

# LEADING EDGE ... *Edge Thoughts*

**Come to the Edge. We might Fall. Come to the edge. It's too high!**  
**COME TO THE EDGE.** And they came; and he pushed; and they flew.

Christopher Logue – *Ode to the Dodo – Poems from 1953 – 78*

ARCAN Logo Designed by Phyllis Gallant, CND



## ARCAN MISSION STATEMENT

Rooted in Gospel values and inspired by the charisms of each religious congregation the mission of ARCAN is to provide a supportive network committed to adult learning, inclusive actions, embracing diversity, along with an awareness of the new consciousness that all life is sacred and connected.

## ARCAN VISION STATEMENT

The vision of ARCAN is to be a mutually supportive network of Associates and Sisters in Atlantic Canada living a new and dynamic expression of religious life and spirituality for the 21st century. We inspire to invite one another to a wider embrace of Gospel values and to live a commitment of love in relationship with all.

## NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

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## Message from Newsletter Committee

We hope you enjoy this June issue of “The Leading Edge” as we stay connected through ARCAN with the Atlantic Religious Congregations and their Associates. In this newsletter you will find a re-cap of ARCAN’s April meeting, and of the Spiritual session with Sister Elizabeth Davis.

You will find interesting stories of the beginnings of several Congregations who are celebrating anniversaries.

There are some “Personal Reflections” on visions of how our Church may change in Post-Synod times. These articles may inspire you to do your own reflections, follow the next session of the Synod in October, and pray for its success for growth and unity.

The CND Sisters and Associates have shared information on their up-coming Forum on “De-Colonization” which may help inspire us in efforts to seek justice for all who suffer the consequences of colonization in our country and around the world.

We thank everyone who made submissions and invite feedback, which is always appreciated.

God Bless!

*Deirdre & Mary*

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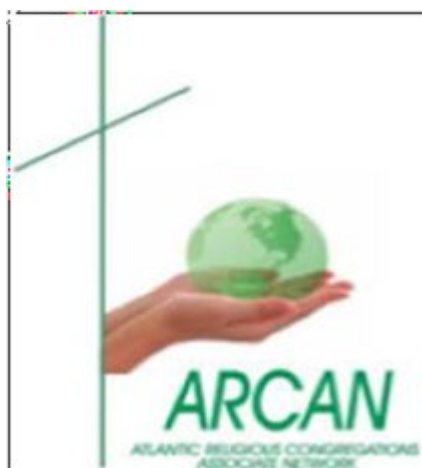
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ARCAN April Zoom Meeting Re-cap 12-13 April 2024

Twelve Associates and three Sisters were in attendance, representing the following eight Atlantic Religious Congregations: Religious Sisters of Mercy (RSM), NL; Presentation Sisters of Blessed Virgin Mary (PBVM), NL; Sisters of Charity, Halifax (SCH); Sisters of Charity of Immaculate Conception (SCIC), NB; Congregation of Notre Dame (CND), Atlantic Province; Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ), Atlantic; Sisters of Saint Martha (CSM), PEI; Sisters of Saint Martha (CSM), Antigonish.

The meeting was co-chaired by Julia Townsend, and Dianne MacAskill. After the welcoming (Julia), land acknowledgement (Dianne), and opening prayer (Gail), new members were introduced, agenda reviewed, and prayers were offered for Anne Bown who is preparing to have surgery.

A Check-In was provided from each Associate group providing information on their most recent activities. Many groups are restructuring and moving towards autonomy with the diminishing numbers of sisters. All, of course, are involved with their continuing spiritual development. Some facilitate spiritual programs for other people in the community. Some are involved in community outreach programs such as dinners, supporting local and international projects providing food baskets and hygiene packages, and monthly sponsorships. While associate membership is reported to be diminishing, groups are still focused on being present and prepared to invite and provide formation for inquirers and potential new associates. Associates particularly enjoy many opportunities to be engaged with the sisters through social gatherings, games, praying the rosary, chats, and, of course, tea and refreshments. Social justice issues such as climate change, water protection, awareness of the issues of indigenous peoples, and the effects of colonization are on the agendas of various groups. As one group was told, “Stay grounded in your Charism.”

