

# Winter fire in church roof displaces Innisfail parishioners over Christmas

A small parish in central Alberta is facing a big challenge.

The parishioners of [Our Lady of Peace](#) in Innisfail have a \$600,000 bill to replace the roof of their church after a devastating fire just before Christmas. Temporary repairs to the fire-ravaged wood beams will last only until the summer.

Rev. Liju Jose, pastor of Our Lady of Peace, said his parishioners were happy to return to the church for Mass in the New Year after celebrating Christmas at a school. "It was good, but now we have to replace the whole roof. There's a limited time we have to work. It's challenging."

The church's insurance company managed the temporary repairs to the structure's beams, but due to the condition of the roof before the fire, the insurance may not cover the replacement of the roof.

Due to rotting in the wood beams, the church was already planning to replace the roof. Before the fire, it had the option of waiting another year to replace the roof. The fire cut the church's time to replace the roof to just six months.

The insurance company will determine whether it will help with the replacement costs after the completion of a report from the engineer, said Liju.



Rev. Liju Jose

A second Sunday collection has been added to raise money to replace the roof, but it's a big task for the 200 to 250 families of the parish. The church was forced to close on Dec. 22 after one of its rotting wood beams caught fire several hours after undergoing welding repairs.

"It was smoldering fire. There was no flame but it was burning inside the wood beam," said David Flynn, who was driving by the church with his family around 9 a.m. when he saw smoke on the southeast side of the building.

Flynn alerted the Innisfail Fire Department when he saw one of the beams burning on the outside of the church's inverted roof. No one was inside the building at the time.

"I was glad we noticed it before it turned into a bigger fire, because that would've been really unfortunate to happen just before Christmas," Flynn said.

The fire was extinguished before it could spread to other parts of the roof and structure, but the weakened beams made the building unsafe for parishioners. Christmas masses were held in the gymnasium at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Catholic School while repairs were being made.

The parish celebrated its first Mass back in the church building on Jan. 5.

"It was OK, people co-operated and we moved almost everything," said Father Jose. "But we knew it's a school gym, not a church. There was some difference, but people were happy, I believe."

Extended steel plates were installed to support the church's wood beams. However, the fix on the hyperbolic roof system, which resembles a saddle shape, is only temporary. The parish will have to replace the entire roof on the 55-year-old building by this summer.

The new roof won't have the same saddle shape, Father Jose said.

"That type of roof needs more money because the structure is more complicated, so the new style will be more economical," he said, adding building maintenance is even more of a priority now.

The repairs could take up to five months, meaning the parishioners will likely return to the school gymnasium for Mass this summer, until the roof is fixed.

In the meantime, they're glad to be back in the church building.

"Everything is fine, for now," Father Jose said.