

# Charity Alive

December 2025

## Making Home

By Sister Kati Hamm

**Everyday of my life, more and more increases my gratitude to God, for having made me who I am.**

Elizabeth Ann Seton

Among the many roles that Elizabeth took on was to be a maker of home. To make home for others one must first be at home with oneself. The words of Elizabeth Seton above say two things. Elizabeth knew herself well and she accepted her whole life as gift from God.

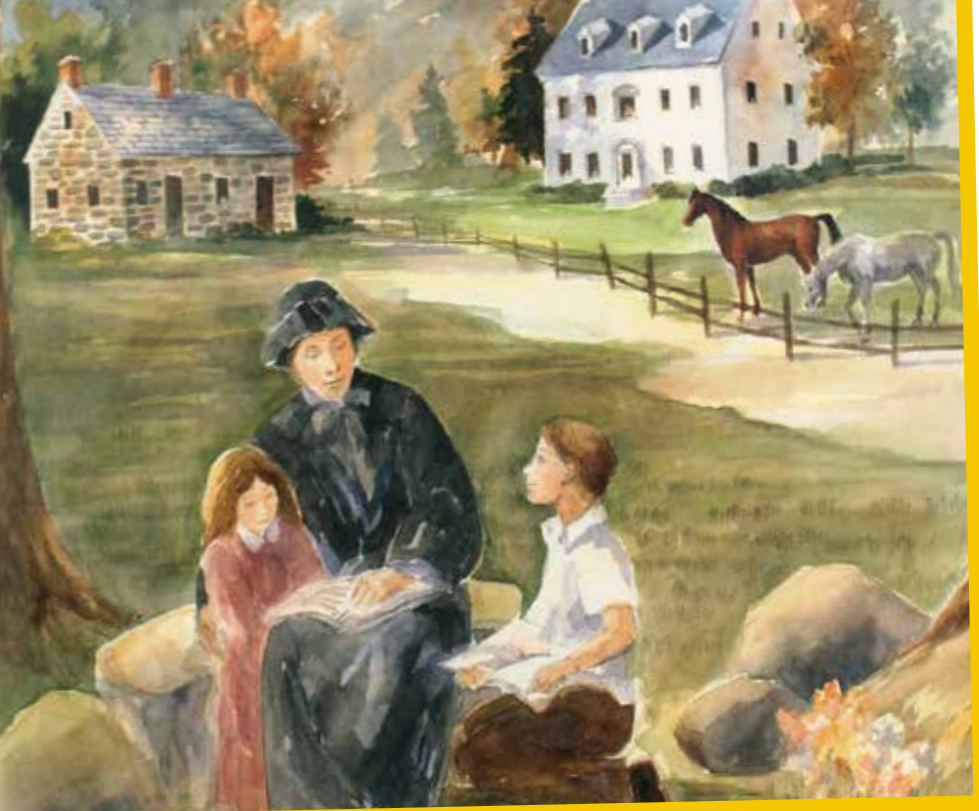
**We all know people who seem to be in touch with who they are at any given moment. Whether in times of worry, hope, grief or serenity, these people recognize that each new day, hour or moment is a place of becoming. They accept their purpose and believe in the future in which they are called to play a part. Because they are at home with themselves, they want to create home for others.**



The Stone House, Emmitsburg  
One of the first houses Saint Elizabeth lived in when she came to Emmitsburg



Inside the Stone House  
©The Seton Shrine



Thinking back to Emmitsburg in the early 19th century, we can imagine Elizabeth joyfully welcoming the students, boarders, their families and the new Sisters into this simple home and courageous endeavour. Having few resources but abundant faith, hope and love, the community grew.

In St. Joseph's Valley people knew they were welcomed, accepted, loved and challenged to be their best selves for the sake of the community.

**Elizabeth describes the home she made, "Oh what a comfort ... God permits us to serve him in peace in this happy corner, where he stays with us even under our very roof."**

In this issue of Charity Alive we will read about celebrations of people making home in these days.