*Continued p.3.*

## ARCAN April Zoom Meeting Re-cap 12-13 April 2024, cont.

Sister Maureen O'Keefe, RSM, reported on "Wellsprings", which has been organized to continue eight of the Mercies' sponsored ministries and will be guided by a Board of Directors comprising four lay people and two sisters. Sister Maureen also spoke of their use of "Wisdom Circles" to carry out the directives of the Chapter, welcoming inclusion and diversity, and discerning new paths of the Mercy charism into the future.

Sr. Pat Poole SCIC reported they have had their last Chapter canonically. They will celebrate the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their founding and 100<sup>th</sup> for their French sisters. They are consciously working on personal and communal transformation, but happy to be "Still here!"

Sister Helen Danahy SCH spoke about their humble beginnings 175 years ago and of their anniversary celebration events. They endeavor to "Keep active and hopeful."

Pauline Scott gave the report for the RSCJ sisters who continue to operate the Barat Centre and serve as members of the School Board for Sacred Heart School. They also will celebrate 175 years since their founding. Being an international congregation their Chapter will be held in Rome in August.

Other business of the meeting consisted of discussions about the Newsletter Committee, suggestions for facilitators for the next spiritual session at October's ARCAN meeting, discussion of ARCAN DAY last February and decision to have another in 2025, and the detailed financial report.

Great appreciation was expressed to Julia and Dianne and all who helped plan and participated in this ARCAN meeting. Our next meeting will be October 18-19, 2024.

*Submitted by Mary MacLean, Newsletter Committee Member*

## 175 Years of "Sacred Heart" Education in Halifax

Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat founded the Society of the Sacred Heart in France in 1800. Their mission is to discover and reveal God's love in the heart of the world through the service of education. Sophie's vision for the Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) was to provide education and spiritual development to young women in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The first school was opened in 1801 in Amiens, France. Her vision extended to North America through the efforts of Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne.

In 1849, Reverend Mother Hardey, Mother Mary Frances Peacock, Mother Donnelly, Mother Dussart and two other Sisters came from New York to found a community of the Religious of the Sacred Heart. Archbishop William Walsh requested their help to educate young girls in Halifax and they opened the Convent of the Sacred Heart one week after their arrival to their new home at Brookside, the present site of the Lord Nelson Hotel.

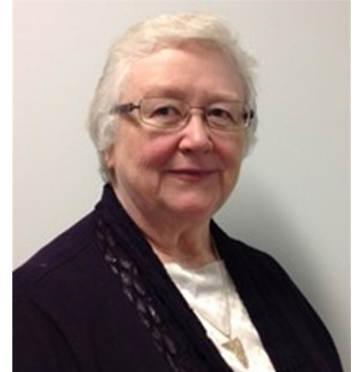
The Convent moved from Spring Garden Road to the present location of the Sacred Heart School of Halifax. Enrollment grew from 13 pupils in 1851 to 500 in 2024 after spanning 175 years of Sacred Heart education.

"For the sake of one child, I would have founded the Society." -St. Madeleine Sophie Baret

*Submitted by Sarah Cassidy, RSCJ Associate Co-Coordinator in Halifax and Co-Chair of the Associate Leadership Team for the RSCJ US-Canada Province, and past member of the ARCAN newsletter committee.*

## ARCAN Spiritual Session 13 April 2024

with Sister Elizabeth Davis RSM, voting delegate at the Synod on Synodality in Rome, October 2023 & 2024



*Sr Elizabeth Davis, RM, NL*

Sister Elizabeth, using slides as visuals, vividly described her participation in the Synod in October 2023, with its focus on Communion, Mission and Participation in a Church that is “walking with” and “listening to”. Five hundred individuals were in attendance, 360 delegates and 140 translators, communicators and support persons. There were 54 women (15%). 20% of the delegates were not cardinals or bishops. Delegates were seated at 32 tables. Translations were officially provided in the five languages of English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Each table had a facilitator and the process used for discussion was called “Conversations in the Spirit” which consisted of silent reflection on a topic, 4-minutes of uninterrupted speaking by each participant, prayer, and then 4 minutes for each to express what they learned that was new or what was re-enforced for them. A two-page document was prepared from each table on what was agreed on in the conversation. The process was based on silence, encounter, prayer, and action.

As a result of the session, it was agreed the Church exists in three qualities: diversity, unity and incompleteness.

