



Fr. Marcel Dumais, OMI, Fr. Andre Boyer, OMI, and Gisele Bauche during the celebration of an outdoor Eucharist June 1 to mark the 50th anniversary of Queen's House in Saskatoon.
Photo by Sr. Felicitas Drobig, osu

Queen's House 50th Anniversary Celebration held June 1, 2008

By Lucie Leduc

SASKATOON - On a perfect, clear, sunny, blue sky Sunday, June 1, 2008, Queen's House celebrated an outdoor Eucharist with approximately 350 people in attendance. From patrons to volunteers; elders who had attended 50 years ago, to religious communities and diocesan priests; the gathering was family-like and full of enthusiasm and gratitude.

For the liturgy, the main celebrant was Fr. Marcel Dumais, omi with co-president, Fr. Andre Boyer, omi giving the homily.

"It is clearly not only a memory you celebrate today; it is a promise as well; your promise and my promise to this world in which we walk, a promise that our past is prologue, a promise in 3 parts: 1) A promise that Christ, in whom we place our deepest trust, be the only model of our faith. 2) A promise that this faith of ours, penetrated with love, will

continually seek more profound intelligence, yearning to understand the things of God, the people of God, and yes, truly the living God. 3) A promise that this intelligent faith will not stay sterile, will increasingly be a faith that does justice, which looks on each Lazarus at your gate with the compassion of Christ,” said Boyer in the summary of his homily. “I pray with today’s first reading: ‘Choose life so that you and your descendants may live. And the Lord your God will bless you in this land that you are entering to possess.’”



At the end of the liturgy, Queen’s House Director Gisele Bauche gave closing remarks of gratitude, expressing how retreat ministry was desired by the founder, Eugene de Mazenod, from the beginning, and giving thanks for all that has been these 50 years.

“It is in light of our glance backward and our examination of the present, that we can look forward to the future with confidence,” Bauche said. Looking at the present we see that there is much for which to be grateful. There is much that has been entrusted to us. For this we not only give thanks, but we ‘do thanks.’ We are reminded of the words of Saint Paul: ‘Think of us as servants of Christ: stewards entrusted with God’s mysteries. It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.’ We are to take these mysteries and intensify them, develop them further and multiply them to bring about a newness.”



She added that concretely this means that Queen’s House ministry responds to the gospel to proclaim good news to the poor and the marginalized, serving the local community first and reaching outward and beyond. It means living the mission by fostering a holistic spirituality that promotes healing qualities of compassion and reconciliation; as well as fostering hospitality and evangelization with an ecumenical and multi-faith soul, welcoming peoples from all walks of life; and striving to offer a fresh, personal, genuine encounter with Jesus Christ.

A dancer from St. Mary’s school (left) performs during the entertainment portion of a program held on the grounds of Queen’s House June 1.

Photo by Sr. Felicitas Drobig, osu

Bauche's comments concluded with the Oblate rule: "In the Oblate rule we read that 'Mary received Christ in order to share him with all the world, whose hope he is. In her we recognize the model of the Church's faith and our own.' As we celebrate 50 years of retreat ministry and prepare for our future may we be inspired by Mary and shaped by the power of the Spirit of God, both of whom have a prominent place in the heart of Queens House ministry."

The liturgy was enhanced by colorful processions and beautiful music. After the liturgy, entertainment was provided by the Aboriginal Hoop Dancers from St. Mary's school, and by the band "The Other Side" made up of teachers and principals from the Saskatoon Catholic School District.

Everyone enjoyed a wonderful meal of barbecued hamburgers and hotdogs cooked by the members of the Knights of Columbus, along with homemade salads and desserts provided by Queen's House chef.



Preparing to cut the birthday cake at the 50th anniversary celebrations.

Photo by Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Queen's House offers oasis of healing and peace

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Healing and peace are the hallmarks of Queen's House of Retreats, according to director Gisele Bauche and chaplain / spiritual direction coordinator Fr. Paul Fachet, OMI.



Since Fr. Lequia and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate envisioned a need for a “privileged place of evangelization” and created Queen’s House 50 years ago (see article, below), many things have changed, but the mission of the retreat centre remains the same, stressed Gisele Bauche (*left*). “The call to proclaim good news to the poor and the marginalized is still the basis of our mission,” she said. “We’ve simply developed and embellish-ed that vision over the years, and moved forward to fit the context of these times.”

One thing that has emerged is a great hunger for healing, and for a safe place of reconciliation and peace, she described. “There are a lot of people who come to this house unknown. They come here to get themselves centred. A lot of them are suffering, whether because of things out there in the world, or because they have been broken or wounded in some way.”

