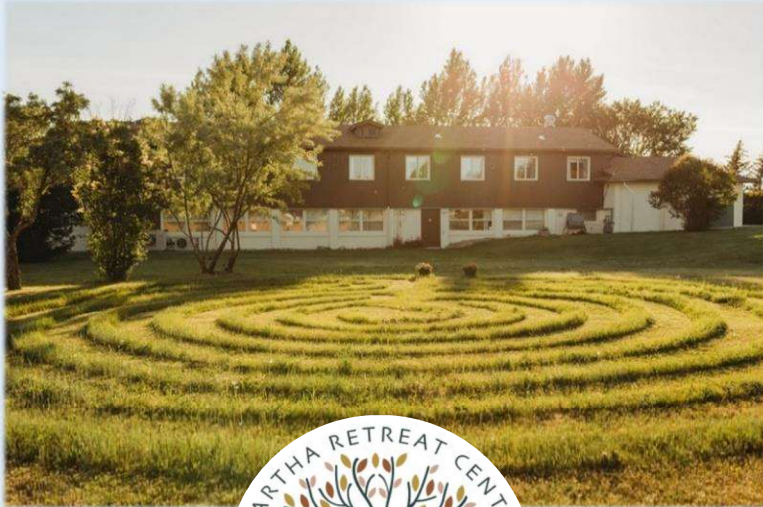




Hello and a big “*we miss you*” from the Western Associates!
July 2021 will mark 2 years since our loving Sisters of St. Martha packed up and moved home to Nova Scotia. Although Sisters left, their spirit is alive and well in the West! And how powerful the Spirit is!



The Martha Gospel Hospitality is palpable when one steps foot on the grounds of Martha Retreat Centre Society in Lethbridge, AB and even stronger when one steps into the Centre’s front doors. We never felt abandoned or left in the dust (so to speak as we are in the prairies); however, we did experience a severe ‘empty nest’ syndrome. During our early faith gatherings, we shed many tears, offered prayers, and shared the impact this change had on our lives, individually and as a group. We had strong support from each other, from Julia Townsend's leadership and from you, the Marthas.

*We often speak of feeling the beating heart of the Marthas
and continually witness how “prayed up” the Centre is!*



The last of the Marthas in Alberta.

Sisters Theresa Parker, Josie MacLellan, and Josephine Keyzer, the last of the Marthas who cared for the community of Lethbridge through the Martha Retreat Centre, were instrumental in preparing us for this transition. They, along with their predecessors, prepared the Associates by nourishing and growing our Martha heart. They helped us see ‘the Martha’ that lives within each of us and invited us to trust that all unfolds in God care. Your collective belief and trust in us give us courage, energy, and faith to continue to serve our families, our community, and our church with our common Martha heart. For that we give thanks.



So where has our journey taken us since the summer of 2019, you ask...

Our pre-pandemic 2019/2020 Faith Gathering year was one of seeking and searching within our individual hearts and as a group for what it means to carry our associates 'torch' without the Sisters directly with us. We gathered each month and explored enriching materials that continued to nourish our spirit and faith. We had 4 wonderful individuals begin to journey with us.

In March 2020, a new path was being illuminated, COVID-19 put the 'park brake' on everything we knew in our lives. We tried to stay connected through emails, phone calls and prayer. We were able to hold two smaller in-person Faith Gatherings in the Fall of 2020. Father Tim Boyle, one of our journeyers, celebrated Mass with us at the Martha Retreat Centre chapel. What a gift! We had a wonderful discussion around how isolation and restrictions were affecting us and shared where we found strength and resilience to cope.

Faith in God and love of family and friends was getting us through.



Faith Gathering, December 2019

In 2021, after the pandemic closed Alberta down again, we held three virtual sessions. In February, Father Tim, offered us an amazing discussion on the power of lamenting. He shared God laments, Christ laments, and creation laments. This offered hope, healing, and a strong reminder of how God hears us - always.

"Lament says: I still have a voice and there is someone (God) expected to hear me."

Two very special faith gatherings were organized with the support of Julia Townsend and the power of Zoom. In March, we welcomed special guests from Nova Scotia: Sisters Theresa Parker, Josie MacLellan, Josephine Keyzer, Jovita MacPherson, Claudette Gallant and Catherine MacFarlane who shared the history of the Sisters of St. Martha, interwoven with pieces of their personal stories. It was outstanding and we were delighted!



Zooming in 2021!

We took opportunity to share updates from Lethbridge and Calgary as the Associates from Calgary also joined in. It was a heartfelt reunion and Zoom was buzzing! Emotions were everywhere,



laughter to tears. It was a gift that unwrapped for all - moment by moment! This faith gathering was followed up, in April, with Julia Townsend, our Martha Associate Director, providing a rich and detailed review of the history of the Martha Associates.

Both gatherings gave us an opportunity to revisit our roots as well as enlighten our journeyers to the stories and histories grounding our shared Martha charism. We now wait in faith and prayer until we resume our faith gatherings in September.

My beautiful Sisters, I hope you enjoyed this update from the West. Always know how important you are to us and how grateful we are to have you in our lives. Your leadership, faith and care for all does not go unnoticed. So, like the little robin fledglings I see today in my backyard, our "empty nest" remains, however, our hearts are full and enriched by being a part of the Martha family who dares to stand in undaunted hope. God bless and stay well!

Lovingly in St. Martha,

~Kathy Gillis,

Martha Associate (Lethbridge), Martha Retreat Centre Society Board Member & Secretary



Photos of Martha Retreat Centre in Lethbridge, AB courtesy of MRCS Board