At the end of the 2023 session, two documents were produced. One was a two-page “Letter to the People of God” and the second was a 44-page Synthesis of the Synod session.

Sister Elizabeth was very conscious of her role as a delegate, grateful for the opportunity, and conscientious of speaking to issues of gender equity, inclusiveness, formation for ministries, and the identity of care of creation being included in spirituality and faith.

Her presentation was followed by a Q&A period when she expressed her need to listen to as many views as possible in preparation for the second session of this Synod, in October 2024.

*Submitted by Mary MacLean, Newsletter Committee Member*

## Sisters of Charity of Halifax: The Beginning

On May 11, 1849, the *SS Cambria* arrived in Halifax and four Sisters of Charity of New York stepped off the ship and onto the dock. A priest was there to welcome them. The Bishop of Halifax had written to the American religious community asking if they could send four sisters to help out in his diocese.

In short order the sisters were settled into the house to be called St. Mary's Convent on Barrington Street not far from the Basilica. Two of the rooms were in use as classrooms and the sisters took over teaching. They had 200 students. Soon they encountered young female orphans on the city streets and took them home to care for and teach. Unbeknownst to them this would be the seed of what would be St. Joseph's Orphanage in years to come. An adoption agency and care for unwed mothers would also materialize to bring joy to many couples and secure love for many babies.

After teaching classes, the sisters would visit homes and assess the needs of the people they encountered. Food, clothing, whatever support was needed, they endeavored to supply. Needless to say, they had to be creative in thinking up activities to raise money to help the less advantaged. After several years, in 1856, it was decided they would establish a separate congregation called the Sisters of Charity, Halifax, independent from New York but following the same rules espoused by St. Vincent de Paul and Elizabeth Seton. They drew up their own constitution.

At this time in history, however, a time called "the troubles" began. The Bishop was quite controlling and discord was being disseminated among the members of the mission at St. Mary's. The newly appointed Mother General knew the problems had to be handled if the group was to continue to effectively witness to God's love and be of service. A plan was formed. Two sisters were selected who would sail to Rome and consult with the Pope. They would present their Rules and Constitutions to the Roman Canon lawyers for approval. To do this without anyone noticing, they dressed as lay women and left secretly for the port. It took many months to achieve their goals, but they did. They were proclaimed a Pontifical Institute which meant that only the Pope himself was over the congregation, and local bishops had no say in the decisions of the congregation. They were out from under the bishop's undue pressure.

The achievement was costly though. It split the local community into two factions. Those who supported the bishop versus those relishing the new canonical status. Discerning God's Will demands sacrifice and, in this case, it enabled the congregation to grow, flourish and expand over the years to the United States, across Canada, to the far North, Peru and the Dominican Republic. Education, nursing, social work, immigration support, houses of prayer and housekeeping were areas they happily pursued. They studied and prepared themselves to go where needed to do what needed to be done. Faith got them through and Hope gave them a fund of energy.

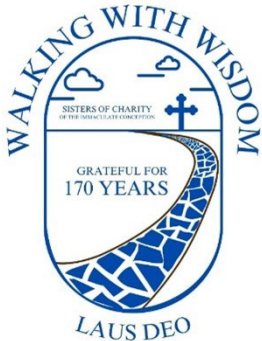
August 15, 2024 The Halifax Charities will celebrate 175 years as Sisters of Charity, Halifax. The whole year has been decreed one of gratitude. We give heartfelt thanksgiving for all the joys, challenges and love that have filled the decades. We invite you to join us in a great paean of thanks.

*Submitted by Ronnie MacDonald, SCH Associate, Halifax*



**Above:** *Painting by Sister Agnes Berchmans of Sisters of Charity of New York arriving in Halifax on May 11, 1849, to begin a new foundation.*

## Story of Faith ... Mission of Love ... Trusting in God's Providence

*Walking the Synodal path.*

The Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception are celebrating the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their foundation.

In 1854, Honoria Conway and three other women were inspired by their ancestors, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and they too responded to the call of humanity's suffering to serve with humility, simplicity and charity.

This anniversary year is being celebrated as a "170-day journey / pilgrimage of the heart" which began on May 4, 2024 and will culminate on the anniversary of the actual founding day, October 21, 1854. It was on this day that Honoria Conway (Mother Vincent) and three other sisters, professed vows in the presence of Bishop Thomas Louise Connolly, OFM. These women responded to Bishop Connolly's plea for help in caring for the many persons, especially children, orphaned by the epidemic of cholera that was ravaging the city.

