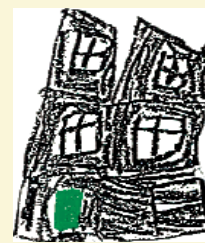


To the Point ...

Saint Columba House Newsletter.

Fall 2008



May you know the wisdom of deep listening, the healing of wholesome words, the encouragement of the appreciative gaze, the decorum of held dignity, the springtime edge of the bleak question.

(For a Leader, John O'Donahue)

The beautiful blessing above encapsulates everything that a ministry of hospitality hopes and strives to be - a place where all are welcome, listened to and acknowledged, encouraged and respected. A place where one finds dignity and hope even when faced with the bleak and difficult questions. A place of refuge and belonging.

At Saint Columba House, September is the beginning of the program year when we welcome many people back or through our doors for the first time. Nervous children starting their first school program at the Alternate School; newly arrived immigrant families facing economic hardship coming for the lunch program; intellectually challenged participants returning from August break to the Hand-in-Hand program; busloads of children from the Point St. Charles community arriving for the After-School program; individuals in need of assistance with housing or welfare problems. We also welcome new people to the many tables and arenas of action in which Saint Columba House is involved - The Action Watchdog community coalition; the Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Committee of Montreal Presbytery; or the Governing Board of Saint Gabriel School - to mention a few. Each person has their reasons for participating in our programs or community initiatives, and each needs to be welcomed and to feel part of the community.

September is also a time for sharing in the bounty of the harvest - not only the beautiful fruits and vegetables available at this time of year and bursting forth from our collective gardens, but also in the fruits of our labour and the realisation of so many initiatives that took place at Saint Columba House over the summer. In the following pages, you will read about many of these as well as the challenges ahead. We hope that you will continue to walk with us or join us as a newcomer yourself as we move towards new frontiers in hope and faith, as a community and church in solidarity.

Patricia Murphy

Summer in the City

Summer 2008 at Saint Columba House was indeed something to write home about. So hopefully you'll enjoy reading a diary of its exciting highlights. You might have missed our Open House on June 9th, but know that you are always welcome to join us for lunch any day around 11:30. Give us a call in advance so we can be sure to welcome you and show you around.

June 9th

The *Feast of Saint Columba* is for us the harbinger of summer! Each year, we welcome people from the neighbourhood, church and wider community for a community Bar-BQ (garbage free!), plant sale, bake sale, and exposition of Hand-in-Hand art. This year we also had the pleasure of welcoming Designated Lay Ministers from across the country who were here in Montreal for their annual gathering ... (Continued, page 2)



(Continued from page 1 ...) We took this opportunity to share stories of how people across Canada are engaged with the United Church *Challenging Empire* program. As people spoke of challenges their communities face - from the pressures of declining industries such as fishing and agriculture; to the tensions between job creation and environmental devastation caused by the oil industry; to the plight of the homeless or the isolation of family care-givers; to the fight in our own community to block the move of the Casino to Point St-Charles - we heard stories of victory, stories of loss, but mainly stories of on-going struggle and hope as people work together to meet the challenges and obstacles to social justice that they face. What an inspiring encounter!

June 27th

A big day for the *Day Camp* staff and counselors-in-training (CITs). First Aid Training! All staff, volunteers and CITs participate in a two week training session to prepare for the *Day Camp*. They learn about leadership, safety, literacy animation and how to make activities fun. Many of these youth are from the community and benefit from a positive first job experience at Saint Columba House. Bonds of friendship are already forming and laughter and words of encouragement are heard from the main hall where the training is underway.

July 2nd

The day we have all been waiting for! The noisy arrival of 55 neighbourhood children for the *Summer Day Camp* - ready for action! An exciting program of outings, swimming, guests and visits, arts and crafts and literacy activities is planned - all in both languages. Children meet their counselors and slowly begin to greet new and old friends. Let the fun begin! But the work continues. Next week we will have an inspection visit from the Association des camps du Quebec (ACQ). If we meet high standards for safety, training, programming and animation, we will receive ACQ accreditation. In preparation, final touches are put on documents and the program is fine-tuned. We will have news by the end of the summer.



