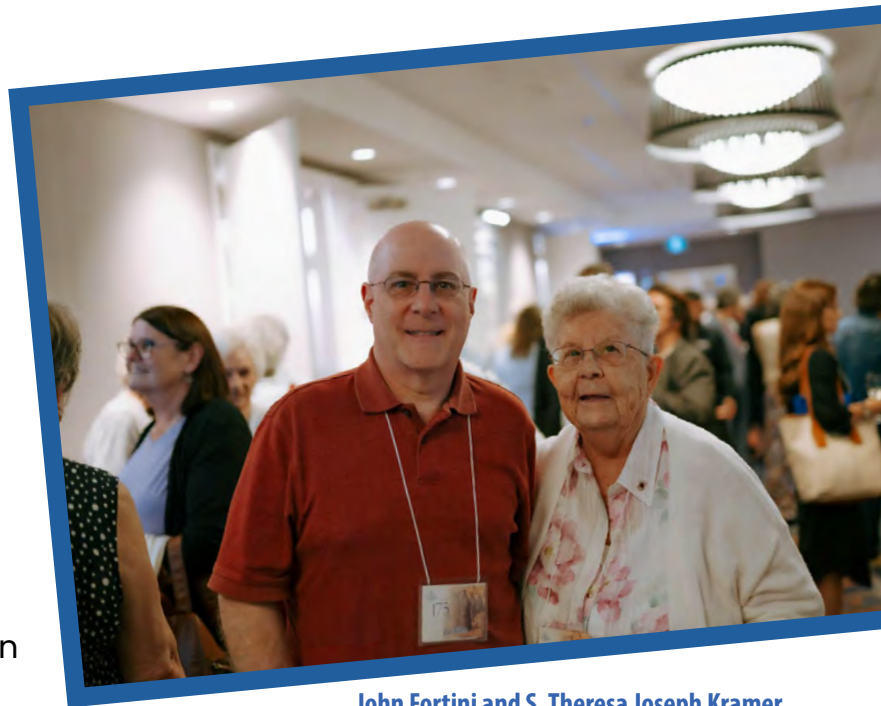
**I could feel the joy and love in the room emanating from all those in attendance.**

Sharing the celebration of Mass with so many of the Sisters was a blessing, there was a glow in the room that came from more than the lights.

At dinner I sat with some of the Sisters who had come from Caritas for the afternoon and evening. It was wonderful to be able to meet many of them and share in their joy of the day. I noticed the care of the staff that had come with them so they could attend and their love and connection with the Sisters.

I thought one of the funniest things was when the Sisters from NY presented S. Margaret Mary with the bill for the funeral and perpetual care for over 100 years of the first Mother Superior. I told her later that she should tell them that she will have a cheque for them at the 275th celebration!

I had known that the Sisters had served in many locations and had ministered to many varied populations, but I had no idea



John Fortini and S. Theresa Joseph Kramer



S. Donna Dodge, President of the Sisters of Charity of New York

of huge number of wide-reaching ministries they had been involved in.

Seeing the historic pictures and videos and hearing the Sisters speak of their involvement was very special. It brought to life the charism of the Congregation as they recalled some of the ways they had been living the spirit of charity for the past 175 years. To realize the legacy of service and love that the Sisters of Charity brought to the millions of lives they touched was awe-inspiring.

# Members of the Earth Community Cluster share their experience of the 175th anniversary



Sisters Sheila Moore, Gertie Jocksch and Mary Louise Brink

The 175th prayer successfully combined an account of our history, the evolution of the Congregation, and our embrace of a new consciousness. This was indicated in the 'Welcome' which referred to "evolution in our understanding of God, the universe, and the great work, to which we are all called...." That same theme concluded the prayer; we 'come home' to God's dream for the earth, to our mission, to ourselves. "We are drawn into the future because of its sheer beauty, goodness, and truth." Wow!

*Noneen Cleary*

Everything about this hour touched me: the content, certainly, but the tenderness and care with which it was composed and delivered made the biggest impact—right from the beginning statement by S. Gerry Lancaster I found myself riveted. The language used showed a welcome understanding of the new story, (the new cosmology) and a worldview that I espouse: phrases like "in the heart of the universe ...we pray for the grace of coming home ... we have valued the quality of our relationships ...of the new consciousness ... this is our evolutionary story ..." and so forth. I felt the prevailing sense of gratitude throughout, and that posture seemed to be what everyone felt for those several days and probably still.

*Bernice Vetter*

As we prayed on the opening day, my heart was full of gratitude. The whole prayer recognized and gave thanks for Earth's evolution and our evolution from our founders to the present day. Throughout this evolution we gave thanks for all the beginnings from Earth's and our ancestors, and our discernment through the years. We expressed thanksgiving for all the transformations in nature and our own, communally and individually, as we recognized our place in the evolution of love on this planet.

