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Cathedral building new ties with renovations

By: Arielle Godbout



*Fred Kelly, who led a smudging ceremony to help launch St. Boniface Cathedral's new vision and restoration project last week, stands in the cathedral's ruins.
(Photo by Arielle Godbout)*

The smell of sage and the beating of the drum helped launch St. Boniface Cathedral's new vision and restoration project last week.

For Fred Kelly — a Southdale resident who led the smudging ceremony for the gathered guests — the inclusion of the aboriginal tradition was significant.

"When I was going to residential school not so long ago, these were the kinds of ceremonies that were banned" he told the crowd.

Reconciliation and unity are integral parts of the cathedral's new vision, which was launched on April 11 in conjunction with a \$6 million fundraising campaign to renovate the church and its grounds.

Archbishop Albert LeGatt, co-chair of the heritage cabinet committee leading the project, said the cathedral's much-needed repairs provided an opportunity for the parish to think about its larger role in the community.

The church, its cemetery and the iconic ruins of the previous cathedral — which was destroyed by fire in 1968 — are already used by different groups for events.

"I think it's just touching the potential," LeGatt said.

He said the cathedral envisions itself becoming a sacred gathering spot for all faiths and cultures, much like The Forks — encouraging reconciliation and unity through multi-faith events, such as concerts.

LeGatt's co-chair, Gérald Labossière, said the church is an important heritage site — in part because it is the final resting place of Louis Riel — and also serves as a destination hub and tourism gem.

All those aspects are incorporated into the new vision, he said.

To help fulfill its new vision, the cabinet committee — which will advise the cathedral on how to reach out beyond its parish — is multi-faith. Members include Phil Fontaine, former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and Senior Rabbi Alan Green of Shaarey Zedek Synagogue in River Heights.

"I believe that this may be the first time in the history of the Catholic Church that such an invitation has been issued, and accepted," he said, saying it is a step in the direction of a more peaceful world.

The cathedral's first phase of renovations — pegged at \$3 million, with \$1.65 million already raised — is set to take place this year, and will include repairs to the roof, altar window, and restoration of the ruins.

The second \$3 million phase — including interior renovations, mechanical and electrical upgrades, and new lighting and sound equipment to increase the church's capacity to host events — is scheduled to begin next year.

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