



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

Editor: Kiply Lukan Yaworski, Communications
Phone: 306-242-1500; Toll Free: 1-877-661-5005
communications@saskatoonrcdiocese.com

Brazilian archbishop visits Saskatoon, continuing long-time connection between two dioceses

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

The Archbishop of Maceió, Brazil visited the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon in July 2009, building upon a 45-year connection between the two dioceses.

Archbishop Antônio Muniz Fernandes, O. Carm. – who was introduced throughout his visit as “Dom Antônio” – attended celebrations, connected with local families and religious communities, and visited a variety of Saskatchewan sites, experiencing everything from a prairie farm and a northern lake to helping agencies on 20th Street in Saskatoon.

Dom Antônio’s visit came in response to an invitation from Saskatoon Bishop Albert LeGatt in 2008, when LeGatt was visiting diocesan missionaries serving in Brazil. The Saskatoon diocese has had a mission in the archdiocese of Maceio in northeastern Brazil since 1964.

The archbishop’s visit was timed to coincide with a 50th anniversary celebration for Sr. Claire Novecosky, OSU. An Ursuline of Bruno, Novecosky continues to serve in Brazil after 37 years. Sr. Louise Hinz, OSU, and two Sisters of Mission Service, Srs. Jeannine Rondot and Marie-Noelle Rondot, are the other missionaries from the diocese of Saskatoon presently serving in Brazil.

Sr. Claire Novecosky, along with former missionaries Rev. Emile April and Rev. Les Paquin, accompanied Dom Antônio to various events during his visit, as did many members of the Brazil Mission Awareness Committee (BMAC).



Archbishop Antônio Muniz Fernandes, O. Carm. (“Dom Antonio”) of the Archdiocese of Maceió, Brazil visited the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon in July at the invitation of Saskatoon Bishop Albert LeGatt.

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The itinerary of the archbishop's 10-day stay included a visit to St. Peter's Abbey in Muenster; Mass at St. Anne's parish in Saskatoon and St. Augustine's parish in Humboldt; the Mount Carmel pilgrimage July 19; visits to St. Joseph's Nursing Home, St. Paul's Hospital, the YWCA, the Food Bank, Friendship Inn and the CWL Clothing Depot, as well as a family farm; meeting with children at a Vacation Bible School at Holy Spirit parish in Saskatoon; gatherings with the Ursuline sisters, the Franciscan Sisters of St. Elizabeth, and the Sisters of Mission Service; as well as a trip to Waskesiu and walks along the riverbank in Saskatoon.



Special visitor Dom Antonio joined children participating in a Vacation Bible School at Holy Spirit Parish in Saskatoon, answering their questions about Brazil.

The visit also provided an opportunity to further discuss what the relationship between the two dioceses will look like in the future, Paquin said at a public gathering to introduce Dom Antônio July 23 at St. Paul's Cathedral. With a diminishing number of clergy and religious involved in the mission, the two dioceses are considering other possibilities, such as lay participation or project exchanges, he noted.



Bishop Albert LeGatt (left) presents Archbishop Antônio Muniz Fernandes with a gift at a diocesan gathering July 23 at St. Paul's Cathedral

"The visit has also given Dom Antônio an idea of who we are as the diocese of Saskatoon. He has already said he will be taking ideas back to Maceió," Paquin said, before introducing the archbishop.

"He is a man who has a real vision; an idea of Church that is very committed to mission and to evangelization. He is very committed to the poor, and he has brought about a lot of new life in the archdiocese of Maceió," said

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Archbishop Antônio Muniz Fernandes “Dom Antonio”) was answering questions about his archdiocese in Brazil during a public gathering July 23 at St. Paul’s Cathedral.

Paquin, who served as a missionary in Brazil for several years.

During the public gathering Dom Antônio spoke about the importance of continuing to build bridges between the two dioceses, for mutual enrichment. “Now in this moment, I think that we have to create another river... the River of Hope... and we have to build a bridge: in Maceió one point, in Saskatoon another point,” the archbishop said.

Acknowledging that both dioceses face problems and challenges, Dom Antônio added that each community also has something to offer the other. “Nobody is the teacher; nobody is the student. Everybody has to learn. Everybody has to teach,” he said, describing how he will return to Brazil enriched by what he has experienced in Canada. In the same way, Canadians who visit Brazil are also enriched, he added.

Those in attendance heard about some of the challenges facing the archdiocese of Maceió, which has a population of about 1.8 million Catholics, with one priest for every 30,000 to 40,000 people. In Maceió, the church is focusing on two priorities: holding popular missions of evangelization and renewal and emphasizing the need to be “Samaritan men and women,” Dom Antônio related. “We define our Church as missionary, and our Church as Samaritan,” he said.

Dom Antônio made note of the helping agencies he visited in the core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon, including Friendship Inn and the CWL Clothing Depot, as well as the work of the Ukrainian Catholic Sisters of St. Joseph at a local nursing home. “This is strong work, beautiful work,” he said. “You have this kind of work, this compassion to the other. It is so important. It is the Samaritan at work.”

The gathering also heard something about the struggles experienced in Brazil: poverty, the need for land reform, problems surrounding the sugar cane industry, and the ravages of drug addiction and violence.



Dom Antonio Muniz Fernandes, **Bishop Albert LeGatt** and **Abbot Peter Novecosky** at the Carmel pilgrimage, which took place during Dom Antonio's visit to the diocese.

Dom Antônio called upon Sr. Claire Novecosky to describe work being done by Farm of Hope, a year-long drug addiction recovery program based on the three pillars of hard work, community life and spirituality. There is a need for more of these facilities, especially for women, Novecosky said.

Convincing the government that such Farm of Hope centres will do more good than plans to build a prison for young people is a challenge, added Dom Antônio. "When the young people go to prison, they leave the prison as a specialist in criminality. Prisons don't have the capacity to help people to recuperate," said the archbishop, stressing the need for social investment to resolve problems in Brazil.

At the gathering Dom Antônio expressed his appreciation to all those from Saskatchewan who have served in Brazil over the years. "I think this is what I bring in my heart is this: to say thank you."

On behalf of the Saskatoon diocese, Bishop Albert LeGatt presented a photograph and a book of prairie scenes to Dom Antônio. LeGatt also reflected on possibilities for continuing the connections between the two dioceses. He cited a whole spectrum of ideas, including such things as high school group exchanges, teacher exchanges, delegations to share experiences of such things as parish missions, or groups going to participate in service or building projects.

Exploring such options will be the ongoing work of BMAC and the Diocesan Mission Office, LeGatt said. "This is not just something nice to do, it is an essential part of being Church."