



## **SISTERS CELEBRATE 165<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY WITH GRATITUDE**

SAINT JOHN – Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception (SCIC) joyfully celebrated 165 years of grace and gratitude at Ruth Ross Residence Oct. 17-20 among Associates, family members, staff and friends.

“May these four days of festival release within and among us a renewed sense of God’s providence, surprise and ever-unfolding presence over 165 years,” said Sister Mary Beth McCurdy as the Festival of Thanksgiving began in Carmel Chapel.

“Let us welcome to this sacred circle the spirit of all those who have preceded us,” added the SCIC congregational leader. “Let us live fully for the sake of the gospel ever-unfolding into the future.”

Six Sisters and one Associate travelled from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories to participate in the celebration. Guests came from Greater Saint John, Fredericton, Hampton,

Moncton and St. Stephen, NB, as well as Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Toronto, ON and Portland, Maine.

SCIC were founded Oct. 21, 1854 in Saint John by Honoria Conway and three companions at the invitation of Bishop Thomas Louis Connolly, second bishop of the diocese. Amid many challenges, they responded to urgent needs of Irish immigrants and orphans.

The Sisters' way of life and spirituality were inspired by Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac in 17<sup>th</sup> century France, as well as St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. In more recent history, SCIC became active members of the Sisters of Charity Federation of North America.

One highlight of the celebration was a panel presentation Oct. 19 which included representatives of the five Federation congregations based in Canada. In addition to SCIC, these include Sisters of Charity of Halifax; Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish, NS; Sisters of St. Martha of Prince Edward Island and Religieuses de Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur based in Moncton.

Panelists were asked to address key moments of both grace and challenge in the history of their religious communities. They also highlighted their experience of a June 2019 Federation Assembly of the Whole in Chicago, Ill. Before responding to questions, panelists expressed hopes and dreams for future collaboration among the Canadian-based Federation congregations.

Colourful weavings displayed throughout Ruth Ross Residence symbolized the 165<sup>th</sup> celebration. With five felt strands, they represented the Canadian Federation congregations, as well as a broader weaving of past, present and future in God's call to life and mission.

The anniversary celebration was planned by a 10-member committee of Sisters and Associates meeting monthly throughout 2019. An anniversary prayer was created by committee chair, Sister Margaret MacLean.

Together with staff, committee members and many others contributed to the festival which included historical exhibits and PowerPoint presentations, as well as prayer, liturgy, poetry, singing, dancing, storytelling and local tours.

SCIC gratefully received and acknowledged flowers and greetings from many of their partners in mission. On Oct. 19 at a midday banquet, Sisters,

Associates and guests were treated to poignant and lively entertainment from gifted local singers and musicians, coordinated by Tracy Friars.

Bishop Robert Harris, apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Saint John, presided at the closing eucharistic liturgy Oct. 20 in Carmel Chapel. Briefly tracing the Sisters' history, he noted how the founding women heard a call and responded generously.

SCIC missions expanded throughout many parts of Canada. For 50 years, Sisters also lived among and accompanied people in Peru. The bishop said in Peru and elsewhere, the Sisters expressed "the language of love." He also noted how SCIC faithfully responded to the call of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and beyond.

Bishop Harris said although SCIC are far fewer in number today, they and Associates continue to be a sign of God's presence in the world, radiating divine love and charity. "The future belongs to God," he added.

Sister Anita Naves thanked Bishop Harris, highlighting his many kind and thoughtful gestures among SCIC throughout more than 12 years as bishop. On behalf of the Sisters, she also wished him well as he soon begins retirement.

At the closing liturgy, Sister McCurdy said Sisters, Associates and guests "sing, rejoice and give thanks for all that has been, is now and is yet to be."

(Submitted by Roma DeRobertis,scic)