



Insights and Encounters

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Rejoicing in God's Blessing Upon Our Shepherd

Dr. Agnes Thomas



I just returned from the Eternal City yesterday after attending the consistory. On my journey back, I realized it would take some time to fully comprehend the magnitude of the experience. Both the event and the city hold immense significance for the Church and its people—not just today but for generations to come. It was an incredible privilege to witness the ceremony and attend the Mass the following day with our own Cardinal Leo, his father, family, friends, and colleagues from the Archdiocese. The consistory, a formal gathering where new cardinals are given their rings and birettas, symbolizing their service to the Church and the Pope, unfolded amidst the splendor of Vatican City. In two words, the experience of Rome can be described as a fusion of the divine and the human. The event reflects centuries of tradition and deep spiritual significance, with its roots tracing back to the early Church.

Being part of it offered a glimpse into the rich heritage of the Catholic faith and a profound sense of its universality and continuity. It was also a vivid display of the divine and the human working together for the greater good of humanity—upholding faith and traditions, responding to God's call, and living out the unique charisms of each cardinal's vocation. This new apostolic responsibility is truly a gift for the universal Church and, in particular, for Canada through the elevation of Cardinal Leo. I would be remiss if I didn't comment on the overwhelming beauty of St. Peter's Basilica. Michelangelo's architectural masterpieces defy description. The intricate details of the altar, the dome, and the numerous sculptures seemed to come alive in the glow of the ceremony, even as thousands gathered. What struck me most was the palpable sense of unity and spirituality in the air. Pilgrims, clergy, and visitors from across the globe joined together in prayer and reflection. Despite the grandeur, the atmosphere felt deeply personal—connecting faith, tradition, and the divine in an intimate way. Rome itself amplified the experience. Walking its cobblestone streets, surrounded by history at every turn—from the Colosseum to the Vatican Gardens—felt like stepping into a living museum of faith and culture. In short, it was an unforgettable moment in history, but also one that felt deeply personal. We offer prayers of support and gratitude as we welcome our new cardinals, especially our shepherd, Frank Cardinal Leo.



Catholic Charities' Christmas Card Design Contest



Honourable Mention:
Padideh from CCSYR



2024 Winner:
Houses of Providence

Once again, this year, we appealed to our agencies' talented clients, program users, staff, and volunteers to help us create our digital Christmas Card. As always, we were utterly impressed and moved by the submissions we received.

Many thanks to CCSYR, CFS Peel Dufferin, Houses of Providence, L'arche Toronto, and Rose of Sharon for their entries. Although we had difficulty choosing, we agreed that our winner would be the thoughtful submission we received from the Informatics Team from the Houses of Providence – Annaliza, Caroline, Maria, and Nilmini. We also selected one honourable mention, the beautiful artwork of Padideh from CSSYR. We will contact the winning artists to arrange for their prizes!

We're already looking forward to seeing the artwork for next year!



From Shadows to Strength: A Journey of Resilience & New Beginnings

Catholic Crosscultural Services



At Catholic Crosscultural Services (CCS), we are passionate about the transformative power of support and resilience. Allow us to share the inspiring story of a 43-year-old woman from Mexico, a former lawyer and devoted mother of three, who turned to our services after facing emotional, verbal, and economic abuse from her husband. Alone and without financial resources or language skills, she was determined to create a better life for her family in Canada.

With the dedicated support of our Spanish Orientation Worker, she took her first steps towards stability by applying for Ontario Works and the Child Tax Credit, ensuring her family's basic needs were met. Through Legal Aid, she connected with a lawyer who initiated crucial Child Support and Parenting Time applications. Through our Mental Health Program, she built emotional resilience, and our Transitional and Housing Program opened doors to subsidized housing.

Today, she shares her heartfelt gratitude, stating, “Without your services, I would not be where I am today. I feel hopeful for a future free of abuse and am ready to take care of my family.”

Thanks to CCS, she has gained financial stability, legal support, and emotional strength, creating a safe and nurturing environment for her children. If you or someone you know needs support, CCS is here to help families reclaim their lives and futures. Together, we can help them thrive!



