



NEWS ARCHIVE:

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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# Power of parables explored during diocesan Study Days Oct 14-15, 2009



Gertrude Rompré, John Thompson and Glen Hilton (l-r) facilitated Study Days in the diocese of Saskatoon.

BY KIPLY LUKAN YAWORSKI

Representatives of parishes and ministries from across the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon recently gathered for the annual diocesan Study Days.

Lay, ordained and religious – including pastors, pastoral teams, and parish staff; diocesan ministry coordinators; Diocesan Pastoral Council members and deanery representatives – participated in the two days of enrichment and reflection Oct. 14 and 15 at St. Patrick Parish Centre in Saskatoon.

Following up on last year's Study Days, when facilitator David Wells told parish and ministry leaders that "you are the plan," the theme of the 2009 gathering was "you are the parable."

Facilitators John Thompson, Gertrude Rompré and Glenn Hilton focused on how those in ministry can bring forth their own stories and experiences as "parables" that connect to the "everyday parables" of

others in our world and to the gospel message about God's unconditional love.

Rompré, a member of the St. Thomas More campus ministry team, began by noting two impulses that are reflected in the *Rooted in Christ* Diocesan Vision – "root" and "branch" desires.

The desire to be rooted leads us to seek community, celebration and nourishment, while "branch desires" call us to reach out in mission, evangelization and social justice, Rompré said, noting that both impulses are contained in the six priorities of the Diocesan Vision.

"I think true leadership is rooted in Christ, although that is not an image most of us have of leadership," said Thompson, a retired professor of sociology and former president of St. Thomas More College who now works with the Leadership Saskatoon program.

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Hilton, hired as part-time human resources consultant for the diocese in January 2009, pointed to the Diocesan Vision to be *Rooted in Christ* as a touchstone for discussions about ministry and leadership in the diocese. "I've come to realize how important vision, mission, values, and objectives are for leaders to keep in front of them all the time, so that people know where they are going," Hilton said.

### ***Personal parables***

Opening with a consideration of "personal parables," the Study Days team encouraged those in attendance to pray and reflect upon the "ah-ha moments" in their personal stories of ministry and faith.

Rev. Kevin McGee, pastor at St. Patrick, St. Michael and St. Peter the Apostle parishes; Sharon Powell, pastoral associate at St. Augustine parish, and Michelle Sieben, rural catechetics coordinator in the Kerrobert deanery, led the way, reflecting on memorable moments of their ministry, before the group was invited to recall and share their own "personal parables."



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“The extraordinary is in the ordinary,” said Thompson of the discussion. “When God is at work, the extraordinary is there.”

Everyday parables in the world were also encountered in three videos presented to the group: an address by musician and activist Bono at a prayer breakfast in 2006; brain researcher Jill Bolte Taylor’s account of the insights she gained into the brain and its recovery when she herself suffered a stroke; and a talk about classical music by conductor Benjamin Zander.

Although not explicitly religious, each of the video presentations featured people of conviction and passion, pursuing something beyond themselves, Thompson noted, before encouraging the group to reflect on the presentations through the lens of Christian faith.

### ***Unconditional love of God***

Parables help us to see the truth that exists below the surface, Thompson said, noting how often Jesus uses story to convey the unconditional love of God.

“The power of the parable is very profound,” Thompson said, citing the discovery of one author that those who are familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan are more likely to help a stranger in need than those who do not know the story.

The Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Good Shepherd and Jesus’ description of the vine and the branches were among the gospel parables explored in small group settings during Study Days.

### ***Leaders in Foam Lake***

In considering the nature of Christian leadership, Hilton introduced the work of a group of women in Foam Lake, Sk. who created a series of “Breast Friends” cookbooks to raise money in support of breast cancer research and treatment – another “everyday parable” of dedicated people making a difference.

“Breast Friends” member Darlene Cooper described how 10 women who were impacted by cancer among friends and family got together to work on a cookbook, which has now turned into a series of books that have become national bestsellers, raising over \$1 million to help fight cancer.

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“We were small in number, from a community of 1,200 – we were 10 very ordinary women who have managed to do extraordinary things, I believe by the grace of God and many small miracles,” said Cooper who works as a diocesan rural catechetics coordinator in the Eatonia deanery as well as in the diocesan Development Office (*below left*).

The cookbooks come from ordinary “salt of the earth” prairie families, said Cooper.

The women from Foam Lake took on coordination of all the details of book production and funded the publication on their own.

After the first cookbook was successfully launched, cancer came into Cooper’s own life, when her husband Kevin was diagnosed in late 2004 and died in April 2005. “That was the catalyst for book two: part of our pain and journey, and particularly to help me out, to get me out to meetings once a week, and to carry on.” The second book was a bestseller before it went to print.

“Cancer is not easy, it is very prevalent, and it is systemic and it’s in all of our lives,” said Cooper, describing how the series continued with the third book “Breast Wishes” which focuses on hope, survival and good news.

Thompson pointed to the Breast Friends group as an example of servant leadership at work. He asserted that rather than asking “Am I a leader?” the better question is “How am I a leader?”

Authentic and effective leadership begins from the inside out, he said, stressing the importance of passion, conviction and commitment.

Successful leaders are a “paradoxical combination of deep personal humility and fierce resolve,” Thompson noted, stressing the importance of mission and vision.

Discussion about the six priorities of the Diocesan Vision – evangelization, ongoing faith formation, liturgy and worship, building and sustaining community, justice and peace, and strengthening the diocese – concluded Study Days.

This year, the annual Diocesan Congress did not happen in conjunction with Study Days but took place later in the year – with “Congress Day 1,” a diocesan gathering, held Nov. 18 (*see article on Page 1*), and “Congress Day 2” happening in each of the seven deaneries of the diocese in the New Year. The focus will be the Diocesan Vision.