



Insights and Encounters

August 2026

Volume 4 - Issue 7

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Covenant House's Rooftop Garden

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.



Living is When Dignity Meets Care

This month, we're highlighting our latest podcast series, **Living Is When Dignity Meets Care**, which turns to one of the most pressing issues facing our communities today: Canada's pending expansion of Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) to include those suffering from mental illness alone. Through conversations with Dr. Ramona Coelho, Neil MacCarthy, Kathy Matusiak Costa, and Dr. Agnes Thomas, the series asks what it truly means to support human dignity — and makes the case that before we offer anyone death, we owe them presence, care, and hope.

INSIGHTS & ENCOUNTERS THE PODCAST



Living is When Dignity Meets Care

EPISODE 1

Life, Death, and Hope:
Dr. Ramona Coelho on MAiD
and Community Solutions

With
Dr. Ramona Coelho,
MDCM, CCFP



EPISODE 2

Help Not Harm: Raising
Awareness on Mental Illness
and Medical Assistance in
Dying in Canada

With
Neil MacCarthy,
Director of Public Relations &
Communications
Archdiocese of Toronto



EPISODE 3

Embracing Compassion:
Community Care and the
Power of Presence

With
Kathy Matusiak-Costa
Director of Compassionate
Community Care



EPISODE 4

Shaping Hope:
From Individual Suffering
to Collective Responsibility
in Care

With
Dr. Agnes Thomas



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listen:



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Rooted in Community, Growing Awareness and Care

Catholic Community Services of York Region



Earlier this summer, CCSYR's Autism Program, offered through disABILITY Services, partnered with CCAT and ShareLife to bring a Cantonese-language workshop on Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease to St. Agnes KY Tsao Catholic Church—a session designed to reach Chinese-speaking families with information they could use at home.

It worked. Families left with real, practical tools and told us directly—"very informative," "clear and to the point," "wish to hear more in the future." This is the kind of care our Autism Program brings to every family it serves: evidence-based, culturally grounded, and built around real people's real days.

None of it could have happened without the program facilitator, whose care in preparing and delivering the session left a real mark on everyone in the room. Our thanks to St. Agnes KY Tsao Catholic Church for opening its doors to the community.

We're deeply grateful to CCAT and ShareLife — your funding doesn't just support programming; it builds the trust that lets families walk through our doors in the first place. That support makes this possible.



Growing More Than a Garden

Covenant House Toronto



The harvest has begun on Covenant House Toronto's rooftop garden!

After planting seeds and seedlings earlier this spring, youth are now picking fresh herbs and eagerly watching tomatoes ripen on the vine. For many, it is their first experience growing food from start to finish, learning firsthand what it takes to help something thrive.

Lined with raised beds of tomatoes, herbs and vegetables, the rooftop garden offers much more than fresh ingredients. It gives young people a chance to build practical skills, build confidence, and experience the rewards of patience and perseverance.

Throughout the season, youth work alongside volunteers who share their gardening knowledge and help them learn the basics, from planting and watering to caring for growing plants and preparing for harvest. Together, they tend the garden week after week, watching small seedlings transform into healthy crops.

As they care for the garden, youth discover lessons that extend far beyond the raised beds. They learn that growth takes time. That setbacks can be overcome. That consistency matters. And that success often comes from small, steady efforts over time.

For young people preparing for greater independence, these experiences are especially valuable. Learning how to grow herbs and vegetables can support healthy eating, stretch a budget and foster self-sufficiency. Equally important, gardening encourages responsibility, problem-solving and planning ahead.

Working outdoors also offers a chance to slow down and focus on something positive. Watching plants grow, spending time in nature and working toward a shared goal can provide a sense of calm and accomplishment for young people whose lives have often been marked by uncertainty.

"I've seen how the rooftop garden becomes a place where young people can slow down, connect with nature and take pride in caring for something over time," says Sonya Gammal, chef instructor of Covenant House Toronto's Cooking for Life program. "Through Cooking for Life, they harvest what they've grown and turn it into meals they're proud to create."

Today, youth are harvesting herbs while anticipating a fresh crop of tomatoes that will soon be ready to pick. The excitement is not just about the food. It is about seeing the results of months of effort, care and commitment.

Every garden offers a powerful lesson: growth requires the right environment, guidance, patience, and support. The same is true for young people.

Just as a garden needs time, care, community and knowledge to flourish, young people need those things to reach their full potential. At Covenant House, the rooftop garden helps nurture both.



Nourishing Community Through Food Pantry And Youth Cooking Classes

Deaf Services Canada



Through a 2025 ShareLife/CCAT Food Security Grant, Deaf Services Canada had the opportunity to address food insecurity among our Deaf and Hard of Hearing clients. We operate a small food pantry at our office for clients in need who are struggling financially to buy food for themselves or their families.

Deaf Services Canada has an incredible team of dedicated volunteers who help with every aspect of maintaining our food pantry, from loading and unloading the vehicle when we purchase food to sorting items and stocking the pantry shelves. We also have volunteers who deliver food in their own vehicles to Deaf clients with mobility issues or Deaf seniors who have difficulty taking food hampers home on public transit.

Over 20 Deaf and Hard of Hearing teenagers volunteer to help with our food pantry. While volunteering, we came to realize that over half of the youth themselves were struggling with food insecurity in their household. We were able to help them with food hampers, and it was heartwarming for both us and the youth to see how much giving back meant to them. We continue to run an informal weekly cooking class at our office to learn different recipes and ways to cook nutritious, affordable foods. The youth completely run these cooking classes as volunteers.

Our volunteers drive our organization. Our food pantry is such an important service, and they ensure it operates year-round. Special thanks also to ShareLife donors and parishioners. Without your generosity, we could not meet the dire need of food insecurity in the Deaf community.



