



NEWS ARCHIVE:

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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# Church leaders plan another Advent campaign to support Good Food Junction

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

A number of church leaders gathered for an early morning meeting Oct. 12 at St. George Anglican parish in Saskatoon, to receive an update about Station 20 West and discuss plans for another ecumenical Advent campaign in support of Good Food Junction Cooperative Grocery Store.

Good Food Junction continues to work to raise funds to equip and stock the cooperative grocery store, which is one part of Station 20 West, now under construction in the city's core neighbourhood. During an Advent campaign undertaken by a number of Christian churches in Saskatoon last year, some \$150,000 was raised for the project.

An estimated \$350,000 to \$400,000 is still needed to equip and stock the grocery store, permitting it to open without debt, something that the business plan deems necessary to ensure the Good Food Junction's ongoing viability, said Ralph Winterhalt, the cooperative grocery store's business development manager. "If that grocery store can open without debt for equipment, and has its inventory paid for, it's going to be a very successful project in the core neighbourhoods."

Winterhalt, who is also the project manager of Station 20 West, described how the Good Food Junction will be just one of the tenants located in the community enterprise centre. Others will include Quint, involved in creating housing in core neighbourhoods; CHEP, which works to place good food in schools and in the community; and Saskatoon Health Region, which will operate a Mother Centre and the Kids' First health centre; as well as a University of Saskatchewan community service outreach program.



**Janice Sanford Beck, chair of Good Food Junction, and Ralph Winterhalt, Station 20 West project manager provided church leaders with an update about the projects.**

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The history of the grocery store project was described by Janice Sanford Beck, program director of CHEP and president of the Good Food Junction Co-operative. “It has been almost 12 years since the last full service grocery store in this neighbourhood shut down,” she said, adding that there were several efforts of the years to try and address the huge hole this left in the community.

Eventually, CHEP took a leadership role especially in bringing people together to develop plans for including a grocery store in Station 20 West, finding resources for the feasibility study and a business plan. Good Food Junction was incorporated six years ago as a cooperative grocery store, owned by members of the community. Plans are in place for a membership drive in the near future, to add to those memberships that have already been pledged, said Sanford Beck.



**Church leaders are planning to repeat last year’s campaign in support of Good Food Junction, in an effort to raise funds to offset the cost of equipment and inventory to open the cooperative grocery store in conjunction with Station 20 West.**

“The fundraising that the churches did last year was a huge boost for the grocery store,” Sanford Beck said, as well as for Station 20 West as a whole. “It really drew people’s attention to the project, and brought it into the minds and hearts of people who might otherwise not have had known about it, or might otherwise not have been as supportive.”

The lack of a full service grocery store makes shopping for healthy, inexpensive food a huge challenge for those living in the core neighbourhoods, especially those without access to a vehicle, she described.

“We all know how important food is to good health, and we also know that it is often the heaviest and most expensive foods that are the healthiest for us. And so things like milk, fresh fruits and vegetables, are things that are heavy to carry home from the store, and they are also things that don’t keep for a long time,” she said of the situation.

Ideas for bulletin inserts, events and fund raising ideas, and a proposed ecumenical outdoor nativity pageant to launch another Advent campaign in Christian churches were discussed during the meeting.

Saskatoon Health Region chief medical officer Dr. Cory Neudorf also spoke during the meeting, stressing the ongoing gospel call to address income and health disparity, and tackle poverty and the suffering it causes. He noted that there are over 3,000 verses in scripture that address poverty, calling for justice and mercy.

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Neudorf was one of those who worked on a 2008 health disparity report addressing the health status of residents within Saskatoon’s six low income neighbourhoods, compared to the rest of the city – a report that showed a clear connection between low income and poor health.

It is important to recognize that the problem is ongoing, and calls for a long-term ongoing response to poverty issues, he said. The “poverty issue” is never done, he said. For instance, with the income-health disparity study, it has been suggested it be repeated every few years to continue to “keep this in front of the community,” and determine what progress has been made.

Neudorf suggested that a system of networking be established, whereby concerned individuals and groups can work together to share ideas, support each other, and coordinate their responses and initiatives. “There does seem to be a movement of God’s Spirit working in this across many denominations,” he said. “This is bringing churches together across the spectrum.”

As an example, Neudorf suggested local churches might sponsor an event “to bring people together to give some feet to the words.” Facilitators of such an event might guide the process, but it would permit people with similar projects, concern or interests to actually work together on practical responses to problems such as housing, hunger, support for single parents, and so on, he said. Neudorf said that he envisioned such a process including business leaders, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists.

“There is this sense that people want to make a difference, they just don’t know how.”

Bishop Cindy Halmarson of the Saskatchewan synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada said there is a need to focus on building relationships as a way to address issues. Neudorf agreed.

“Many people’s misconceptions and judgments (about poverty) start from a lack of relationship,” said Neudorf. “Take that first step and get to know others in your own congregation, because it may be you are sitting beside that person already, they just hide it. But beyond that, reaching out and actually getting to know someone, getting to know ‘the other’ breaks down those walls of judgments and preconceptions.”