Success Stories of International Medical Graduates

Catholic Community Services of York Region



As we look back at the highlights of 2024, it has been a year of abundant success, innovation, and expansion for Catholic Community Services of York Region (CCSYR). As an example, we saw incredible achievement of our online study group for international medical graduates. Recently, 107 IMG participants took their licensing exam in September, and with the results just released in November, an impressive 80%+ passed. This is a testament to the dedication and perseverance of CCSYR staff and volunteers as well as the power of a supportive community.

Organized by our Community Healthcare Projects Lead, Shamima Mili and powered by the volunteer facilitators/mentors, this program is truly one of its kind in Canada. Since 2010, CCSYR has been running networking and study groups for international medical graduates (IMGs). This specialized program is designed to bringing numerous participants and mentors together to exchange knowledge, practice skills, and uplift one another.

Over time, these study groups have evolved into a lifeline where IMGs find not only academic resources they need to succeed, but also a community that believes in them even when they struggle to chase their dreams. In fact, many former participants became volunteer facilitators/mentors in these groups after successfully passing their exams, driven by a desire to give back to the community that supported them.

[Click here to watch mentor Nousheen's journey](#)

The study groups meet four days a week online, focusing on licensing exams-MCCQE1 (Medical Council of Canada Qualifying Examination - Part 1) and NAC OSCE (National Assessment Collaboration Objective Structured Clinical Examination). We are proud of the collective efforts put in Mili and the mentors to help IMGs rebuild their careers in Canada and simultaneously address the critical need for more physicians in Canada.

[To know more about our study groups for IMGs and other programs for Internationally Educated Health Professionals, click here](#)



Spotlight on Success

Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin



We are excited to share the highlights from our recent Open House, a vibrant gathering that took place on November 6th, 2024, at our Peel-Dufferin location. This event was more than just an open door; it was a celebration of community spirit and collaboration!

A Warm Welcome and Insightful Tour

Our CEO, Sharon Mayne, kicked off the event with an inspiring welcome address, setting the tone for a day filled with discovery and connection. Attendees had the unique opportunity to tour the Safe Centre of Peel, guided by our Director of Strategic Partnerships, Shelina Jeshani. The tour offered a firsthand look into the vital work we do to support individuals and families in need.

Engaging with Community Partners

The lobby of 60 West Drive buzzed with energy as our partnering organizations showcased their services at interactive booths. This setup allowed guests to engage directly with representatives, learn more about the resources available, and explore opportunities for collaboration. It was a fantastic platform for fostering stronger community ties and enhancing the network of support services.

Celebrating Community and Connection

The Open House was a resounding success, bringing together parish members, community leaders, and service providers in a dynamic exchange of ideas and resources. We are grateful to everyone who attended and contributed to the spirit of unity and shared purpose.

As we move forward, Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin remains committed to strengthening community connections and expanding our reach to serve even more individuals and families. Stay tuned for more exciting events and initiatives in the coming months!



Covenant House Toronto adds warmth this winter & extends 24/7 care to youth experiencing homelessness

Covenant House



Winter months are extremely difficult for people experiencing homelessness; trying to find a safe and warm place to spend the night and food to eat are daily concerns. Young people are particularly vulnerable to these circumstances. This is why the organization launched a Youth Winter Respite Program to provide 16–24-year-olds with a safe place to sleep, and access to basic necessities and critical services that help break the cycle of homelessness.

Covenant House’s Youth Winter Respite Program operates 24/7 from November until April and is in addition to the organization’s crisis shelter program that operates year-round. Youth participating in the program will also have access to on-site healthcare, youth-focused mental health services, educational and employment resources in a caring and supportive environment where they can heal, grow and thrive.

This winter, the need is especially great, and the program is operating at a critical time, as the demand for shelter beds continues to vastly outstrip the available supply. The most current data suggests that youth make up more than 1,000 young people in the city’s shelter system each night. Unfortunately, the number of young people experiencing homelessness is likely much higher due to what is often referred to as hidden homelessness where people stay in temporary spaces.

