

Friends of Concilio Prison Ministry

Newsletter for April 2024

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:11

As I reflect on the past three months, it's evident that the Kairos Marathons, both inside prison walls and within our communities, have made a profound impact on all involved. Whether it's the inmates or community members, including those experiencing the marathon for the first time, there's a tangible sense of renewal.

In Dartmouth and Wolfville, Nova Scotia, where community circles are held, fresh perspectives are emerging. Graduate students from Acadia's Master of Divinity and Master of Education (Counselling) programs have joined in, sharing feedback about the encounters with love they've experienced. Even within the confines of Springhill prison, there's a genuine sense of community, adding richness to the overall experience as participants bear witness to the Divine among us.

How do inmates, former inmates, and volunteers ensure everyone feels emotionally secure? It's all about perspective. Instead of closing off when someone is angry without reason, participants choose to reach out, seeking to understand their pain and offer support. Why is that person acting this way? Is there any way I can help? This mindset makes it easier to pray for others' healing and inner peace. In this ministry work, our aim is for everyone to become more aware of God's love surrounding us. The love shared and received in the Kairos Marathon Circles is something to be truly grateful for. Thanks be to God!

Clarence DeSchiffart

President, Concilio Prison Ministry
Facilitator, Kairos Marathons



A Student's Experience - Kairos Marathon Circle (Community)

Attending a Kairos Marathon Circle in Dartmouth was an incredible experience. The amount of love in the room was palpable – it was clear that every participant genuinely cared for one another, even those attending the circle for the first time. People were actively listening, creating an atmosphere where everyone sharing felt truly heard. I was also struck by people's willingness to be honest and raw about what they are going through and what they were feeling. On more than one occasion, one person's sharing prompted someone else to share that they were going through something similar.

I doubt anyone left the experience feeling isolated in their challenges. Overall, it was a deeply moving experience, and I hope to attend another Kairos circle in the future.

Alex McMorine

Acadia Master of Divinity (2024)



Advent 2023 - Moments of Grace

For three decades, Concilio volunteers have made the annual journey to the four federal men's prisons in the Maritime Region to share an "Advent program" with the men. The program kicks off with a spirited rendition of the Twelve Days of Christmas, followed by lively contests, puzzle games, a reading of a contemporary Christmas children's story, and concludes with a brief meditation.

This year, during the meditation, Jeff Hosick reflected on Jesus, who hailed from Galilee as a Jew. Jeff said, "I was thinking of Jesus as a six-year-old, always being an outsider. Not belonging with the north because he was Jewish, not belonging in the south because he came from the north. I live with Autism, as do many of the inmates. I have experienced being an outsider. Jesus too knows what being an outsider is all about."

During Jeff's heartfelt sharing, the young men listened intently, nodding in understanding, and feeling a sense of connection. It was a brief but profound moment of solidarity at the end of the program. Jeff called it "a day to experience Grace".

One of the volunteers reflected, "My initial encounter with a prison was at the Atlantic Institution in Renous, New Brunswick, participating in an Advent program. That was the beginning of a cherished tradition for me. Each Christmas season spent with the inmates fills me with a profound sense of God's grace as I view these men through the lens of unconditional love."

Another volunteer, attending her first Advent program this year, described it as a truly wonderful experience that she would hold dear in her heart. "I was touched by the inmates' appreciation and joy during the program, and I cherish the camaraderie within the volunteer group. From start to finish, the experience left a lasting impression, and I eagerly anticipate participating again next year."

This year marked the first Advent program in four years, requiring considerable effort in planning and organization. Yet, once immersed in the chapel filled with laughter and camaraderie, all the hurdles seemed to vanish. Moments of tenderness, like witnessing a man's first time in the chapel or observing the emotional response to the storybook emphasizing the uniqueness of each child, offered glimpses of God's presence shining through the darkness.

As the men exited the chapel, the volunteers formed a circle, holding hands and singing The Lord's Prayer—a deeply moving expression of gratitude to the Source of Grace.



Sheila MacCrimmon
on behalf of the 2023 Advent Program team

St. Luke's Renewal Centre - Fall 2023 and Winter 2024



Life at St. Luke's Renewal Centre has been bustling throughout the summer and fall, albeit with occasional pauses for staff vacations and several lockdowns.