Among the many interesting articles are a reflection on the fiftieth anniversary of the Seton Foundation in Cape Breton, reminding us of the life-changing impact of housing—offering families safety, stability, community and pride—and the opening of Ozanam Housing on Brunswick Street in Halifax.

For many, the opportunity to secure affordable housing had seemed out of reach. In each of these stories people felt blessed, were lifted up and experienced a sense of possibility.

**Imagine how making home gives them new energy. They are grateful and their gratitude radiates outward to change the face of the future.**

# *To Live is to Change*

by Sister Martha Westwater

## **With Grateful Hearts**

Sister Martha Westwater died on December 9. This Charity Alive article, submitted on November 8, may be among the last pieces she wrote for our Congregation.

In it, Sister Martha reflects with honesty and wisdom on the experience of change, particularly the ways it brings both gain and loss. She speaks candidly about the loss of independence, seen most clearly in relinquishing the use of a car, and the spiritual invitation that follows: learning again how to let go.

With characteristic clarity, she names this letting go as detachment, accepting life as it is and trusting God within it.

We share her reflection with gratitude, receiving it now as both gift and legacy.

Eleven years ago I came to Marillac Residence in Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts. What changes I have seen! Cardinal Newman could never have been thinking of me when he wrote, “To live is to change, and to change often is to become perfect.”

**I may not have become perfect, but I do think my life has been transformed in two ways. First, I have accepted my deafness (well, almost), and secondly, I have learned to share. The second lesson is more important than the first.**

One of the first things a child is taught by a good parent is to share. Children think everything belongs to them. Part

of becoming an adult is learning to give up, and we at Wellesley are learning to give up by having members of five





religious orders share our charism as we learn theirs. Marists, Religious of Jesus and Mary, Sister of Charity of Nazareth, and Franciscans Sisters, Missionaries of Mary, are our latest arrivals. Perhaps causing the most change in the Marillac household is having 11 good, lay people share life with us; and what a disparate group our new residents are.

Eight women and three men share their gifts with us. Of those eleven there is a husband and wife team, two widowers and seven widows. What changes these new residents must be experiencing, also!

Usually in any change, there is gain and loss. The greatest loss is independence—seen most vividly in the loss of a car. We have to learn again the ability to “let go”—to accept things as they are—detachment, or abandonment to divine providence, as the old piety calls it.

**Letting go means allowing members of other communities to share our charism and for us to learn theirs: to learn the Marist Sisters gift of simplicity of life style, from the Religious of Jesus and Mary, their courage in forging new ministries, from the Franciscans, their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and from our lay residents the freedom to let go of old homes and beloved companions.**

Perhaps our lay residents have given up the most in coming to Marillac. How quickly they have adapted—looking after one another, making sure that there is room at the table for late-comers, accepting house rules—like three “people with rollers” on the elevators, even waiting patiently for the elevator. Kindness prevails at Marillac.

Cardinal Newman summed it up so succinctly: to live is to change and to change often is to become perfect. More changes await us. May we have the grace to accept the gains and losses of old age; may we concentrate on the gains of life, minimize the losses. May we find in the beauty of Marillac’s rural setting compensation for our losses and may we find in the changes of nature a pattern for our lives.

**We are now in the depths and death of Winter, awaiting the coming of the crocuses of the new life Spring brings, glorying in Summer’s liberation, and finding peace and rest in Autumn’s letting go.**



# *A Night to Remember: 50 Years of Affordable Housing in Cape Breton*

by Sister Margie Gillis

November 5, 2025 at the Joan Harris Cruise Pavilion in Sydney, Nova Scotia was an evening of remembrance marking the 50th anniversary of the Seton Foundation.

**The Foundation was the inspiration and passion of Sister Louise Bray and the Sisters who lived at Seton Centre in Glace Bay in the 1970's.**



Ginger Hogan (Vice Chair- Board of Directors) making presentation to Sisters Mary Anne Foster, Joan Dawber and Sheilagh Martin

Originally known as Houses For People the project was eventually renamed The Seton Foundation, a name chosen to commemorate the canonization of Elizabeth Ann Seton in 1975.

