

Springs of hope

FONTBONNE MINISTRIES

spring newsletter 2005



Introducing: Fontbonne Ministries!

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF! Often this phrase is used as a warning — pay attention to history to avoid repeating the struggles and mistakes of the past. For the Sisters of St. Joseph it has an entirely different meaning. The Sisters have been responding to the needs of the day for more than 150 years. These responses have taken the form of offering shelter and food to those without the bare necessities of life, creating unique learning environments, providing health-care and attending to the spiritual needs of those who come for help. The Sisters have ministered by establishing many organizations and institutions that were then passed on to the local communities. Their latest response is the creation of Fontbonne Ministries, named after Sister Delphine Fontbonne, a Sister of St. Joseph who arrived in Toronto in 1851 with three other Sisters to minister to the most critical needs of the city.

Fontbonne Ministries, established in 2000, is an incorporated non-profit and registered charity governed by a Board of

Directors. The President and Chair of the Board, Sister Margaret Myatt, is also the General Superior of the Congregation. Sister Margaret, in announcing the establishment of Fontbonne Ministries to the Sisters, said, “It is our hope that the establishment of Fontbonne Ministries and the hiring of a lay administrator will free us to be present in a more personal way to the ministries we undertake in order to realize our commitment to nurture community with our neighbour; especially with the homeless, the alienated, the economically poor and women at risk.”

Sisters have ministered at our Women’s Drop-In Centre on Shuter Street for women who live in poverty downtown. They are found on O’Connor Drive in East York at Studio On The Hill, a pottery studio where “there are no mistakes, only new creations.” Recently, in South Riverdale, we converted a building owned by the Sisters into affordable housing for older, single women who were either homeless, under housed or in danger of losing their housing. *continued on back cover*

WELCOME TO OUR FIRST issue of *Springs of Hope*, to be published twice yearly, Spring and Fall.

For some time we have wanted a newsletter for you, our friends and supporters. In these pages we intend to share with you stories from our ministries, stories of the people who are with us each day — their hopes, struggles and joy. Not least, we’ll include the many blessings we all receive through Fontbonne Ministries.

We have gone full-colour and not broken the bank thanks to advances in printing technology. We hope you like the result.

We now look forward to your thoughts, ideas and feedback.

Enjoy the read!

— Joan Breech, Administrator
Fontbonne Ministries

A newsletter of Fontbonne Ministries, Sisters of St. Joseph, Toronto

Fontbonne Ministries seeks to nurture community with the neighbour – welcoming everyone without distinction.



A Place of Possibilities

“Take the grain of the Mustard Seed” —Matthew 13:31

SISTERS ARE STILL engaged in healing and educating, but in new places. Welcome to Mustard Seed, one of our newest ministries at 791 Queen Street East. The Sisters of St. Joseph were pleased to return to South Riverdale in 2000 since this area is close to where the original motherhouse stood over 150 years ago. In the past the Sisters taught at St. Ann’s School and more recently served in the St. Michael’s Broadview Clinic.

Mustard Seed programs are open to everyone and developed with a view to the needs of the neighbourhood. Informal teaching of life skills and the nurturing of body, mind and spirit go on every day here. Sisters and volunteers facilitate a weekly community kitchen as well as a daily sewing and crafts program. Our weekly communal cooking groups are based on the idea that everyone has the right to good food.

“What happens is all about delicious, nutritious, affordable food prepared and shared together,” said Sr. Gwen Smith, Director of Mustard Seed. The picture of Sr. Mary Lou Harris and Marilyn on the front cover of Springs of Hope expresses this shared experience. In the crafts classes, participants learn different sewing and craft-based skills such as hemming slacks, changing zippers and making practical household items. During our drop-in, participants share coffee, conversation, music and recreation. All benefit from the sense of belonging to a welcoming and caring community.

