

Journey for Justice: Listen! Learn! Act!

Fall 2024 Newsletter

*From the Ministry for Social Justice, Peace and Creation Care
Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto,*

View web and mobile versions at csj-to.ca/journeyforjustice.

“Out of deep respect for those who have cared for these lands since time immemorial, we are committed to tread lightly on the land, protect water as sacred, and affirm our desire for right relations with all Indigenous Peoples.”

- From our CSJ Land Acknowledgement

In This Issue...

- **A Journey Through Relationships:** An issue about the connections between us and the world. Page 2.
- **Reflecting on Indigenous Justice:** Reconciliation and the Spirit Garden. Page 2.
- **Cordial Hospitality and Social Justice:** How we treat guests, visitors, or strangers. Page 4.
- **Introducing Our New Placement Student:** Florence Ampomaa Osafo shares her work and passion. Page 5.
- **Elements in Flux:** A masterful choreography between creation and destruction. Page 7.

- **The Faith Of An Elder: Lillian Sam:** Sister Divinia Pedro, CSJ shares her memories of an Indigenous elder and a friend. Page 10.
 - **Tread Softly...** Right relations require a significant change in how we interact with the universe. Page 15.
 - **From Embers:** A reflection on relationship... Page 17.
-

A Journey Through Relationships

Relationships are at the heart of Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto. Their charism of caring for the dear neighbour and coming into oneness is firmly rooted in an understanding of the interconnected unity of God's Creation.

This latest issue of *Journey for Justice* explores themes of relationships: between people, cultures, nations, and the elements of Creation itself. We hope these writings help you in your own journey towards right relations.

Leah Watkiss, Ministry Director

Reflecting on Indigenous Justice

By Leah Watkiss

Our Ministry strives to keep reconciliation and right relations with First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people at the forefront of

our work. But September is an especially poignant time for us as a team to pause, reflect, learn, and act. Many special gatherings and events are held in the lead up to Canada's National Truth and Reconciliation Day. One of our highlights from the month was the Indigenous Legacy Gathering.

This annual event held at Nathan Phillips Square in front of City Hall, honours victims and survivors of the Indian Residential School System, and celebrates the restoration of identity through ceremonies and languages.

It features educational workshops, Indigenous artisans and vendors, speakers, drummers, dancers, singers, and teachings. Breathtaking tipis adorn the Square, each featuring a different organization that supports First Nations, Inuit, and/or Metis people.

Most of the event is open to the public, though a special Survivor Area maintains a safe space for survivors to connect and access counselling and health supports.

This year's gathering was particularly momentous as it celebrated the opening of the Spirit Garden, a 20,650 square foot Indigenous cultural space that will provide teaching, learning, sharing and healing experiences for the Indigenous community of Toronto, the City's diverse citizens, newcomers and visitors.

The project responds in part to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Call to Action 82 for governments to commission and install a Residential Schools Monument in each capital city to honour residential school survivors, and all the children lost to their families and communities.

The design of the Spirit Garden revolves around Turtle Island, and offers dedicated places for contemplation, celebration, and ceremonies – open, inclusive and welcoming to all.

The fully accessible site includes a reflecting pond, a Two Wampum walkway, a Voyageur canoe, an Inukshuk, and a timber frame Teaching Lodge.

The Sisters of St Joseph of Toronto were privileged to be one of the many donors who contributed to this important project, and our Integral Ecology Specialist, Sabrina Chiefari, was invited to be present for the garden's official opening ceremony.

We encourage all who are able to visit the Garden. You can learn more about it by [clicking here](#).

Cordial Hospitality and Social Justice

By Leah Watkiss

Cordial hospitality is a trademark of Sisters of St Joseph around the world.

Cordial originally referred to medicine, food, or drink that stimulated the heart. It also refers to the warmth you feel in your heart when you are deeply moved.

Hospitality refers to the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.

So cordial hospitality refers to a specific type of hospitality that is felt deeply in one's heart and soul. It is the mission of the Sisters to make a heart-to-heart connection with all of their neighbours.

