



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Diocese gathers to bid farewell to bishop

BY KIPLY LUKAN YAWORSKI

A diocesan celebration to bid farewell to Bishop Albert LeGatt was marked by expressions of appreciation and love.

The sixth bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon will be installed as Archbishop of St. Boniface Sept. 21, 2009.

The farewell gathering Thursday, Sept. 3, 2009 at St. Patrick Parish began with celebration of the Eucharist, bringing clergy, religious and laity together from across the diocese. Presiding at the Eucharist, LeGatt expressed his gratitude to God, stressing that must always be the priority.



In his homily, LeGatt reflected on the blessings of his time as bishop of Saskatoon, coming to the new role in 2001 after years as a parish priest in the diocese of Prince Albert. "It is my joy to be able to say that after eight years I am no longer speaking to strangers," he said. "Now when I look out I recognize people, names and faces, and after eight years, I know something of your lives, your hearts. To me that's been a great blessing."

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LeGatt also reflected on his motto as priest and bishop: “That they may be one” taken from the prayer of Jesus at the last supper in the gospel of John, Chapter 17. He described how he selected the motto just before he was ordained as a result of working on a thesis about pastoral needs in the diocese of Prince Albert. “I realized that whatever we are engaged in -- whether it be catechesis or liturgy or adult faith formation – the most important thing was whether in the living out of that task, we have come to be one,” he said. “Has it made us one, where people can see the love, or has it brought division?”

He recalled the many times he has experienced a sense of unity and love in his time as bishop of Saskatoon. “What has filled my heart again and again and again in the past eight years is when I see that oneness – oneness as a parish, oneness as laypeople gathered, the oneness of youth gathered at Rock the Mount, the oneness of diocesan church gathered at SaskPlace to celebrate the centre of our faith. It has filled me with joy to see that oneness again and again, to see that which is kindness, respect, listening, and to know that is the work of God.”

The bishop expressed appreciation for the prayers, kindness, friendship, prayers and love that he has experienced from people throughout the diocese of Saskatoon over the past eight years. “And I especially thank you for your faith, for your commitment, and for your generosity.”

Requesting forgiveness for his failings and mistakes, LeGatt asked the diocesan community for their continued prayers.

He added that he goes forward as Archbishop of St. Boniface with much more confidence than he had when he was first appointed bishop of Saskatoon. “You have trained me well,” he said, joking that it seems to be the role of the diocese of Saskatoon to have bishops trained and sent on to other dioceses – with the exception of Bishop James Mahoney, all of Saskatoon’s bishops have been appointed to other dioceses after serving here.

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“I am more confident because of what I’ve experienced here, because of what we’ve lived together, but most especially because I have come to realize how much I can trust in God and God’s people and the goodness of God’s people.”

In words of advise to the clergy, LeGatt urged priests to “trust in your priesthood, believe in the grace of God working through your priesthood, and let that never be about privilege, but always about humble service.”

He challenged priests to pursue a transparent accountability. “Let that accountability come forth in the truth of your dialogue, your listening and your collaboration with the people you serve. And so it will be an inner accountability that brings you more and more to be ministers of God’s love and mercy.”

To the laity, LeGatt said: “Trust in the leadership and goodness of your priests and together build up those communities of faith that our church needs.”

LeGatt encouraged the diocese to move forward, trusting in the presence and power of Jesus. “My prayers will be with you, not only as you build the cathedral and pastoral centre, but as you build a diocese – a diocese where what we receive in the sacraments of initiation never stops growing as youth, as young adults, as young married parents, as seniors; where you will build strong communities, from which you will send people to help in other parts of the world and in those parts of our society that need compassion and our sense of justice. My prayer will be that you will continue to be the wonderful diocese that you are, and I pray those prayers with great trust.”

Representatives of the clergy, the religious and the laity expressed their appreciation for LeGatt and his ministry in a program following Mass.

Rev. Bernard de Margerie spoke on behalf of priests, expressing a gratitude that is “heartfelt and huge.”

“We thank God and yourself for the exceptional quality of your ministry among us, your pastoral charity for all the faithful so evident; your personal priestly spirituality always transparent; your gentleness in your exercising of authority, releasing healing and giving peace,” de Margerie said.

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“You have been among us as one who truly gathers people,” he said, noting LeGatt’s care, gentleness and compassion for all priests. “You have shown us a tenderness and humility in leadership, that is not pretentious, haughty or self-centred. You gave us a good example of perseverance and determination with courage and self-forgetfulness, and trust in God.”

DeMargerie noted the bishop’s efforts to strengthen the ranks of the ordained in the diocese, by recruiting priests from abroad and nurturing vocations at home.

“Thank you for tirelessly spelling out pastoral priorities for the diocese that are truly evangelical. You’ve also done a lot of good in the ecumenical community of Saskatoon and area,” he said.

“Our best wishes to you: brother, father, Bishop Albert. We pray that the church in St. Boniface will soon come to love you as much as we do. May God grant you as you leave Saskatoon, the fairest diocese, to be firmly uplifted by our brotherly admiration and affection and by our abiding solidarity with you in the service of the gospel,” de Margerie concluded.

Describing LeGatt as a “one-hundred percenter,” Sr. Kay MacDonald, NDS, expressed appreciation for the bishop’s relationship with women religious, bringing comments and reflections from religious orders in the diocese of Saskatoon.

“We loved your friendly smile, you were comfortable with us,” she said to LeGatt, adding that it was always evident that he was a man of God, grounded in prayer. “We noted and were inspired with your availability, whenever, wherever and for whomever. We experienced your listening ear. The word very often repeated was presence.”



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MacDonald listed some of LeGatt's many initiatives and undertakings in his eight years as bishop. "You took the diocese to the north, to the Iraqi community, to our aboriginal community," she said, also expressing appreciation for the respectful and faithful outreach to other Christian communities with such initiatives as the policy for sacramental sharing. She

noted LeGatt's efforts to understand issues surrounding education and health, and his unwavering support of those ministries. She also described how he worked to increase lay leadership, through the establishment of such offices as Catholic Hospital Chaplaincy in the diocese. "And you made it a point to reach out to youth," she added.

"We marveled at your seeming ease with risks," she said, noting such initiatives as the launching of a campaign to build a new Cathedral and Catholic Pastoral Centre; undertaking a multi-year call to know Christ as priest, prophet and shepherd; using videos to communicate at Mass; gathering the diocese for a massive Eucharistic celebration at SaskPlace; and permitting others to undertake initiatives, such as the establishment of a new school of faith at Bruno.

Diane Cote of the Diocesan Pastoral Council spoke on behalf of the laity, describing three key characteristics of LeGatt's ministry: his presence, his collaborative spirit and his humility.

"When Bishop Albert is at a meeting, he is fully present to the meeting," Cote said, noting how the bishop would tirelessly listen and work to build relationships. His collaborative skills are evident in projects such as the launch of a diocesan vision, which happened after much consultation, she added.

LeGatt's humble spirit has made it easy for her to support and work for the Uniting in Faith campaign to build a new Cathedral and Catholic Pastoral Centre, Cote added. Knowing Bishop Albert, it was clear the project was not about any kind of personal glory, but was launched because he saw a need and recognized an opportunity to address that need, she said.

The program concluded with Leah Perrault, Director of Pastoral Services at the Catholic Pastoral Centre, presenting the bishop with two framed photographs of Saskatoon scenes, including one of St. Paul's Cathedral: "to remind you how much you miss us!"

"We pray that God will bless you both at St. Boniface and in the legacy that you leave us here," Perrault said.

