

Archbishop Weisgerber presented with Caritas Award

By James Buchok

Archbishop of Winnipeg James Weisgerber was praised for his leadership, his vision of the church and his love of social justice as he was presented with the 2010 Caritas Award by the Catholic Foundation of Manitoba April 15.

Weisgerber “mixes with everybody, Pope and pauper” said longtime colleague Rev. Douglas Crosby O.M.I., Bishop of Cornerbrook and Labrador. Crosby told the 800 people in attendance at the annual Caritas Dinner that in his work with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Weisgerber proved to be “a master of understanding complex issues.” Weisgerber served as CCCB general secretary, vice president and was president from fall 2007 to fall 2009.

“He loves being a chief pastor and he’s good at it because his relationship with the Lord is alive and rich,” said Crosby. “Perhaps his most outstanding quality is his love for and commitment to social justice and some of us find those kinds of people irksome because they make us work,” Crosby said.



President of the Catholic Foundation of Manitoba Tom Lussier, left, with Archbishop of Winnipeg James Weisgerber. Photo by Paul Swart.

“Because he is not afraid of hard work, he makes us work.”

Crosby said Weisgerber’s devotion to justice led him to develop “a deep respect for aboriginal people,” and Crosby reminded the audience of Weisgerber’s work to arrange an historic gathering at the Vatican in April 2009 attended by Pope Benedict XVI, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Phil Fontaine, former students of residential schools and First Nations elders. The pope expressed his sorrow for the conduct of some members of the church which led to abuses suffered by aboriginal children in Canadian residential schools.

Foundation president

Tom Lussier, principal of Winnipeg’s St. Paul’s High School said what he noticed upon Weisgerber’s first visit to the school years ago was that Weisgerber was obviously a teacher having at one time been Dean of Arts at Atholl Murray College of Notre Dame in Wilcox, Sask. “He knew how to connect with the students,” Lussier said. “He is a spiritual leader with a strong vision of the church, a church of communion,” said Lussier. “He has demonstrated that leadership in Manitoba and in Canada.”

Accepting the award, Weisgerber said he was “filled with gratitude” for the Catholic Foundation of Manitoba and for him the

Caritas Dinner is one of the year’s highlights and a chance to gather with many in the Catholic community.

Weisgerber spoke of living on the prairie and no matter how many times one sees the large harvest moon shining on the horizon “we still have to say ‘look at the moon!’ The moon is just a rock but when the sun shines on it how glorious it is,” and he compared it to “the splendour of Jesus rising from the dead and shining on us.”

“Sometimes we are like a rock, ” said Weisgerber, “cold, lifeless, dark and we are going through a lot of that right now. We always need to be transformed by Christ, his splendour makes

us who we are and the splendour of the risen Christ never abandons us.”

Weisgerber said he has had “a marvelous time being a priest, a bishop and a leader of the church. It’s a struggle at times as it is for any leader. I wish to acknowledge my family and friends and in a particular way the priests. The bishop is nothing without his priests.”

Weisgerber said his work with the CCCB kept him away from the archdiocese at times “and I regretted that but there were other callings. Now I’m back here full-time and you may regret it.”

Weisgerber said his priority is the reconciliation of aboriginal people with non-aboriginal people. “Neither will succeed without the other,” he said. “I have said before the challenges we face are the same as they were 200 years ago and we did not handle it very well 200 years ago and now we have a second chance. It’s not too often that history gives you a second chance.”

Weisgerber said the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission “is an opportunity for all of us to become involved.”