*Ruth Anne Brighton*

For me, it spoke about both our cumulative history and story of the past as well as pointed to the new understandings of contemporary science and theology of the present day that are drawing us into the future. The prayer, I think, traced the evolutionary path of the Congregation.

*Margie Gillis*

The opening prayer gave witness to our graced communal journey. Images of our Sisters and ministries mirrored our evolution and transformation over these many years. I was touched by the language and spirit of the prayer...its inclusivity... its call to a broader worldview. It truly reflects the on-going presence of our personal, theological and ecological conversions that have enabled us to see in a new way. Thank you!

*Margaret Coppennath*

The experience of the 175th prayer is still resonating in me today. I found myself totally taken in by the whole process. As the story of our history unfolded, I realized that this was our story, my story. The connections of our history as an evolving story and its connections to the story of Earth and the Universe was so heartwarming to hear. We were reminded that we were part of a sacred story and something much bigger than ourselves. The care and the language of the prayer spoke to the importance of relationships, beginning with both Sisters Gerry Lancaster and Jolaine States acknowledging the land and the peoples. The energy of the prayer was evident throughout the rest of our days together.

*Gertie Jocksch*



**Sisters Anita Gagnon; Stella Arsenault, NDSC; Judith Fitzgerald, NDSC; Sheilagh Martin, Fran Fahey, Roma de Robertis, SCIC; Susan Dean and Maryann Seton Lopiccolo**

# Our Sisters who joined us virtually share their experience of the 175th anniversary

Sisters Nancy, Edna and I were “remote” and grateful participants in the 175th celebration. Through the biographies of the [175 Sisters](#) whose life stories and images are the building stones of who we are, I came away with an even deeper sense of “standing on the shoulders”—past and present.

But the strongest sense of pride and belonging was when I viewed the videos—the [Expansion](#) video and the [Transformation](#) video. I encouraged my family to view them to understand more of our sense of mission and community, though unless you live it, I’m not sure you can understand it all.

At the Assembly, Zoom didn’t diminish my sense of belonging and pride in the Congregation and the sense of joy and unity as we worked through our familiar agenda even at very early hours of the morning.

Even from afar, connections endure, are refreshed and impel forward.

## Phyllis Giroux

At our 175th anniversary celebration on August 15th, I loved the prayerful beginning, remembering the different moments of our past and the joyful conclusion with an evening of musical enjoyment and entertainment.

In-between these special moments, there was a surprise announcement by

S. Margaret Mary that awakened feelings of gratitude, surprise and delight—a large donation had been made to our tree project. This speaks to me of our commitment to care for Mother Earth, our desire to make reparations for past destructive actions, our care for victims of environmental disasters and climate crisis throughout our world today and tomorrow.

## Nancy Brown

As a native Haligonian, educated by Sisters of Charity from grade one through nursing school, several of the 175 Sisters profiled during this anniversary year I knew personally. As I read the profiles, I had a deep sense of pride and gratitude for how the seeds of Charity had been planted throughout Canada, USA, Bermuda, Peru and the Dominican Republic.

Giving joyful witness to love through living the Gospel among the poor was evident in each story. Each profile revealed their deep faith, prayerfulness and desire to use their gifts to educate or care for those in need. Our charism was fully alive in their lives.

## Edna Walsh

We raised over \$10,000 and planted over 10,000 trees in areas where we have ministered.





# Family Connections

by Cathy Ward, SC Centre Staff

The 175th celebration of the Sisters of Charity's arrival in Halifax was truly a joyous occasion. Leading up to the celebration a strong sense of community developed in me. Community: the word evokes a feeling of connectiveness, cohesion, a sense of belonging.

The guest list included Sisters, VIP's, Associates, religious from other Congregations, friends and staff. Every single Sister was truly happy to see staff at the event. I believe I can speak for all the staff: we were welcomed, loved, and graciously received. My guest was my sister, Joanne Walsh.

For myself I was excited to talk to Sisters who I only know from their directory photos. When I did connect, there was much to talk about and learn from each other. We also connected with others in the community and for my family there are a couple of standouts. During the reception we were fortunate to talk to Archbishop Emeritus, Martin Currie. There is an extended connection with my various family members. Bishop Currie married Joanne and her husband, Gerard, back in 1989, as well as marrying my brother Tom and Helen in 1997. Also, he performed a renewal of marriage vows for my parents' 50th wedding anniversary and is a very close friend to my brother Doug and his wife Margo.