The Saint Columba House Literacy Day Camp welcomes 55 children from Point St. Charles for a fun-filled and dynamic program of outings, swimming, arts and crafts and many other activities with an emphasis on reading and writing while having lots of fun, exercise and fresh air, all in both languages!

July 14th

Heather arrives with a report in hand from the McGill Natural Resources Laboratory on soil toxicity. Heather Elliott animates the *Oasis Collective Garden* in partnership with community group ACSA (Action Concertée pour la sécurité en alimentation). She has worked with many community residents on this wonderful project, producing copious amount of flowers by the side of our building and fresh fruits and vegetables in the container garden on our upstairs terrasse. The report is on a soil test from our side garden, showing high levels of lead. We have not planted edibles here due to uncertainty about the state of the soil and the knowledge that many areas of the community have evidence of toxic waste in the soil. We consider recommendations to plant in raised boxes or to try some phytoremediation techniques - planting plants that detoxify the soil over time. Both are great ideas that we'll study further and hopefully implement in the near future.



Garden Animator, Heather, admires the fruits of her team's labours at Oasis Garden - on our upstairs terrasse.

July 21st

Nothing unusual today ... just an ordinary day. The building and lunch program staff and volunteers - Leslie, Anita, John, Kathy and Wayne arrive - early as usual - for a regular day of work. Out come the mops and buckets, paint cans and brushes, hammers and nails. Before too long the ladders are installed and work on stripping the front doors begins. John is already working on the raised boxes for the collective gardens and is recuperating wood that can be recycled for this purpose. Lively discussions take place on an ongoing basis as to what's the next project, what colour we'll paint the Alternate School, when to paint the downstairs hall and floor. A delicious lunch is prepared for the gardeners and they are joined in the lunchroom by staff and volunteers. The energy and enthusiasm are palpable. Did I say ordinary? At Saint Columba House, every day is *extraordinary!*

July 28th

A special day is planned for the *Hand-in-Hand summer camp* - a visit to Granby Zoo. The camp's big outing usually has something to do with animals - who maintain a soft spot in the hearts of all at Hand-in-Hand. The bus arrives and they are off for a fun-filled day. Like many of the participants in our programs at Saint Columba House, most of the intellectually challenged adults who come to Hand-in-Hand live on low-incomes and face few options for recreation, education or privileged activities. This program offers these kinds of important opportunities and special occasions that allow them to participate more fully in society.

August 3rd

Today I came across an article entitled "The Dignity of the Decent Facility" which focussed on the tremendous difficulties faced by much of the world's population without access to decent toilet facilities. What a coincidence that today work begins downstairs to renovate our 50 year old toilets - a long-awaited project for which fundraising has not been easy! We greatly hope that the construction of decent washrooms will help to support the message of hospitality and dignity that we hope to convey in all aspects of our ministry at Saint Columba House.



Composting over 2,000 pounds of kitchen refuse per year from our lunch program is one of many steps that Saint Columba House has undertaken in its efforts to improve its environmental practices. Saint Columba House is a participant in the Green Church Project of Montreal Presbytery, U.C.C.

Project, more news about Saint Columba House's efforts to "go green" can be found at www.greenchurchproject.org. Read all about it!

August 25th

Issac Mundy from the *Green Church Project* arrives to meet with Leslie to discuss the Saint Columba House energy audit. Results from a preliminary evaluation are impressive. Since 2006, our efforts to reduce our energy consumption have already resulted in a reduction of about 730 kg of carbon emissions in terms of the reduction of natural gas use, plus a rebate of almost \$3,000 from Gas Metropolitan, and an obvious increase in consciousness about energy use on the part of staff and program participants. In addition to this, we now have a large composting program, improved recycling practices as well as our collective gardens to promote food security. As a participant in the *Green Church Pilot*



The Saint Columba House lunch program welcomes about 125 people daily for a hot nutritious and affordable lunch in a welcoming family atmosphere; the lunch program is blessed by many dedicated volunteers who make it possible!