The vision of the staff and volunteers at Mustard Seed is to nurture community and welcome everyone without distinction, giving priority to those who might not otherwise have access to such opportunities. This vision includes enabling participants to collaborate with community members and agencies and providing opportunities to nurture mind, body and spirit. To attain that goal, we have programs like community kitchens, Our Foremothers in Faith, sewing and crafts, spiritual companioning, a Saturday drop-in, a spiritual lending library and basic computer training. The Toronto Catholic District School Board provides Basic and Intermediate English Classes.



The participants teach us about their struggles and we marvel at their ability to find joy in the simplest of things. At the end of the day, it is the Sisters like Sr. Barbara Grozelle, pictured above, and volunteers who most feel that they have been given a special gift. To see these tiny seeds of community grow, fuelled by this dream of becoming a welcoming space in South Riverdale, is something worth celebrating.

Walking With Another

“Each person is so unique; I love visiting them in their own space, where they become our welcomers”

—Sr. Patricia Macaulay, Director of In Good Company

IN GOOD COMPANY, the newest ministry of Fontbonne Ministries, provides a coordinated friendly visiting program in the Greater Toronto Area for individuals seeking emotional and spiritual support and companionship. Developed by Sr.

Georgette Gregory and a dedicated and very experienced group of Sisters, the goals of this ministry are to:

- provide a visiting service that will assist individuals in the community to maintain and extend their independence,
- offer individuals opportunities to get to know people in their community as well as enhancing their quality of life,
- encourage mutually supportive and stimulating social relationships for both the individual and volunteer,
- enable volunteers and clients to be nurtured in body, mind and spirit.

“In Good Company to me is about walking with another to share stories and be a companion in life,” says volunteer Sr. Barbara Grozelle. Occasionally the volunteers partner with students who assist clients with household chores. Our program is growing by word of mouth and through partnerships with local community agencies and referrals from family and friends.

Opportunities for clients and volunteers to interact socially with each other are an important part of the In Good Company ministry. Volunteers gather monthly for a dinner meeting that includes, prayer, reflection, and sharing and in-service seminars.

Twice a year, usually in February and in the Spring, organizers hold a tea at Mustard Seed. At this year’s

Valentine tea, the L’Arche Spirit Movers entertained guests, who also received goodies and gifts. This occasion offers an opportunity for clients who are isolated to meet each other and experience the In Good Company volunteers in a community setting. As one client said, “You are doing God’s work for which we feel blessed and grateful.”



A Return to South Riverdale



Sisters Gwen Smith and Pat Macaulay offer neighbourly support to the women of Fontbonne Place.

“TODAY, 18 FEWER women will be homeless in Toronto,” read the Toronto Star

headline. On March 19, 2003, Fontbonne Place officially opened at 791 Queen Street East. The Sisters responded to the needs of women who were homeless, on the verge of being homeless or untenably housed by building an apartment building with 18 units for single, older women. The two floors of apartments were built over the original St. Michael’s Broadview Clinic, established by the Sisters in the 1970’s. The ground floor was renovated to include an apartment for Sisters and community space for Mustard Seed.

All the apartments are occupied, complete with the odd pet or two. Encouraged by the resident Sisters and Sister Patricia

Macaulay, a strong sense of community has developed among the residents, who support each other in times of need. The women hold a monthly dessert club where they celebrate birthdays and special events.

There is a sense of pride of place that is evident in the way the residents help to look after the garden and community space in the building. “It’s not just about having a roof over our heads; it’s about belonging,” said a resident. Several have become volunteers at Mustard Seed and some participate in the programs offered. When the women describe life at Fontbonne Place, they often speak of a sense of belonging — for many that is what counts the most.



Seven years of presence

IT IS WITH regret, but also with profound respect for the many participants and for what was accomplished, that the Sisters of St. Joseph, after prayer, reflection and discussion, decided to discontinue the drop-in as of April 28, 2005.

