



For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

Dear Friends of Concilio,

Advent is upon us once again. It is a Latin word meaning "coming". It is a season observed as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the coming of Jesus. Within Concilio Prison Ministry, we too are waiting with hopeful expectation for things that are yet to come.

Concilio Prison Ministry continues its focus on helping others to learn about the love of God, the love of oneself, and the love of others through St. Luke's Renewal Centre, Advent Programs, and Kairos Marathon Circles. These programs are vehicles to welcome vulnerable - and often forgotten - people in society.

"Not being welcome is your greatest fear. It connects with your birth fear, your fear of not being welcome in this life, and your death fear, your fear of not being welcome in the life after this. It is the deep-seated fear that it would have been better if you had not lived."

"You can only seek God when you have already found God. The desire for God's unconditional love is the fruit of having been touched by that love."

— Henri J.M. Nouwen, The Inner Voice of Love

I invite you to read the following pages, to meet our new board and to learn more about each of the programs. We covet your prayers as we continue to move forward in faith, hope, and love.

Blessings and peace be with you in this time of Advent,

Clarence DeSchiffart
President, Board of Directors

Meet the New Board

At the Annual General Meeting on September 23, 2017, words of appreciation were shared for the faithful service of four Board members: **Renée Clark, Lorna Crawley, David Seller, and Jacquie Wilson.**

Five new board members were announced and affirmed at this same meeting, and they have since been working together to bring renewal to this unique and critical ministry.



Vicki Patton
Counsellor
Kentville, Nova Scotia

I was introduced to prison work by Charlie Taylor through the Kairos Marathons many years ago. I have always appreciated Charlie's words, "We are more alike than different," and I have felt most at home with those who have been deeply wounded.



Clarence DeSchiffart
Career Counsellor, retired
Wolfville, Nova Scotia

I have been profoundly touched by the men and women in the Kairos Marathons over the past thirty years. The people in the circle have taught me much about my spiritual life and humanness in the light of the Trinity's love.



Simeon Hanson
Clinical and Forensic Psychologist
Wolfville, Nova Scotia

For nearly twenty years, I have worked primarily with vulnerable young people, many of whom have been involved in the criminal justice system. I have lived in Nova Scotia for the past four years after emigrating from the UK.

I am involved in prison ministry as I seek to understand the journeys of people who have found themselves in custody. I believe that all of us need healing and that often those who are in custody have been victims themselves, and, only God can truly mend that which is broken.



Colette Van Meekeren
Accounting Clerk at a local law firm
Coldbrook, Nova Scotia

Concilio Prison Ministry is new to me. I believe we are all part of one body to do God's work.



Rachel Sovka
Journalist
Monrovia, Liberia
(formerly Halifax, Nova Scotia)

I'm interested in prison ministry because I believe in restorative justice, that no one is beyond hope, and "there but for the grace of God go I". *Rachel has recently moved to Liberia to engage in international development. We wish to thank Rachel for her contributions and interest in Concilio.*

St. Luke's Renewal Centre is re-opened!

In August 2017, Concilio Prison Ministry re-opened St. Luke's Renewal Centre at the Springhill Institution, with a new facilitator, **Rev. John Tonks!** This exciting development is due to the generous support and commitment of the Law Foundation of Nova Scotia and other Concilio supporters, including one anonymous donation.

John brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the Renewal Centre. His work experience includes serving as a chaplain at Springhill Institution, the Atlantic Regional Chaplain for Correctional Services Canada, and a co-owner of an organization that hired and managed the prison chaplains across Canada. Along with the founder, Dr. Charles J. Taylor, John was involved in the creation and building of St. Luke's Renewal Centre.

Since September, John's time has been focused on educating and promoting within the institution that St. Luke's is once again operational. For more than a year, the Renewal Centre was vacant except for occasional meetings by staff. With the help of a few inmates, the building was cleaned and organized to re-create a quiet, home-like sacred space for inmates.

John's history at Springhill has been valuable through this transition; all the senior managers have known him for many years and they have been colleagues. Management's support for St. Luke's is very strong, and security officers have cooperated well.

With the temporary closure of St. Luke's for 16 months, many of the inmates felt abandoned. St. Luke's is known among the inmates as a place of freedom and acceptance - a place of peace. It will take slow careful nudging to win back their confidence. We are grateful that John has offered to remain at St. Luke's for an extended period during this critical time until the relationships are re-established. **This is an answer to prayer!** When a new facilitator is identified, it is clear we will need a smooth transition without a gap in leadership.

True Gratitude for Advent Programs

A volunteer team with two leaders, **Sheila MacCrimmon** and **Jeff Hosick**, spent three days in three federal men's prisons in the Maritimes this Advent Season, sharing the Christmas message. It's a joy to see the men smile, laugh, and play. At the end of our time together, many of the inmates seek out the volunteers to thank them individually - true gratitude for people who recognize their value as children of God.

With sadness, the Advent program at the Dorchester medium-security prison was cancelled due to a lockdown. The men were confined to their cells until the incident was resolved and the lockdown lifted. Prayer was offered for the staff as they managed this tense situation, for the chaplains who were on call, and especially for the inmates who were agitated by missing the Advent program. The lockdown was very disappointing for both the volunteers and the inmates. **Please continue to offer prayer for inmates during this time of year as they are missing their families.**

Learning about Love at Kairos Marathon Circles

During the November Kairos Marathon Circle at the Springhill Institution, one inmate asked a simple, yet deep, question, "What is love? What do we mean by love?" This stirred many emotional reactions.

How does one explain love? How does one find love and healing?

One example of finding love is the recent Kairos Marathon Circle at Acadia Divinity College on December 9. Four of the eight participants travelled between 3 and 5 hours that Saturday morning to attend the day-long Circle. One of the participants also invited his partner to attend with him. Through listening and sharing, each participant received a small taste of what it means to be loved. This love *in action* gave them the strength to begin to face their vulnerabilities. **Christ was truly present** in that safe and sacred space, with glimpses of light in the darkness.

Words of Appreciation

Thank you for your generosity and encouragement by volunteering your time and abilities, purchasing food for events, and making financial donations. Your support is vital to this ministry.

We also wish to acknowledge and thank three organizations for their partnership: Law Foundation of Nova Scotia, Mennonite Central Committee, and the United Church of Canada: Maritime Conference.



How can you help?

1. Please pray.

- The Board of Directors and committees of Concilio Prison Ministry
- The development of a long-term fundraising strategy and campaign
- The financial support to sustain and grow the current ministries of St. Luke's Renewal Centre, Kairos marathon circles, and Advent programs

2. Please share the news with others.

Consider using your gifts to help communicate the mission of Concilio ministries. If you or your church would like a presentation and update on Concilio Prison Ministry and its services, please contact:

Clarence DeSchiffart
clarence.deschiffart@acadiau.ca
902-542-3917

3. Please give generously.

We gratefully accept your cheque by mail or donations through CanadaHelps.com. You can search **Concilio Prison Ministry** on the Canada Helps website.

Please consider donating this Christmas to Concilio Prison Ministry!

Mail a cheque to: Concilio Prison Ministry, 261 McGee Street, RR#1, Springhill NS B0M 1X0

Give online: Canada Helps: <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/5921>