

Bringing the Season of Creation Alive in A Special Way in Central Saskatchewan

- submitted by Christopher Hrynkow

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The Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I inaugurated the World Day of Prayer for the Environment on September 1, 1989. As part of Pope Francis' ecumenical outreach and as an expression of his concern for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation undertaken in the spirit of St. Francis, in 2015 Pope Francis' established the practice in the Catholic Church. As a result, Catholics are now called to participate in the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation annually on September 1st. Here, Francis is also taking up a recommendation made in the *Charta Oecumenica* in 2001. That document, jointly issued by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops Conferences recommends the establishment of an ecumenical day prayer for "the preservation of creation".

In his 2015 letter mandating Catholic participation in the event, the Pope explicitly notes that day is meant to be an ecumenical event. Indeed, in that letter, Francis publicly instructs Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity to work with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the World Council of Churches, and "other ecumenical organizations so that this World Day can serve as a sign of a common journey in which all believers in Christ take part."

Further in 2015 and drawing on diverse ecumenical examples ranging from the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines proclamation of "creation time" to European Ecumenical Assembly's advocacy for a "time of creation", which itself was adopted by the World Council of Churches, Pope Francis went one step further and in his message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation proclaimed the period from September 1st until the feast of St. Francis on October 4th, the "Season of Creation". That message, also returned to extolling the need for ecological conversion. To cite another cogent example, in this year's World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation message, Pope Francis invites us to ponder the effects of social and ecological abuse on the Earth community as they relate to water, helping to ensure that this essential element for life is shared equality for the benefit of all.

While there have been events engaging these themes celebrating and reflecting on the Season of Creation in Saskatoon previously, the season was brought alive in a special way for Central Saskatchewan this fall by Dr. Lesya Sabada which are rooted in her identity as a Ukrainian Catholic with unique insights into Western and Eastern Christian traditions. To craft the evening proceedings, Dr. Sabada drew on her own understandings of the interfaith dimensions of caring for creation honed through time studying and teaching at the University of Saskatchewan, St. Thomas More College, St. Peter College in Munster, and her work for the World Council for Churches. She also drew on her impressive social network, to bring together a diverse group of religious leaders to pray and share insights about the value of creation and their work to care for the ecological world.



The evening taking place on Treaty Six Land and the Homeland of the Métis, on Wednesday, September 19, 2018 started inside at a specially eco-decorated St. George's Seniors Centre, with words of welcome and explanation. Then it was outside to the adjacent Steve Patola Park. The faith leaders formed a circle and the large crowd that was in attendance gathering around them to participating in the Akathist service, which celebrates the beauty of the natural world and thanks God for creation. Prior to the service the Ukrainian Catholic Bishop of the Saskatoon Eparchy, Most Rev. Bishop Bryan Bayda, CSSR, gave a traditional blessing of bread and salt that was shared with the group after the evening's

Blessing of Bread and Salt, Photo Credit: Linden Predy

formal proceedings. Elder Irene Sharp of the Métis community also smudged the inner circle. The Akathist service, reflecting Eastern Christian spirituality, itself was remarkable as the candles of those gathered began to burn brighter as the sunlight outside dimmed.

Then it was back into the hall, first to learn from Robert White about the faith-inspired work of Richard St.



*Learning about Richard St. Barbe Baker
Photo Credit: Linden Predy*

Barbe Baker (1889-1982), a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan's Anglican theological college, and after the first world war a graduate of Cambridge University in forestry and silviculture, and a Bahá'í from 1924 until death. He is buried in Saskatoon's Woodlawn cemetery and is well-known as the co-founder with the Kenyan Chief Josiah Njonjo of Watu wa Miti, the Men of the Trees (now known the International Tree Foundation and based in the UK), which is estimated to be responsible for the successful lives of 27 billion trees through programming in over thirty countries.

Next, the crowd heard from a impressive range of speakers representing a variety of faith traditions including (as pictured below from right to left below top row) Ukrainian Catholic, an Interfaith Representative, Mennonite Church of Canada, Roman Catholic/Development and Peace, Doukabhur, Syro-Malabar Catholic, Tibetan Buddhist, Unitarian, United Church, Lutheran, along with (seated row left to right) Ukrainian Catholic, Hindu, Muslim, Evangelical Orthodox, Indigenous Spirituality, Presbyterian, and an Indigenous Elder. Most of these, under the watchful timekeeping of the speakers shared a prayer or spiritual reflection and few instance of what their tradition did to address the ecological challenges. Reaction to the evening from the faith leaders and audience was extremely positive many expressing their appreciation for Dr. Sabada's efforts to make the evening possible and a wish to deepen and strengthen interfaith collaboration to care for creation. As such, the event was truly a special way to ground the season of creation in central Saskatchewan.



Back Row (L-R): Dr. Micheal Pollet, Rev. Brian Maitland, Rev. Karen Fraser Gitzelz, Lori Petruskevich, Fr. Antony Ploggen, Mae Popoff, Louise Bitz, Stephanie Siemens, Dr. Christopher Hrynkow, Dr. Lesya Sabada. **Front row (L-R):** Bishop Bryan Bayda, CSsR, Dr. Nawal Sharma, Iman Ilyas Sidyot, Fr. Jakob Palm, Sandi Harper, Gerri Madill, Elder Irene Sharp. Photo Credit: Linden Predy

Those interested in continuing the conversation about people of faith coming together to care for our common home can join Dr. Sabada and other members of Communities Inspired for Environmental Action at the Congregation Agudas Israel at 715 McKinnon Avenue in Saskatoon on November 29 at 7:15pm, when faith leaders including Sandi Harper (Indigenous Spirituality, Teacher at Saskatoon Public Schools Teacher), Ilyas Sidiyot (Islam, Imam at Islamic Association of Saskatoon), Claudio Jodorkovsky (Judaism, Rabbi at Congregation Agudas Israel), Sean Sanford Beck (Christian Druid, Anglican Priest), Lori Petruskevich (Tibetan Buddhist), and Carroll Chubb (Unitarian, Green Sanctuary) will address the evening's theme, *Spirited Environmental Action?: Why? How? By Who?*, from the podium in the sanctuary. A short panel-based discussion featuring the faith leaders and based upon audience questions will follow from the stage. Then all in attendance will be given an opportunity to address the why, how, and who questions in moderated groups. A synthesis discussion will close the evening. In this way, audience participation will help craft a common action statement and solidify the vision of Communities Inspired for Environmental Action. All are welcome at this important evening.

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