

## Parishioners and the wider community take the reins in Rise & Shine Breakfast



**By Brock Weir**

As the fire raged in his spiritual home on Friday, Reverend Andy Comar never shied away from the positive.

Holy Week, he said, always signals a sign of new life. What new life would come from the blaze which gutted Aurora United Church could, at that time, only be imagined.

But, less than 24 hours later, hope rose from the ashes and the Aurora United Church, and its people, banded together in steely resolve.

In a remarkable show of strength and solidarity, volunteers that have been the backbone of the church, along with some very welcome assistance from Trinity Anglican Church, were back in action to host their traditional Rise and Shine Breakfast, a partnership with other faith groups in the Aurora Community to provide a warm meal and fellowship to some of our community's more vulnerable citizens.

Those who came to Trinity on Saturday morning were not simply looking for this fellowship the Rise and Shine Breakfast normally dispenses, but they wanted to be together not just in grief, but to mount a plan of action.

‘It would have been so easy to step back and grieve because we were all grieving the loss of a church building and part of the history of Aurora,’ said Carol Lever, one of the founders of the program.

With the help of parishioner Steve Falk and Trinity’s Reverend Dawn Davis, they were soon mobilized with a sense of purpose, and a record number of volunteers to help lend a hand.

‘We called on more volunteers than our regular team who would be here today because we knew how important it would be to provide some additional fellowship today,’ said Ms. Lever. ‘People need to know that we don’t know how, and we don’t know where, but the Breakfast will continue next year. Obviously we haven’t lost our will and we have not lost the commitment of our guests and volunteers because we are here today.’

With over half of their food for Saturday lost in the blaze, the volunteers worked like clockwork to do the necessary grocery shopping, pick up their regular bread donations from Cobs Bakery, which was then bagged up by the helpers.

Among these helpers was 16-year-old Aurora resident Ross Kenyon, who has been volunteering with the program at Aurora United since 2012. He was on a school field trip in Markham at the time and could see the plume of smoke rising from Aurora from there.

‘When my mom picked me up and told me it was the church, I was just really devastated,’ he said. ‘To think I have been wheeling tables since 2012 and they are all burnt now and everything is gone. [Being here today] feels like a heartwarming start to a sunny, warm weekend. All of the people here are amazing.’

These feelings were shared universally by the people in the room.

Andrea Hartley, an Aurora resident who is not a member of Aurora United Church, was out for her morning walk with her son Ty and his friend Daniel and was so moved by the plight of the church she came over to the breakfast looking for ways to donate her time and money to help the congregation.

They shared their meal with Joyce Hagarty, an 18 year member of Aurora United's congregation, who spent her morning in Trinity's kitchen preparing for guests.

"I am just sad at the loss, but it is just a building and we have to regroup and think what our next steps are going to be," she said.

For leaders in attendance ? both church and civic ? events unfolding Saturday morning signalled exactly what the community should be.

"This is what we are, this is the church in action," said Andy. "The Rise and Shine is going to continue with the love of our friends and neighbours. Rise and Shine continues."

Added Councillor John Abel: "To see it happen and transform over here in less than 24 hours is absolutely amazing. I am not surprised, but really impressed at how fast they galvanized and put it together. It shows the character of our community and it shows how important it must be for community members to not forget."

Also on hand to provide his support for the group was Father Joe Gorman of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church. While he said Friday's fire was a "tragedy", the community needs to band together to support those displaced by the loss of "this beautiful central pillar of our community."

"We know a building is a structure," he said. "The church is the people of God, but you need places to worship. This was a beautiful structure in which to worship and it will leave a hole in this community. Nobody was injured, nobody was killed, so it is an opportunity just to move forward with openness, support and anything we can do to help the community."