One of the ways the Ministry for Social Justice embodies this value is by providing hospitality at important justice events.

In September, our Ministry participated in two important rallies: the Say No To Racism rally for immigrant justice through regularization and the River Run rally for Grassy Narrows First Nation's ongoing struggle for justice and reparations for the mercury contamination of their land.

In the name and spirit of the Sisters, Ministry staff handed out samosas, cartons of water, and granola bars to participants, providing much-needed sustenance to fellow supporters.

Introducing Our New Placement Student

Florence Ampomaa Osafo introduces herself.

I'm thrilled to announce some wonderful news: I officially began my placement with the Sisters of St. Joseph Toronto! It is a real honor to join this amazing team in the Ministry for Social Justice, Peace, and Creation Care.

This opportunity marks a new phase in my life as I engage in important topics that surround social justice and advocacy. As a student in the Social Service Worker program at Seneca College, with a focus on immigration and refugee support, I look forward to applying my knowledge and skills in a practical setting, working alongside dedicated professionals to make a meaningful impact in the community.

I am excited to be part of the Collaborative Network to End Exploitation's (CNEE) Harvest Justice: a project that will uplift and amplify the voices of migrant workers by sharing their stories of hardship and endurance in a theatre production with Mixed Company Theatre.

Working with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto deeply resonates with my spiritual beliefs and aspirations for growth in life making this experience not only relevant, but inspiring.

Together, let us lift up our community in a positive and lasting way.

Being part of this project is not just work; it's an absolute honour. I treat this as a great opportunity for personal and professional growth while working as a placement student.

Elements in Flux

By Sabrina Chiefari

We've been in the midst of an ecological and, consequently, climate crises for the better part of 60 years. It can be most difficult to grapple with the reality of what has been lost in that time, often irrevocably; flora, fauna, places, and people.

It helps me to remember that there is a masterful choreography between creation & destruction here on Earth. A constant ebb & flow of life makes up Creation and we, as humans, have extraordinary influence.

Earth

All ecological phenomena are connected, though we're not always able to make the connections. Not so with landslides that caused emergency alerts in B.C. this summer.

Evacuation orders were issued when a major landslide blocked a tributary of the Fraser River, effectively damming it and creating a rapid, life-threatening rise of water. Decades of deforestation in the area, combined with wildfires and "atmospheric rivers", all amplified due to climate change, are considered significant compounding factors.

A few weeks after that news in B.C. Forests Ontario announced that it had planted over 2, 000, 000 trees this year. This healthy

sign of reforestation takes much work and many, many hands. It was a new record for that organization alone, showing that is possible to help our Earth heal.

Air

Air, the one element we can't see or smell without something else in it (think diesel exhaust or cooking onions), can't feel or hear unless it moves, and (to the best of my knowledge) can't taste. But its absence is immediately noticeable. As is its presence, when tornadoes, heat domes, and polar vortexes visit us.

We crave fresh air and open spaces. In recent weeks, we've even been captivated by a different kind of storm, geomagnetic storms; Aurora borealis.

Ironically, the human eye can't capture the full spectrum of colours on its own. Between that, and the fact that so many people live in urban areas with constant light pollution, it's been a gift of technology to share the lights with each other.

Water

What part of the world hasn't been catastrophically flooded? Meteorologists all over the globe have been brought to their wits' end, tracking abnormal weather patterns and issuing repeated storm alerts. In September alone, **massive flood events across three continents** claimed over 1,500 lives and cost over \$15 billion.

While we continue to demand that those who hold public offices, and those who have decision making powers in energy and development industries, take the climate emergency much more seriously, we can acknowledge steps in the right direction.

Where freshwater is concerned, the **Government of Canada recently announced a new “Canada Water Agency”**.

Empowered to act independently of Government, this new agency will be responsible for guiding water policy and administering funding to programs that protect, rehabilitate, and respond to emerging issues in major watersheds across Canada.

Fire

What part of the world has been untouched by forest conflagrations? Across the Americas this year, from Western Canada to Brazil, record-setting fires ripped through communities. Again.