Healing the wounded spirit has therefore become a greater focus for the centre, with 12-step programs, initiatives aimed at grieving, and movements such as Returning to Spirit, in which First Nations and Church representatives walk a path of reconciliation and healing together, she described.

The beauty of the building and the Queen’s House grounds speaks to people, as does the palpable spirit of peace that pervades the place, added Fachet (*right*).

He recalled a moment he once shared with Rabbi Roger Pavey after participating in one of a series of multi-faith dialogue sessions offered at Queen’s House, involving members of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities. “He reached out and touched the little wooden plaque by the entrance which says ‘peace to all who come here’ – and he looked at his Muslim friend David and he said ‘it’s true of this place.’ It was deeply, deeply moving,” Fachet recalled.



A two-year program of formation for spiritual direction is an example of both the emphasis on healing and of the strong ecumenical spirit that characterizes Queen's House. Spiritual direction formation leaders Fr. Paul Fachel, Sr. Louisa Brost, OSU and Claire Ewart Fisher work with people of many Christian denominations, equipping them to walk with others on their spiritual journeys. "There is a lot of healing that goes on in that as well. About a third of the elements in that program address healing hurt, grief counseling, forgiveness, the 12-step program," said Fachel, describing how one only has to look at the morning newspaper to see the depth of spiritual hunger in our world. "We are so caught up in things that have nothing to do with the issue. We are hungry, spiritually hungry, lacking God."

Releasing the artistic and creative potential of the human spirit is another area of priority at Queen's House, where artistic expression and spirituality often go hand in hand, as with icon-writing workshops and art instruction sessions. Art therapist Sr. Felicitas Drobig is one of several outside resource people who regularly offer sessions at Queen's House – she combines art and healing in a unique and powerful way, noted Bauche. Other resource people in areas such as reflexology, Reiki and spiritual direction are also available.

About 1,500 people last year participated in a diverse offering of retreats, workshops, speakers, prayer and contemplation opportunities organized at Queen's House by program coordinator Lucie Leduc.

In addition, some 336 groups and organizations came through Queen's House last year, said Bauche, noting that of these, 62 per cent were faith based or religious organizations. Community groups or businesses are also using the centre for meetings, conferences, wellness days or special occasions, she added.

The decision to open the centre up for bookings by companies and community groups has increased awareness about Queen's House in the community, suggested Fachel. Even though the ministry of Queen's House has expanded, however, there is not always an understanding of what Queen's House is, or what it offers – even within the neighborhood or among local parish communities, Fr. Paul Fachel noted.

In spite of operating on the banks of the Saskatchewan river in Saskatoon for the past 50 years, Queen's House still remains something of an unknown jewel, agreed Bauche. "So many people aren't aware of it. And yet so many people who do enter this house are changed, and they're changed forever."

Staff support for the mission of Queen's House is phenomenal, Bauche said. "Everyone – the kitchen staff, the housekeeping staff, anybody that is working here – is attentive to what this house is about. We're all responsible for that reign and that responsibility of welcome and of somehow bringing healing to people."

A strong community spirit exists among the staff at Queen's House, agreed Fachel. It is a spirit nourished and grounded in daily prayer together, he said.

“It’s like a family, with mutual care and compassion, lots of fun of course, and humour,” he described. “We don’t use the word work here, we use the word ministry. People are the priority. We might be handling food, or a bible, or a mop, but it’s the people that count.”

Support from the community at large also continues to be vital to the continuing operation of Queen’s House, which in recent years has concentrated on capital campaigns to raise much needed funds to maintain and upgrade the facility. Events include an annual fundraising dinner and silent auction, and an annual walk or bike-a-thon, to be held in August.

Queen’s House mission continues through 50 years of growth & change

When the official opening and blessing took place on May 31, 1958, Queen’s House of Retreats was a simple brick building located on a bare section of prairie on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River at the southern edge of the city of Saskatoon.

Comprised of 24 small bedrooms, a chapel, lounge, kitchen and dining room, with an Oblate residence at one end and an apartment for the SMS Sisters at the other, it offered a hospitable place of prayer and spiritual renewal.

The spirit of the Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, St. Eugene de Mazenod, permeates the mission of Queen’s House. “We consider retreat houses to be, in a certain way, privileged places for evangelization. They are fully in line with the purpose of the (Oblate) Congregation whose first mission is evangelization, especially of the poor, of the most abandoned,” wrote Fr. Fernand Jette, Oblate Superior General (1974-1986).

