



Committee members Agnes Rolheiser (left) and Sarah Farthing with the Steps in Faith poster at an Administration Day in September 2008.

Steps in Faith program invites Grade 8 youth to examine Creed and reaffirm faith as part of lifelong faith adventure

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

A new program being launched in the diocese of Saskatoon invites youth to explore the Creed and to affirm their faith.

Steps in Faith is aimed at students around the age of Grade 8, and will include time for learning, a service project, and a retreat experience. The process will conclude with youth reaffirming their faith at a parish celebration, blessed and supported by the prayers of family and community.

Parish representatives from across the diocese received an overview of the Steps in Faith program, including suggested schedules and resources, at a diocesan Administration Day this fall.

“This is an effort born out of restoration of the order of initiation,” explained Bishop Albert LeGatt. With confirmation now celebrated at the same celebration at which children receive their first communion (usually around Grade 2), the question of ongoing faith formation for older youth was quickly raised, he said.

“It’s a matter of helping young people grow in faith – not just toward receiving the sacraments, but as a life long process,” said Bishop LeGatt.

Faith formation experiences that used to happen around the confirmation process for young adolescents are valuable and should continue to be offered, he said. The intention is that a similar Steps in Faith program would also eventually be offered to students at around Grade 11 or 12.

Youth ministry, catechesis, service projects, retreat experiences, and ritual moments must continue to be part of an ongoing faith journey happening within parishes, he said.

Committee chair Agnes Rolheiser of the diocesan Rural Catechetics office and Sarah Farthing, coordinator of Youth Ministries, presented practical suggestions for launching the Steps in Faith program, with input from two parishes that have already implemented the process.

For the past three years, a faith affirmation program has been offered to Grade 8 students at St. Mary’s parish in downtown Saskatoon.

As well, for the first time this spring, St. Mary’s parish in Macklin presented the Steps in Faith program to a group of young people from Macklin and St. Donatus. When Bishop LeGatt came to confirm younger children in Macklin in April, the older youth also made their public reaffirmation of faith.

Myron Rogal, youth minister at St. Mary’s parish in Saskatoon, described the sessions held in that community. Participant Sean Fortosky then spoke about what the process meant to him.



Sean Fortosky

“During this experience I had a great time,” said Fortosky, noting the program offered a chance to gather with friends, share some pizza and do some activities. “But it turned into something different that I didn’t expect to happen.” A visit to elderly residents at a neighbourhood care home was powerful, he said. “I also felt I could do more at church. It literally felt like my first Mass,” he said of the reaffirmation experience. “We have to keep this going,” he said. “Everyone needs to be thinking about God the way I am right now.”

At Administration Day, committee member Michael MacLean of St. Thomas More campus ministry led discussion among parish groups about the program, and what will be needed to get it going.

The diocesan committee will provide parishes with resources and support, said chair Agnes Rolheiser. Some parishes may choose to celebrate the reaffirmation of faith this Easter/Pentecost season, while other parishes will take more time, she noted.

“The focus of the catechesis is the creed, which corresponds to the Grade 7-8 curriculum in Catholic schools, the Born in the Spirit catechism program, which is also being used in many rural parishes. “We also have several other options in terms of resource materials for parishes,” she said. “The ritual for the affirmation of faith has also been prepared.”

Family involvement will ideally be part of the Steps in Faith process, suggested Sarah Farthing. “It’s really important that youth see that parents and others are actively involved in their faith journey. As much as adolescents might moan and role their eyes, they really do appreciate and recognize when they’re being supported.”

As for how to get started with the program in parishes, Michelle Sieben of Macklin said although there was reluctance on the part of parents at the beginning, organizers persevered with Steps in Faith, and it soon took on a life of its own – to the point where some of the young participants asked if they could do it again next year.