**The evening recalled the immense assistance and generosity of the Sisters of Charity. Of significance was the \$500,000 contribution made in the initial stage of the project.**

The weight and influence of this contribution launched the Foundation and provided leverage for additional money

from the federal government to begin the process of building homes.

Over time, the financial contribution from the Congregation was repaid, and today The Seton Foundation currently holds nearly 200 homes throughout the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. The Foundation owns and maintains the properties and in recent years each of the homes has been completely renovated, putting the Foundation in an extremely strong position.

During the evening Sisters Sheilagh Martin, Joan Dawber and Mary Anne



Foster of the Congregational Leadership Team were recognized and thanked by the grateful audience.

Ginger Hogan, Vice Chair of the Seton Foundation Board of Directors, noted in her remarks that:

**The Sisters of Charity made this all possible. The work of the Sisters and the original financial contribution elevated and propelled the vision of Louse Bray into a very concrete reality that stands today!**

It is interesting to note that Ginger Hogan's aunt, Sister Johanna Hogan, was one of the Sisters at Seton Centre involved in the Houses for People project.



Board Chair Sister Margie Gillis addresses the gathering.



Nancy Prendergast (Assistant Administrator), Sisters Mary Anne Foster and Joan Dawber, Bill Buckland (Administrator) and Sister Sheilagh Martin



Sisters Joan Dawber, Margie Gillis, Mary Anne Foster and Sheilagh Martin

# Casino Night 2025

by Judy Coogan

Director of Development, ESR

As guests arrived, a magical double rainbow arched gracefully over the Mount Saint Vincent campus in Wellesley, heralding the beginning of Casino Night 2025. The community came together for an evening filled with excitement, laughter, fun and fundraising, all in support of the Elizabeth Seton Residence Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, a ministry of the Sisters of Charity - Halifax. Funds raised are dedicated to replacing resident furniture and upgrading nursing equipment, ensuring the comfort and safety of those we serve.

**For the Elizabeth Seton Residence community, the true meaning of belonging extends far beyond borders. Community is built on the bonds of family and heart, not simply on location.**

We welcomed residents, family members, community friends, business partners, former employees and Sisters from near and far. Numerous staff members volunteered their time to transform the dining room into a festive venue where all enjoyed a warm sense of camaraderie and a spectacular evening of fun. Underneath the rainbows there was a sense of shared purpose and, perhaps, the promise of a pot of gold at the end, a symbol of hope and generosity that united everyone present.

*"We, Sisters of Charity, are so proud of the quality of care given to each of our residents at ESR. The charism of charity is alive in all those who serve. It was my joy to add to its spirit and fiscal resources through participation at the lively Casino Night. We were all winners!"*

Sister Margaret Mary Fitzpatrick  
Congregational Leader



Sisters Anne Power, Mary Anne Foster and Doris Schoner



Sister Theresa Joseph Kramer



*"The spirit in the room was festive and joyful right from the start. Our community friends showed up in force to support our residents. Looking around the room, I was surrounded by laughter and smiles as everyone gathered around the game tables for an evening of fun. I am most grateful for their generosity and enthusiasm that contributed to the success of the evening!"*

Lori Ferrante

Executive Director / CEO Elizabeth Seton Residence

*"We are so happy to support ESR and the wonderful work that all of you do!"*  
Sarah & Harold Foley



*"Casino night was so enjoyable ... and all for a good cause. I invited my cousin from New Hampshire. Who knew we would both be so good at Blackjack?! He got to meet many who live and work here, which made me happy. The food was plentiful and tasty and the wine was delicious. Of course we all thought that we were going to win all the wonderful prizes! Maybe next year!"*

Sister Judy Park



**Harold and Sarah Foley, Bob Green and Noreen Lovett**  
Harold and Sarah Foley were the high bidders in the Casino Night Silent Auction -- a trip to the Kentucky Derby in Louisville - May, 2026.

