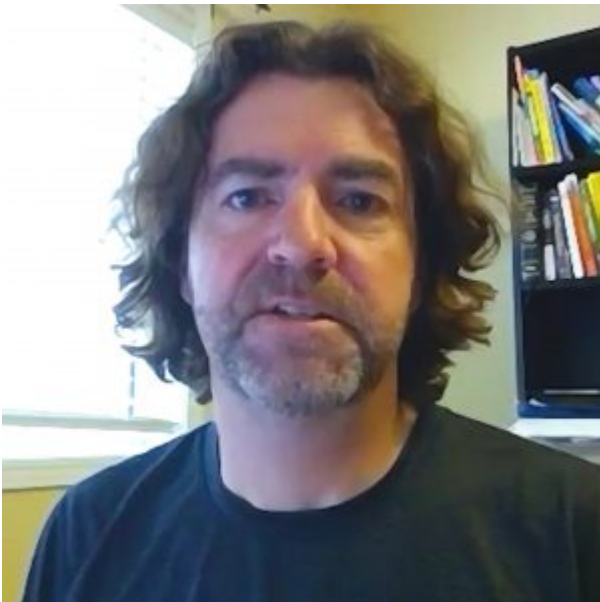


Future church in south Edmonton named on Divine Mercy Sunday

A new church in southwest Edmonton is at least a decade away, but preparations are underway to build it to serve the growing neighbourhoods of that part of the city.

There's a committee of volunteers. The land has been purchased. There's a website to raise money.

And now there's a name: The Catholic Parish of Divine Mercy. Announced by Archbishop Richard Smith on this Divine Mercy Sunday, organizers say that with this new name, the faithful can now prepare the vision for the new parish.



Paul Givens

"I love it. I think it's fantastic," Paul Givens, chairman of the fundraising committee, said of the name.

"Without the name of the new parish, without its establishment, it really hampers the development of that vision. With that now in hand, we can more easily move forward and have that as the guiding principle, the guiding component of that vision."

Givens heads a 10-member committee at St. Thomas More, the biggest parish in southwest Edmonton, which is leading the development of The Catholic Parish of Divine Mercy church in the Glenridding Heights neighbourhood. The Divine Mercy

devotion is associated with the apparitions of Jesus to St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish saint.

The church is part of a conceptual plan for a Catholic campus, including a Covenant Care and Covenant Living facility next door and a high school across the street. The campus is an ever-growing area of southwest Edmonton.

Already, St. Thomas More parish serves more than 5,000 families, and it's one of the largest by population in the Edmonton Archdiocese. Many of its five weekend masses are filled beyond capacity, and the number of families in Windermere, Ambleside, Heritage Valley and the communities near the Edmonton International Airport is expected to continue increasing along with new housing development.

Eleven Catholic schools are affiliated with St. Thomas More parish.



The Catholic Parish of Divine Mercy will be part of a larger Catholic Campus in southwest Edmonton. St. Thomas More Parish

The name "Divine Mercy" topped an online survey of 250 St. Thomas More parishioners and their families with 53 votes, followed closely with St. John Paul II with 50 votes and St. Kateri with 30.

Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, a long-term plan is underway for

the new church. The site is a 10-acre parcel of land in the Glenridding Heights neighbourhood, off Rabbit Hill Road and south of Anthony Henday Drive, purchased by the Archdiocese for \$9.5 million in January 2020.

Two other 10-acres parcels for future churches have been purchased for roughly \$10 million in total. One is in the Horse Hill area of northeast Edmonton and the other is on Winterburn Road, south of 23 Avenue, in the Edgemont neighbourhood. South Edmonton is now home to some of the city's biggest churches.



The Catholic Parish of Divine Mercy is located in a growing part of southwest Edmonton. St. Thomas More Parish

Rev. Mitch Fidyka, pastor of St. Thomas More church, said the church is an investment.

"We were always people of the future and we are people of the future. We are not alone. We have to believe that in the centre of the Church we call holy and apostolic and universal is Jesus Christ. So we have hope," Father Fidyka said.

"We see that this area is growing and will continue to grow. If we miss the opportunity to do something now, in 10, 20 years when there is really a great need, it will be too late."

The naming of the new church is important particularly now when COVID-19 precautions have limited access to the church, Father Fidyka said.

"We have to remember that our Church is a sacramental Church. We cannot work from a distance. To belong to the parish is not that my name is there, the parish is a spiritual home with others."

He cautioned that it's unclear what parishes will look like after the pandemic, but having a spiritual home is critical.

The parish committee is currently developing an estimated cost of The Catholic Parish of Divine Mercy church while working with the Archdiocese and with other parishes that have built new churches. Corpus Christi Church in Mill Woods – which was completed in 2015 at a cost of \$14 million – is being used as a benchmark.

Father Fidyka said that's a good beginning, but the cost will likely be much higher. Nevertheless, it's worth it.

"People say 'Why are we spending so much? We do not need it. Jesus doesn't need it'. Jesus doesn't need it. But we need it," Father Fidyka said. "Build the best possible. Why not? I would have no problems here at all, and people would understand as well."

"If you serve people well, try at least to serve people well and they know they will be served well in this parish and so on, people are very generous," Father Fidyka said. "We do not even have to expect that big billionaires will pay for the churches. No. Average people are paying for the churches."

However, it will be at least 10 years before there are shovels in the ground.

"We're supporting that fundraising in a very quiet way right now," Givens said. "We've made a decision to focus on communication within our parish, which has been a challenge over the last year and bit. We want to continue to reach as many parishioners as we can and tell them about this new mission."

"The exact of day of putting shovels in the ground, and construction of the church, will depend on the generosity of our Catholic community and our parish."



Father Mitch Fidyka is seen at the site of the future Catholic Parish of Divine Mercy.St. Thomas More Parish

Nevertheless, individual donations are being made and the St. Thomas More parish finance council is setting aside \$50,000 each month for the new Catholic Parish of Divine Mercy – contingent St. Thomas More parish meeting its own needs. The Divine Mercy and St. Thomas More churches will be sister parishes, sharing the rectory at St. Thomas More.

The fundraising committee launched a website almost exactly a year ago detailing plans for the new church project. Organizers say they have faith that the Catholic community will support the new church project. Many of the naming survey respondents live in the area of the new The Catholic Parish of Divine Mercy.

“They’re very excited. They would love to be attending Mass in their neighbourhood already,” Givens said. “This is a generational type project. It’s not a sprint by any means.”

In that sense, the COVID-19 pandemic hasn’t impacted the plans for the church beyond a few months. The standing mandate to raise 50 per cent of the funds prior to construction, which is still years away.

“It may sound like 10-plus years is a long time,” Givens said. “The time is going to fly by, and we’ll probably feel like we don’t have enough time to get all the planning done that we want to do ... Even if it’s going to span years, it’s going to go by extremely quickly and it will seem like nothing.”

“We’re people of faith. We’re people who have been presented with this opportunity to participate in a very tangible way in Christ’s mission. These are exciting things,” Givens said. “This is a generational mission. It is a very important mission. And it’s a privilege to be part of it. I invite everyone to come on the mission with me.”

While there may be suggestions on church parking, a hall or meeting rooms, Father Fidyka said that’s not what’s important.

“They forget about one thing. We have all those things because of the altar in the centre. If we have our hope and our faith in this, that’s the most important,” Fidyka said. “What builds the churches? Faith. That was always in the past, in the Church, and will be in the future.”