

SEASON OF CREATION MERGES PRAYER, PROTECTING PLANET

All faiths have a role to play in traditionally Christian-led undertaking, organizer says

. Saskatoon StarPhoenix

. 14 Sep 2019

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The Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon is once again hosting Season of Creation, a celebration of prayer and a call to action to protect the Earth.

Though this is only the second year for the event in Saskatoon, organizer Lesya Sabada says Season of Creation has been celebrated elsewhere for decades.

Sabada, who teaches in the Department of Religion and Culture at the University of Saskatchewan, says the Season of Creation officially begins on Sept. 1, the World Day of Prayer for Creation, and continues until Oct. 4, the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi - the patron saint of ecology in many Western traditions.

Eastern Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I declared Sept. 1 as the Day of Prayer for Creation in 1989. It was embraced by other European Christian churches in 2001, and by the Roman Catholic Church in 2015.

Though the Season of Creation is traditionally a Christian initiative, Sabada believes cooperation from the entire religious community is necessary to appropriately address the challenge of saving the planet. As a result, 16 local groups from various religious stripes and spiritual traditions will participate in this year's event, and the invitation is open to the entire community.

The Season of Creation event on Sept. 19 is set to begin with a prayer service at Steve Patola Park at 1235 20th St. West. It will feature Akathist Prayers in Praise of and Care for God's Creation led by The Rt. Rev. Janko Kolosnjaji from St. George's Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral.

Afterward, the gathering will move indoors to St. George's Senior Citizens Club for a panel discussion and refreshments.

Panel members will include Bishop Mark Hagemoen from the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop Bryan Bayda from the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Rabbi Claudio Jodorkowsky from Congregation Agudas Israel, Sandra Harper of the Indigenous community, Minister Karen Fraser Gitlitz from the Unitarian Church and youth from various parts of the world. All will address the same theme: Reconciling with Each Other, Healing Mother Earth.

"The indoor space will be decorated with educational posters," Sabada says. "And we're showcasing a new initiative - a display of environmentally-friendly products from local entrepreneurs and businesses."

She hopes viewing the displays and booths will stimulate informal dialogue. Sabada is a firm believer that today's youth are the key to any hope of success in healing the planet.

"As a university professor,

I find that as I teach on this subject, the youth become very passionate about it.

Once challenged, they are ready and eager to get to work," she says.

One of Sabada's personal areas of interest is Indigenous peoples and their unique

challenges. She has travelled widely and had the opportunity to visit and observe Indigenous communities in various corners of the world.

Sabada and her husband, Thomas Nahachewsky, recently returned from a trip to the Amazon where they visited the Pantanal - the largest wetland on the planet - and viewed jaguars in their natural habitat.

Part of her mandate on the trip was to visit the Mura and Tatuyo tribes on behalf of a group called Development and Peace. One tribe lives deep in the Amazon, and reaching them required travelling by canoe through vegetation-choked waterways inhabited by alligators and anacondas.

What Sabada discovered was that these remote tribes have the same basic human needs as everyone else. They are very poor, and lack proper water, sanitation, medicine and anything beyond elementary education. They have little hope of improvement or advancement.

"They live in the largest rainforest on the globe," she says.

"It has a staggering diversity of life, and is a mind-blowing, mesmerizing ecological marvel that was millennia in the making. However, species are being destroyed and the Indigenous communities there are threatened. Ironically, one of the biggest threats comes from tourism."

Sabada sees faith as a crucial element in any efforts to heal the planet. She believes climate change is a spiritual matter because it speaks to the very core of what it means to be human, and to our relationship with each other and God's creation.

"The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy," she says, "while God's relationship with creation is one of loving care and concern. As human beings, created in the image of God, we are created to give and love, and we have a responsibility to love creation as God does.

"Faith speaks about transformation, conversion, the common good, the role of sacrifice, the need for redemption, and more. All these are necessary virtues for an effective and proportionate response to the ecological crisis facing us. Motivations based on fear, economics, politics or reason alone will not be sufficient for the magnitude of conversion of mind and heart that is required, nor for the endurance it will take."

For more information on Season of Creation, contact Lesya Sabada at l.sabada@usask.ca.