This pilgrimage / journey of the heart invites us to remember these women of Courage, Faith and Charity along with 170 ordinary/extraordinary SCIC community members. Each day our Ancestral Candle, blessed on May 4, 2024, burns brightly in Carmel Chapel reminding us of their courageous faith and love. Each day, also, we are blessed to encounter by email a community member from decades ago. This daily visit draws us all, Sisters and Associates, to discover the beauty and goodness, the humanity and simplicity with which these women of charity "walked with heart," responding to the challenges of their time.

We will also celebrate in a special way the fourteen Sisters of Charity who died during COVID restrictions.

Grateful for 170 years, we will partner with the YMCA of South-eastern NB who are also celebrating 170 anniversary years and together host a special luncheon for the many non-profits with whom we collaborate in our ministry.

*Walking with wisdom... Celebrating wisdom... Seeking wisdom...*

A very special pilgrimage event will be in June 2024, when we celebrate in Moncton with Les Religieuses de Notre-Dame du Sacre Coeur, who are in their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of foundation.

In 2024, thirty-nine Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception carry forward the legacy of Honoria Conway and all who have gone before us:

- With prayer for the world, the planet, for our communities, for each other
- With collaboration and partnering with agencies and organizations who share our values
- With support to our Sisters, Associates and Staff... walking together in gratitude

**Laus Deo: Praise be to God!**

*Submitted by Zita Longobardi and Mary Beth McCurdy,scic , Co-chairs of the 170<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (30 May 2024)*

## Global CND Forum

*Everything is connected' (Pope Francis, Laudato Si)*

In August 2024, all Congregations of Notre Dame Sisters and Associates have been invited to participate in a Global CND FORUM. This forum to be held in Montreal is in person and on Zoom. The theme is 'A call to decolonize the Congrégation de Notre-Dame - in order to better participate in the humanization of the world. '

This session is intended for the training of all CND Sisters and people associated with the work of the Congregation to eliminate discrimination.

The logo represents the union of forces for the establishment of a new order, for humanizing growth that includes human plurality and the diversity of living beings in a cycle of perpetual renewal. Together, for a more humane and life-giving world for all.

Facilitators Amel Zaazaa, in collaboration with Mrs. Jeanne-Marie Rugira, will help us all to move forward together through open and courageous dialogue, so that we can work together to create the conditions essential to achieving the objectives of our FORUM. These objectives and our CND 2021 -2026 orientations are part of our established guidelines to become more aware of discrimination and transform our society into a more humane community. Our CND Forum 2024 will be about TRANSFORMATION. We are all created by God, each with our own unique gifts to share with others as we help to build a culture of love, mercy, compassion, hospitality and kindness all around us. It will be a time for earnest prayer and hope for grace to be free from discriminatory attitudes. More than ever, our foundress Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys, our rootedness in Jesus Christ, is revealed day by day in the realities of Visitation and Pentecost which define us, shape us, and challenge us.

*Submitted by Dianne MacAskill*

## Some Suggested Summer Activities

**\*Watch:** the new version of the movie, "The Color Purple."

**\* Meditation:** The Our Father has 56 words which is approximately the number of summer days. Each day take a few minutes periodically through the day to reflect on each successive word of The Lord's Prayer.

## Some Suggested Summer Activities

**\*Watch:** Netflix series "Our Living World".

**\* Read:** Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Kimmerer.

**\* Reflect:** on **Laudato Si'** by visiting a park, woods, beach, lake or walking trail that you've never visited before.



## Associates' Reflections on the Synod on Synodality

### The Church as a Community of Love and Inclusivity

Overall, the concept of the Synod was hopeful and positive, especially as a personal project of Pope Francis who continues to make clear his intent to foster the Church and make it more a community of love and inclusivity and less a rigid, dogmatic institution. In the time leading up to the Synod there was an air of anticipation reminiscent to that of my religious teachers prior to Vatican II. Like Vatican II the Synod has not gone so far as many have hoped but it is causing people to think, broadening their concept of who comprise the church, and fostering a sense of community without so much emphasis on the “we/they”, ie, “people versus the hierarchy” which was so prevalent in the past.

