



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Pastoral Care Appreciation evening recognizes importance of ministry to those who are sick

BY KIPLY LUKAN YAWORSKI

The profound impact of pastoral care volunteers on the lives of those who are sick, suffering and isolated was acknowledged and celebrated on the World Day of the Sick in Saskatoon.

An annual appreciation evening was held Feb. 11, 2011 for pastoral care volunteers who provide outreach in a range of settings, including hospitals, seniors' care homes and parish communities.

Sponsored by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon and the Knights of Columbus, the evening included a prayer service, wine and cheese refreshments, speakers and entertainment.



Bishop Don Bolen, musicians Erin Gratton and Thomas McKay during the prayer service that opened the Pastoral Care Appreciation evening Feb. 11, 2011.

Bishop Don Bolen led the gathering in prayer, and blessed the caregivers. He also expressed appreciation for all who care for the sick and suffering.

“The risen Lord sends his disciples out to bring a healing word: to bring his presence to those who are in hospitals, to those who are ailing, to those who are suffering. You have received that call and have responded generously, bringing the Lord’s presence to his suffering body, to the sisters and brothers who are in need of support, in need of friendship,” he said.

Speaker Francis Maza, “executive lead” of mission, ethics, and spirituality for Catholic Health Ministry of Saskatchewan, commended volunteers for their faithfulness in providing a caring presence to those in distress.

“You bring the presence of the entire Christian community into the room of the person you are visiting,” he told volunteers. “Every time you go to visit someone, and they are going through a difficult time, and they are afraid, you can say to them that there are a whole bunch of people out there who care; [people] who are praying for them.”

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Volunteers continue the healing ministry of Christ through simple acts: talking, listening, being quiet, bringing flowers or walking through the hallways praying, he said.



Guest speakers Francis Maza and Charlene Nijhawan

“What you do really makes a difference. I know how important it is,” said Maza, relating his own experience of the power of a pastoral presence when he donated a kidney to his son Samuel 10 years ago. Travelling to Toronto for the surgery, far from home and from community support, he woke from surgery to find a “friend of a friend” sitting at his bedside.

“He volunteered at a different hospital, but he knew we were there, and he volunteered to sit with me the first morning after surgery,” he said. “He didn’t do much, he didn’t say anything, but I tell you: he did everything for me. At a time when I was most afraid and felt most alone in a strange city, I had someone there.”

Maza said this scenario is repeated in countless ways in many settings and situations. “I don’t think this story is unique. It happens every day that people come into the city from all over [for health care], hoping they can find help,” he said. “When something like that happens, everything is affected by it.”

Maza said that he wanted every volunteer to know how important their ministry is and the impact they can have. “Please know that you make a huge difference.”

Those who are sick suffer from fear of the unknown and the anxiety can be worsened by endless rounds of waiting – and the entire experience can raise tough questions, Maza related. “Why is this happening? Why now? And where is God in all of this?” Every time a caring person comes into such a situation, they have an opportunity to “reveal the face of Christ,” he stressed.

Charlene Nijhawan spoke about her experience as a pastoral care volunteer, describing how she has always felt comfortable in hospitals, from the time that she first volunteered as a young “candy striper.” When she saw a notice in the parish bulletin about the need for spiritual care volunteers, she responded to the call.



Visiting those in hospital has blessed and enriched her, Nijhawan said. “They are often at their most vulnerable, and yet most of the time they unabashedly welcome us, not only into their hospital room, but into their pain, their loneliness, their confusion, their suffering, and yes, their faith, and sometimes their joy.”

As a volunteer, she has experienced the presence of Christ in and through the ministry, Nijhawan said. “When we give someone a blessing, making the sign of the cross on their forehead and their previously restless spirit settles peacefully, when someone holds our hands in peace and gratitude after we visit them and they receive Eucharist, when we journey week after week with someone on their last days on earth and they say to *us*: ‘I’ll pray for you’ – we are walking on holy ground,” she said.

“For me, no spiritual experience compares to that spiritual care experience – that fullness, that clarity, that gift – the sacramental presence of the body of Christ in our brothers and sisters. I am glad to share it.”

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Each day, sisters and brothers in Christ from across our diocese – and beyond – are admitted to hospital in Saskatoon, facing illness, suffering and fear, in journeys through the health care system that often include a great spiritual longing for understanding, prayer, and connection.

Committed, caring volunteers are vital in answering this need. Areas where spiritual care volunteers can make a difference include Sunday pastoral visiting and bringing communion to Catholics, and assistance in setting up and serving during liturgies at Royal University and Saskatoon City Hospitals in Saskatoon. If you feel the Holy Spirit calling you to share your time, your compassion and your listening heart in this ministry, please consider applying to be a volunteer. Training and support will be provided. Call diocesan chaplaincy coordinator Céline Hudon at: (306) 292-5531

Catholic Hospital Chaplaincy – supported by the BAA!