In late August, Joanne Charest, the new Regional Deputy Commissioner for the Atlantic Region of Corrections Services Canada (CSC), visited St. Luke's during her initial tour of Springhill Institution. Her interest was piqued by the Office of the Correctional Investigator, who hailed St. Luke's as a "CSC best practice". Accompanied by Jennifer Fillmore, the Warden at the time, and Ian Carr, the Assistant Warden of Interventions, Ms. Charest enthusiastically expressed her support for St. Luke's, eager to learn about the services it offered within the prison walls. St. Luke's is a sanctuary away from the typical stresses of prison life, providing a space to engage in individual reflection, communal gatherings, and a range of activities and programs, both short-term and long-term.

Throughout the fall, a multitude of activities have continued, including weekly sessions of *Houses of Healing+*, and the pioneering group of *Fathering From the Inside(s) Out* (FFTIO), a program created at St. Luke's with grant support from the Anglican Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Despite interruptions from lockdowns and holidays, participants devoted themselves to the program's core concepts: understanding their inner selves, understanding the impacts of their past traumas, and understanding their relationships with their fathers, with the goal to become better fathers themselves. As the pilot session nears its end, each participant is crafting a Fathering Plan tailored to their circumstances.

Over the summer, nine Art Days were hosted, led by volunteer artist Danielle Gallant. Each Art Day offered 10-14 participants a creative outlet through drawing, painting, collage-making, and more. Their enjoyment was palpable, and hopes are high for Danielle's return in 2024.

In December, the Reverend Ed Coleman, an Anglican priest and artist, graced St. Luke's with a one-day art retreat. Ten men participated, each creating two canvases under Ed's guidance. Many of the participants said: "I could never draw or paint. I didn't believe I could do that!" Departing with newfound confidence in their artistic abilities, plans are underway for another retreat in the spring.

Lastly, significant upgrades and renovations to the building are underway or scheduled. These include the replacement and expansion of the back porch and front entryway, repairs to exterior walls, and the replacement of the basement central beam. We are very grateful to CSC for this most tangible form of support.

Rev. Lorraine Street
Facilitator, St. Luke's Renewal Centre

What St. Luke's Renewal Centre Means to Two Inmates

Interview conducted by Lorraine Street, Facilitator of St. Luke's. Questions:

1. Could you talk about the value of St. Luke's to you?
2. Are there any specific stories about your time at St. Luke's where you have experienced a higher power or God in the midst of your experience in prison?
3. What would you like to tell the world about St. Luke's and its purpose and value?



Before I knew I was coming to Springhill, I had heard of St. Luke's— a place for guys to relax away from the units. As a Christian, the idea of a place with a distinctly Christian name gave me comfort - where something of Christ is known and will be witnessed to. I imagined it being in the heart of the institution, thinking a place like that belonged at its core. However, St. Luke's is on the outside of the first fence, and in my experience, that's appropriate because I feel we really do leave all this on the other side.

I remember the first time I sat in the living room; it felt so calm. I could see creation - the trees and the sky - the fence was only visible at the lower edge of the windowsill. I give thanks for everything I'm experiencing here; it is a gift from God, reflecting his grace and his glory.



Someone suggested I ask the chaplain about St. Luke's, a place especially for lifers. Other people told me that St. Luke's was a type of religious place. For me, it is a comforting place to be. When I first looked out over the view, it was peaceful. Having no correctional officers walking around or sitting in the bubble gave me a break. When I come here, I don't feel like I'm in prison.

This place has created connections for me – it's allowed me to build good relationships with people – and learning about what makes them tick.

The Roots Program opened my eyes a little bit; it brought out things I didn't realize about myself. Houses of Healing has helped me recognize the traumas I've experienced, and I now realize why I am the way I am – it's helped immensely.

I like that we pray before meals. When I'm here, I feel that the Holy Spirit is with me. When I'm here, I am in the happiest place in prison. Talking to Lorraine Street helps take weight off my shoulders, while a psychologist only tells me what's wrong. Here I am able to understand why these things are happening—I have an empathetic witness.



As someone from out-of-province and knowing only a handful of people in the entire prison, being at St. Luke's has forced me to be around new people – some I initially saw as intimidating. Yet, in this environment, walls come down. It's surprising how often the conversation turns to deeper matters – things about life, God, personal struggle and hardship – that are carried back into the prison. What begins here carries on, renewed every week.

