



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

Editor: Kiply Lukan Yaworski, Communications
Phone: 306-242-1500; Toll Free: 1-877-661-5005
communications@saskatoonrcdiocese.com

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools opens 2011-12 centennial year

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Some 2,000 staff members of Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools (GSCS) recently gathered to launch the new school year, taking time to celebrate and reflect upon the gift of Catholic education as the district marks its 100th anniversary.

Presentations at the annual opening celebration highlighted the theme for the anniversary year –“Celebrating a Century of Faith and Learning” – and provided an overview of the history and the ongoing vision of Catholic education in the community.



Some 2000 gathered for the GSCS opening Aug. 26 at Circle Drive Alliance.

The first Catholic school opened in Saskatoon on Sept. 5, 1911, when three Sisters of the Presentation of Mary began teaching 69 students in the basement of St. Paul’s Church. Today the GSCS district includes some 15,000 students attending 44 schools in Saskatoon, Humboldt, Viscount and Biggar.

Although much has changed since the district began – including fashions, technology, and teaching methods – the fundamental nature of Catholic education remains the same, the gathering heard.

“A strong belief in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ has sustained us through the past 100 years,” said Director of Education Bev Hanson, describing a century of conviction and commitment, which has touched thousands of lives over the past century.

“Our mission has not changed at all,” she asserted. “We continue to be people who want to impart the basic values and truths of the Catholic faith to our young people in an increasingly secular, globalized, pluralistic world.”

Board Chair Diane Boyko addressed the ongoing challenge of nurturing, promoting and protecting Catholic education, in the face of forces that would like to see separate school rights diminish.

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“We all know that this division is not a duplication of a public school division, because Catholic education is more than just having students take a religion or Christian ethics class,” Boyko said. “Faith is tangible in our schools and in our workplaces.”

In Catholic schools, faith and learning go hand in hand, with students encouraged to go forth and transform the world, Boyko said.

She described the work of a district Catholic Faith Committee, which works on faith development and formation initiatives such as the production of a series of “*Understanding Catholic Education*” booklets. She also acknowledged the work of the GSCS Foundation in raising funds to support projects and enhance faith initiatives in schools.

Boyko said that the GSCS board of education is acutely aware that “whatever decision is made must not only preserve our faith-based identity, but must allow it to flourish.”

Keynote speaker Rev. Leo English stressed the importance of treasuring and nurturing Catholic Education (see related article). As well, former GSCS student Dr. Greg Malin described the impact of Catholic schools on his life and formation.

The celebration concluded with Mass celebrated by Bishop Bryan Bayda of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon and a number of local priests.

Representatives of each of the 44 schools were presented with a time capsule and a tree to plant in school yards as part of school-based centennial celebrations Sept. 9.



Father Leo English, CSsR

Speaker urges GSCS staff to treasure Catholic education and to deepen faith

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Never take Catholic education for granted, urged the keynote speaker at an opening celebration for the Greater Saskatoon Catholic School district’s 100th year of operation.

Rev. Leo English, CSsR, of St. John’s, Newfoundland, gave an overview of the 1998 loss of publicly funded Catholic education in his home province and the impact on the community.

“We took what we had for granted. This is an all too common practice, Saskatoon,” said English. “Do not take what you have for granted, because there are storms everywhere.”

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English outlined some of the contributing factors that brought about the demise of Catholic schools in his home province, including the “soul piercing and gut wrenching” revelations about sexual abuse by clergy, and a complacency that assumed the constitutional rights to Catholic education were untouchable.

“Complacency at so many levels led to an inadequate response,” English said. “Work and pray for a genuine political involvement from committed Catholics at every level of government,” he urged.

English, a Redemptorist priest who served for several years at St. Mary’s parish in Saskatoon, also addressed the nature of Catholic education, which he described as a process of holistic formation that helps in navigating the stormy seas of life.

“A well-rounded individual on the prairie or on the banks of Newfoundland must have an internal compass connected to a belief system larger than all of us,” he said.

Catholic identity is grounded in the paschal mystery, English told the GSCS educators, administrators and support staff. “It is about who we are, baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, so as to rise to the newness of life with him,” he said.

“This is the lens through which we must look at life. Our own story must be an experience of a bigger story.” That bigger story is also the story of our Catholic faith, tradition, ritual, sacramental life, scripture, Eucharistic belief and practice, he said.