Over the years, a number of Oblates held the position of Queen’s House director:

- Fr. Edward Lequia, OMI, began the building in 1957; served as director from 1958 to 1968; and from 1974 to 1978;
- Fr. Norbert Engel, OMI - 1968 to 1974
- Fr. Ronald Dechant, OMI - 1978 to 1981
- Fr. Glenn Zimmer, OMI - 1981 to 1995
- Fr. John Malazdrewich, OMI - 1995 to 1998

In 1998, Larry Novakowski was appointed acting director, and in the fall of that year Gisele Bauche was named director. This marked the beginning of lay directors at Queen’s House, with the Oblates continuing an active presence. At the present time, Fr.

Paul Fachet, OMI, serves as chaplain and spiritual direction coordinator at Queen's House, and Lucie Leduc is program coordinator.

Parish retreats

For many years after its opening, parish retreats were prominent at Queen's House, giving a strong emphasis to involvement, formation and leadership of the laity. Retreat captains in each parish of the diocese encouraged parishioners to attend a weekend retreat, often filling Queen's House to capacity. Priests and various religious orders also held their annual retreats at the facility.

Eventually there was a need to expand the building in order to accommodate the number of people who wanted to participate in Queen's House programs. In 1964, a west wing was added which gave Queen's House another 16 bedrooms and what today is known as Conference Room B.

Later on, under the leadership of director Fr. Glenn Zimmer, a new chapel was built with windows overlooking the beautiful grounds and the river. A Stillness Lounge and Stillness Chapel also became part of the main floor with a large room (Conference Room A), kitchenette, washrooms and reconciliation rooms added on the lower floor. The original chapel off the main lounge became Conference Room C.

Four large bedrooms, the Prairie Lounge, office space and a staff room were built in 1988 and in 1991 the kitchen and dining room were remodeled.

Today, Queen's House is able to accommodate a number of programs at the same time. Over the years, attempts were made to reach out to the broader community, with innovations such as spiritual days for those involved in 12-Step programs. Ecumenical events were also added to the calendar. Special guest speakers were invited to address current issues of concern in the church and society.

As well, in an effort to subsidize its spiritual purpose, over the years Queen's House has expanded its mandate to include facility rentals.

"Queen's House continues to live its mission by releasing the artistic and creative potential of the human spirit, encouraging radically positive solutions for our world and proclaiming the non-violent Christ to assist us in becoming more effective agents of Christ's peace to the world," says director Gisele Bauche.

Mission continues

"During this half century, for thousands of people that have spent time here – an hour, a day, a weekend, a week or longer – it continues to be a place to deepen one's relationship with God in an atmosphere of welcome and peace."

"We are grateful to OMI Lacombe Canada and the Oblates of our Saskatchewan local community for their support, commitment and leadership to Queen's House of Retreats and to the dedicated Oblate Directors who through the years have given their

heart and soul to its mission and vision,” said Bauche, adding her thanks to the board, the staff, and all friends, patrons and volunteers of Queen’s House for their dedication, courage, commitment and service over the past 50 years.

Queen’s House has been the “welcome of God” to the many who have come through its doors, according to members of the executive team of OMI Canada.

Congratulation messages

In a message of congratulations, Provincial Fr. Andre Boyer, OMI; and Vicars Fr. Doug Jeffrey, OMI and Fr. Jim Fiori, OMI, observed that at Queen’s House “people have been nourished, the vision of the Church has been expanded, and the poor have been comforted by the presence of God.”

Programming at Queen’s House reflects the ideals of the Oblate mission, the Oblate leadership team said in their message.

“In true missionary style you are not content to rest on past achievements. You are in touch with the wider community. You continue to develop programs to make Jesus Christ and the Good News of the Gospel known to all people. You create opportunities for people to explore their life choices and commitments,” the Oblate team said.

Saskatoon Bishop Albert LeGatt reflected on the impact that Queen’s House has had on the local faith community. “For the past 50 years Queen’s House of Retreats has been a rich and essential centre of prayer and spirituality, of hospitality and gathering, of education and formation within the diocese of Saskatoon,” he said. “Through the vision and generous support of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate the retreat ministry of Queen’s House has been a source of much spiritual and pastoral growth both for countless individuals and for our parishes and the diocese as a whole.”

Sr. Anne Lewans, OSU, general superior of the Ursulines of Prelate noted how retreat ministry at Queen’s House has evolved, always being sensitive to the changing needs of the many people served. “Women religious, among other groups, have appreciated the variety of retreats and workshops, the quality of presenters, and the warm, welcoming environment which makes Queen’s House a spiritual oasis, she said.

The Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas greatly appreciates Queen’s House hospitality during events such as Study Days, said Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie, OMI. The centre’s “presence and ministry is invaluable for events that benefit us such as Returning To Spirit, the Aboriginal Stream of the Lay Formation program and 12-step retreats.”he noted.