Lorraine Street has become like family. I'm grateful for her sympathetic and empathetic ability to listen and provide support. You can see it on her face – her tears speaks of how she enters into the experiences of others, to feel their emotions and share their burdens. She mourns and weeps alongside them.



And it's not one person but more than one—I've shared things here I would never have shared with other people. St. Luke's is in my daily vocabulary.



Me as well. I can't go through a day without talking about St. Luke's - asking if people are going or saying I'm going down there. It's part of my life, and I hope it can continue to be part of my life while I'm here. When I'm here, there is genuine care and concern.



There's lots of stuff in the back of the bus that's getting unloaded. I haven't thought about some of these things for [over 50] years.



St. Luke's is the brightest, the most open space within the institution, both emotionally and physically. It's a great place to be. The opportunity to cook and enjoy a meal together – it's not so much the cooking or the eating – it's the cooking together and the eating together – the fullness of the experience. Cleaning up afterwards is also rewarding. The smell of coffee or something baking in the oven – these little, thoughtful, special things brighten the week. It's relaxed and comfortable, yet there's also a depth of trust that allows us to share feelings I wouldn't share anywhere else.

I am grateful for the people who have generously donated to St. Luke's over the years - books that have deepened my own Bible study, a piano and a guitar that have given me the opportunity to play music, and art like the painting of Christ on the cross¹. St. Luke's is my home away from home right now.



We're all told at the beginning that St. Luke's is a privilege, that the prison could shut it down. But once we've been here, no one has to be told that it's a privilege. You don't see people getting in fights here. They treat it like a privilege.

St. Luke's helps me with the idea of transitioning back to life on the other side. I'll have skills and knowledge that will be of lifelong help and value. Also, it removes some of the bitterness of being here. Rather than leaving here broken, it will allow me to leave nourished and more whole. This is a huge positive in a very negative environment. St. Luke's is a lamp on a hill; it stands as a bright beacon in the darkness.

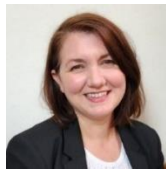
¹ A print of Salvador Dali's painting, Christ of St. John of the Cross, hangs in the living room at St. Luke's.

Kairos Street and Prison Marathon Circles

Kairos “Street” Community Circles

We held Kairos Marathon Circles on November 11 and February 24 at Acadia Divinity College (ADC) in Wolfville, and on December 16 at Our Lady of Guadalupe / Saint Anthony’s Catholic Church in Dartmouth. Each circle, attended by 15-20 participants, was characterized by an atmosphere of love and mutual support. Participants shared their experiences of pain related to addiction, broken relationships, feelings of low self-worth, verbal abuse, and physical abuse, and expressed a desire to encounter the loving presence of God.

During these Kairos Circles, graduate students from the Acadia Master of Education (Counselling) program and the Acadia Master of Divinity program were actively involved. They expressed amazement about the depth of love, connection, and feeling of being truly heard.



We extend our thanks to Jennifer Deane, who, in her role as Outreach Coordinator for Our Lady of Guadalupe / Saint Anthony’s Catholic Church in Dartmouth, arranged the venue for the Dartmouth circle.

Additionally, we express our appreciation for Coryn Stehouwer of the Halifax Community Chaplaincy Society. Coryn and her husband have moved to England to pursue new professional opportunities. In our next newsletter, we will introduce the new Halifax Community Chaplain.



Kairos Prison Marathons in Springhill, Nova Scotia



These enthusiastic volunteers were preparing to participate in a two-day Kairos Marathon Circle scheduled for November 4-5, 2023, at the Springhill Institution. Volunteers also attended circles on January 13-14 and March 2-3. In the past four Kairos Marathon circles, the main meal was generously purchased by inmates. Most recently, the food was prepared by an inmate in the institutional kitchen. We are deeply grateful for their contributions—a significant gift to this ministry.

Upcoming Kairos Marathon Circle dates: April 20-21, June 22-23, August 24-25, October 5-6, and November 30-December 1. We kindly ask for prayers of support during these times.