Forest fires are a natural part of forest ecology. Without periodic burns, like those practiced by Indigenous communities for thousands of years, certain seeds can't germinate and forest litter builds up, creating fuel for larger fires.

In response to the devastation of this year's fires, an Alberta brewer created “Fire Bloom - The Beer We Don't Want to Brew”, with proceeds going to recovery efforts. Honey collected from Fireweed nectar was used, a simple

acknowledgement of the flourishing that can still happen after devastation. You can learn more about Fireweed by [clicking here](#).

The Faith Of An Elder: Lillian Sam

By Sister Divinia Pedro, CSJ

Sister Divinia Pedro shares her memories of an Indigenous elder. From 2010 - 2023, Sister Divinia was a pastoral assistant in Fort St. James, British Columbia at Our Lady of the Snows Parish, a community that is 80 percent Indigenous.

When I came to Fort St. James in 2010, one of the first things that Father Frank Salmon, omi told me was that there are only three types of relationship you can have with our First Nations people – you are either a family, a friend or an enemy. Where do you belong? In the 13 years I was there, I must say I became friends with them and some even consider me a part of their family.

In the book *The Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto in Ministry Today*, the late Sister Jane Dwyer said of the elders in Fort St. James: “The elders here teach me so much: about how to accept whatever God gives us and about the power of prayer... There is a great deal of pain in this community and yet there is a deep and abiding faith.”

This is so true with our elder Lillian Sam who died on September 4, 2024. Just two hours after she passed away, her family phoned me immediately to tell me the sad news of her passing because I am a friend and a part of their family in a way.

After I heard the news, I reflected on who Lillian had been in my life journey in Fort St. James. She was one of those who experienced a great deal of pain, yet it was her deep faith that gave meaning to her own life. She was a great woman with a prayerful heart filled with love for God, for everyone especially her family.

I remember a time when I was asked to talk about poverty among our First Nations people. I went to her for some advice. She said to me: "Sister, you have to begin with the intergenerational effect of the residential school." And my talk flowed from there. Lillian helped us when we had a weekend retreat for our elders. She also helped us when we had Liturgy of Healing for those who experienced abuse. She had a compassionate heart and was also a part of our Bereavement Team.

One day a year in December, we would hold a prayer service, *Remembering our Loved Ones*, for those who were grieving. She would do the smudging before the service.

The Stuart River had claimed several lives, including her husband. There were times she asked me to go to the river and

she would bless it. There were also several times in the past when she would tell me: “Sister, I need some quiet time. Can the two of us have a prayer day at your house?” And so we did – starting with a prayer, quiet time and sharing in the afternoon.

I learned so much from her sharing her life and how her faith helped her to cope with her difficulties. She got so sick around 2021. She survived, but with limited mobility. This was when we started praying regularly on Wednesdays (as our schedules permitted). We prayed the rosary the first time because she loved it.

Because her speech was affected, I told her the following week: “Lillian, if praying the rosary is too long for you, we can just pray one decade.” Her answer came as a surprise to me: “Sister, long is good.” That was who Lillian was – prayerful.

Whenever there was a problem like power outage, and despite her failing health, she would ask her daughter or granddaughter to drive her to my place.

She wanted to be assured that I was safe and that I had everything I needed, especially during COVID. Even after I left Fort St. James in January 2023, we continued our Wednesday prayer on Whatsapp until I went for my Sabbatical in the Philippines.

The family sent me a picture that she coloured. It was a simple gift that I will treasure in my life.

Hello Sister,

How are you? hope well.



God will bless you for helping in times when our lives were in turmoil. And you and Father Frank came and prayed. We will always remember your kindness.

It was not a surprise to me when her memorial card included personal quotes from her:

When faith bows down low? And tiredness takes over. Let it ride for another day just maybe the sun will shine and better days will come – (August 9, 2021)

It has been awhile since I posted anyway, what would your interest be? Mm let's see...How about faith? Since we have been encountering so much the last while, difficult circumstances to handle, hardship, loss and you name it. How do you handle all that? I have never seen anything like this, turmoil after turmoil.