*"It was a fun filled night. It was so extra special, because we had quite a few visiting Sisters from New York. It was such a pleasure for them to come for fun, rather than business. It was wonderful having them share in our ESR and Marillac adventures. Thank you for all you do. We had a blast in Ireland. Loved the house and time there!"*

Sister Theresa Joseph Kramer



**Sister Theresa Joseph Kramer and Lori Ferrante**  
Sister Theresa Joseph's nephew, Bill Kramer, won the grand prize in our Casino Night raffle, a wonderful trip to Ireland.



# An Afternoon of Gratitude

by Sister Kathleen Kull

On September 29 Sister Roberta Kerins and I were fortunate to attend the LifeWay Network Afternoon Tea, held at the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (Marymount Sisters) Provincial Center in Tarrytown, NY. This event truly was, as promised in the invitation, “a celebration of community, generosity and hope!”

Alison Boak, Executive Director, welcomed all and proudly introduced LifeWay Network’s newly expanded 360 Safe Housing Program Model—increasing the length of stay of survivors from one to three years. The Comprehensive Transitional Safe Housing continues to offer a trauma-informed environment with wraparound support for up to one year. From there, women can now move into the newly created Semi-Independent Transitional Safe Housing, which offers a minimally structured setting for up to two additional years as they strengthen their independence and prepare for life beyond LifeWay.

**When no housing is immediately available, the new Emergency Hotel Stays will provide immediate safety and care.**

Next were the panelists: Sisters Kate O’Neill and Claudia Stecker of Our Lady of the Missions Congregation, host community at LifeWay 2, and Fordham University master’s degree candidate Venissa Vincent, a Fordham social work intern and Care Coordinator for both LifeWay 1 and 2. They spoke of the day-in and day-out challenges of providing safe housing, the relationships built among survivors and staff, the joys and hardships experienced in living and working so closely with survivors of unspeakable trauma and helping them feel safe – for the first time.



Alison Boak, Executive Director



Panelists: Venissa Vincent, Sisters Kate O'Neill and Claudia Stecker



The engagement of the guests with the panelists was especially wonderful, evidenced by thoughtful questions and lively discussion, making the afternoon both inspiring and meaningful. Alison and the panelists expressed gratitude to all, not only for their presence this day, but for the consistent, generous and truly impressive support of both the Marymount Sisters and our Congregation over these many years.

*LifeWay's safe housing program is the only program in the New York metro area providing safe housing specifically for both domestic and foreign-born women survivors of human trafficking. [www.lifewaynetwork.org](http://www.lifewaynetwork.org)*

**Events like these are a beautiful reminder of the strength and power women religious have exercised in bringing healing and hope to survivors ever since 2001, when this urgent need was first identified.**

**Throughout our Congregation, we Sisters of Charity have been a steadfast and generous supporter of this trailblazing endeavour, one that provides a home for some of the neediest among us.**

### **Corporate Stance on Human Trafficking**

We Sisters of Charity– Halifax, called to be prophetic women in a world wounded by violence and stripped of hope, are committed to make the love of God visible in our world by serving persons who are poor, especially those who through shame conceal their necessities. We stand together in a time when we hear the silent cries of victims of human trafficking, especially those women and children taken for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour. We commit ourselves to work to eradicate this global human rights violation and to affirm the dignity of all human beings.

(adopted 2008)





# Grand Opening of Ozanam Place

by Angela Rafuse, Executive Director, SC Centre  
and Sister Cecilia Mac Neil



**Sisters Cecilia Mac Neil, Margaret Mary Fitzpatrick, Evelyn Williams and Sheilagh Martin**

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVdP) of Halifax celebrated the grand opening of Ozanam Place on October 9, 2025, with the Sisters of Charity present for the occasion. Named in honour of the Society's founder, Frederic Ozanam, the new residence features 38 private units offering supportive housing for tenants aged 50 and older, with priority given to women, and to African Nova Scotian and Urban Indigenous community members who have experienced homelessness.

As SSVdP's mission conveys, "serving people living in poverty with love, respect, and joy," each tenant signs their own lease, with rent set at an affordable rate equal to 30% of their income.