September 15th

The tail-winds of Hurricane Ike and the early autumn leaves on the ground are not the only indicators of summer's end. In the morning, the building is filled with the comforting odor of home-made pumpkin soup and the afternoon is filled with the shouts of gleeful children as they arrive for After-School. This week we will reconvene with our community partners at *Action Watchdog* to plan a busy year of preparation for consultations on CN Lands development. With the *Justice, Global & Ecumenical Relations Committee* of Montreal Presbytery, we will ponder the impact of impending funding cuts to community ministries including Saint Columba House. In the midst of a snap Federal election, *Welfare Rights Committee* is organizing a candidate's debate - an opportunity for citizens to ask their questions and make their choices. Already our lunch program numbers are burgeoning as we open our doors to newcomers affected by the closure of yet another local group. All our programs are full to the brim.

Much was accomplished this summer. The raised plant boxes are built - affording safe edibles and easier access to gardening for elderly or disabled people. Most of the building has been spruced up, the front doors restored to their original forest green. The *Collective Garden Harvest Party* is planned for Saturday to celebrate its great success. Publicity is posted for a new program (P.I.E.D) to help elderly people avoid falls by teaching light exercise, nutrition and helpful tips. Bathroom renovations are well underway, though some work yet to complete. We await final approval for ACQ accreditation for the Day Camp. Most importantly, the spirit of welcoming hospitality is alive and well at Saint Columba House as we prepare for another wonderful year in our now 82 year old life in the community of Point St. Charles.



Thanks to Myrna Rose

Thirty-six years is a life-time ... at least a good chunk of one! How fortunate Saint Columba House has been to have benefited from a life-time commitment from Myrna Rose, the coordinator, founder and defender par excellence of the Saint Columba House *Hand-in-Hand* Day Program for intellectually challenged adults.

Myrna moved to Montreal in 1964 from Atholville, New Brunswick and settled in Point St. Charles. As a single mother, she raised five children including Yvon who lives with an intellectual disability. She came to work at Saint Columba House as the cook and remembers the days when the lunch program worked double shifts to serve hundreds of children and adults a daily home-made meal. Always with her finger on the pulse of community life, Myrna realized she was not alone in her challenge to raise a disabled child. With the support of Saint

Columba House director, Rev. Chris Levan, and two other mothers of disabled young adults, she founded the Hand-in-Hand day program at Saint Columba House.

The rest is history. Now in its 28th year, Hand-in-Hand has become a thriving program welcoming up to 16 participants daily to a diversified program offering literacy and art activities, physical education and celebrations - all in a family atmosphere that many of the participants refer to as home. Not only has Myrna nurtured the participants, but so many others have taken part in this wonderful program as students, interns in theology and volunteers - all of whom claim to have learned from and been greatly inspired by Myrna.

And if that was not enough! Myrna participated in many community projects, including the conception and writing of the books 'Hope is the Struggle' and 'The Point is ... Grassroots Organizing Works' - testimonies of the historical, spiritual and dynamic collective life of the community of Point St. Charles.

After all these years, Myrna is retiring. This will be a difficult transition for many and there will be many tears as we say goodbye. But we hope that Myrna knows that her second family and home is always here and that this is only an au revoir. Don't be a stranger, Myrna!!!

Living Gifts

Want to avoid the entrapments of consumerism at Christmas time? Want to get your Christmas shopping over and done with? Want to give an ethical gift that makes a difference in the world?

Consider the Saint Columba House Living Gifts Program!

Make a donation to Saint Columba House in the name of someone you love, and they will receive a beautiful card and certificate showing what that gift will make possible (i.e. 5 Christmas dinners for singles, 2 books for our Children's library, 5 hours of tutoring for a child, etc.) You will receive a tax-deductible receipt for the full value of your gift.

*For information, call
514-932-6202.*

The Montreal Jubilation Gospel Choir

What better way to ring in the Christmas season than by inviting your family, friends and community to this wonderful Christmas concert of joyful seasonal and Gospel music

On

Friday December 12th, 8:00 p.m.

at

Saint James United Church

463 Ste. Catherine Street West

Saint Columba House has 75 tickets to sell. Proceeds will go to our children's programs. Cost: \$45.00 each (taxes included)

For information or to purchase tickets, call

514-932-6202.

Many thanks to Nicole Poirat for her wonderful work on the Saint Columba House web-site. Visit www.saintcolumbahouse.org