



September 12, 2023

Sisters of St. Martha

Mount Carmel Administration Centre
75 Marian Drive
Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada
B2G 2G6

Tel: (902) 863-3113

Fax: (902) 863-9439

E-mail: csmleadership@themarthas.com

Dear Supporters of Martha Retreat Centre in Lethbridge,

I would like to share with you some of our thoughts, concerns, and hopes about the future of Martha Retreat Centre and to share our Martha (CSM) strategic planning about this essential ministry in Western Canada.

In our work throughout the Sisters of Charity Federation, of which we are members as well as the Canadian Religious of Canada (CRC), we are aware that Retreat Centres are having a difficult time becoming sustainable and many have had to close due to lack of funding or competent oversight.

We feel blessed to have the Executive Director and Board working diligently to become sustainable so that the *Centre* can continue in Western Canada for many years to come. We are grateful for their efforts to continue the *mission* within the Christian tradition.

Martha Retreat Centre held its first retreat in 1974. In the almost fifty years since, the *mission* of the Retreat Centre has been revised many times but has always been rooted in a legacy of service; fostering and celebrating the spiritual well-being of all who come to the Centre.

In 2016, it became evident that we, Sisters of St. Martha, could not continue to run the Centre indefinitely due to the lack of availability of sisters able to serve on Retreat Teams and/or offer oversight re the operations of the Centre. For the next two years, a group of dedicated lay people, sisters missioned at the Centre and a representative of the CSM General Administration team met to pray, discuss, and discern the future of Martha Centre. In the fiscal year 2018 – 2019 and following, yeoman's work was done to move the transition forward, appoint a new Board of Directors, hire an Executive Director, obtain legal charitable status for the new entity now called *Martha Retreat Centre Society*. Numerous other administrative achievements were completed. The three remaining Sisters of St. Martha returned to Nova Scotia in July 2019.

In the past five years, the Board, Staff, Facilitators and Volunteers at Martha Retreat Centre have accomplished much – the following is just a smattering:

- ✓ Enhancement of grounds and creation of a contemplative garden.
- ✓ Revision of all key documents.
- ✓ New and creative programming.
- ✓ Strong Executive Director, Board of Directors, Committees.
- ✓ Volunteer group – building, grounds, hospitality, prayer, and programming.
- ✓ Valiant efforts to make the Centre known through fund raising events.
- ✓ Strengthening of social media and update technology.

It is the hope and dream of the Sisters of St. Martha that Martha Retreat Center continues to thrive and grow in the years to come. The need has never been greater to have resources available to promote the spiritual in our lives. To have this sacred place of welcome – to be able to go aside and connect with nature, other seekers and the Divine is a treasure worth keeping.

The Sisters of St. Martha still own the building and are subsidizing the operations. The plan is that the facility will be gifted to the Society at the end of August 2026 if they can become self sustaining. The Centre is a registered charity and able to give receipts for charitable donations. The revenue from programs is not enough, the Centre needs donations to reach financial sustainability.

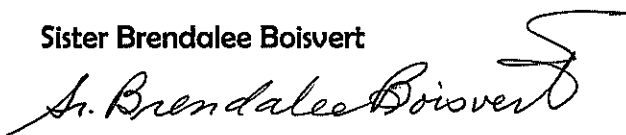
As a Congregation, we are grateful to the lay women and men who have taken on the responsibility of operating Martha Retreat Centre. We are proud of what they have accomplished. I/we humbly ask you to support this group in any way possible, through prayer, participating in programs and/or by donation. Our goal is to transfer the ownership of the facility to Martha Retreat Centre Society.

The lives of the Sisters of St. Martha have been enriched through our ministry in Western Canada. We would be honoured if you could help this legacy live on in Lethbridge by supporting this very dedicated group of lay people carrying on this spirituality and retreat ministry which is near and dear to our hearts!

As an attachment to this letter, I have included the thoughts of three of our sisters who had the opportunity to live and work at Martha Retreat Centre over the years and they share their hope for the Centre's future.

Blessings and may you generously continue to support the Centre in whatever way is possible for you at this time.

Sister Brendalee Boisvert

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sr. Brendalee Boisvert". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Congregation Leader
Sisters of St. Martha
Antigonish, Nova Scotia

Martha Retreat Centre, Thoughts and hopes:

- For me...being at *Martha Retreat Centre* was a wonderful experience of seeing people grow. Providing a setting where people came to listen to God. My hope is that Martha Retreat Centre can continue being a setting where people can grow and tell others about the opportunity, to spend quality time with God and to spread the good news.

Sr. Claire MacNeil (2003-2008 as Director)

- For me...I valued working at *Martha Retreat Centre* because so many people from all different faiths came looking for a place to pray and be quiet. We were able to provide this quiet. We were able to assist them with this dimension in their lives that they could not find elsewhere.

Now as we look to the future my hope is that this dimension of finding a quiet space with assistance in prayer for the different faiths will be continued.

Sr. Loretta Gillis (2008-2013 as Director)

- For me...It is inspiring for me to witness the creativity and commitment of the members of the *Martha Retreat Centre Society Board*, and its Executive Director, as they meet the various realities of developing Martha Retreat Centre. How can anyone forget "Covid Times!" when it was difficult to welcome retreatants, visitors, patrons? At that time a labyrinth was developed on the Centre's grounds, benches were sold, and wonderful friends/patrons met the challenge of buying them, so the beautiful grounds of the Centre became more accessible. Now, PAL (Peace at Lunch) and Music on the Grounds are annual events.

Congratulations for making the Vision of the Centre a living reality: **To be a welcoming place where individuals explore and experience spiritual nurturing through retreats of stillness and peace, inspirational programming and events that nourish the soul.** My prayer is that more people may realize "the Gem" that Martha Retreat Centre is and may take an active part in its sustainability.

Sister Theresa Parker (2009-2019 as Director and Program Coordinator. She continues to serve on the Board)