The drop-in opened over seven years ago on the feast of St. Michael, September 29. The Sisters of St. Joseph renovated this space in St. Michael’s Hospital West Annex at 26 Shuter St. The drop-in offered a safe

and welcoming place, a listening heart and ear and a caring and compassionate presence for women who live in need in downtown Toronto. In its first year alone, the drop-in welcomed over 1000 women.

The staff and volunteers served a nutritious lunch, distributed clothing, assisted with laundry and shower needs, and provided daily newspapers and the use of a telephone. They directed women to shelters, health centres and other suitable agencies as

needed. Opportunities to work in arts and crafts activities were also available.

Director Sister Penny McDonald said, “The staff and volunteers were honoured to be with the women who blessed us and invited us to be ourselves and to live (like they live) close to the limits of our resources, relying on the providence and care of God.”



Peace, healing and relaxation

“There are no mistakes only new creations” —Sister Helen Kluge, Director and teacher

SISTER HELEN KLUKE’S Studio on the Hill is located at 976 O’Connor Drive. Sister Helen teaches hand building and wheelwork in this bright, welcoming pottery studio and gift shop. Students range in age from six to 93 and, much like society, form a mosaic. The studio embraces everyone: women, men and children, those who are working and those on subsidized incomes, physically challenged individuals and students, each with a different need.

Many students have revealed that learning a skill is not the only benefit of the pottery classes. They also experience peace, healing and relaxation. Sister Helen says, “Time at pottery helps to restore one’s equilibrium and eventually students become aware of their own unique style of creativity. They gain a sense of self-confidence and renewed energy.”

Sr. Helen is a resource for others teaching pottery. She provides materials for firing to the Women’s Drop-In Centre, Diefenbaker Public School, the Aphasia Institute and others. Sister Helen has



Sr. Helen Kluge works in clay with a young student.

provided many people with the opportunity to work and create with clay and to experience the joy of their creation.



SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF TORONTO

FONTBONNE MINISTRIES

Sisters of St. Joseph, Toronto

**3377 Bayview Avenue
Toronto, ON
Canada M2M 3S4
P: 416-250-3100
F: 416-222-9816
Web site: www.csj-to.ca**

Fontbonne Ministries embodies and furthers the mission and values of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto.

The ministries are funded by the Sisters of St. Joseph and individual donations. Your ongoing contributions enable Fontbonne Ministries to respond to many unmet needs in our city.

To help support these programs, call or write:
Joan Breech at 416-250-3100
or jbreech@csj-to.ca

For volunteer information, please contact: Leanne Kloppenborg at 416-465-6069 or lkloppenborg@csj-to.ca

For further information or to be removed from our mailing list, please contact: Vickie McNally at 416-222-1426 Ext. 249 or vmcnally@csj-to.ca

To contact the editor, call Gisela Côté at 416-250-3119 or gcote@csj-to.ca

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Opening of Fontbonne Place March 19, 2003



Joan Breech and Sr. Margaret Myatt cut the cake at the opening party.



Councillor Joe Mihevc and Sr. Gwen Smith share a moment at the opening.

Introducing... *continued*

Besides these apartments, Fontbonne Place is home to Mustard Seed, our community outreach ministry, and to In Good Company, our friendly visiting ministry to elderly, isolated or disabled individuals.

Recognizing that our resources are not limitless, we can only address the changing societal needs in collaboration with others. Our Volunteer program provides many diverse opportunities, whether it is assisting participants with crafts or pottery, providing companionship at a drop-in, visiting isolated individuals in their homes or helping with administrative functions. We also participate in a number of networks and are developing partnerships with other religious orders, social service agencies, the laity and the community at large.

We are very appreciative of the financial support from our friends in the community that supplements the generous funding received from the Sisters of St. Joseph. In order to ensure the sustainability of Fontbonne Ministries, an endowment fund has recently been established to enable the ministries to continue to meet the changing needs well into the future.

These pages will describe the ministries in more detail and give a flavour of what's happening. I think that both those who have known the Sisters for some time and those who are just getting to know the Sisters will agree with me that it's a good thing that... history repeats itself!