At times, it seems endless and many seeking answers while trying to be strong... Faith for me is something I can hang on to when I can't do it anymore, when I'm empty. Let the tears fall in surrender like a baby that cries for the mother or for food.

Sure there are angry moments, doubts, helplessness so that's when we let God be God. There is a sweet promise that lies ahead of us where peace abounds. Goodnight and try to help one another if you can, a slight touch to say you care or understand goes a long way. (August 24, 2021)

In the book Chief Kw'eh Remembered, Lillian wrote:

There are a lot of people who lack identity and knowledge about where they're coming from.

Like me, they've been to residential school where they were cut off from a lot of information: story-telling, traditions, learning the culture, and the potlatch system. We need to let people know that history is important. This in a way started my healing journey as to where I came from, and who I am today.

May we learn from elder Lillian Sam the importance of our culture, history and deep faith to carry us through the difficulties of life.

Tread Softly...

By Cécilia Meunier

Right relations require a significant change in how we interact with the universe.

To be right with creation is to bring oneself into alignment with the world and to humbly acknowledge that we are no more important than the tree, the water or the worm. When we are right with the universe, we move with good intent, honouring our responsibility to protect relationships.

Society yearns for a world where harmony prevails, but we have strayed from the wisdom of cultures that guide us. We speak of respect, dignity and kindness while failing to recognize our consumer driven disregard for the spirit of the living Earth. Our words sound righteous, but are they merely ploys to make

us feel better? Is “right relations” another such term, espousing an idea without action or do we earnestly believe that it should guide our every step?

We forego foie gras upon learning that ducks and geese sacrificed for producing this “delicacy” are crammed into cages so small they cannot turn. Several times a day, a foot long tube is shoved down their throat and they are force fed, causing their livers to become diseased.

Do you drink coffee? From deforestation to pesticide use, the demand for coffee devastates the land and manipulates thousands of people in some of the poorest parts of the world. Limit your social and environmental impact by buying certified coffee. Fair Trade certification guarantees an income for farmers. Organic certification regulates the use of chemicals and pesticides. Rain Forest certification guarantees the production of your coffee respects living conditions for workers and biodiversity.

Actions speak.

The Whanganui tribe of New Zealand spent 140 years negotiating the rights of the Whanganui river which now enjoys the same legal rights as human beings.

With community support, Stouffville Road in Richmond Hill, Ontario closes on rainy nights in October to allow safe migration of endangered Jefferson salamanders.

Do we believe that every individual has the right to dignity? Do we believe that domestic and wild animals should be afforded the same rights? Do trees, rivers, oceans, mountains have intrinsic worth? Then it is time to step forward as gracious participants, aware that our thoughts, words and actions have the power to strengthen or weaken the intricate web of life. We step softly into a new partnership with all creation. Now, perhaps, right relations will evolve into more than an idea...it will become a way of life.

"We cannot change what we are not aware of, and once we are aware, we cannot help but change."

(Sheryl Sandberg)

From Embers

by Richard Wagamese

From our very first breath, we are in relationship. With that indrawn draft of air, we become joined to everything that ever was, is and will ever be. When we exhale, we forge that relationship by virtue of the act of living. Our breath commingles with all breath, and we are a part of everything. That's the simple fact of things.

We are born into a state of relationship, and our ceremonies and rituals are guides to lead us deeper into that relationship with all things. Big lesson? Relationships never end; the just

change. In believing that lies the freedom to carry compassion, empathy, love, kindness and respect into and through whatever changes. We are made more by that practice.

Subscribe to Our Newsletter

We hope this newsletter will inspire our readers to listen, learn and act to create a just and equitable world.

Signing Up

Please visit csj-to.ca/journeyforjusticesignup to subscribe to our next issue.

Get in Touch

If you have any suggestions or want to connect with us, you can email us at lwatkiss@csj-to.ca.

Our Website

Visit us online at csj-to.ca/socialjustice.