

## [New \\$17M Camrose church among those building up as others struggle](#)

Declining church attendance, priests shortage and rising building costs are common factors that are forcing dioceses across the country to close churches and amalgamate parishes.

However, it is not all bad news. There are some areas of the country where brand new churches are going up.

For now, the \$17-million, 35,000-square-foot [St. Francis Xavier Church](#) is a hollow building that towers over a main street in Camrose, about 100 kilometres southeast of Edmonton. But in a few months time, Rev. Larry Pederson said it will be a shining beacon of Christ's presence in the small city.

"This is such a positive and important statement for our community, this building," said Pederson. "The fact that we have the courage to build in this day and age."

In a way, St. Francis Xavier Church was a solution to these factors for the [Archdiocese of Edmonton](#). The current church building was built in 1963 and Pederson said the parishioners outgrew the facility a long time ago. The costs of maintaining the building are also rising faster than the parish can manage.

"There's no hall here. There's very few meeting rooms. The facilities are just not accommodating our needs," said Pederson. "Another important thing is that we cover an area outside of ourselves."



**Rev. Larry Pederson**

As pastor of St. Francis Xavier Church, Pederson is also pastor to five mission

churches in the area. The goal for this new building is to expand the facilities to accommodate the 1,100 families, as well as the surrounding communities.

“Right from the beginning, I included all of them in the planning,” said Pederson. “Some of them have Mass (at their home churches) about once a year, so this is their centre now for the Sunday Mass. And probably, our territory will expand even more in the future.”

Plans for the new church has been 15 years in the making. During that time, the parish community was responsible for raising \$17 million for the build. The Archdiocese of Edmonton provided a loan for the amount the parish was short, but the parish will have to pay the full amount of the loan back, plus interest.



An artist's drawing shows the new St. Francis Xavier church.

The Archdiocese of Edmonton acquired six acres of property and in 2015, they broke ground. The new St. Francis Xavier Church is set to open in October this year.

Similar to St. Francis Xavier Parish, chancellor Msgr. Murray Kroetsch in the [Diocese of Hamilton](#) said building new parishes has become a more economic solution than restoring old churches. Our Lady of Lourdes Parish and Corpus Christi Parish have been worshipping in church buildings that are 60 to 70

years old.

Anticipating the rising costs of maintaining the aging buildings of these neighbouring parishes, Kroetsch is working with them to start a new parish named after St. Catherine of Siena.

“It’s the first experience we’ve had of this in the Hamilton diocese where we’ve closed two parishes in order to make a new parish,” said Kroetsch.

“Both are very viable parishes but the two churches are in desperate need of repairs that are going to be very, very costly.... It just wasn’t a responsible use of our resources.”

The diocese acquired a large piece of land and Kroetsch is working closely with both communities to raise the \$13-\$15 million needed for the build.

“I don’t think it’s any more of a challenge to build (new churches) today. It’s always a challenge because it’s a financial commitment that’s required. Many parishes, they built the church and they’re paying the church debt for many years, but it’s like people buying a house and they have to pay the mortgage down.”

Kroetsch said that the Hamilton diocese has its eyes on a couple of other parishes, discerning future needs for new parishes. However, parishes aren’t built in a day.

In fact, David Finnegan, director of Planning, Properties and Housing in the [Archdiocese of Toronto](#), said establishing new parishes can be a seven- or eight-year process. And even before a parish is formally established by Cardinal Thomas Collins, a lot of work goes into researching the need for a new parish.

“In terms of planning for new parishes, you have to first have the need there, the Catholic population projections in that area,” said Finnegan.

“We consult with the school boards, we consult with the regional bishops, pastors in the area and developers, municipality planning consultants, so there’s a lot of work that goes into studying the need for future parishes.”

Finnegan said the archdiocese has seen a gradual but steady growth. In the past 15 years, he said he’s seen a new parish open its doors approximately once every year. The Greater Toronto Area is becoming more populated and as more young families move to the suburbs, the archdiocese is working to keep up with the demand for churches.

“It’s very positive for the archdiocese and for the Catholic community in our archdiocese,” said Finnegan.

The archdiocese will celebrate the opening of its newest parish, St. Josephine

Bakhita Church in Mississauga, on May 2. Established in 2008, it is the only parish in Canada named after the African-born saint. For the past 10 years, pastor Rev. Mark Villanueva has been celebrating Mass in a local high school.

Finnegan said the archdiocese makes sure that the pastor who is shepherding a new parish is well-supported, especially during the first few years.

“After the parish is established and the pastor is appointed, there’s a meeting that takes place with that pastor and various departments sit down with him,” he said. “We make sure that we are providing as much guidance and support as we can give to the new pastor.”

Finnegan said the first priority for the Planning, Properties and Housing office is to assist the new pastor in finding a rectory to live in. Then, they must find a temporary worship space, which is usually a Catholic school gymnasium.

Different departments throughout the archdiocese also provide the pastor support, such as spiritual formation and fundraising.

“It takes a lot of prayer, certainly a lot of prayer, and it takes a lot of team effort,” said Rev. Joseph Grima, pastor of the newly-established Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish which held its first Mass in an elementary school gym in Markham, Ont., last September. “It’s important that (parishioners) engage in that way and participate.”

So far, about 300 families have registered to be a part of Blessed Ozanam Parish. With four elementary schools and one high school within its territory, it is growing by the hundreds every week.

“There is a huge excitement. I keep telling them, ‘You are the founding families of this parish’, ” said Grima. “It’s just a question of bringing knowledge to the community of the new parish... It’s a question of educating people and helping them understand that we need your support now, not when the church is built or after the church is built, but now.”