



NEWS ARCHIVE:

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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### *Poverty Awareness Week marked in Saskatoon in October 2010*

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

“Nothing about us without us” was the theme of this year’s Poverty Awareness Week in Saskatoon launched Oct. 16 at a lunchtime community gathering at St. George’s Ukrainian Catholic Hall.

“Frequently, those of us who live in poverty suffer from social exclusion in that we are frequently left out of the process in decisions that affect our lives,” said speaker Vanessa Charles of the Anti-Poverty Coalition of Saskatchewan at the Saturday afternoon launch of the awareness week that runs from Oct. 16 to 23.



The Raging Grannies were part of the entertainment during a lunch held in conjunction with the launch of Poverty Awareness Week in Saskatoon.

“We, the poor, are the professors of poverty; we have unique expertise and experiences that can be brought to the table,” she said.

Charles called on civic, provincial and federal governments to take action to include those affected by poverty in the decision-making and policy-forming processes on “issues that affect us, such as health, social, legal and research policies.”

The principle “Nothing about us without us” will ensure “that our health and human rights are respected, protected and promoted and that we are involved in all decisions that affect our lives,” she said.

Charles also challenged community-based organizations providing service to low-income residents to ensure that their boards include representation from the poor community.

“To our brothers and sisters who feel invisible and unheard we pledge to honour your lives by fighting the fear, shame and stigma that keep us from fully participating in our communities. No more silence, no more invisibility,” stressed Charles.

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Other speakers included city councillor Pat Lorje, who outlined several city of Saskatoon programs that work to ensure that every person “in our city is treated with dignity.” She also described efforts to change the property maintenance bylaw and her interest in creating a landlord registry to battle the problem of “slum landlords.” She asserted “there is no justification for people forcing other people to live in squalid, urban blight conditions.”



**Kevin Norlin, Vanessa Charles and Laurie O'Connor of the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition (left to right) spoke at a lunchtime launch of Poverty Awareness Week Oct. 16 in Saskatoon.**

Kevin Norlin, co-chair of the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition, also spoke at the event, stressing that true development leads to the unfolding of “creative energy and personal development.”

For those who are poor, poverty is a negative experience, he said, adding that poverty also has a negative impact on “all our communities, all our cities and all our nations and our lands.” But Norlin stressed that there are positive effects when individuals and governments, the city, the churches, and the health region all work together to tackle that negative reality of poverty.

Sheila Pocha, school principal and representative of the Station 20 West board, called for an end to poverty and to racism.

Pocha recalled her own experiences growing up in poverty, as her mother worked to raise ten children. The bullying and stigma experienced caused a lot of hurt, she said, recalling how she was mocked for wearing homemade and second hand clothing. She also recalled attending church, sitting in pews alongside people who would then make hurtful or racist comments after the service. “My mom would say: ‘you have to pray for them too, my girl, because they don’t know.’” Pocha said. “I thank my mom tremendously for her strength in raising us.”

Pocha described efforts to reach out to students and families in the school where she works as principal. She also addressed the ongoing need for a food store in the core neighbourhood of Saskatoon – a huge need that organizers behind the Station 20 West project are trying to address, she said.

Pocha reported on upcoming fundraising efforts to raise the final \$2 million needed to start construction, and expressed appreciation that church groups in the city are coming together in the weeks ahead to promote and support the effort to build a food store as part of Station 20 West.

Nancy Allan of Oxfam also spoke about efforts to battle extreme hunger around the world, and to find “lasting solutions to end global poverty and injustice.”

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Entertainment and a chili lunch by CHEP (Child Hunger and Education Program) were also part of the event. A tray of strawberries was also passed around, as the strawberry or “heart berry” is the symbol of the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition, explained coalition co-chair Laurie O’Connor.

“The ancient names for wild strawberry translate to ‘heart berry,’ special among aboriginal people for its very essence: the way it smells, the way it looks, the way it tastes, the way it makes us feel when we eat it. Even the way it sends out red runners along the ground to reproduce itself inspires us to think of the outreach and renewal of our own community,” she said.

“In the ancient spirit of the heartberry, we look to strengthen our collective resolve to support those experiencing poverty and provide opportunities to promote collaboration, health and well-being for all our community’s members and give all a chance to voice their views, experiences, knowledge and hope.

Other events organized for Poverty Awareness Week in Saskatoon included poverty presentations in local churches Oct. 17 (the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty); a “red tent day” of action against homelessness Oct. 19 at city hall; a community supper at Mayfair United Church Oct. 20; an “Empowering Voices” art display at St. Mary’s Parish Oct. 21; and a “Hands across the bridge” demonstration Oct. 22 to show that poverty spans the whole city.

The Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition is made up of those with lived experience of poverty, and organizational representatives from Riverbend Inner City Ministry, Saskatoon Health Region, Canadian Red Cross, Elizabeth Fry, Child Hunger and Education Program (CHEP), Quint Development Corporation, Equal Justice for All, Saskatoon Housing Coalition, Indian and Metis Friendship Centre, Canada Without Poverty, Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre, Saskatoon United Way, Saskatoon Community Clinic, Rainbow Community Centre, Poverty Free Saskatchewan, Saskatoon Multi-faith Social Justice Circle, Saskatoon Friendship Inn, and Saskatoon faith communities/churches. For more information contact 955-5095, e-mail [antipoverty@sasktel.net](mailto:antipoverty@sasktel.net) or see the SAPC Facebook page.



**A volunteer hands out strawberries – the symbol of the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition – during the launch of Poverty Awareness Week in Saskatoon Oct. 16.**