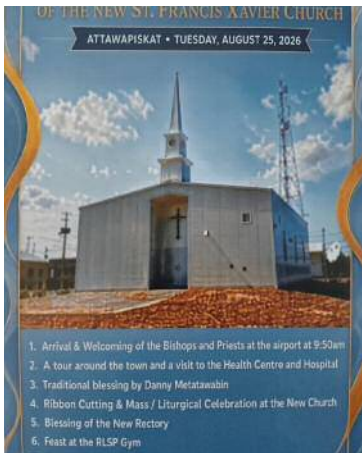


A church rises anew



Diocese of Hearst-Moosonee

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On August 25, in the parish of St. Francis Xavier in Attawapiskat, we experienced a historic day: the dedication of the new church, five years after the fire that destroyed the former building in 2021. To reach the community, a chartered plane had been arranged. We were 34 people in total, including two bishops (Bishop Campeau of Thunder Bay and myself) and seventeen priests travelling from Timmins up to James Bay. The trip was delayed by two and a half hours because of fog that morning. Upon our arrival, a community was waiting for us with great anticipation. After such a long wait—five years—the hope so often expressed by its members was finally becoming reality.

But what is a church dedication? It is the solemn celebration by which the Church consecrates a building for the worship of God and for the celebration of the Eucharist. A church becomes a visible sign of the Church, the People of God, and a place set apart for prayer and the sacraments.

The celebration led us through the rites of dedication: the solemn entrance and the handing over of the church to the bishop (symbolized by the giving of the keys), the Liturgy of the Word, the Litany of the Saints, the placing of relics in the altar, the prayer of dedication, and then the anointing of the altar and the walls with Sacred Chrism. The incensation and the lighting of the altar and the church prepared us for the celebration of the first Eucharist on the newly consecrated altar.

Rebuilding a church that has burned down is far more than a construction project. It is a way of expressing the resilience of a community that rises again. In our present time, this church also becomes a symbol of the reconciliation hoped for between First Nations peoples and the Christian faith. During the homily,

I affirmed that this reconciliation is truly desired—both by myself and by Christians. But our hope goes further: it expresses the longing for a genuine new life.

Father John O'Brien, SJ, rector of the Shrine of the Canadian Martyrs in Midland, came with the relics of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. During the veneration of these relics, the profound devotion of the Cree people, of all ages, deeply moved everyone present.



After the celebration, a banquet brought us together—including some traditional Indigenous dishes!—and then it was time to begin the journey home. For me and for all who took part, this day will remain truly memorable.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to the construction of this church, to the organization of the trip, the celebration, and the banquet. Above all, I give thanks to God for His blessing and for His presence, felt throughout the entire day.

Let us pray for our Cree brothers and sisters, that this new church may be for them a place of peace, faith, healing, reconciliation, and hope. May this church be an open home where generations come together. May God dwell in the midst of His people and accompany all who place their hope in Him.

+Bishop Pierre Olivier Tremblay, O.M.I.
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