

Chaldean Catholic community purchases new church building in Saskatoon

By **Andréa Ledding**

The Chaldean Catholic community, made up of families and individuals who have had to leave Iraq in recent years, have a new place to call home – the church formerly known as St. Timothy’s Anglican, on Lansdowne Ave in southeast Saskatoon.

Alex Istifo, parishioner and spokesperson, said the search for new space had been on-going for a while.

“We either needed to add on to our current space in Sutherland – perhaps build a second floor – or find a new building,” he explained, adding that their community is growing. Having a strong vibrant parish combined with a supportive community only serves to continue to draw more parishioners to the area. “There are more and more coming from overseas,” he said.

With almost 180 registered families, it adds up to over a thousand people - and growing. The community had previously shared a priest with the other large western Canadian Chaldean Catholic parish in Calgary, but this meant having a priest only every second week.

“We now have our own priest, we have only had him about six months,” said Istifo, explaining that Fr. Sabah Kamora arrived from Iraq, via Turkey and then Michigan. “Bishop Albert LeGatt has been very supportive of us, of course, a huge factor for our community. Bishop Albert and Bishop Ibrahim in Michigan were in contact and this is how having our own priest came about.”

Besides weekly celebrations, having their own priest means regular catechetical instruction for the children – there are now almost 200 youth ages five to 18 years who meet every Saturday to study church teachings with the pastor and celebrate their faith, while those preparing for sacraments meet on Wednesdays as well as weekends.

“The community all came together to make this happen,” explains Istifo of the purchase. They had looked at several churches that were too small, and then made an offer on St. Timothy’s, which had closed down this summer with fewer than 50 families registered, and were able to make a deal at \$1.3 million. The diocese of Saskatoon provided some of the financing “and we were able to sell our other

building for \$600,000, but the community had to raise another \$450,000,” Istifo said.

With the pressure on, in less than three months through donations and fundraising efforts, and the support of many local Iraqi businessmen and donors, the faith community was able to make up the shortfall. “It was really hard, but we pushed, and individuals, families, and the business people in our church made it happen,” Istifo said.

The building will be officially opened and blessed Sunday, Nov. 15, in a celebration that will include LeGatt (who has since been appointed archbishop of St Boniface and will be returning from a trip to Jerusalem only the day before) as well as prominent members of the Chaldean Catholic Church, including Bishop Ibrahim Ibrahim, leader of the largest Chaldean diocese in North America. The Chaldean Catholic Church exists as a separate rite with a patriarch, bishops, and priests, but in full communion with Rome.

Currently, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon is also co-sponsoring a Saskatoon seminarian, Raad Eshoo, from the local Chaldean Catholic community. He is studying this year at St. Peter’s Seminary in London, Ontario.