

Jesus comes to life for students through sculptures of artist who reclaimed his faith

The biblical stories of Jesus seemed to come to life for students in Stony Plain as they toured a travelling art exhibit featuring Gospel moments captured in intricate clay sculptures.

“It was so detailed and I thought it was great. I learned a lot from the scenes of Jesus forgiving and a lot of the miracles that he’s done,” said nine-year-old Jaxton Walters.

Jaxton, a Grade 4 student at St. John Paul II Catholic Elementary school in Stony Plain, was among those who lined up to enter a semi-trailer to view *The One Called Jesus*, a sculpture collection by Ontario artist Maurice Gaudreault. He said he really liked Gaudreault’s sculpture of Jesus in prison before his crucifixion.



Sister Thérèse Turcotte, of the Ontario-based Sisters of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, is curator of the 50-piece collection of sculptures by Maurice Gaudreault. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

The exhibit is on a five-year journey across Alberta. It was brought to Stony Plain, west of Edmonton, on June 18 after stops in St. Albert and the St. Paul area.

“This is a true story. Jesus is one of us, he’s still speaking to our hearts

today,” said Sister Thérèse Turcotte, a member of the Ontario-based Sisters of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin and curator of the 50-piece collection.

The sculptures are on average 30 to 36 centimetres in diameter. The largest is 84 centimetres.

Turcotte described them as a powerful teaching tool.

“At another school I was at, there was a Grade 5 student that came in on his own. He said, ‘This is like walking through the Gospels!’ This comes alive for them. This is living art.”

The collection is owned by the Diocese of Hearst in northern Ontario. It’s the final work of Gaudreault, who created 1,148 sculptures in his lifetime, many of which depict farming and local wildlife.

Gaudreault created *The One Called Jesus* sculptures to thank God for a good life, Turcotte explained.

He returned to his Catholic faith after he was diagnosed with leukemia in 1996, and began working on the collection the same year. He finished all 50 pieces in 1997 and died three years later.

Turcotte first saw the collection in 2000 while teaching at a high school in Hearst. She quickly saw its potential to teach the history and language of Jesus to students from Grade 1 through 12.



Gaudreault's detailed clay sculptures feature various scenes from the life of Jesus. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

Each age group has a different reaction. Younger students are often interested in the elaborate details of sculptures and in Jesus' miracles, Turcotte said. Older students in Grades 10 through 12 want to know about the history of Jesus.

"In the classroom they learn stories about Jesus, but they're all disconnected. But in here, there's a timeline. 'Oh this is where it happened, and this is connected to this,'" said Turcotte, pointing to different pieces inside the semi-trailer.

Tenley Dunn, a Grade 4 student at St. John Paul II, said the sculpture collection helped her see Jesus' life in a new light.

"I think it was very hard to make I like the Christmas and Easter ones. My favourite times of year are Christmas and Easter, because they're both about Jesus," said Tenley, 10.

Grade 4 teacher Leah Long was particularly excited for her students to see the exhibit.

"I think the kids were very interested. It's one thing to read the stories from the Bible, but it's another thing to see it (and) to get the visuals, which is really nice," Long said. "It's not every day that you get to see something like this."

Turcotte's personal favourite is the sculpture entitled Jesus in the Temple. She says it displays how Gaudreault personally saw Jesus.

"I love his approach. It's always a Jesus who is close to the people, who is open and caring."

Turcotte brought *The One Called Jesus* exhibit to Alberta after receiving requests from schools. She'll visit several Edmonton-area schools this month and later in the fall after a summer break.

Maurice Gaudreault

Sculpteur d'histoires - Clay Sculptor
Kapuskasiging (1932-2000) Ontario



Maurice Gaudreault, an Ontario sculptor, created the 50-piece collection 'The One Called Jesus', which is touring across Canada inside a semi-trailer that recently visited local schools. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media