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Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Purity Rally held Feb. 26, 2011 in Saskatoon, exploring the theme: "On a Quest for True Love"

By Anne-Marie Hughes

It was a cold Saturday morning when MCs "Indy Andy Jones" (Andrew Dupuis) and "Annie of the North" (Maria Zimmer) set out to warm up the crowd at St. Patrick's Parish for an annual Purity Rally organized by Pure Witness Ministries.

The young leaders hosted 300 youth and family members "On a Quest For True Love," using skits and games to bring the rally theme into focus for the all-day event Feb. 26 in Saskatoon.

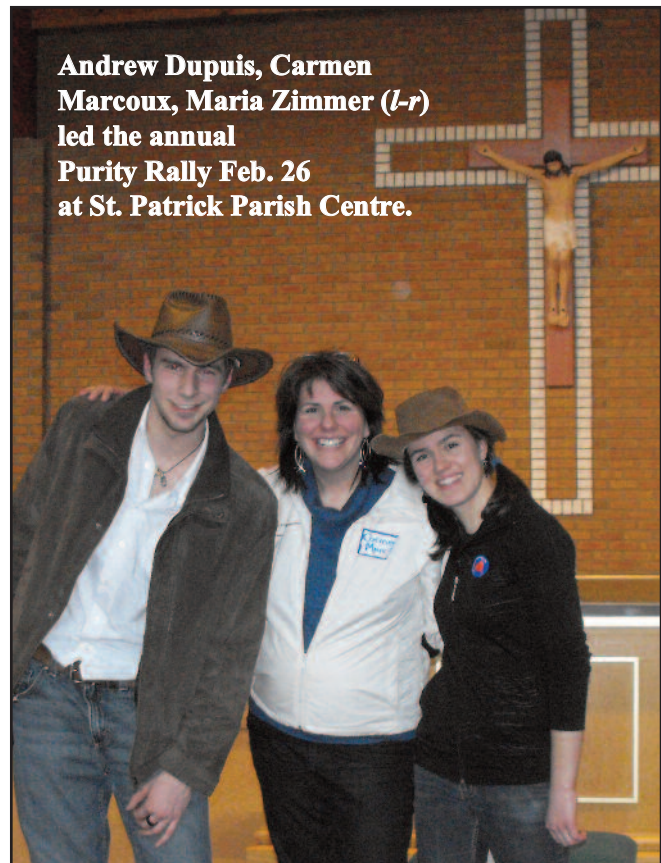
Pure Witness Ministries founder Carmen Marcoux opened the rally with the idea of changing the mindset of seeing purity as a line to be observed and instead, looking at purity as a direction to be taken.

"Human nature is such that a line becomes something we look at as 'how far can I go up to the line? Can I touch the line? Stick my nose over the line? An elbow? Will I fall over the line? Can I move the line?'" explained Carmen Marcoux. "Purity is not a line that divides sin from not sin. Purity is a direction."

She encouraged listeners to put "the line" behind them, and experience a mind shift where they focus on the relationship they have with God. "Live for, in and through Jesus Christ and you will be fit for life."

"Chastity is not enough," Carmen Marcoux explained. "You can embrace chastity but that doesn't always lead to purity. People save themselves for marriage but can still have impure lives in their thoughts, television and books. Commit your life to purity. Plan chastity in your life. Get into relationship with Jesus and have a talk with him. We have to let Jesus in."

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Paul Hilton, Beci Hilton, Carmen Marcoux, Naomi Redl, Steve Redl (l-r): The Hiltons and the Redls took part in the Purity Rally panel discussion.

Panel discussions and a testimony followed, where participants could ask couples practical questions about how a relationship can move from friendship to marriage, while keeping purity and God as the focus. Giving youth and parents a clear picture of how a pure relationship looks and the parameters couples set in their lives to follow this direction is a big part of the rally's content.

While the talks upstairs in the church are directed at youth ages 12 and up, the rally itself has something for all ages. "The event is for the whole family, and the whole church community," said Carmen Marcoux. "We build a social context that is broader than one parish. We create opportunities for mentoring of all age groups and social times for parents and youth to talk about what they have experienced and build support for the idea of purity."

The rally also gave families the chance to partake in sacraments together. Reconciliation took place over the lunch hour, mass was celebrated together with the congregation of St. Patrick's at 5 p.m. and the day wrapped up with an hour of musical Eucharistic adoration.

Pure Witness Ministries began nine years ago after Carmen Marcoux was inspired to write a novel, in which characters Joanie and Brandon's relationship unfolds in a romantic but yet pure fashion that was true to Catholic teaching.

"When I wrote 'Arms of Love' it would have been enough if it was just for my family and an example to my children of how a loving yet chaste relationship would look," explained Carmen Marcoux. But the story became something bigger when the book was finished.

John Paul II's call for a new evangelization inspired Carmen and her husband James to do more. The family decided to create their own publishing company to publish the book and pursue the idea of purity as a ministry. It became a true family affair when James Marcoux quit his teaching position five years ago to work alongside his wife and children in what has become a family mission.

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The tradition of urban vs. rural games continued at the annual event.

The ministry has taken Carmen across North America to speaking engagements in person and on television encouraging youth to live pure lives. Over nine years she has written two novels, and the family has together written and illustrated a new children's book "The Parish Picnic." In addition, eight purity rallies have been coordinated, pure dances organized and a web site and blog developed (www.courtshipnow.com).

This year's Purity Rally was a home-grown event. While in years past organizers have brought in outside speakers and musicians, this year all presenters were from the local area.

Masters of Ceremonies Maria Zimmer and Andrew Dupuis took on the roles of Indy Andy Jones and Annie of the North and organized the "rural versus urban" games that participants have come to expect at a Purity Rally. Youth from Our Lady of Lourdes Parish developed skits that augmented the message presented.

These local resources have developed over time as youth grow up coming to the purity rallies. Steven Redl was the first Purity Rally MC as a youth, but came to the 2011 event as a father of three and served with his wife as a panel presenter of couples talking about how they have lived out purity in their early relationships.

"The message is becoming generational as kids move on from one stage to another," says Carmen Marcoux, watching kids who started out in the children's program now performing in skits and leading activities.

The family-friendly nature of the rally lends itself to inter-generational involvement and is unique to many youth events. During the presentations for older youth and parents, two programs following many of the same themes is run downstairs for preschoolers and children ages 7-11 years.

"It's such a great day when you can bring your whole family to one event and all your children are involved in hearing a great message" says Leah Sidloski who attended with her five children ages 9 years to 18months. "I think it's really important for parents to be hearing the same message as their children and know what has been presented so they can talk about dating and relationships in the same language."