



NEWS ARCHIVE:

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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## “Momentum: Don’t Stop Believing” youth rally held for Grades 6 to 8

By Anne-Marie Hughes

Youth ministers in the diocese of Saskatoon were smiling after a first-ever diocesan youth rally for Grade 6 to 8 students held April 30, 2011 at Holy Spirit parish.

“Momentum: Don’t Stop Believing” was the theme of the day-long diocesan event that featured keynote speaker Michael Chiasson of Calgary, music by Storybook Years Worship Band, leadership from members of the Diocesan Youth Retreat Team and the High School Apostles, as well as Mass with Bishop Don Bolen and parishioners at Holy Spirit.

“The whole thing was a great success,” said diocesan Youth Ministry coordinator Colm Leyne during a monthly youth ministers’ meeting in early May. “To see 200 youth and volunteers participating all afternoon and then to have 300 in the audience for the evening session, with parents and Cornerstone being included, was really satisfying especially for a first-time event.”

The youth rally is part of a diocesan focus on middle years youth ministry for those in Grades 6 to 8.

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The recent reordering of the sacraments of initiation in the diocese restored confirmation to its correct order – after baptism and before first Eucharist – with confirmation now being celebrated at the same celebration in which children receive their first communion, usually in Grade 2. With this change, the need for a renewed focus on ongoing, lifelong faith formation – including more intentional youth ministry for those in Grades 6 to 8 – was recognized.

A Steps in Faith process is being introduced across the diocese, which involves four elements: catechesis around the Creed, a retreat experience of prayer and reflection, community service, and a reaffirmation of faith at a parish celebration for youth in Grade 8. The Momentum youth rally was envisioned as another way to nurture the faith of youth in the middle years at a larger, diocesan-wide event.

Michael Chiasson of All Access Ministries in Calgary was Leyne’s first choice for keynote speaker. “I knew he could speak to this age group with a really powerful message.”

Originally from Houston, Texas, Chiasson began touring as a musician and speaker at age 14. He says that his core message is “God has a purpose for all of us.”

Chiasson adds: “People need to get inspired and dream big because with God all things are possible. We need to find what God has planned for us and be intentional about achieving it.”



**Michael Chiasson**  
**All Access Ministries**

At one point in the day, Chiasson had youth measure out 29 feet in front of the audience to show how far the distance really was. “Carl Lewis jumped this. He jumped the impossible. Doing the impossible was important when starting this ministry. We started with three ideas: we would have no debt, be world wide and impact people to change lives. We have now presented to 35,000 people in one and a half years.”

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While Chiasson’s message was encouraging, motivating and often funny, he did not shy away from sharing serious and difficult moments in his life that required a depth of faith to persevere in Christ. His wife was diagnosed with cancer during their engagement and went through two and half years of treatment. Even more challenging was the death of their infant son, born only 23 weeks into their first pregnancy.

With a devastating diagnosis for their son at 20 weeks, Chiasson and his wife persevered with the pregnancy in the hope that time would make a difference to his development. In that time, a hospital staff that began by deeming the situation as hopeless, found inspiration. Three weeks later, the staff in attendance for the high-risk birth all got to hold the Chiassons’ baby son, and witnessed his confirmation and baptism. The attitude of doctors and nurses had totally changed, Chiasson said. “He lived for 24 minutes. We gave our son a chance and in 24 minutes our son changed the lives of many people,” Chiasson related.



Parents who stayed to witness the Momentum sessions were impressed by the quality of the talks. “This speaker could have been for adults too,” commented one parent who brought two boys from Rose Valley, SK.

Parents were encouraged to bring other children and join youth for Mass with Bishop Donald Bolen at 5 p.m., and then to stay for supper as a family and be part of the evening session.

“We intentionally wanted an opportunity for parents to experience what the kids experienced that day. It is critical for parents to understand what their youth went through so they can nourish and grow the experience. Parents are the primary faith teachers and true youth ministers. It starts at home and we are here to work to support that,” explained Leyne.

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Talks during the day were broken up by praise and worship music by a local band and with games and break out sessions, with separate groups for boys and girls. The evening session was organized and promoted as a “Cornerstone” event involving older youth and young adults as well.

"The rally is a wonderful thing for the youth in the diocese," commented the bishop, while visiting with families at supper. "They gather together with a lot of energy – and it is very appropriate that this has taken place during the Octave of Easter. That helped to make it a truly hopeful and joy-filled event."

The readings at Mass about Thomas’ struggle with doubt were also very appropriate to the rally theme “Don’t Stop Believing,” noted Bolen.

Chiasson said the Saskatoon rally was a positive experience for him as well. “My experience working with Colm is that we plant seeds into hearts. It’s great to have a hot show but it meant a lot to connect with the community, with youth; to see the church community support this, all the way to the bishop. The diocese has a true heart for the young people here in Saskatoon.”

