



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie of the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas presents Cecilia Morin with a certificate of appreciation for her service as one of the members of an Aboriginal Stream Advisory Committee that helped to plan a ground-breaking Aboriginal Lay Formation program. Committee members recently gathered to mark the conclusion of their work in helping to establish the program, a joint effort of three dioceses: Keewatin-LePas, Saskatoon and Prince ALbert

Aboriginal Stream Advisory Committee wraps up years of ground-breaking work on unique formation program

BY KIPLY LUKAN YAWORSKI

The first participants in a ground-breaking Aboriginal Lay Formation program will be missioned in June.

The Aboriginal stream of Lay Formation was created as a joint project of three Roman Catholic dioceses: Saskatoon, Prince Albert and Keewatin-Le Pas.

Aboriginal Lay Formation happens in conjunction with formation offered collaboratively by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon and by the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon. The three streams – Aboriginal, diocesan and eparchial – provide faith formation, spiritual development and an experience of Christian community to all participants.

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The three streams run concurrently, one weekend a month from September to June over two years. Participants from all three streams spend time together for some sessions and presentations, and also meet in their individual groups to explore faith and spirituality in the context of their own traditions and cultures.

An Aboriginal Stream Advisory Committee worked on behalf of the three bishops to develop the program. Saskatoon Bishop Albert LeGatt and Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie of Keewatin-Le Pas presented committee members with certificates of appreciation at a recent celebration held to mark the conclusion of the committee's work.

Kathy Hitchings, one of the Lay Formation coordinators, briefly described the history of the Aboriginal Lay Formation program, which had its beginnings in a Native Dialogue group that began in 2004.

"We always had aboriginal people coming to our Lay Formation program, but we wanted to be more welcoming and sensitive to their needs," Hitchings said. "As we were gathered to listen and learn and pray together, the idea of having an aboriginal stream of Lay Formation came forth."

The idea certainly grew out of the successful collaboration between the diocese and the eparchy of Saskatoon, in which Eastern Rite Ukrainian Catholics

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Aboriginal Stream Advisory Committee

Members of the Aboriginal Stream Advisory Committee gathered recently to mark the end of their work in establishing an Aboriginal Lay Formation program. Standing (l-r): Mona Goodman, Germaine Lafond, Agnes Pelletier, Leah Perrault, Michael Averyt, Donna Kristian, Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie, Ivan and Kathy Hitchings; seated (l-r): Bishop Albert LeGatt, Gayle Weenie, Sr. Bonnie Komarnicki, SSML, Irene Sharp, Cecilia Morin and Sr. Marijka Konderewicz, SSML.

Committee members who were unable to attend included: Vivian Whitehawk; Fr. Bill Bernard, CSSR; Harry Lafond; Frank and Jenny Munroe; Fr. Bill Stang, OMI; Verna Vandale; Sr. Cecile Fahl, SMS; Dr. Cecil King; Sr. Ethel Detz; and Bishop Albert Thevenot of Prince Albert.



Committee members Gayle Weenie, Sr Bonnie Komarnicki, SSMI, and Irene Sharp (left to right).

journey alongside diocesan Lay Formation participants in a unique, jointly coordinated program, she noted.

In January 2005, the bishops of Saskatoon, Prince Albert and Keewatin-Le Pas gave their support to the idea of developing an Aboriginal Lay Formation stream, and the advisory committee was established to develop the program. An intense period of planning was launched, with committee members considering how the program would work: “looking at topics, looking at presenters, looking at prayer, looking at community life,” Hitchings recalled.

Vivian Whitehawk was hired as coordinator of Aboriginal Lay Formation and the first two-year program began in the fall of 2007, with 11 participants in the Aboriginal stream, 13 in the Eparchial program, and 20 in the Saskatoon diocesan program. Of that original combined Lay Formation group, 35 are expected to graduate in June.

Throughout the first two years of the program, the Aboriginal Stream Advisory Committee has continued to provide support and consultation, Hitchings said. Although there have been a few “wrinkles and hiccups” along the way, the shared program has been overwhelmingly positive, she said.

“When we look at the level of respectful sharing; the way attitudes have shifted and changed among people; the way the learning has helped us to really come to know each other in new and wonderful ways; the shared friendship; the shared faith; the shared prayer – it has been a wonderful, wonderful experience,” Hitchings said.

“I think formation in our program has always been a kingdom experience. We bring people together and the whole point is to be in a place where they can relax, and God can work in them to become fully who God intends them to be,” she said.

Blessings of the Aboriginal Lay Formation program were shared by committee members during the March 26 celebration, with several noting how it provides much-needed encouragement and support to Aboriginal people as they live out their Catholic faith. Others observed how the program has broadened understanding among committee and team members, and among all those participating in the program.

Aboriginal Lay Formation is “a way of sharing, of building spirituality and of building up the church community,” said Germaine Lafond, who participated on the advisory committee along

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with her husband Harry Lafond. The experience provides a way for aboriginal people to “take ownership” of their faith, and bring their gifts to the church, she added.

“The blessing that I’ve seen as I walked in this last year with Lay Formation is the whole unfolding of God right there in front of us as we walked together in respect, dignity, and love,” said team member Mona Goodman.



Bishop Albert LeGatt presents a certificate of appreciation to committee member Irene Sharp.

“It opened me up as a person to want to help my people. We really need help in our communities,” said committee member Cecilia Morin. “I feel like we’re all one, united together for God.”

Committee member Gayle Weenie, expressed appreciation for all the work done by the Lay Formation team in making the program a reality.

Bishop Albert LeGatt said the Lay Formation program is one part of a much larger picture that includes reconciliation among peoples and healing of the hurts caused by residential schools. “A lot of the things we talk about in terms of greater understanding, greater respect, greater cooperation – we are seeing that happening at Lay Formation,” observed Bishop LeGatt, noting that participants will also take that new understanding back to their parishes and local communities.

“This gives me hope,” Archbishop Lavoie said of the program, noting that it is unique in Canada.

For more information about Lay Formation (which is supported by the BAA) contact the Catholic Pastoral Centre, 242-1500.