

Major reno for St. B. Cathedral

Historic house of worship undergoing multimillion-dollar restoration

CATHOLICS in St. Boniface are spending millions to repair and renovate their modern cathedral.

"It's a whole revitalization and restoration project," project manager Julie Turenne-Maynard says of the \$6-million renovation scheduled to begin next spring at St. Boniface Roman Catholic cathedral.

"The facility (the cathedral) is almost 40 years old and the basilica is over 100 years old."

The project includes replacing the metal roof of the cathedral, which was constructed in 1972 inside the stone ruins of the basilica. That grand stone church was destroyed by fire on July 22, 1968.

As well as a new roof, the cathedral needs updates to its plumbing and wiring, renovations to its parish hall and repairs to water-damaged plaster, especially where the new church joins the sacristy of the old basilica at the east end of the building, says Rev. Marcel Damphousse.

Those planned improvements follow \$175,000 of just-completed exterior work to repair the steps to the basilica and reset the paving stones in the courtyard and the sidewalks through the cemetery.

"We've redone the sidewalk leading to the (1908) cathedral and levelled the paving stones that were there," explains the priest, now in his fourth year at the cathedral.

"We figured it would be wise to do this now because of the safety issues."

Workers are still repairing the masonry in the three arches facing Taché Boulevard, once the front doors to the massive stone French Romanesque basilica, completed in 1908 and destroyed by fire six decades later.

Further masonry repairs to the other walls of the ruins may be needed, says Turenne-Maynard.

"While we're at it, we want to look at all the ancient walls so they can be preserved for a long period of time," she says.

Home to a congregation of 900 families and the seat of Archbishop Albert LeGat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Boniface, the cathedral also is a popular and much-photographed tourist destination, drawing about 100,000 visitors annually.

The iconic image of the windowless ruins figure prominently in published and online materials about Winnipeg, explains an official with Tourism Winnipeg.

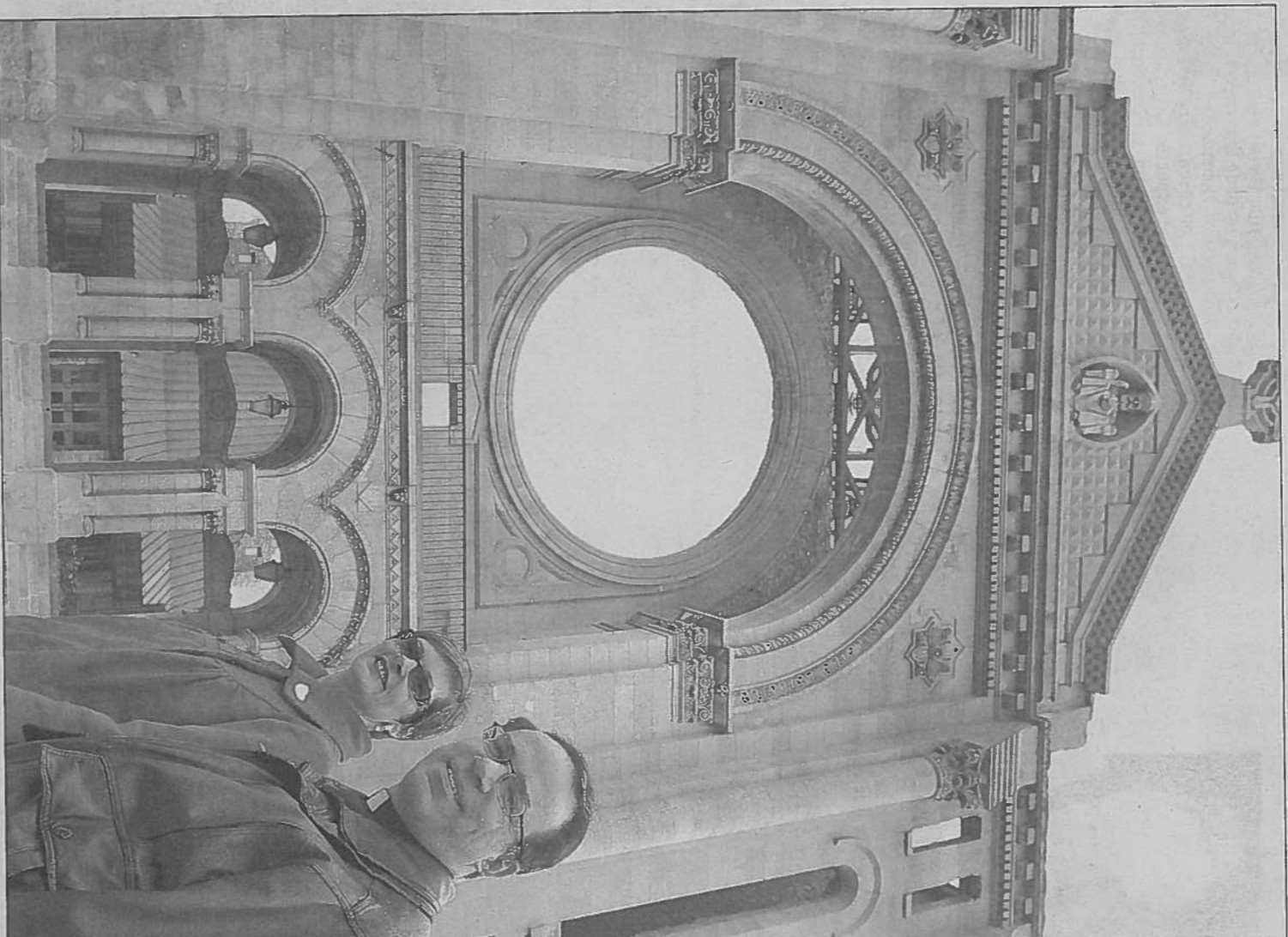
"It tells the story of Manitoba's makeup from a Métis point of view," says senior-vice-president Chantal Sturk-Nadeau of the basilica and the adjacent cemetery, where Métis leader Louis Riel is buried.

