

Catholic Churches in Foam Lake Enter into Historic Agreement

- - submitted on behalf of:
 - Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church and Christ the King Roman Catholic Church, Foam Lake, SK
 - written by Nevin Halyk, Chair of the Catholic Churches of Foam Lake Committee

As of January 1st, the two Catholic Churches in Foam Lake have shared the same building. Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church and Christ the King Roman Catholic Church have signed an agreement that will see the Holy Eucharist building on Cameron Street in Foam Lake co-owned by both parishes.

The co-ownership agreement is the result of several years of discernment and planning. The process to explore the possibility of co-ownership was spoken of informally for many years, but gained momentum in 2009 when representative committees from each parish met to explore the possibility of sharing the same building. The process gained significant momentum when the bishops of each respective parish added their encouragement for the process to proceed in 2014.

The reasons for co-owning the same worship space are compelling – these reasons helped to stimulate further discussion between parishes. Bernie Schultz, Parish Council Chairperson for Christ the King, stated that the growth of the Roman Catholic parish and the aging condition of the church on Broadway street were strong reasons to explore a partnership with Holy Eucharist. “Our church has been renovated several times, but remained too small to host large events that would occur several times each year such as weddings and funerals. In addition, the original church building is over 70 years old and required very significant capital expenditure to maintain. Our parish has experienced steady growth in the past several years, and we were feeling the pressure to act.” In addition, Schultz cited the cost of building a new structure as an obstacle. “In 2014 the cost per square foot for new construction that would suit our needs seemed prohibitive, so we began looking at all sorts of options as a parish for affordable and appropriate worship space.” According to Schultz, approaching the Ukrainian Catholic parish seemed to be a natural next step. “We know that the sharing of churches is getting more common, and our closest possible fit is another catholic church, that being Holy Eucharist.” Ideologically, the churches are identical in belief; the differences between them are in the type of liturgy used by each and regional church hierarchy. “We have different bishops, but the same pope and the same beliefs, so it seemed natural for us to approach Holy Eucharist with the idea of co-owning the church”.

In fact, the two churches have been partners informally or formally at different times in their history together in Foam Lake. Holy Eucharist began by being served by priests from Yorkton in the 1940’s, where masses were held in family homes. In 1948, land south of highway 16 was purchased for a building, and the Holar Church was purchased and moved. This building and location were used until the current building was built and opened in 1965. Interestingly, from 1949 until 1953, Christ the King Parish used this church for some of their services. During the following years, many joint activities took place, including Sacrament Preparation, Catechism Classes, and interactions between the parishes through membership in the Knights of Columbus and other groups. This pre-established relationship, which worked well, was extended to include discussions regarding church sharing.

Christ the King Church enjoys a similar history. Before 1949, Roman Catholics in the area were served by priests from surrounding areas with masses occurring in member homes. In 1954, the parish purchased an Anglican Church from the Hampstead area and moved it to a lot on south Main Street. The parish quickly outgrew this building and in 1968 a church from Beckingham was purchased and moved to its current location on Broadway street. In 1981, the church was expanded with the addition of the hall. It is this current building that was needing significant upgrades.

Bohdan Popowych, Chairman of Holy Eucharist, indicated that a desire to efficiently use resources and space factored into the co-ownership negotiations. “We have two catholic parishes in town, both spending on infrastructure improvements, maintenance and utilities. The opportunity to use our resources more effectively is an important factor. As Christian communities, it makes sense to use our financial resources for evangelization and growth rather than wasteful double management. This agreement is also about proper stewardship of our gifts.”

During the exploration phase, each parish had processes in place where parishioners could voice concerns and ask questions. Each parish had a series of meetings when options were explored. Schultz spoke of Christ the King’s discussion: “We costed out different possibilities – building new, renovating, co-ownership – we presented each scenario to our parishioners and had open discussions. Once everyone had a chance to be heard, we had a parish vote”. Each parish had a vote by membership, and in each case a clear majority were in favour of pursuing co-ownership. Once these processes were complete, the legal departments of the Roman Catholic Diocese and the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy got involved to help construct a legal agreement for sale and management. This agreement was completed and put in place by Jan. 1 2016.

Since mid-January, both parishes have been using their shared facility. Christ the King has moved several items over for use in their new home, and Holy Eucharist parishioners have been clearing up and making room for their partners. Bernie Schultz has been impressed with the process: “Both parishes have worked hard to be accommodating and sensitive. This is a significant disruption for both parishes, and for the most part the move is going very well.” Says Popowych: “Compromise and cooperation describe the way that we have been operating. There are going to be some bumps in the road, but in the end we are two Christian communities working it out. It has gone much better than anyone has expected, and the partnership is working very well.”

A joint committee made of parishioners from each parish meet frequently to manage concerns regarding joint use, expenditures and the like. Otherwise, each parish operates as a separate entity within the building. Masses are scheduled to not conflict, and the calendar is filling up quickly with the activities of both parishes. “Our two parishes together make for a busy building”, says Popowych. “This is what a church should be – very much alive! It will mean creative solutions for each parish to avoid conflicts, but we can already see that the ‘new normal’ is pretty exciting.” Currently, a paper calendar is used for joint scheduling, but an online scheduling calendar is in development that would see all events scheduled and accessible in real time by all parishioners.

Over the course of the next several months, important parts of the Christ the King identity will become part of Holy Eucharist, including the church bell and the stained glass windows. Parishioners have made commitments to assist with projects going into the summer, using their skills and labour to get the physical transition completed. Eventually, Christ the King Parish will disperse unnecessary items from their building and prepare it for sale. Bernie Schultz indicates no clear timeline for this process: “This is an innovative project, and we are leaving timelines open on the ultimate fate of our original church building.”

Plans are in the works for a joint celebration in the next few months. Parishes are hoping for a “large and joyful” celebration in the summer that would see a both bishops and large numbers of people affirming this historic agreement. In summary, both Parish chairpersons agree that the process has been stressful and exciting, and ultimately very rewarding. Says Bernie Schultz: “It’s going to result in growth for each parish. It’s a great witness to the greater community of what God can accomplish when we are open to listening and working together.”