Ozanam Place is one of Nova Scotia's first permanent housing projects to embrace Trauma-Informed Design. This approach promotes resident health, wellness and safety through thoughtful features that support accessibility, environmental efficiency,

onsite healthcare and coordinated case management. The North End Community Health Centre (NECHC), long recognized for its dignified care for individuals without primary healthcare, including through the Mobile Outreach Street Health (MOSH) clinic, will operate the residence with 24/7 onsite staff.

**The property's history dates back to 1868, when it served as the home of a prominent banking executive. Later acquired by the Archdiocese of Halifax, it became a place of ministry for the Sisters of Charity at Saint Joseph's Orphanage and the Home of the Guardian Angel.**

In the mid-1950s, SSVdP transitioned the building into a residence for men, a role it held until 1996. Today, SSVdP continues its service next door at Hope Cottage.

Ozanam Place was made possible through the generosity of many partners committed to equitable housing, including the governments of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Canada; the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia; NECHC; and numerous benefactors and friends of SSVdP, including the Sisters of Charity.

**Reflecting on the project, lead volunteer Ken McClintock remarked that "the soul of the Sisters lives here."**

**Continuing the legacy of the many Sisters who served before her, Sister Cecilia Mac Neil, SC remains an active volunteer with Hope Cottage and SSVdP and played a key role in bringing forward the Congregation's support for Ozanam Place, celebrating the Sisters mission "to give joyful witness to love...of all persons".**

We pray for all who make their home at Ozanam Place, and may they "come together as a family," as in SSVdP's mission.



The Congregation presented this painting of Hope Cottage (Bettie Parker, 1976). It will be displayed in the new Ozanam Place residence.



# Home is the Where the Heart Is

by Angela Rafuse, Executive Director, SC Centre

While many of us return each day to a safe and welcoming home, sadly, many in our communities do not.

**Housing insecurity is rising rapidly, and yet housing remains a fundamental human right. Everyone deserves a place to call their own.**

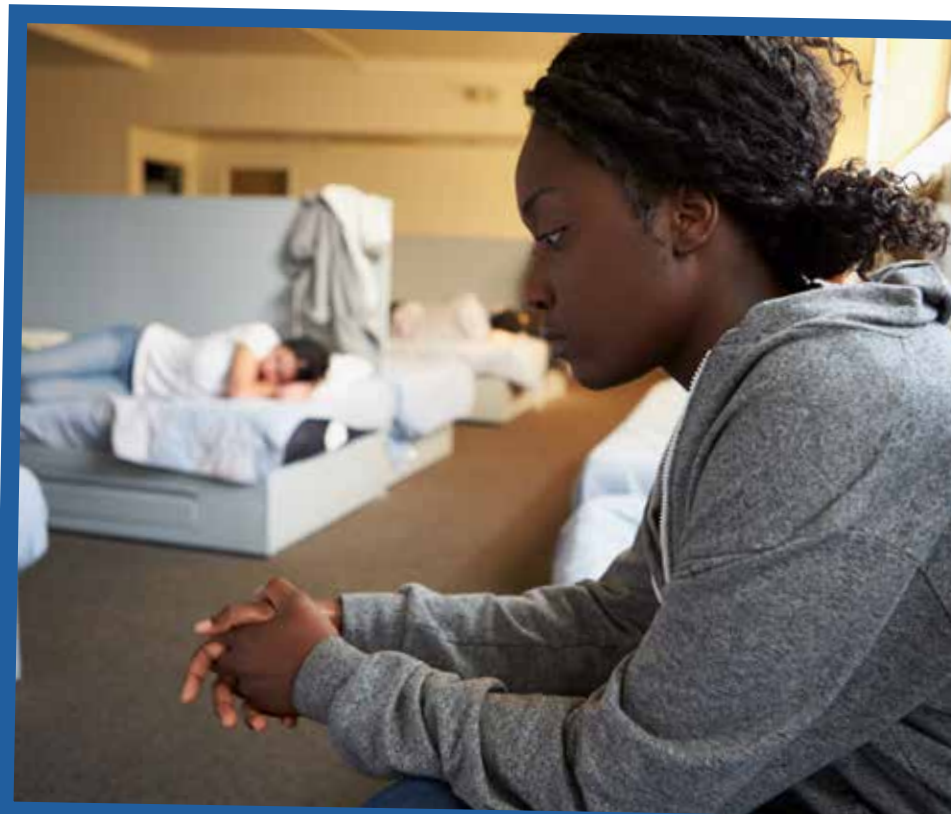
Through the Charity Alive Fund, the Sisters of Charity and their benefactors assist charitable partners whose mission focuses on providing housing, safety and stability for our neighbours.