The Kairos Circles bring renewed hope to many inmates and community participants. In the Circle, there's a profound sense of love that reveals the Holy Spirit's healing presence. We ask for your continued prayers that God's love may continue to work through this ministry.

Clarence DeSchiffart

Facilitator, Kairos Marathon Circles

Ways to Support Concilio Prison Ministry

1. Please pray for ...



Individuals incarcerated and those reintegrating into their communities.

Individuals providing support to inmates—such as families and churches.

The Board of Directors of Concilio Prison Ministry.

The staff of the Correctional Service of Canada and the management of federal and provincial correctional institutions for their dedication and support in assisting residents with their successful transition back into civilian life in a healthy manner.

The programs provided at St. Luke's Renewal Centre and for the guidance of Rev. Lorraine Street, the facilitator.

Continued discussions between Acadia Divinity College and Concilio Prison Ministry as opportunities for collaboration are explored.

The Kairos Marathon Circles in the Wolfville and Dartmouth communities, as well as Springhill, that serve as spaces for healing and experiencing the love of the Trinity.

2. Join the weekly Pray for Prisons Gathering.

Rev. Lorraine Street hosts a Zoom **PrayForPrisons Gathering** each Tuesday at 5pm. This is a meditative 30 minutes of prayer for those who are incarcerated. If interested in participating, contact Rev. Lorraine Street by email prayforprisons@gmail.com.

3. Please share this newsletter with others and invite them to join 'Friends of Concilio' by emailing concilio.ed@gmail.com

4. Learn More



concilioprisonministry.org



Concilio Prison Ministry



For more information on Concilio Prison Ministry or to become a **Friend of Concilio**, email concilio.ed@gmail.com

If your organization is interested in having someone speak about this ministry—whether for one-on-one discussions or formal presentations to groups, organizations, or churches—please contact Clarence DeSchiffart.

To Give a Gift

All gifts of \$20 or more will receive a Canadian tax receipt *once our charitable status is reinstated*.

How to Give

Mail a cheque: Concilio Prison Ministry P.O. Box 2382, Wolfville NS B4P 2N5
E-transfer: Concilio Prison Ministry concilio.ed@gmail.com

***Canada Charitable Status Update for Concilio Prison Ministry

In early December, an email was circulated to **Friends of Concilio Prison Ministry**, stating that our charitable status with Revenue Canada has been suspended on September 16, 2023. We are unable to issue receipts at this time to those who donated after September 16th. Rest assured, Concilio is diligently working to resolve this matter, and we will promptly update you when our charitable status is reinstated. Please understand that this process may take up to six months.

During this waiting period, donors will be unable to donate through the CANADA HELPS website. However, you can still support our mission by mailing a cheque to:

Concilio Prison Ministry
P.O. Box 2382
Wolfville NS B4P 2N5

Alternatively, you may opt to make an e-transfer to Concilio.ed@gmail.com .

We want to express our gratitude to all who have generously donated via email or by mailing a cheque in 2023. Once our charitable status is restored, everyone who contributed during this time will receive a receipt for their donation. We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience this has caused.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your receipt or any other matter, please reach out to the President of Concilio - concilio.ed@gmail.com. Your ongoing support and understanding are greatly appreciated during this period of transition.

Concilio Prison Ministry is grateful for those who:

- ... attend the prison and community Kairos Marathon Circles.
- ... participate in the Advent programs.
- ... write articles for this newsletter and edit this newsletter.
- ... serve on the Board.
- ... pray faithfully for this ministry.
- ... facilitate and offer services at St. Luke's Renewal Centre.
- ... offer advice to the Board President regarding Concilio's way forward.

We extend our gratitude to the **Law Foundation of Nova Scotia** for their continued support. Once again, they have generously provided a grant for the 2024-2025 fiscal year for the operations of **St. Luke's Renewal Centre**.

We are grateful for the collaboration with the **Correctional Service of Canada** whose ongoing encouragement and support enable us to hold the Kairos Marathons at the Chapel and run programs at St. Luke's Renewal Centre. Additionally, we value the growing efforts to work closely with the **Charles J. Taylor Centre for Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care**, an academic centre of **Acadia Divinity College**.



Diocese of Nova Scotia and
Prince Edward Island



Closing Prayer

*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself, and
the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.*

*But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore, I will trust you always,
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

Thomas Merton