

Church undergoes major transformation

BY GAIL JANSEN
SWIFT CURRENT

There were some who thought it couldn't be done.

Reaction from residents was mixed when in December of 2007 the Swift Current Catholic community took possession of the former Pratt GM Pontiac site, with the intent of turning it into their new church.

Some people just couldn't see how a car dealership could be turned into a place of worship, but thanks to the hard work and dedication of the many volunteer parishioners and hired contractors enlisted to turn the vision into a reality, it's a vision that is only months away from being realized.

Under the leadership of Parish Priest Fr. Sathias Anthony, a group of core volunteers have demolished, hammered, built, sanded, painted and polished for more than a year to create a new larger parish and parish hall that they are hoping will better serve the needs of their community. And they've done it well.

"We looked at all different angles when looking for a

new Church," says Ted Wallin, one of the many retired volunteers who works at the church daily. "From building new, to renovating an existing building and all the costs associated. As the costs of building new escalated, renovating once again became a viable option for us, so we returned to the idea of using the dealership."

With more than 4,000 volunteer hours logged in the creation of the new parish it's a labour of love that has ultimately saved them, depending on how you value the labour, anywhere from \$10,000 to \$200,000.

With no set in stone end date and no rush to get out of the building they currently reside in, the volunteers have been able to take their time and not rush the project, which has in turn has meant that no real challenges have arisen.

"The work has gone really well," says Wallin. "An architect drew up the plans, we got all of our building permits and we haven't come across anything unforeseen. The building was set up well, so we've been able to keep moving along steadily."

The first phase of a potential two-phase project is a large welcoming area, where the church's administrative offices will be found and where parishioners can gather prior to entering the sanctuary. Just beyond the welcoming area is a long hallway. To the left parishioners will find a larger more modern sanctuary that will be able to seat 460 at full capacity, and on their right a new church kitchen and community hall with a capacity to sit at least 200.

"A lot of thought and collaboration has gone into every aspect of the design," says Wallin. "It's all on one level to make it easier for seniors to access, there are large meeting rooms where friends and family can gather before a funeral or a wedding, and there is plenty of storage and cupboard space for all the church's present and future needs."

The building is expected to be officially blessed and opened by Archbishop Daniel Bohan sometime in June. In addition to all of the volunteer work put in by the

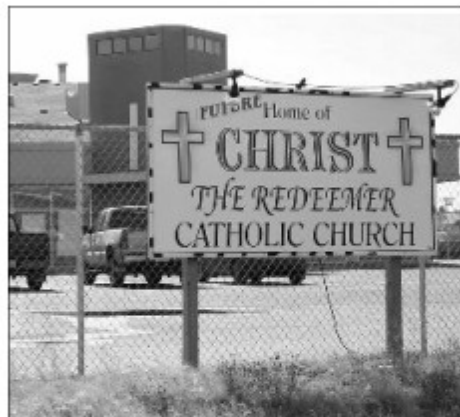


Photo by Gail Jansen

The location of the new Catholic Church.

parishioners, Wallin says they have also used many local contractors with whom they have achieved some great results.

"The contractors we have had have been simply awesome to work with. There haven't been any delays with any of them."

Phase 2 of the project is still a distant plan, one that will grow and change as the community continues to grow, but for now all involved are pleased with the building they have.

"The needs assessment that was carried out before we started," says Wallin, "It showed us as a Building Committee that what they wanted to see in a new church was more and better access to parking, a bigger church hall, more office space for our administrative staff and lastly a larger church itself. With this building we have all that and more."



Photo by Gail Jansen

Ted Wallin points to the design plans volunteers followed as they renovated their new church building.