Below are just a few of the heartwarming stories shared by these partners. These stories show the profound impact of safe homes, compassionate care and restored dignity for those served.

*“Women’s networks are getting stronger. Women in our program are experiencing increased economic security and a greater sense of empowerment in their communities and families.”*

*“Funding was used to support girls in need of getting off the streets, into a home and back into school.”*

*“Living in a safe home has eased me into each step of my healing. I can access the supports I want and need... before, I was afraid to leave my house and didn’t know where to turn for help from the violence I was experiencing.”*



*"Six hubs were built using refurbished shipping containers, offering safe spaces for health services and gender-based-violence (GBV) support. These hubs provide comfort, business support and safe learning spaces."*

*"With a safe, loving home and appropriate health and wellness support, children can be empowered to build a better future ... our home offers nurturing, stable care for children with no other options."*

Home truly is where the heart is. The Charity Alive Fund provides support to those beginning fresh chapters, including newcomers seeking safety, young women pursuing brighter futures and children gaining opportunities they might never otherwise experience.

*"This summer it cost \$800 per child to provide a wonderful week of free camp. That included food, horse rides, crafts and many other opportunities. Our campers enjoyed a safe environment where they learned about self-care, mental health and the hope of Jesus Christ. With 57% of our children coming from families living below the federal poverty line, camp was a powerful response to the cries of the poor. With three generous meals, snacks and backpacks filled with essentials, every child felt loved and cared for."*



*"A huge thank you for the scholarship funding... you have planted a seed in me. I am starting nursing school. I will be able to give back to my community and build a strong foundation for my future."*

*"2025 has been a challenging year for immigrants and refugees. Our resettlement team works tirelessly to ensure our campus remains a safe and supportive home for families from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Haiti as they heal and build new lives of purpose and possibility."*

These testimonials offer a small reflection of how the profound charism of charity is extended to our brothers and sisters through the Sisters of Charity and the Charity Alive Fund.