The connection with Doug and Margo began when Bishop Currie was missioned in Bridgewater. Lastly, he presided over the funeral Mass for my mother, Anna Ward, in 2020. The next family connection is S. Joan O'Keefe. Doug and Margo remember S. Joan when she was missioned



Cathy Ward and S. Elaine Biollo

in Bridgewater. And of course over the years, since I worked for S. Joan, my sister came to know her well. I was also able to have a great conversation with Father Jim Richards and reminisced when my son, George, received the sacrament of First Communion while Father Jim presided. At the banquet, we all shared a table and I am grateful I was able to meet S. Margaret Bickar, who was seated next to me.

**We all keep coming back around to those we know in the community, which gives me great comfort knowing someone is always there with you, celebrating life's significant events.**

During my employment at the Sisters of Charity, my eyes have been opened to so much—mostly the compassion and love the Sisters have for so many people, including strangers.

As a recent graduate of Mount Saint Vincent University in 1991, I was a "stranger" to S. Patricia Mullins when she hired me at the Sisters of Charity Motherhouse. Little did I know I would be part of this "family" that would bring me such joy over the years, as well as the realization how I am part of such a larger community. I was absolutely thrilled to be invited to celebrate with my Sisters of Charity "family" for the 175th celebration!

# The Happiest of Occasions as the Sisters of Charity Celebrate 100 Years in New York

by Sister Liz Bickar



**Sisters and celebrants Resurrection-Ascension parish, Rego Park, NY**

**100th anniversary planning committee members: Sisters Liz Bickar, Joan Holmberg, Maryann Seton Lopiccolo and Katie Quinn**

The day dawned pleasantly cool, the last day of summer. It was September 21, and Sisters from New York and Wellesley, Associates, former members, former students, family, priest friends, parishioners, and many longtime friends of the Sisters gathered at Resurrection-Ascension parish in Rego Park, New York to celebrate 100 years of ministry of the Sisters of Charity of Halifax in the New York area.

In 1924, thanks to the tactical diplomacy of S. Francis Anna Sullivan and a Redemptorist priest friend, a small group of our Sisters

arrived in New York to open a school at Our Lady of Angels parish in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. From there, the Sisters' ministry in New York spread to many parishes and schools and to many and varied works of caring for those in need.

We celebrated the work of so many Sisters, some of whom were present at the anniversary Mass, and many of whom viewed the Mass via livestream. We remembered with gratitude the many Sisters who ministered in New York and have gone before us into eternal life. The



S. Marie Elena Dio; Suzanne Abruzzo, former member; S. Kati Hamm and Mary Ann Cornell, former member

The Congregational Leadership Team: Sisters Margaret Mary Fitzpatrick, Joan Dawber, Sheilagh Martin, Mary Lynn Flett and Mary Anne Foster stand with all our Sisters present, as the Congregation is recognized for our contribution to New York



Sisters Liz Bickar and Joan Holmberg



S. Maureen Murphy

spirit of warm gratitude was joyously evident among the Sisters for those to and with whom we have ministered, and among those who benefited from our ministry.

Sisters from the New York Sisters of Charity and Convent Station, New Jersey Sisters of Charity, and other local Congregations of Sisters.

The singing at the Mass, led by S. Maureen Murphy, filled the church. Father Kevin Noone, the main celebrant, gave a touching homily which resulted in an enthusiastic burst of applause. Bishop Robert Brennan, the Ordinary of the Diocese of Brooklyn, gave concluding remarks reflecting the gratitude of the diocese for the work of the Sisters.

It was a day which resulted in many tears of joy, many hugs and kisses, and much gratitude on the part of all. We thank God for the day, the celebration, and the 100 years during which so many of our Sisters enriched the church of New York.

After the Mass, many acquaintances were renewed in the church hall over refreshments. Elena Miranda, a New York Associate of the Congregation and a technological genius, [created a video loop of photos](#) commemorating the 100 years of ministry.

It was shown while our guests and friends enjoyed their refreshments. Among those celebrating with us were our Congregational Leadership Team and



Sisters Doris Schoner, Rose Annina Stehle, Alice Edward Johnson and Susan Dean

# 175 years of joyful witness to love

by Mary Flynn, Congregational Archivist

At our 175th Anniversary celebration on August 15, 2024, the Congregation received a significant gift—a handwritten copy of our 1857 Constitutions. These are the first Constitutions of the Halifax community after receiving approval from Pope Pius IX to become a diocesan community. Due to the Motherhouse fire in 1951, we did not have an original copy of our first Constitutions, only photocopies of typed versions.

