



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Seven of this year's 41 Lay Formation graduates (standing, l-r): MaryAnne Morrison, Joyce Walker, Darlene George, Brian Thomson, (seated, l-r) Marlene VanDresar, Christine Gartner, Daria Malin.

Graduates from three streams of Lay Formation reflect on impact of program

BY KIPLY LUKAN YAWORSKI

Lay Formation brings about transformation, new life and a deeper commitment to Christian discipleship, say members of this year's graduating class, who come from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences.

This year's shared program included a Ukrainian Catholic eparchial stream, a Saskatoon diocesan stream and an Aboriginal Catholic stream from three dioceses (Saskatoon, Prince Albert and Keewatin Le Pas), with missioning celebrations held June 4 and 5 in Saskatoon.

Marlene VanDresar of St. Augustine Parish in Humboldt said that she had a long-standing desire to join the two-year program, which involves spending one weekend a month in Saskatoon, learning, praying and journeying together as a Christian community.

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“I just felt that this was something that I needed to do so I could grow closer to the Lord and really understand my faith,” she said.

At times the program has been challenging, with a lot to learn and absorb, she noted. “It also gives you an appreciation and understanding of where the other streams are coming from,” VanDresar added. “We’re from three different streams but we’ve gotten to be kind of like a family here.”

She also developed a love of praying the Liturgy of the Hours – one of the prayer forms experienced at Lay Formation.

For those considering Lay Formation, VanDresar would say: “Take a step in faith. Leap. Walk on the water. It’s worth it ... and I’m sorry it’s coming to an end.”

For pharmacist Joyce Walker of St. Mary’s parish in Saskatoon, Lay Formation has deepened her understanding and her faith. “I absolutely loved it. I’m a better Christian for it... it’s just a fullness of faith,” Walker described. “What Lay Formation reminds me of is the woman at the well in John’s gospel. We all come to the well. The three streams come to the well: we all come and meet across that Living Water.”

Starting as a “group of seekers” – a disjointed, diverse group, dealing with many individual challenges and with some carrying hurts and struggles – the three streams bonded as a community over the past two years, Walker said. The bond grew and strengthened as the group shared life, losses and blessings over the two years together, she added.

Walker was enthusiastic about the quality of the speakers and the presentations that are part of the Lay Formation program. She also greatly appreciated the chance to experience all kinds of prayer, different spiritualities and forms of worship.

Walker highly recommends Lay Formation. “You can get so caught up and run the treadmill forever, but here you step out and you take the time. This is something you truly do for yourself.”



Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, is a regular presenter at Lay Formation.



Darlene George of St. Louis parish at Patuanak, Sk. travelled five and a half hours from her home in the archdiocese of Keewatin-LePas to get to the Aboriginal Catholic Lay Formation Program at Queen's House in Saskatoon each month – but she says it was worth the time and effort. “It’s just allowing God to do his work. I firmly believe that if you have chosen to do his work, he will provide you with what you need,” said George who works as a mental health worker in her small community of 1,000.



Participants deepen their faith through study, prayer, and community life.

Invited by Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie to undertake Lay Formation, George says the experience is bearing fruit in her life – for instance, when a priest was not available, she recently served as a lay presider for liturgies in her small parish. “I guess the blessing is that I’ve become more confident and more open and have a willingness to go out and serve in my community.”

Her relationship with God has deepened thanks to the experience of the Aboriginal Catholic program, George said. “One of the first things I really learned and loved here was that there’s no wrong way to pray. So that really made me more fully open to what God is sharing with us and how I communicate with God.”

The learning and sharing that comes from the three streams journeying together has been profound, George said. “Sometimes I’m just in awe in thinking how we’re all so alike. That’s amazing for me... we think we’re different, and we have different cultures, but when we actually meet in God’s presence there are so many similarities and common aspects it’s just amazing. You get really connected, you become really close and you become a huge community.”

MaryAnne Morrison of St. Patrick parish was urged by her friend Gayle Weenie, an elder and pastoral associate at Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Saskatoon, to join the Aboriginal Catholic Lay Formation program. As a Métis person Morrison said that she wanted to explore the connections between her Catholic faith and First Nations spirituality.

“What I was looking for were parallels between Aboriginal spirituality and Catholicism, and trying to learn more in depth about the Bible and the Catholic teachings, so I could draw those connections,” says Morrison, who teaches in the Catholic school system.

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Morrison is now considering further study about faith and spirituality. “And I believe that once you know something, you have a responsibility to do something with it, that you have to give back.”

Three participants in the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy stream of lay formation from Sts. Peter and Paul parish in Saskatoon also described finding new depths of understanding and faith through the Lay Formation experience.



Bishop Don Bolen anoints MaryAnne Morrison of St. Patrick parish, a graduate of the Aboriginal Catholic Lay Formation program.

Daria Malin, a young mother of three from Ss. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic parish in Saskatoon, said she was eager to participate in the program while her children are small, knowing that her growing family was only going to get busier in the years ahead. Malin had friends who went through the eparchial program over the years, and was also encouraged to attend by coordinators Sr. Bonnie Komarnicki, SSMI, and Sr. Marijka Konderewicz, SSMI.

Through Lay Formation, Malin said she has fallen more deeply in love with scripture, and learned much more about her Ukrainian Catholic faith – something which will also benefit her young family. “My home is a lot of my ministry right now... when my children have questions, I can answer them.”

Ss. Peter and Paul parishioners Brian Thomson and Chris Gartner are also among the 13 graduates of the eparchial program. The Lay Formation program’s top notch speakers, the joy of learning more about the Ukrainian Catholic tradition, and sharing this faith journey with Latin-rite and Aboriginal Catholic streams have been hugely enriching, they said.

“One thing that was really brought to my attention is that we’re a community, we’re not just individuals searching for God,” said Thomson, who works for Canada Post and is deeply involved in parish and family life. Through the Lay Formation experience he has now also developed a strong interest in iconography and the writing of icons.



“For me, there has been transformation, change in my personal and spiritual life. I’m looking at this as not an end – it’s a beginning,” said Gartner, who works for the Catholic school division, said that for years she has felt called to service in her family, parish and community. “Life has opened many paths for me, and it’s now that I have to sit

and listen to where God’s calling me to go

When the time was right, she happily embraced the commitment of the Lay Formation program. “Finally it was an opportunity for me to be Mary and sit at Jesus’ feet. It is a wonderful revelation for Christ to let me know that this was my time. There is always a right time.”

Gartner acknowledged that the learning has at times been intense. “Like a sponge I want to absorb so much more,” she said, adding that the program has deepened her prayer life as well. She also was greatly moved by experiencing the writing of icons. “Icons just brought something out of me that I didn’t know I had inside.”

Gartner added that she would recommend the Lay Formation experience to those who are ready. “It’s your own personal journey. You can go on to do great things for everyone else, but it all starts from within. So be open to it, don’t be scared. The timing will be right whenever God tells you it’s right.... it’s never too late. God is always there. Just let go and ‘let God’.”

The Lay Formation program is now taking applications for the fall diocesan and eparchial streams.

The Lay Formation coordinating team includes Mona Goodman, Kathy and Ivan Hitchings, Carol Kohnke, Sr. Bonnie Komarnicki, Sr. Marijka Konderewicz, Anne LaFleur, Agnes Pelletier, Leah Perrault, George Rolheiser, Irene Sharp and Henry Spilchuk.



Members of the Lay Formation leadership team.