**May the comforts of home continue to be shared generously with all those in need through the Sisters' ministry.**

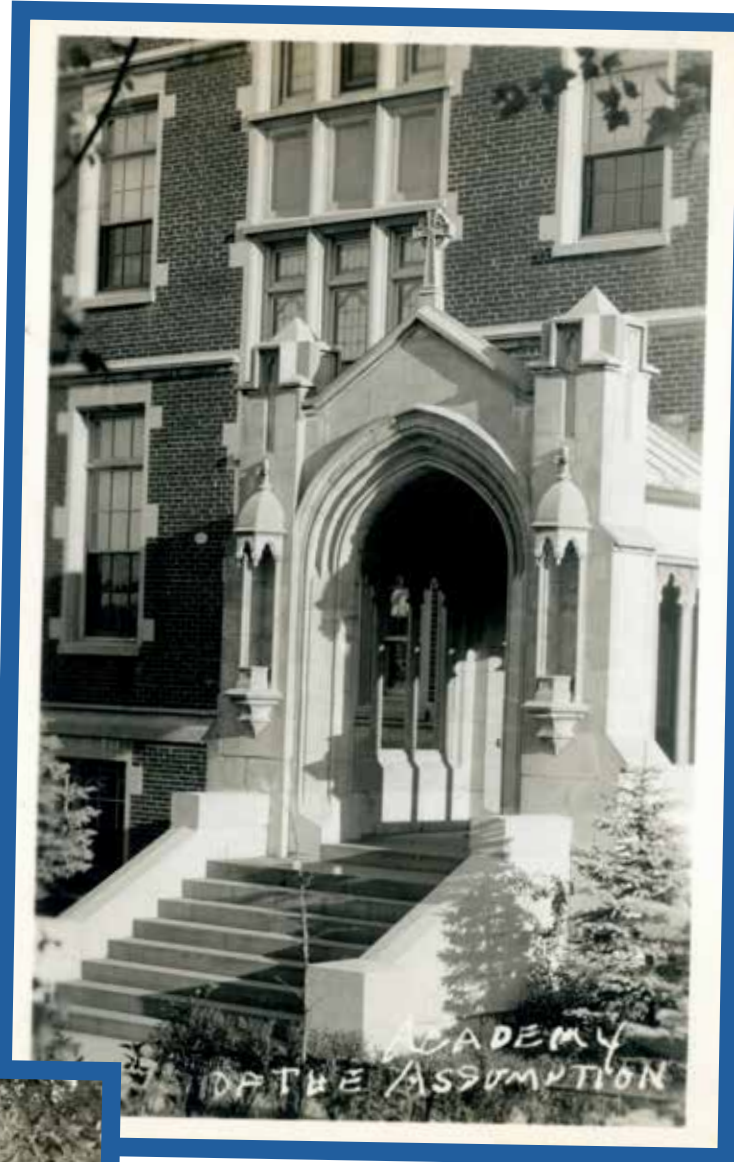


# "We just cannot tell you how grateful we are to you:" Refugee children in Wellesley Hills during World War II

by Mary Flynn, Archivist  
with research support from  
Sister Mary Christine McDonald

**"Dear Friends," the typewritten letter starts, "I have made about twenty attempts to write this letter, but it is impossible for me to put into writing the feelings my wife and I have to you for your generous offer to my two children of a home and safety from war dangers."**

The letter was written by a British father on August 11th, 1940, just weeks after the start of the Battle of Britain. His two children were on the steamship "The Duchess of Atholl" crossing the Atlantic, with faith that they would find safety away from the escalating war at home in London.



Entrance to the Academy of the Assumption



Boys' athletic field, St. Joseph's Academy



Library at Academy of the Assumption

In the summer of 1940, the Catholic Charitable Bureau asked the Sisters in Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts for a favour: take care of refugee children for an indefinite period.

**Starting in September 1940 until the end of the school year in 1945, the Sisters supported girls and boys from seven British families and one Dutch family.**

Some were there just a short time, or as day students living nearby, but others became boarders and finished several academic years. The girls attended Academy of the Assumption, while the boys were taught in St. Joseph's Academy.

The parents of the refugee children sent money and clothing as they could, and the Sisters received anonymous donations of money, fundraised contributions from The Pilot and Boston Evening Transcript newspapers, as well as support from the United States

Committee for the Care of European Children, a committee whose honorary president was Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. One young boy from Reading, England was financed by Rev. Bernard Sheil, Bishop of Chicago and founder of the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO).

In our annals and records from Wellesley Hills, the arrival of these refugee children was well documented with stacks of bureaucratic forms and letters about their medical exams, registration with the American government, and so on. After the British and Dutch children settled in, they took the same courses as the American-born children, they attended the annual Wellesley Field Day and celebrated their confirmations and first communions.

**While their countries were under attack, these young students were given a chance at a bit of normalcy in their childhood in their home away from home.**



*The birth of Jesus,  
is our love, hope, and joy.*

*Let us be this blessing  
in our world.*



*And the word became flesh  
and dwelt among us ...*

John 1:14

*Merry Christmas*

*Joan Margaret Mary Mary Lynn Mary Anne Sheilagh*

**Congregational Leadership Team**

**Sisters Joan Dawber, Margaret Mary Fitzpatrick, Mary Lynn Flett, Mary Anne Foster, Sheilagh Martin**

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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