“Our Youth Winter Respite program responds to the urgent and increasing need we’re seeing in our community,” says Covenant House Toronto’s Executive Director Mark Aston. “We know that providing the right level of support at each point in a young person’s journey forward leads to improved health and social outcomes. This program is providing life-saving refuge for our community’s most vulnerable residents.”

Initially launched two years ago through generous donor funding, the program is operating again this year thanks to support from the City of Toronto’s Winter Service Plan and is the only City-funded program dedicated to youth.

Learn more: [CovenantHouseToronto.ca](https://www.CovenantHouseToronto.ca).



Rose of Sharon's New Location

Rose of Sharon



Rose of Sharon Service for Young Mothers transitioned to our new location at the end of July, and it truly was a labor of love. Our dedicated team which includes board members and staff worked together to make the move as smooth as possible while balancing client support, welcoming new babies, keeping up with reports, and managing the packing and sorting. Despite the challenges, everyone maintained their sense of humor and care for one another, making the relocation process as pleasant as possible.



In the following months, we focused on construction, setting up, and adjusting to our new environment. With successful inspections from the electrician, plumber, fire marshal, TSSA, public health, and the Town of Newmarket, we were finally able to open our doors to the public. Although Father Michael is associated with the Toronto District Catholic School Board, our diverse, multi-faith team has welcomed him with open arms, and we have all come to look forward to his visits.

His connection with our team deepened last year when he supported us through the heartbreaking loss of one of our young mother's babies, offering strength and comfort. It felt like a natural step to invite Fr. Mike to bless our new space. On October 30th, he walked us through each room, offering blessings meaningful for each space. His visit was grounding, helping us shape a nurturing, welcoming environment filled with the positive energy and spirit that defines Rose of Sharon.

We often say that with the community's support, we have "angel's wings" surrounding Rose of Sharon, and Fr. Mike's presence here ensured that those wings continue to carry us.



Silent Voice Holiday Hampers

Silent Voice



The Silent Voice Holiday Hamper Program provides free packages to Deaf individuals and families most in need during the Christmas season. Personalized for each household, the hampers include food for those dealing with food insecurity, toiletries, clothing, and toys for each child in the family.

What started out several years ago as a program that served a dozen families has now grown to one that will provide over 175 hampers in 2024. With so many of our Deaf clients struggling financially and emotionally during the holiday season, and with the high cost of living continuing to rise significantly, the need is greater than ever before.



The Silent Voice Holiday Hamper Program relies on the generosity of our donors and is 100% volunteer driven. Donors sponsor a hamper that goes to our families; our dedicated volunteers take the time to sort, assemble each hamper; wrap each gift that the children and adults receive. Our volunteers then personally deliver each package to the families' homes the week before Christmas. The joy on the faces of each family when they receive the hampers is so rewarding! Holiday Hampers are now a Silent Voice annual program. We are dedicated to making Christmas a little bit brighter for children and adults in the Deaf community through this wonderful initiative.

Our profound and special thanks to Catholic Charities supported by ShareLife for its financial support to combat food insecurity. Its generosity contributes to making the Holiday Hamper Program reach even more families. Thank you!

If you would like to support a family, please visit www.silentvoice.ca and click on '2024 Holiday Hamper'. To all, we at Silent Voice Canada, wish you a Merry Christmas and the very best in 2025! (By the way, Silent Voice turns 50 in 2025 – stay tuned for more information about anniversary events!)



Health



IN OUR OWN WORDS

Kate
Saint Elizabeth Healthcare

At Journey Home Hospice, many of our volunteers share that caring for individuals experiencing homelessness is not just about giving back—it's a vocation. As we enter the season of Advent, we are reminded that the flames of the Advent candles invite us to shine light into the darkest corners and guide the way for the coming of Jesus.

One of our volunteers, Kate, has shared her story and how her work at Journey Home helps to embody the hope, peace, joy, and love this season brings. When Kate first heard about the work being done at Journey Home in the downtown Toronto community she knew she needed to be part of the movement.

