



Larry MacDougal, Calgary Herald

NEW TIMES: After final sermon at St. Michael and All Angels Church, procession begins to St. Cyprian Church Sunday.

Parish union seals end for 88-year-old chapel

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In their hearts, parishioners of an 88-year-old Anglican church in Calgary's northwest wanted to stay, but in their heads they knew Sunday that the hour had come to leave.

St. Michael and All Angels was built on flat, open prairie in 1909.

Today, it perches on the curb at 335 16th Ave N.W., a busy four-lane artery that doubles as the Trans-Canada Highway as it slices through Calgary.

The congregation of St. Michael's read the writing on the wall, and the message was to join another northwest Anglican church, St. Cyprian's at 2828 19th St. N.W.

In votes on amalgamation by the two parishes there were 277 in favor, six opposed and three abstentions.

On paper, it's clear that the first amalgamation of two Anglican churches in the Calgary Diocese was a good idea, said Robert Pynn, dean of the diocese.

"This is not a bottom-line decision. It is future driven," he explained Sunday. "It's taken vision to move before necessity takes over."

It was also clear Sunday that the parting between a church building and those who worshipped in it was a sweet sorrow.

Emotions were mixed for parishioners.

In her 49 years at St. Michael, Nan Hughes, 89, has buried a husband and seen her twin daughters baptized, confirmed and married there. But she said she glad that most of the parishioners were moving to St. Cyprian's.

Another parishioner, Fay Versteegh, said she felt crushed — another "pillar" in her life is gone.

Progress has claimed her nearby birth home, closed her hospital, the General, and now her church.

"There's sort of a gap in my life."

St. Michael was full for services recently, she observed.

"If the church had always been as full as it was the last two Sundays, they wouldn't have had to move."

Most parishioners said the amalgamation will allow more resources for Christian service.

"We are closing one home and moving to another," said Rev. Brian Way of St. Cyprian's.

The future had long been cloudy for St. Michael — possible widening of 16th Avenue has been "hanging over us" for years, said rector Peter Millen.

Membership has been dwindling and had almost reached a point where there wouldn't be enough money to run the church, Millen added. Forty years ago there were 450 families; today there are 125.

Following Sunday's service of de-consecration, St. Michael will be administered by the Calgary Diocese and rented to a Pentecostal church.

The land and building are valued at \$1.3 million.