



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Evangelical-Catholic ecumenical prayer service held at Saskatoon cathedral



Pastor Harry Strauss and Bishop Don Bolen joined together to lead the prayer service Marcy 22 in Saskatoon.

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Evangelical and Catholic Christians recently gathered to pray and to celebrate their common faith in Jesus Christ at a joyful gathering at St. Paul's Cathedral in Saskatoon.

Sharing song, scripture and prayer, some 300 people attended the groundbreaking gathering March 22, 2011. Pastor Harry Strauss of Forest Grove Community Church, representing the Saskatoon Evangelical Ministers Fellowship, and Bishop Donald Bolen of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon presided together at the service.

Welcoming all those attending from many denominations and local churches, Bolen described the origins of the event, which he traced back to the prayer and friendship experienced when three Catholic women joined those in the Evangelical community gathering regularly to pray for local Alliance Church Pastor Ken Rutherford, who was ill with cancer and who died in September 2010.

"It was Ken's request that those who gathered would also pray for the wounded body of Christ in the city of Saskatoon," said Bolen, who attended one of the prayer services, where he first met Ken's wife Lenna. "Eventually I got to meet Pastor Ken as well, and I was stirred by his profound desire for unity and reconciliation."

In a sermon shared with Bolen and Strauss, Lenna Rutherford recalled her husband's experience of joy when he introduced two of his beloved friends to each other – something that also reflected his experience of connecting to other friends through a mutual love of Jesus Christ.



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“ Christ had introduced Ken to many other dear friends. Ken found them in many shapes and presentations, they came from many pastoral and priestly places, in various denominations across the city and Ken found that he was called to see not from a worldly, or religious, or denominational point of view, but from Christ’s point of view, which was: “let me introduce you to someone I love so much that I died for them too.””

Looking out over those assembled to pray together, she concluded: “We have a mutual friend. His name is Jesus Christ, and I think he has been very excited to introduce us to each other”

Bolen described his sense of Pastor Ken Rutherford “passing the torch” of reconciliation, friendship and unity.

The bishop also expressed thanks for all those who have worked for Christian unity over the years in Saskatoon and the many individuals who continue “to help us to know each other, and to understand each other and to have that common vision of being brothers and sisters in Christ, and of trying to live out all that that means.”

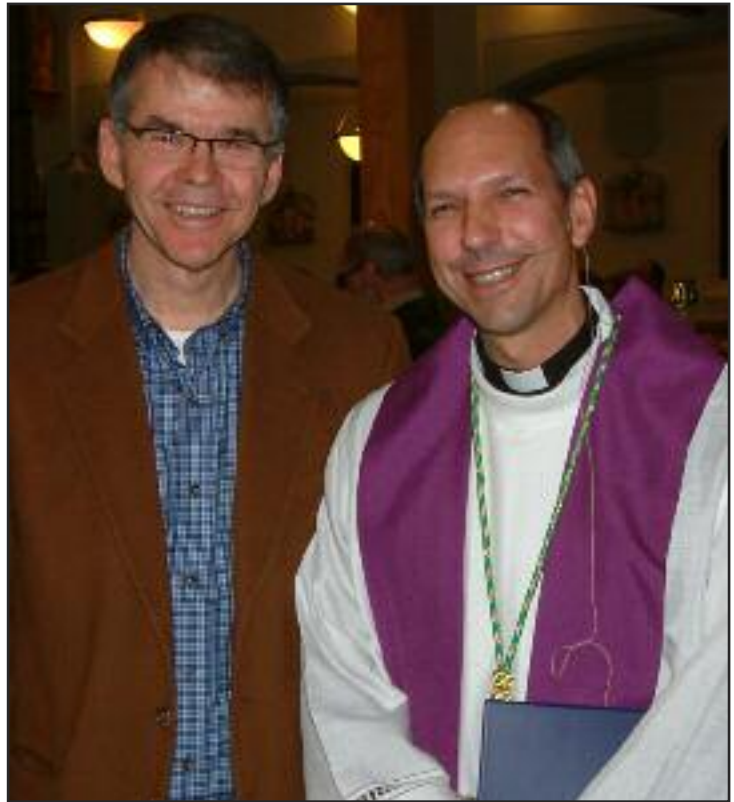
He stressed that Christian unity is not our idea, but is Christ’s fervent prayer, as heard in the Gospel of John, Chapter 17: “that they may be one.”

“This stirring of friendship across the lines of our different traditions, which many people have felt, is not our idea and it’s not our initiative and it’s not our project. It’s the work of the Holy Spirit who lives among us.”

Bolen listed some of the ways in which Christian communities have learned to deepen their

relationship with each other, through friendship, common study and shared prayer. Finding ways to give common witness to the gospel or to stand together on social and moral issues of the day, or exploring ways to engage in common mission are other ways of deepening relationships among Christians, he said, extending an invitation to continue journeying together.

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Pastor Harry Strauss and Bishop Don Bolen





“I look forward to exploring any of those ways in which we might grow closer together in our relationship in Christ,” Bolen concluded. “The closer we come to Christ, the closer we come to one another. Let us take great consolation in that, but also be motivated by it.”

Describing the impact of Jesus Christ on history and on our lives, Strauss stressed that Evangelicals and Catholics find common ground in the centrality of Christ.

Pastor Strauss noted the Saskatoon diocese’s vision statement “In all things we are rooted in Christ, in His desire to bring God’s love to all peoples’ and that the diocesan vision’s first priority is evangelization – something which Evangelical Christians certainly embrace.”

“In the centrality of Jesus Christ, we are one with you in the importance, the foundational truth that Jesus Christ is central and core to who we are as people,” said Strauss. At the same time, he acknowledged Evangelicals and Catholics do not agree on everything. “Can we fellowship around Jesus Christ even in our differences? Well yes we can, tonight is a demonstration of that.”

Acknowledging the different gifts, strengths and resources that Catholic and Evangelical Christians have to share with each other, Strauss asserted that “the reality of a first class gospel calls for a first class fellowship.”

The ecumenical worship service also included prayers asking for forgiveness, the sharing of the Apostles Creed, music of praise and worship, and the exchange of a sign of peace. It was followed by a social gathering with refreshments in the St. Paul’s Cathedral Bishop Mahoney Hall.



Reflecting on the celebration, diocesan ecumenical officer Nick Jesson noted that as with many ecumenical happenings, it grew out of simple encounters of one-on-one friendship and dialogue – including small but powerful steps such as three women joining others for prayer for Pastor Ken Rutherford, or Saskatoon’s Catholic bishop sharing his personal faith testimony at a meeting of the Saskatoon Evangelical Ministers Fellowship .

“Such things help to build understanding and help us to find common ground,” Jesson said.