



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Church leaders who signed the letter launching an Advent campaign in support of a co-operative grocery store in Saskatoon's core neighbourhood were, from left: Bishop Donald Bolen of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon; Bishop Bryan Bayda of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon; Jay Cowsill of the Society of Friends (Quakers); Rev. Harry Strauss of the Saskatoon Evangelical Ministers Fellowship; Rev. Ron McConnell, chair of the River Bend Presbytery of the United Church of Canada; Rev. Jerry Buhler of the Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan; Bishop Cynthia Halmarson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; Bishop David Irving of the Anglican Diocese of Saskatoon; Peter Guenther, chair of the Mennonite Central Committee; and Rev. Amanda Currie of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

Christian leaders unite in support of Good Food Junction at Station 20 West, launching Advent initiative to raise funds for project

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

A number of Christian leaders have joined together to launch an Advent initiative to support construction of a cooperative grocery store in Saskatoon's core neighbourhood.

Ten leaders, representing eight denominations and an evangelical ministerial association, signed a letter of support Nov. 24 for the Good Food Junction grocery store, part of the Station 20 West project.

The city of Saskatoon recently gave a three-year extension to the non-profit organization working to raise the funds to build Station 20 West as a source of nutritious food and other needed services. The area has been without a full-service grocery store since 1997.

"As church leaders and as individuals we commit ourselves to making the Good Food Junction a priority for the weeks leading up to Christmas," states the letter, which was read at a signing ceremony at St. George Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral hall, located across the street from the future site of Station 20 West.

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“We will express support through our prayers, practical assistance, and where appropriate through fundraising to equip the store. We do this in the name of Jesus Christ who is Emmanuel, God-with-us,” said Rev. Ron McConnell, chair of the River Bend Presbytery of the United Church of Canada, reading from the document.



“The Advent and Christmas seasons remind us that when God in Christ came to dwell among us, he was born and lived in poverty and simplicity. In Jesus’ ministry, we see his profound concern for those who were in need,” read Rev. Harry Strauss, chair of the Saskatoon Evangelical Ministers Fellowship.

“He identified himself with those who were hungry or thirsty, saying that whatever we do for those most in need, we do for him (Matthew 25:31-40). As his disciples we have a moral imperative to follow his example.”

Jay Cowsill of the Society of Friends continued: “Saskatoon’s core neighbourhoods are the heart of the city. For our city to be healthy, it needs a healthy heart. Maintaining good health is a challenge for many in the area whose needs are high and whose resources are limited.

Lutheran Bishop Cindy Halmarson added: “Access to healthy food is vital for wellness and self-reliance.”

Speakers at the event stressed the need for a supply of nutritious, affordable food in an area where few residents have access to cars, and where 44 per cent live below Statistics Canada’s Low Income Cut-Off, compared to 17.7 per cent for the city as a whole.



“For those who live in other parts of Saskatoon, who hop into our cars to shop at our favourite grocery store chains, wherever they may be located, it may come as a surprise that a grocery store is what is most desperately needed in the core neighbourhoods of our city,” said Rev. Amanda Currie, Minister of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Presbytery of Northern Saskatchewan.

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“The families and individuals who live in the core neighbourhoods are not dreaming that they’ll get to move to the east side. Their dream is the transformation of their own neighbourhoods,” she said, connecting this dream of transformation to the one expressed in Isaiah 65. “As Christians, we believe that God sent Jesus Christ into the world to begin that transformation,” she said. “We are Christ’s body in the world, empowered to be his hands and feet and voice bringing help and hope to our communities and to our world.”

Bishop Donald Bolen of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon acknowledged that Christians already play an active role in many worthy initiatives in the core neighbourhoods – including the Bridge, the Salvation Army, the Friendship Inn and the Food Bank.

Such services “offer vital resources to people to help them get through the day,” he said, but added that a grocery store provides help at a different level. “We hope that this initiative – the Good Food Junction – will complement those with a longer-term goal to provide food security for their neighbourhood.”

Bolen said he rejoices in the opportunity to come together in unity with other Christians to support the needed initiative. “We hope that this standing together will be an invitation for all of the people of Saskatoon to rise above differences – political differences, differences of neighbourhoods or perspective – to join in support of the people of this neighbourhood,” he said.

Station 20 West co-chair Sheila Pocha and CHEP Good Food representative Janice Sanford-Beck expressed appreciation for the churches coming together to support the project. This initiative in the weeks before Christmas brings an “infusion of energy” to the efforts to raise money to build and equip the Good Food Junction, said Sanford-Beck.

“The people in this neighbourhood have been telling us for years and years that a grocery store is what they need. We’ve done some homework, we’ve done feasibility studies, and we have a business plan. This project can succeed,” she stressed, saying the united effort by Christian church leaders sends a strong message of encouragement and support. “It is sending out a message to people in this community that you are worth it.”



Leaders signing the letter Nov. 24 were Bishop Donald Bolen of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon; Bishop Bryan Bayda of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy; Rev. Jeremiah Buhler of the Mennonite Church; Jay Cowsill of the Saskatoon Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); Rev. Amanda Currie of the Presbytery of Northern Saskatchewan of the Presbyterian Church in Canada; Peter Guenther, chair of the Mennonite Central Committee; Bishop Cynthia Halmarson of the Saskatchewan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; Bishop David Irving of the Anglican Diocese of Saskatoon; Rev. Ron McConnell, chair of the River Bend Presbytery of the United Church of Canada; and Rev. Harry Strauss, chair of Saskatoon Evangelical Ministers Fellowship.

Some 250 attended the signing celebration, which included an opportunity for other individuals and church pastors to also sign an enlarged copy of the letter of support for Good Food Junction. The event concluded with a soup lunch prepared by representatives of CHEP Good Food Inc., one of the organizations that launched the project to build Good Food Junction at Station 20 West.

“Jesus didn’t just care about people’s spiritual side, he cared about bodies, he cared about feeding people,” noted Rev. Jan Bigland-Pritchard, director of the Prairie Centre for Ecumenism, which helped to organize inter-church discussion about the initiative.

Bigland-Pritchard suggested finding a simple way to contribute to the Good Food Junction project: for instance, dropping a toonie into a jar every time one goes to get groceries. Some church congregations are planning special collections and offerings for the project during the Advent season, and others are organizing special events, such as a Dec. 15 Advent Cantata at McClure United Church in Saskatoon.

For more information see: www.station20west.org