As a cradle Catholic woman who worked for the diocese for over 25 years, it was most refreshing to hear so many words of inclusion, collaboration and overall goodwill and invitation to participate and to see firsthand how seriously the input of women delegates was regarded.

Saint Madeline Sophie Barat, foundress of the Religious of the Sacred Heart order, wrote in the Constitutions, “We are sent by the Church to communicate the love of the Heart of Jesus. In Him all find their true growth as persons and the way towards reconciliation with one another.” By virtue of our baptism all Christians are called to do likewise. Our charism as RSCJ Associates reflects the objectives of the Synod in a most profound way and yet another sign of hope for our broken world.

*Submitted by Colleen Quinn, RSCJ Associate, Halifax*

### In Mercy and Love

Mercy and Compassion are cornerstones of inclusion. We know that our loving, all merciful God loves each one of us unconditionally. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, with mercy and caring, we are called to love all of God’s people. We wish to urge the Synodality Team to continue to focus on issues requiring further study, and to prioritize finding a pathway for inclusion of Catholics who have been excluded, those who are LGBTQ+ Catholics and those whose marriages are not currently recognized by the Church. Listening requires unconditional acceptance. Jesus unconditionally opened new horizons and pathways and we are all called to do likewise.

A focus on Catholic Social Doctrine speaks to these cornerstones of inclusion. We urge members of the Synodal Team to place emphasis on Catholic Social Doctrine with its focus on the dignity of the human person, the common good, preferential option for the poor, and stewardship of creation. It has been suggested that Catholic Social Doctrine is one of the best kept secrets in the Catholic Church. A renewed focus on the Doctrine will enhance awareness of its place of centrality within the Church.

We urge members of the Synodal Team to place emphasis on the renewal of parish life through the development of Small Church Communities, where one can find synodality function at the most basic level, through listening and sharing in the Spirit. It is here the people of God journey with the Scriptures, reflecting on Jesus as our model for life.

*Submitted by Gerri Stapleton and Barbara Hawley, Mercy Associates, St John’s NL*

## Associates' Reflections on the Synod on Synodality, cont.

### What is my Vision of a Post-Synodal Church?

It is my hope that my Post-Synodal Catholic Church will make four main changes.

**First is in clericalism.** I can accept for the present that only men are ordained as priests to preside at the celebration of the Eucharist “in persona Christi”. However, there must be great change in their formation for this ministry. They must be persons who are dedicated in humble service to this holy action.

Many of the other activities now performed by priests can also be carried out by well-informed and devoted men and women who have been properly trained by skillful holy men and women in properly developed and monitored educational faith institutions under careful supervision of experienced caring Church leaders.

Let our priests be leaders in our faith, but also encourage and designate other members of the faithful to leadership ministries.

**The second change is a change of attitude towards greater inclusiveness** which will only happen with developing a complete sense of RESPECT for the other person regardless of age, gender identity, race, faith, or status in society. We must model our attitudes on the life and teachings of Jesus himself and not continue the tendency that has developed over time to “judge” others as sinful and unworthy.

This inclusiveness must be extended to members of the LBGTQ2 community. Science cannot account for the diversity in people, but church and society can accept and respect their presence and value within our communities. We have a long way to go, but we have to begin now.

**The third change is in our treatment of persons who are unable to live up to their marriage vows.** The world would love that every marriage is permanent, but in reality this does not happen for many good and faithful people. The ideal is one love, one sex partner, one happy ever after. Humans fail in these partnerships. Yes, because they are not well prepared, but growth can happen, and our church must be more accepting of our weaknesses and failures and provide support and encouragement for improved relationships. This involves good formation in youth and adults of all ages with added support for parents in our ever-changing society.

**The fourth change is a hugely greater buy-in to Pope Francis's teaching on the interdependency of all creation.** We must make it part of our faith teaching that we learn to live with respect for nature and appreciation of God's gifts of creation.

*Submitted by Mary MacLean, CSM Associate, PEI*

### Wisdom in Words

There is one spectacle grander than the sea, that is the sky;  
there is one spectacle grander than the sky, that is the interior of the soul. ~ *Victor Hugo*

**Associates' Reflections on the Synod on Synodality, cont.****Conversation in the Spirit for Synod Input**

To gather our group data for the Synod, SCIC Sisters and Associates used the Conversation in the Spirit method which encouraged and supported each participant in a welcoming and respectful manner. We chose two priorities to address: Church in Mission and Women in the Life and Mission of the Church. The following content contains our hopes for the future.