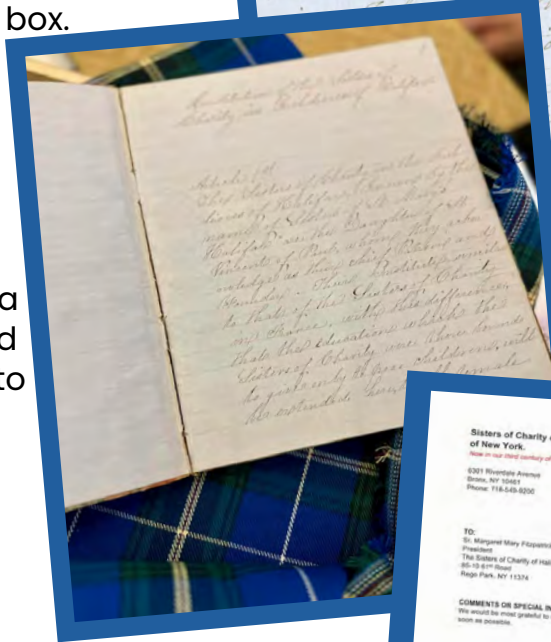
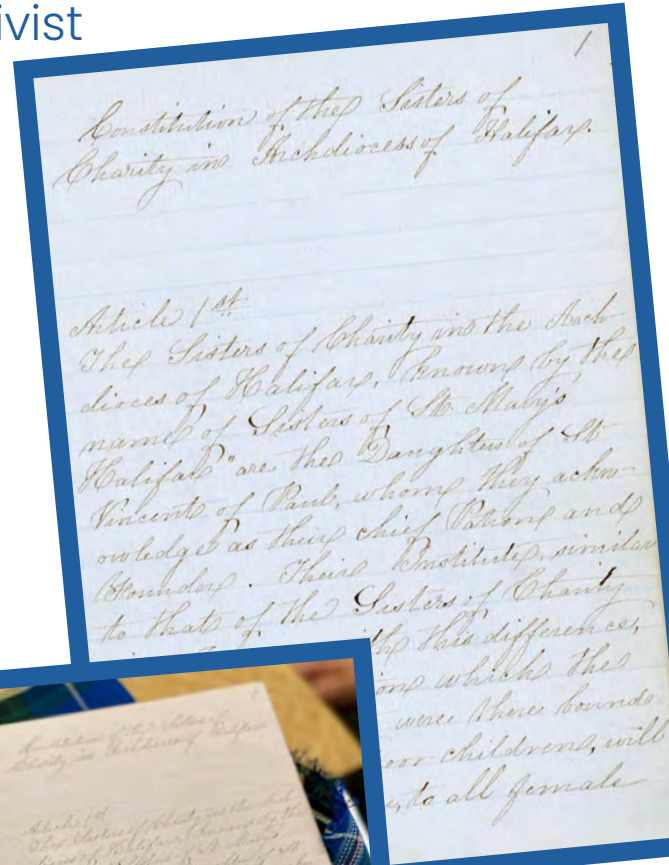
The Constitutions were recently discovered in the Sisters of Charity of New York Archives and were presented to S. Margaret Mary Fitzpatrick by SCNY President S. Donna Dodge. They were wrapped in Nova Scotia tartan and placed in a wooden box.

The gift also came with a cheeky request from S. Donna: "PAY UP!" She presented S. Margaret Mary with an overdue invoice for the ongoing maintenance of Mother M. Basilia McCann's gravesite at Mount Saint Vincent Cemetery in New York. Mother Basilia was the first Mother of the Congregation and spent nine years in Halifax before returning to her Sisters in New York in 1858.

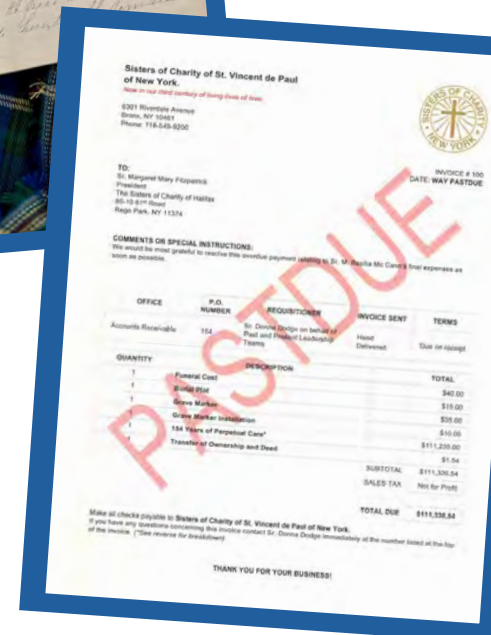
The gift of the Constitutions felt especially poignant at this moment, like a tangible connection to the early years as we journey through the final years of the Congregation.

At the time that the 1857 Constitutions were written, there were only five professed Sisters and a handful of postulants and novices.

**Could they have ever dreamt that the seed their new community planted would grow into what the Sisters of Charity – Halifax have become?**



1857 Constitutions



Invoice from the Sisters of Charity of New York

# 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](http://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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