“I’ve volunteered for seven years with members of the Toronto community who are experiencing homelessness,” Kate explained. “Everyone at Journey Home Hospice works tirelessly to offer residents space, security, respect, and options. That is so rare. Providing support systems with the dignity, safety and choices that every human being deserves at end of life is incredible to be a part of.”

Kate, and all our volunteers, make a meaningful difference with each moment they give and they love helping to welcome new team members. If you’re looking to mark the holiday season and coming New Year by giving back, please consider registering to become a Journey Home Hospice Toronto volunteer. We currently have opportunities available in: reception services, kitchen services, and companionship.

Volunteer support can truly make a difference in the lives of those we serve. If you're interested in giving back and being part of a caring community, we would love to hear from you!

Together, we can create a warm and supportive environment for those in need.

Apply now by following the link:

(<https://foundation.sehc.com/charitable-programs/volunteer-application/>)

or reach out to Rachel for more information at rachelweatherbee@sehc.com.

PAUSE & REFLECT

ADVENT: A SEASON OF LISTENING

Dr. Agnes Thomas

As kids, preparing for Christmas was just as important—and magical—as the day itself. Those with musical Talent honed their caroling skills, while the creative ones built mangers using sticks, hay, and anything else they could find. Then there were the star makers, crafting shining symbols of the season. It was a time of immense joy, filled with hours spent in the church. The experience was both fulfilling and fun, something everyone eagerly anticipated. Notably, it was a season free of shopping—a tradition I still try to uphold as much as possible.

As an adult, my reflections on the season shift each year. Sometimes they are deeply influenced by the social or political climate; other times they are shaped by the tidings of my faith journey. Regardless of the situation, I often wonder how Mary and Joseph would have responded, what Jesus would have done, and so on.

As the season approaches this year, I am reflecting on a talk by our Archbishop, the Most Reverend Francis Leo. At a recent event, he spoke about listening, a sense of community, and hospitality as the antithesis to polarization. These are also core themes of the Christmas story, which is still unfolding.

Listening and discernment were central to everything that unfolded during Advent and afterward, enabling promises and prophecies to be fulfilled across generations, lands, and people. It makes one wonder: what if these events were to take place today? The circumstances would look so different with all our technologies and social advancements. There would be no need for a donkey; with the right resources, one could choose a mode of transportation to suit their preference and comfort. Accommodation options would be abundant and communication would be instantaneous—there is no need for a guiding star when GPS and smartphones are at our fingertips. There wouldn't even be a need to travel. A video call via Zoom or WhatsApp could replace an in-person visit and gifts could be sent instantly, just a click away. But would these advancements help us discern what is truly good, deepen our connections, or bring us closer to one another?

While the question of whether the advancements of our society are genuinely accessible and equally beneficial to all remains, I want to shift our focus to how listening and discernment made the impossible possible during the first Christmas. Remarkably, the good news of that time continues to be shared—not stored away on a shared drive or in some cloud space, but living and active in our world today. This leads to a profound question: What if we, as humans, dared to pay closer attention to the stirrings of our hearts and the dreams within us? What if we truly mastered the art of deep listening—to ourselves, one another, and the world around us? Could we then become bearers of good news, channels of goodness, and beacons of hope in a world yearning for light?

Through deep listening and discernment, Mary, Joseph, the Magi and the shepherds knew precisely what they were meant to do. They recognized whom to follow and which direction to take, reading the signs of their times with clarity and conviction. Despite their challenges, they found the courage to act, trusting in a promise far greater than their understanding. They followed a bigger star, a more profound truth, and an enduring hope in their hearts.

We, too, could partner in grander plans—plans that bring joy, peace, and prosperity to all—if we genuinely commit to listening and discerning as Mary (Luke 1:26–38), Joseph (Matthew 1:18–25), the Magi (Matthew 2:1–12) and the shepherds (Luke 2:15) once did. They were humble and simple people, but what made them special was their willingness, availability, trust, and faith—virtues that allowed them to become partners in God's grander plan.

