

Innisfail parishioners aim for Easter Mass in rebuilt church

It's a small-town parish with big dreams.

The parishioners of Our Lady of Peace in Innisfail hope to attend Easter Mass in their new church as they continue to raise thousands of dollars for a rebuild following a devastating fire. For nine months now, Sunday Mass has been held in a school gym.

"In ways, it's made our faith stronger," said Rev. Liju Jose, the pastor of Our Lady of Peace Parish.

"When difficulties like this happen, people always have to put their trust in God. We fully trust Him because we know there is no other way. We have to pray that He will see us through."



Rev. Liju Jose says the church rebuild has strengthened the faith of parishioners. Kyle Greenham, Grandin Media

The December 2018 fire is believed to have been caused by sparks from welding to repair the roof of the church, held up by four wooden pillars that had rotted and weakened over time. The fire left the church, built in 1962 with a unique roof design, beyond repair.

The church was demolished and shovels were in the ground to build a new one by October 2019. The interior is expected to be completed by the end of March, and the goal is to have the first Mass celebrated there at the Easter vigil.

Mass is currently celebrated in the St. Marguerite Bourgeoys School gymnasium. Every weekend Jose and parishioners set up hundreds of chairs and an altar and bring crosses and candles for Mass. They've also set up a small adoration chapel inside the school.

"Faith has played a very large role in our quest to rebuild our church," said parishioner Doug Barlund.

"We had faith that we could rebuild the church. We had faith that we could gather enough pledges to make the \$600,000 loan to rebuild. And we pray every weekend that God will watch over our project and bring it to a spiritual conclusion."



The church has raised \$150,000 of its \$600,000 loan from the Archdiocese of Edmonton through a turkey supper, raffles and calls for donations. A raffle is underway for travel vouchers and there will be another raffle to win a vintage 1978 Corvette. There is also a gofundme page for donations.

"Times are tough for everybody in this economy, but people are doing all they can," said parishioner George Rehman. "We just keep trying to think of

different things that will draw some attention to our cause and make some money. The church is being rebuilt now, so we've got to find a way to pay for it."

The new church was initially designed at an estimated cost of \$1 million, but plans were downsized to something the parish of 100 families could afford.

"For a small community to have a major project like this can be very difficult," said Jose. "Everything is based on donations; we do not have any other income. So we have to work on many limitations – particularly financial. We had to have discussion after discussion to simplify the design of the church as much as we could."



Doug Barlund

Walls have been framed and roof trusses installed. The roof is now a basic open gable design, and its interior will be an open space with a sacristy and cry room near the church entrance.

"It feels a lot more like we've advanced and things are coming to a head," said Barlund. "There was certainly some aggravation as we were waiting and waiting, but now that construction has begun people feel more encouraged.

"It will be a joyous time to get back into our own church and celebrate Mass in that formal and reverent environment."

The pews, altar, and stained glass windows of the former church are in storage and will be brought back as construction nears completion. Rehman said there is a lot of anticipation about celebrating Easter in the new church.

"I think there will be a lot of pleased parishioners on that day," he said. "It

will definitely lift spirits and give all of us a feeling of accomplishment.”