There are no quick fixes; Canada needs a national synod to address the needs of our different cultures and the relationship of the Church with the Indigenous people of Canada. There needs to be a collaborative emphasis on walking, talking, listening together in a spirit of welcoming and equality for all with laity and clergy and bishops sitting at the table. Each parish has to develop its own process and solution with programs for all ages.

We seek equality for all people. The Diocese must ensure the equal allocation of roles within the Church for women and men. There is a need to continue the Synodal conversation within parishes to include women, men, youth and the elderly. We seek the revision of both liturgical texts and Church documents to utilize inclusive language. Also, there is a need for restructuring of the hierarchy to support and acknowledge the equality of women's gifts from the Holy Spirit.

We want women to have access to a newly structured Diaconate, not as it exists currently. It must emphasize inclusiveness, openness, and the desire to Go Forth.

Trust in God, hope for the future, and love of God and neighbour are the overarching themes.

*Submitted by Mary Ann Kneeland and Denise Isaacs, SCIC Associates, NB*

**My Associate Journey: Kim Kelly, Presentation Associate**

My journey as a Presentation Association began in 1988 when Sr. Lois Greene, PBVM invited me to join their vocations committee. After journeying with some terrific women for several years the focus began to shift to beginning an associate movement in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). My Presentation journey thereby continued as I traveled to convents across the province to visit with sisters and friends to gather feedback on what associate relationship would look like. While I was a very small part of the creation of the Presentation Associate movement in NL, today, I remain a proud Associate who has been involved with the Presentation Sisters for 36 years and counting. The Presentation charism has shaped the person I am today. Presentation Sisters and Associates, especially Associate Pauline Lake, fostered opportunities to learn about and facilitate the pursuits of advocacy, social justice and reflection which I also espoused as a social worker. With the strength and guidance of Nano, I am now embarking on a new relationship with Presentation as a member of the International Presentation Association, where together with members from Union, Conference and Society, we will journey to continue Venerable Nano's mission of education and global advocacy.

**Associates' Reflections on the Synod on Synodality, cont.****A Changing Post-Synodal Church**

The Church landscape has shifted greatly since the Second Vatican Council in 1965. Many people today have lost trust in the institution or find it irrelevant. Those who remain have much to offer the Church they love. From my experiences of great love and pain, as a facilitator and delegate of international Synodal conversations, I offer my insights of a changing Post-Synodal Church.

Listening to the Holy Spirit and walking together with Jesus and Mary, our church can become the church of Nazareth where our story began. A miraculous birth of a son named Jesus born in a stable to a poor humble Palestinian woman. When we walk together with Jesus and Mary, we learn to see the world through their eyes, and we are transformed through the Holy Spirit

A transformed church is a place where we all belong while respecting each other's differences, a church of inclusion, free of oppression, male domination, and the effects of colonization. Injustice and oppression have no place in our church. We are stronger together and we need each other.

A listening church will hear especially the voice of women with their maternal instinct, who take care of families, and relate with love, compassion, respect and understanding.

A church of action is rooted in the Gospel where we call home with an extended family with whom we all belong. It is a sacred space of belonging and unconditional love. A church goes forth and gives witness of hope for a marginalized world. A church goes out and meets people where they are and welcomes God's people in through the doors. Doors of a transformed church are open to all people. giving blessings to all God's creation in the name of Christ. No one is excluded from God's love. All are connected.

I see a new model of church, building and repairing relationships with the unchurched and with those who feel they no longer belong. We are all called to go beyond our comfort zones to invite others to faith, to go beyond the walls of the building and out from sacred liturgy. Coming together as a group, a community becomes church.

Holy Family parish in Sydney Mines, participated in eight rounds of Synod Conversations in the past two years. Community and inclusion were two words that stood out for me.

God of Life and Resurrection, hear our prayer that our church, through this Synod on Synodality, will listen to the stories of many and create a new story for today's changing world based firmly on the story that started in Nazareth.

*For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. (Romans 12:3-13)*

*Submitted by Norma Blinkhorn, Martha Associate, St. Clare's Associates, Sydney Mines, NS*