In this Advent season, as we reflect on the state of our world—a world fraught with turmoil, pain, and polarization—we are called to a deeper listening as people of faith. We are invited to pray for the grace to hear the cries of the poor, the broken-hearted and the oppressed. As we have witnessed in the Christmas story, this act of listening is not passive; it is the foundation for discerning how we can respond with justice, kindness and compassion.

ON THE HORIZON



Need someone to talk to? Visit our
CONNECT WALK-IN CLINIC!



Every Thursday,
Time: 12:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Arrive by 6:00 PM for same-day service.
Location:
The Honourable William G. Davis Centre for Families
60 West Drive, Brampton, ON, L6T 3T6
Phone: (905) 450-1608
What to Expect:
Meet with a caring counselor for a personalized support plan.



introducing
1155JOBS.CA

We've launched 1155jobs.ca, a dedicated platform for finding meaningful employment and volunteer opportunities within Catholic organizations and agencies. Created and administered by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto (CCAT).

Whether you are seeking a paid position or looking to volunteer your time and skills, 1155jobs.ca offers a wide range of job postings tailored to various talents and interests.

Please contact Hesika Kandiah
at hkandiah@ccat.ca
if you would like to add your job postings
to our job board, all at no cost to you.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto provides leadership, supports social services, and facilitates advocacy for its member agencies and the people they serve. At its core is Catholic Social Teaching that focuses on the poor and marginalized, urging us all to build a just society and safeguard the dignity of every person.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto

How you can contact member agencies of Catholic Charities

MEMBER AGENCIES

COMMUNITY/FAMILY SERVICES

Catholic Community Services of York Region
1-800-263-2075
www.ccsyr.org

Catholic Crosscultural Services
416-757-7010
www.cathcrosscultural.org

Catholic Family Services of Durham
1-877-282-8932
www.cfsdurham.com

Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin
905-450-1608
www.cfspd.com

Catholic Family Services of Simcoe County
1-800-726-2503
www.cfssc.ca

Catholic Family Services of Toronto
416-921-1163
www.cfstoronto.com

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Mary Centre
416-630-5533
www.marycentre.com

Saint Elizabeth Health Care
905-940-9655
www.sehc.com

St. Bernadette's Family Resource Centre
416-654-9810
www.stbernadettesfrc.org

St. Michael's Homes
Our Place Community of Hope
416-926-8267
www.stmichaelshomes.org

Silent Voice Canada
416-463-1104 TTY
416-463-3928
www.silentvoice.ca

SENIORS

Centres d'Accueil Héritage (CAH)
416-365-3350
www.caheritage.org

LA Centre for Active Seniors
416-452-4875
www.lacentreforseniors.ca

Houses of Providence
(Unity Health Toronto)
416-285-3666
www.providence.on.ca

Society of Sharing
416-413-0380
www.societyofsharing.org

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto
416-395-1500
www.torontoccas.ca

Covenant House of Toronto
1-800-435-7308
www.covenanthouseoftoronto.com

YOUNG PARENTS

Rosalie Hall
416-438-6880
www.rosaliehall.com

Rose of Durham
(Young Parents Division of CFS Durham)
905-432-3622
www.roseofdurham.com

Rose of Sharon
905-853-5514
www.roseofsharon.com

Vita Centre
905-502-7933
www.vitacentre.org

AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS

Camp Ozanam
(Society of St. Vincent de Paul)
416-364-5577
info@ssvptoronto.ca

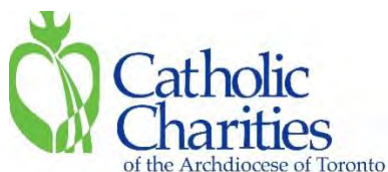
Good Shepherd Ministries
416-869-3619
www.goodshepherd.ca

Birthright International
1-800-550-4900
www.birthright.org

St. Marguerite Bourgeoys
FertilityCare Toronto
416-465-2868
www.fertilitycare.ca

Natural Family Planning Association
437-600-9333
www.toronto.naturalfamilyplanning.ca

To learn more about
Catholic Charities go to:
www.ccat.ca



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