

Concerns of natives, response from church to be discussed

The Ottawa Citizen

28 October 1989

Rev. R.G. McNeil

An evening with George Erasmus and Father Barry McGrory on Thursday at 7.30 p.m. at St. Paul's University will be an important statement of native people's hopes and a Catholic church response.

Erasmus, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, will outline the concerns of Canada's First Nations. Father McGrory, president of the Catholic Church Extension Society of Canada, will respond with the informed point of view of a churchman who has travelled to all the areas where native peoples form communities of the Catholic church. The Wolf Pact Singers and sponsors of Native Art in Ottawa have also been invited.

George Erasmus was born in Fort Rae in the Northwest Territories and rose to be chief of the Dene Nation between 1976 and 1983. He was elected national chief of the Assembly of First Nations in 1985 and awarded the Order of Canada in 1987. During his youthful years he belonged to the Company of Young Canadians. Today he leads the push for self-government in territories which have been promised to the native people of Canada. Claims for these lands have not yet been settled as developers are contesting the handing over of resource-rich areas.

Father Barry McGrory is well known here as a former long-time pastor of Holy Cross Parish. His keen interest in social justice led to a twinning arrangement of that parish with St. Francis Xavier Parish in Managua, Nicaragua. For more than a decade both parishes have carried on an active exchange of people and resources. Holy Cross is also known for its work with the disabled. This is their first exploration of native people's issues since they housed the delegation of native men, women and children who marched on Parliament Hill about six years ago.

In 1987 McGrory was selected to head the Catholic Church Extension Society which raises financial support and sponsors resource people to assist the church in outlying areas. His job is to travel to Catholic missions and determine the best way to allocate limited resources for the development of authentically native Christian communities.

Chief Erasmus will outline the native people's position on constitutional issues. He is informed on the present status of native land claims and the desire of his people to get a land base from which they can return to the self-sufficiency they enjoyed before the advent of Europeans. A regaining of cultural identity as well as economic self-sufficiency is increasingly important to them. So is the resolve to resist the increasing exploitation of their resources by outsiders and international low-level military flying.

The mission, peace and development committee and religious education committee of Holy Cross Parish have set up this presentation and an informed response. Then the speakers will take comments and questions from the floor.