"It's telling a story of our history and where we come from."

That story goes back nearly two centuries, when Father Joseph Norbert Provencher, later the first bishop of St. Boniface, came to Western



BRENDA SUDERMAN



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Rev. Marcel Damphousse and Julie Turenne-Maynard, project co-ordinator, outside the cathedral.

Canada to establish a Roman Catholic mission, says the current bishop.

"It's obviously, by its size and its beauty, one of the defining landmarks of Winnipeg," says Archbishop LeGat.

LeGat says funds to renovate the cathedral will be solicited from local Catholics, but the larger community will be invited to contribute to

repairs to the historic site.

"It's a place that draws not just Catholics, but the citizens of Manitoba, for many reasons."

The repairs and renovations are scheduled to begin next April, and all the work could take up to a year to complete, explains Gerry Labossiere, chairman of the fundraising committee.

As well as preserving the cathedral's heritage

and history, the repairs, restorations and renovations allow the congregation freedom to imagine using their building differently.

"What do we want it to be in the future? How do we want to reflect where the Catholic church is today?" asks Labossiere.

In the near future, Turenne-Maynard expects the cathedral, cemetery and ruins will become an even greater draw for tourists after the completion of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, just across the Red River from the cathedral grounds.

"We want to ensure the cathedral and basilica will be there to serve pastoral needs for decades to come," she says.

"We're also looking at the community and how to make this a spiritual place for anyone who wants to be at peace, spiritual and reflective."

No matter what their faith tradition, Winnipeggers view the ruins of the basilica as part of the city's landscape and visit the provincial heritage site year-round, says Damphousse.

"We have the cathedral, the cemetery, but it also a living community," says the priest, who recites mass daily in the cathedral.

"It's a historic site in which there's still a living faith community. We want it to grow and serve our community."

■ The St. Boniface Cathedral, blessed in 1972, is the sixth church and third cathedral to be built along the banks of the Red River at the corner of Taché and Cathédrale. The first church was a small log building constructed in 1818.

■ The cathedral is known to Roman Catholics as the Mother Church of Western Canada.

■ The current cathedral rose from the ruins of the 1908 stone basilica, which seated 2,000, destroyed by fire on July 22, 1968. Winnipeg architect Etienne Gaboury designed the new limestone and wood structure to fit within the walls of the old basilica and incorporated the sacristy, façade and walls of the 1908 building.

■ Early bishops of St. Boniface include Provencher, Taché and Grandin, who have been immortalized in Winnipeg street names.

■ The cathedral cemetery is the final resting place of Métis leader Louis Riel and many early Roman Catholic settlers and missionaries. A crypt with the remains of St. Boniface's bishops is housed in the façade of the basilica.

■ St. Boniface Cathedral was designated a provincial heritage site in 1994.

Sources: www.cathedralestboniface.ca
www.gov.mb.ca/chc/hc/bprow/index.html

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