

The Sisters bid farewell to Sainte-Martine

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After 115 years of service to the small community of Sainte-Martine, the Sisters of the Congregation of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary are leaving the area.



Only a few years ago, in 2005, there were 36 Sisters in their convent. At the beginning of this year, there were still 20 and today, there 12. "Everything has happened very quickly", explains Sister Marthe Carmel, the superior.

Within a few months, the number of Sisters decreased as a result of aging: "Several have left us (died), others had to go to houses where they could receive medical care they needed...We learned last November that we would have to leave Sainte-Martine. We were almost expecting it ... our average age is 83.5 years old! ", stated the lady who has lost none of her spirit. "It is really with regret that we are leaving," she added. "We really feel at home here. The people are very kind to us. »

A page of history is being turned

The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary moved to Sainte-Martine in 1896. Their work at that time consisted of educating young girls. "The courses which we offered were of high quality, explained Sister Carmel. There was basic education in French, Philosophy, and Mathematics. Then there was specialized education in Home Economics. With the changes imposed by the Ministry of Education the courses disappeared, but I believe that our contribution to the community was still very apparent: the women of Sainte-Martine have a broad-based culture and exceptional know-how."



The end of their mandate in education initiated the beginning of a very active involvement in the community: spaghetti suppers, other fund-raisers, and even a casino night at the 'Maison des Jeunes'. "This year we did not participate in it because our hearts were no longer in it", confessed Sister Carmel.

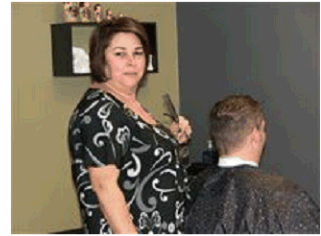
A void beside the Church



At the end of June, when the last Sisters will leave for the Congregational Motherhouse in Longueuil, the residents of Sainte-Martine will most probably feel a void. At the little 'depanneur' situated in front of the convent, there is sadness over this departure. Daisy Veillette, an employee at the depanneur, says that many of her customers got a shock when

they saw the “For Sale” sign in front of the Sisters’ property. “It is a shame; they were always available to the community”, said Mme Veillette. “Any one of them would often just stop in. They will miss us”, added Marie-Ange Côté, the manager of the business.

A little farther on at the village “barber”, who is really a female barber” (a sign that traditions are changing), they are less surprised by the news. “I find it sad that they can no longer stay in their convent, but on the other hand, times are changing and there are no replacements to follow after them”, said Carole Côté, the owner of the property.



The End of a Mission

The Sisters still don’t think that their mission is ended. “Our ideal would be to be able to continue our education in the faith as before”, explains Sister Carmel, “but we have to accept the changes in today’s society. We have several associates who will continue our work in their own way. For example, there is the director of the “Maison des Enfants” in Beauharnois, Jeanine Lefèvre, who offers young people an excellent supplement to their education by enabling them to do theatre and photography. For us, this kind of undertaking is important for the community”.

The citizens, the former students at the convent and the Sisters will gather for a Mass on May 22 to commemorate the Congregation’s years of service in the community. The celebration will end with a small reception.