

A Journey of Faith

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The story of St. Joseph's Basilica goes hand in hand with the history of Edmonton itself. It was a journey of faith, hope and waiting; a story of the incredible dedication and determination of Edmonton Catholics who dreamed of building a Cathedral.

A Cathedral is the Church of the Bishop and is the hub connecting all parishes. It is a symbol of authority, permanence and faith to the community.

St. Joseph's Basilica often is referred to as one of Edmonton's stately landmarks but its beginnings were more humble. Edmonton's increasing population required another Church. In 1913, a basement was excavated but with the First World War, the project had to be abandoned. In 1924, work began again on a new church. The first services were held in the basement in 1925. That year, it was chosen by Archbishop O'Leary as the Cathedral Church for Edmonton.

Dreams to build a cathedral remained alive but the depression and the Second World War delayed the construction. For almost 40 years, the Cathedral basement was the heart of the Catholic community in Edmonton.

Only in 1961 did the Cathedral upper structure begin to rise. Finally, after 50 years of waiting, the Cathedral was completed. It was blessed and officially opened on May 1, 1963. Walking into it, one is touched by its beauty. The peaceful atmosphere of its interior is appreciated by many.

Over the past 47 years, St. Joseph Basilica has celebrated many significant events. But one special event was a visit by Pope John Paul II, in September, 1984. He bestowed on it the honorary title of Basilica, one of only two in Western Canada.

In keeping with Pope John Paul's efforts to build bridges with all faiths, an interfaith service was celebrated with representatives of many faiths. This was the first of many interfaith services to follow in Edmonton.

Although made of stone, St. Joseph Basilica is truly a living community and a beacon of light. It exudes tradition and devotion, stories and history. Church bells call worshippers to Sunday celebrations and remind them of the traditional three-times-a-day prayer. Parishioners fill the Church for the five Sunday services and leave inspired by the prayerful liturgies and the sacred music. Worshippers often linger after services to listen to the magnificent Casavant organ.

On weekdays, amidst the busyness of their lives, people come to its noon-hour and after-work services to pause, pray and thank God. "This community provides me with a venue to meet Jesus Christ, nourish my faith, and interact with other people and with other young adults" was a comment of a young adult.

It was a 24-hour open-door church providing a sacred space for worship and quiet prayer at any time of day or night while its pews gave refuge to tired bodies of homeless people until 1980 when an arsonist caused extensive damage to the interior.

In the words of former Archbishop Thomas Collins: "Beauty is a sign of God's presence. As we look at the images of beauty in this church, we are shown how to be God's people, making this world a better place. The Basilica is right where it should be, here on Jasper Avenue, in the hustle and bustle of our lives".



St. Joseph's Basilica