

# Daughters of St. Paul reconstructing a solid future in media ministry

Where many people would be tempted by the money they could reap by selling a property in a desirable Toronto location to condo developers, the Daughters of St. Paul are staying put to continue their mission in a place that is home. And has been home for decades.

The sisters, rather than take the money and run, are renovating their building north of the city's downtown and building the future of their media ministry in Toronto and beyond.

"(It's) our mission and desire really to stay in the heart of Toronto in order to reach Canada, that's who we are as Daughters of St. Paul, to be evangelizers," said Sr. Carly Paula Arcella.

It was important for the sisters to remain where they are because it's the centre of the order's work in Canada and where the sisters reach out to the rest of the nation, said Sr. Catherine Bennett, the local superior.

"We had a look inside ourselves and said no, we are Daughters of St. Paul here to be an oasis to the people of Toronto," added Arcella. There is the exterior reality of upkeep on the building, but also "the interior reality for us to kind of refocus who we are, to look at what the needs are of the people of Canada and to contribute in the way that the Lord is inviting us."

So the sisters have begun the first phase of a four-stage, \$3-million renovation that includes their convent and the Pauline Books & Media Centre that is central to their media mission. Contractors have begun exterior work on the building, including brick pointing and waterproofing as well as replacing a leaky roof. The sisters gave *The Catholic Register* a tour of the worksite that included them climbing a ladder on a chilly January morning, without coat or hat, to personally inspect the roof.

The renovations have been needed for some time and the sisters have been putting them off for the past decade, just doing work as needed. They've been lucky in that the building, which is approaching 60 years, is very solid and well-built. But it wasn't going to hold up forever, hence the construction zone their home and place of ministry has become.

The sisters continue to follow the thinking of founder [Blessed James Alberione](#), who saw the power of the press to reach out and move the masses with the Gospel. They, like their founder, see the mission of communication as a way to proclaim the Gospel.

Pauline Books & Media offers books, newspapers, CDs and DVDs, but has also

branched out into the digital world with podcasts, Facebook, blogs, apps and e-books. It serves as the Canadian distribution centre for publications of the Daughters of St. Paul and the Society of St. Paul (the male branch) and has been located at the present location since 1969.

The book centre has outlasted so many other bookstores that have fallen by the wayside in this time of Amazon and larger conglomerates like Chapters. It's a niche market the sisters tend to with teachers and principals coming in looking for resources for their schools, catechists for their programs in the parish and pastors and families seeking spiritual guidance as well, said Sr. Amanda Marie Detry.

"The heart of our renovation... is really about creating this place of encounter which is something dear to our founder's heart. (He) talked about our book centres being places of encounter, places where people can really meet the Lord and then find ways to bring Him to others," said Detry.

This first stage will cost the sisters about \$500,000 and all the money has been raised for that. Fundraising, and a little help from the motherhouse in Boston, will help with the rest of the renovations, pegged at another \$2.5 million. Following the exterior work, contractors will move inside to install an elevator to make life easier for more elderly sisters as well as help the sisters move inventory to the book centre from the basement storage area.

The later stages of the renovations will see work done on the book centre (electrical and communications upgrades, enhanced security and a barrier-free entry) before fixing up their living area above the book centre. Bennett said they want to concentrate on their mission first and foremost.

"Not that we don't want to take care of the convent, but we are focused on mission and we want to be welcoming and have that real atmosphere where people come in that it's a real place of encounter with the sisters. And we have the Blessed Sacrament right here in the chapel that many people avail themselves of," said Bennett.

There is no timeline for when the project will wrap up, but the architects and engineers have been in talks with city planners. Much will depend on the support the sisters can garner. They have set up a secure donation portal on their website at [daughtersofstpaul.ca](http://daughtersofstpaul.ca).