Sharing the Bounty, Supporting Equitable Care

Journey Home Hospice

At Saint Elizabeth Foundation, sharing the bounty means ensuring that everyone has access to the care, dignity, and support they deserve. Through the Journey Home Hospice Patient Fund, we help provide comfort and a sense of home for people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity at the end of life.

The Fund supports meaningful experiences that extend beyond clinical care, including multimedia entertainment, freshly prepared meals, new pyjamas and loungewear, holiday celebrations, and special activities that bring joy and connection. These simple but powerful moments help create comfort, belonging, and dignity during life's most vulnerable chapter.



This work reflects the spirit of stewardship and sharing at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching. Just as communities come together to share the fruits of their harvest, we are called to share our resources and compassion with those most in need. Thanks to generous donors, the Patient Fund helps ensure that no one is left behind.

Together, we are building communities rooted in dignity, equity, and compassion. By sharing what we have, we bring hope, human connection, and comfort to those facing the end of life — because every person deserves to be cared for and valued to their very last moment.

Learn more about supporting the Journey Home Hospice Patient Fund:

donate.sehc.com/donation-22/journey-home-hospice-patient-fund



IN OUR OWN WORDS

Stephen Hurley

Host of Insights & Encounters Podcast

For the past two and a half years, I've had the privilege of hosting 40 conversations with leaders across the CCAT landscape — some directly connected to the agencies and organizations it supports, others doing important work on issues it has come to care deeply about. For me, each conversation has led to some powerful observations.

First and foremost, whether the topic was prayer, leadership, justice, compassion, or — most recently — the pending legislation on MAiD for mental health, guests have brought a wealth of experience, insight, and, most notably, passion. The engagement each guest has brought to our conversations speaks volumes about the engagement they bring to their own work.

As a host, I always give my guests a sense of where I'd like the conversation to go. But the real gift of this work has been the moments when we've been able to set that plan aside and let the real story emerge. In these unguarded moments, I've come to see, again and again, that their primary motivation and inspiration come from the people they serve. For me, this is truly Gospel work.

My hope is that the 2 ½ years of Insights and Encounters will, on the one hand, allow listeners to connect with the wide landscape covered by CCAT. On the other hand, I'm hoping that somewhere in one of these conversations, they will hear a call to action. It might be a particular issue that captures their heart, or a way of responding that draws them in. However the call comes, and in whatever conversation it appears, I hope you'll feel moved to answer it — and to discover, as I have, how much these stories have to offer, and how much of yourself you have to bring to them.

Have a listen: <https://open.spotify.com/show/0LHa9uDbZFXR43kmGZu1JW>

PAUSE & REFLECT

Water as...

By Sabrina M. Chiefari



Sabrina Chiefari is a Catholic Environmental Educator. As the Integral Ecology Specialist for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, she is a long-time proponent of Integral Ecology.

For 16 years, Grassy Narrows River Run has been a rally calling for mercury justice and freedom for the Grassy Narrows First Nation in Kenora, Ontario. **River Run 2026 will be in downtown Toronto on Wednesday, September 23 at noon**, offering the chance to walk with the Grassy Narrows community.

Water as a human right

At a 2023 Grassy Narrows rally, I listened as a member of Grassy Narrows spoke of no longer being able to fish in local waters; his wife's multiple miscarriages; a childhood friend who died due to mercury in his system reacting to children's vitamins.

His story was not from 30 – 40 years ago, but within the last 15 years. It is still happening.

From 1962 – 1970, a paper mill dumped 20,000 pounds of mercury into the Wabigon River upstream of the Grassy Narrows community, contaminating their water supply, causing widespread illness, and devastating their fishing industry. It is one of Canada's worst environmental disasters, and the government downplayed the crisis for decades.

Grassy Narrows still faces these life-threatening conditions 50 years after the plant was decommissioned. The community is sick and dealing with remediation and healing.

Why join River Run 2026? Because Grassy Narrows, Wapekeka, Neskantaga, and Big Trout Lake First Nations are defending themselves, the land, and the waters from mining projects.

Water as a shared commons

If we understand that water is a vital right, then we must understand our shared responsibility to advocate for justice and against privatization. Colonial, capital-driven extraction further impoverishes Indigenous peoples and denies remote communities access to water. Extraction serves only corporate profits.

We must all work to demand justice now and better for the future.



River Run 2026, September 23. RSVP:

actionnetwork.org/events/river-run-2026

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto are a Blue Community, committed to protecting water as a human right, shared commons, and sacred gift. csj-to.ca

ON THE HORIZON

VOLUNTEER *with us at* SYNERGY TORONTO 2026



Be part of something big!

This November, hundreds of leaders from across Catholic health, education, and community services are coming together in Toronto and we want you to be part of making it happen.



**VOLUNTEER
SIGN-UPS ARE NOW OPEN!**
PLEASE SEND YOUR INQUIRIES TO:
hkandiah@ccat.ca



THERE'S A ROLE FOR EVERYONE.
From registration and hospitality to logistics and media.

*Together, we create change.
Together, we build hope.*



Catholic
Charities
of the Archdiocese of Toronto

**SYNERGY
TORONTO 2026
CONFERENCE**
November 3 – 5, 2026
Chelsea Hotel
Toronto, ON

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto

How you can contact member agencies and affiliated 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

Deaf Services Canada
416-463-1104
www.deafservices.ca

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 Program)
416-926-8267
www.stmichaelshomes.org

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 Toronto
1-800-465-7308
www.covenanthousetoronto.ca

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

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

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

Natural Family Planning Association
437-600-9333
www.naturalfamilyplanningtoronto.ca

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

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

**To learn more about
Catholic Charities, go to:**

www.ccat.ca



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