



Pastors Allan & Carole O'Soup

ALMOND TREE MINISTRIES

by Darlene Polachic

God is making a difference on the Key First Nation northeast of Canora, SK, using pastors Allan and Carole O'Soup.

The First Nations couple are both ordained ministers who established Almond Tree Ministries, a Christian ministry of evangelistic outreach, tent revivals and prison ministry. They also operate a Christian school and a bible school on the Key Reserve.

The O'Soups took their own bible school training with Faith Alive Ministries in Saskatoon and travelled widely in an evangelistic tent ministry for 17 years.

"Then God placed a vision on my heart to go back to the reservation and open a bible school for adults, a centre where they would be trained as disciples for Christ," Allan says. "We established Almond Tree Ministries Bible Institute (ATMBI) in 2004. It was closed for a couple of years due to lack of accommodations. We had students from Alberta wanting to come but there was nowhere to house them. Now we're building a 14-bedroom dormitory."

The bible school offers three-week courses in basic

Bible teaching with subjects like the Pentateuch, Hebrews, Acts, counselling, and much more. There is also prophetic teaching and courses on healing.

Course credits are accepted by Faith Alive Bible College, an accredited institution, allowing ATMBI to offer a first year certificate of Christian service and a second year diploma in theological and biblical studies.

The seminary has no age limitations. One student was 75. All have been First Nations.

Allan shares the teaching with a variety of guest lecturers. One is former Almond Tree graduate Jamie Desjarlais who is now an ordained minister.

"Roxanne Brass is another graduate who has become ordained," O'Soup says. "Another is in his third year at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma."

A number of Almond Tree graduates are now doing their own ministry. They have genuine testimonies of lives--like Allan's and Carole's--transformed from addiction to drugs and alcohol. "They're serving the Lord," Allan says, "and contributing to the community. Their changed lifestyle is a message in itself."

The bible school is funded mainly through private donations and tuitions. "We don't like our students to take out loans," Allan says. "Instead, we encourage them to find a church to sponsor them. We will provide a progress report to sponsors."

Carole O'Soup, a teacher, had a dream of starting a Christian school to educate First Nations children in a faith atmosphere.

"Since Sask Learning does not allow a Christian school to be established on a First Nations reserve, we started one in our kitchen," she says. "We started in 2004 with six students who were no longer allowed in the public school system because of their behaviour. Some were Grade 8 age, but Grade 5 level educationally. First Nations children are often too shy to ask for help so in the public school system they're put in a Resource Room and classified as slow learners."

The school uses the ACE (Accelerated Christian Education) program where students work at their own speed.

"We teach one-to-one, and have seen our students catch up with their age level."

School and seminary classes are held in a church building on the O'Soups' yard alongside the Key Reserve. How it came to be there is a story in itself.

"When I was a kid, a man from the Covenant Church in Norquay came to the Reservation every Sunday to pick up

kids for Sunday School," Allan says. "Many years later, when I wanted to start a church on the reservation, someone from the Covenant Church told me of a vacant building we were able to move to our property. We put it on a basement and later added on classrooms."

A core of about 70 people attend services in the church which is also the site of community events like meals, family bible camp, the annual Sweetheart Banquet, and marriage and divorce care seminars.

All of this is making a difference on the Key First Nation. Parents of school children are coming to church; lives are being changed. One mother who beat her son for sneaking off to Sunday School is now a minister of the Gospel.

"The ones who brought the most alcohol and drugs to the reserve are now born again Christians serving Jesus," Allan says. "They are examples to the whole community of lives changed by the Gospel and the Word of God. Even former residential school students are finding healing from their wounds."

Future plans for Almond Tree Ministries Bible Institute include finishing the dormitory and bringing seven ACTO-type trailers on-site to accommodate families. "We have parents wanting to attend bible school and have their children in the Christian school," Allan says, "and we've had to turn them away. It's especially important for new Christians to be transplanted into a Christian environment."

For more information, www.almondtreeministries.com.