“Do we know where we come from?” he challenged. “Not as a theological pursuit, but as a personal quest?”

English urged all those involved in Catholic education to ground their lives in faith. “Faith and coming to the core of our belief system is about having a personal relationship with the person of Jesus Christ,” he said. It also has “less to do with finding answers and more to do with finding the grace to live with questions.”

In addressing the question “what can I do to foster Catholic education,” individuals may wrestle with a number of scenarios, including a mistaken belief that this is “only a job” as opposed to a call from God, he said.

“The teaching vocation is fundamentally about example and the life we lead,” English said, encouraging all those involved in Catholic education to pursue a relationship with a loving God and to work at deepening their understanding and experience of their Catholic faith.

He said that for those who are struggling with faith, a good place to start is by asking: “what is life teaching me through my own experiences?” Stepping back from the busy-ness of life is essential, he added.

“The quality of our living and the way we treat each other” is also critical in our faith journey, he said. “Never let it be said that Catholic education imploded by cynicism, infighting and spite.”

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Facing the big questions and living with the tensions of life requires humility, and the ability “to say very squarely: ‘I don’t know what the future holds, but I certainly do know who holds the future.’”

English also urged educators to take advantage of faith enrichment resources available in this time and place, including a Catholic newspaper, a tri-stream Lay Formation program, adult faith education at the Catholic Pastoral Centre, and the offerings at Queen’s House of retreats. In promoting the resources, English\e quoted Newfoundland politician John Crosby’s words about the railroad: “Use it or lose it.”

“Coming from a land where none of these resources I mentioned exist, I remind you that you have a treasure at your fingertips,” English said.

Living out faith in justice and love is the ultimate witness to faith, he said, stressing that the world needs witnesses more than teachers.

“Offering hope is our greatest challenge and it our gravest need in the never-ending reality of change,” English said. “To offer hope, we must desire hope ... and be a source of hope to other people.”

He concluded by urging all those involved in Catholic education to walk hand in hand with Jesus, and follow him in being genuine teachers, sources of hope and servant leaders.

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Schools plant centennial trees

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Special ceremonies marking 100 years of Catholic education were held Sept. 9, 2011 at Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools in Saskatoon, Humboldt, Viscount and Biggar.

Each school in the district planted a tree that was presented at an earlier district-wide opening day celebration.

In planting the trees, soil collected from the grounds of each of the 44 schools in the division was placed around the roots, as a symbol of the unity shared in the body of Christ.

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A centennial song, prayers, and a chance to learn about the history of the division through a video prepared for the anniversary year were also part of the school-based celebrations.

At École St Paul School in Saskatoon, student representatives helped to plant the green ash tree, before assembling for a program and barbecue with students from Sr. O'Brien School. St. Paul opened in 1953.

“Planting a tree is in remembrance of our heritage, that is rooted in our faith and the vision of our ancestors,” said St. Paul Principal Robert Brisebois.

“Our tree will be nurtured and cared for so that future generations of students at École St Paul School will be able to enjoy its beauty and remember us,” he told students gathered on the front lawn of the school for the tree-planting ceremony. “Perhaps in 50 years we will all get to

come back here and this tree will be 40 feet high!”

Classes in Saskatoon’s Catholic school division officially started on Sept. 5, 1911, as three nuns began teaching 69 students in the basement of what was then St. Paul’s Church in Saskatoon. Since that exact date fell on the Labour Day holiday this year, the anniversary celebration at schools was held Sept. 9.

Other events to celebrate the centennial are planned throughout the school year and include a leadership banquet; a public lecture series beginning Oct. 24 with a talk by Bishop Murray Chatlain, performing and visual arts events, and a community celebration June 23-24.

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools has some 15,000 students and 44 schools in Saskatoon, Humboldt, Biggar and Viscount.



Hundreds of students from Holy Cross High School in Saskatoon followed the school cross to nearby Holy Spirit Parish to celebrate the school’s feast day, the Triumph of the Cross, Sept. 14, and to launch the school year -- during the 100th anniversary of Catholic education in Saskatoon. Holy Spirit associate Pastor Rev. Geoffrey Young, an alumni of Holy Cross who was ordained in June, presided at the celebration of the Eucharist, along with Rev. Matthew Ramsay, associate pastor at St. Philip Neri parish and Rev. Raymond Senger, pastor at St. Francis Xavier.