

Destroyed by fire, Grantsville parish to rebuild

The fire that devastated St. Ann in Grantsville two days before Christmas may have taken the tiny faith community's church building but it failed to claim the parish's spirit.

Parishioners now worship in the chapel at Newman Funeral Home in Grantsville and the religious education program has adopted a home-based approach under the direction of Camilla Rawe.

For larger liturgies during Palm Sunday and Easter, the parish plans to celebrate Mass at the local elementary school. Liturgies will be held at the funeral home for a year, according to Father James Hannon, pastor of St. Ann and six other churches in Western Maryland.

"The parishioners have been most resilient in the face of all the change that has happened in their lives," he said. "The fire has reminded parishioners that people are the church - not stone and wood," Father Hannon said. That was the message delivered to the community by Father Ty Hullinger, associate pastor, in the first Mass celebrated after the disaster.

"While we certainly miss our church building, we know that we will have a building one day," Father Hannon said. "In the meantime, we carry on and do the best we can."

The pastoral council has met and established a committee to work on plans for a future church building. Parish leaders have also met with archdiocesan officials, Father Hannon said.

"We are certainly hoping to build a new church," he said. "We do not know if the present church will be part of that or not."

The cause of the fire remains undetermined, according to the pastor. The church, built in 1977, sustained significant damage in the blaze - as did office, meeting and

living space.

Steve Adams, pastoral council president and a member of the building committee, said the parish is waiting for a settlement from the insurance company. The company will pay to return the church to the way it was before the fire, he said, but the parish might opt to do additional work.

Parishioners will be surveyed about what they would like to see happen regarding the rebuilding effort, he said. There are more than 100 registered families.

Bishop W. Francis Malooly, western vicar, said he was impressed by the “strong spirit and support of the parishioners” after the fire. Because the nearest church is 30 minutes away in Frostburg, the bishop said it’s important to maintain a Catholic presence in Grantsville.