



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Gladys McElwee hired to coordinate diocesan Hospital Chaplaincy office

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Bringing a listening, prayerful heart to those who are suffering, worried, ill or grieving is the essence of pastoral care, says Gladys McElwee.

“It can be emotionally draining to just be present and to listen to all the grief and the pain that people are experiencing,” she said. “But I try to deeply understand what they’re going through. I watch for cues, listen with compassion, and advocate when necessary.”

McElwee is coordinating the diocesan office of Hospital Chaplaincy this year while Nancy Buttinger is on maternity leave.

McElwee brings a wide range of experience to the position, which was established to promote, nurture and provide Catholic pastoral care at Royal University and City Hospitals in Saskatoon.



Gladys McElwee

She began her ministry as a volunteer at St. Paul’s Hospital in Saskatoon, prompted by her experience with her grandmother’s death in 1987, which brought home to her the need for pastoral care for patients and families at moments of crisis.

When the director of spiritual care at Holy Family Hospital in Prince Albert resigned, McElwee was asked to take on the position as the facility was preparing to close in 1997, an emotional and stressful time.

She also embarked on Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) training.

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The long term and palliative care provided by Holy Family Hospital at that time struck a chord with McElwee, who decided she wanted to do her CPE residency in that sort of facility. She eventually was able to do so at Riverview Health Centre in Winnipeg. McElwee is now certified as a Pastoral Care Specialist by CAPPE (Canadian Association of Pastoral Practice and Education).

A move to Regina when her husband Albert was offered a job eventually led McElwee to a part-time position in spiritual care at Regina General Hospital. Then this summer the mother of two grown sons returned to Saskatoon to take on the diocesan position for a year.

The diocesan Hospital Chaplaincy position involves working with the priest chaplains and volunteers from parishes to provide much-needed pastoral care at two large Saskatoon hospitals. She also gives one-on-one pastoral care to patients and families who come from across the region.

“The need is very great,” she said of the huge challenge of trying to connect with every Catholic patient, and respond to requests for pastoral visits. More volunteers are needed, and those who apply receive training and support.

“There are moments when you realize that this is holy ground,” she says of the rewards of providing pastoral care.

She recalls the words of a distraught elderly patient she once cared for, telling her in Ukrainian that what every human soul needs most is someone to listen. “People are so impacted by what we do and when they express that in such a sacred way, it is powerful,” says McElwee.

Anyone feeling called to volunteer in a hospital setting is invited to contact Gladys McElwee for more information: 306-292-5531.