

# Art for Art's Sake- Father Nathan Siray, Pastor and Parish Priest

Author of the article:

**Pam Doyle**

Publishing date: Mar 11, 2021 • March 11, 2021



Father Nathan Siray is the Pastor and Parish Priest of the Shrine Church of Our Lady of the Rockies in Canmore. photo by Pam Doyle/www.pamdoylephoto.com PHOTO BY PAM DOYLE / BA

## Article content

Siray, who has been living in Canmore since April 2018, was assigned to be the pastor of Our Lady of the Rockies, by Bishop William McGrattan.

“I was serving in a parish in N.W. Calgary and was very surprised to learn I was assigned to Canmore as I expected my predecessor, Father Wilbert Chin Jon, to complete the building of the new church,” Siray said. “Father Wilbert had been assigned to a new leadership in our diocese and there was need for a new pastor. Having grown up in Millarville, Alberta, in proximity to K-Country and the Rockies and having spent much of my childhood in the mountains hiking, climbing, snowboarding, etc., the chance to live in Canmore was an opportunity I was grateful to receive.”

Siray said he’s become a better sport climber since moving to Canmore.

“I’m starting to be more proficient with longer multi-pitch and trad climbs. I did a little ice climbing last year but have spent more time with it this winter. I was invited to try out ice climbing by a parishioner and I really enjoy it, (though the occasional onset of screaming barfies in your frozen hands is not so great),” Siray said. “My foot work is still poor and my technique needs a lot of work but I did complete many top rope climbs on the Tokkum Pole in Marble Canyon so that has been my ice climbing highlight so far this season.”

Becoming a priest was not a path that Siray considered as a child or teen but was something that he began to discern while at McGill University in Montreal, he said. “Though becoming a priest was not where I thought life would lead me, I am grateful that I was called to this life and vocation,” Siray said.

Besides celebrating daily Mass, including two Masses on Saturday and three on Sunday, Siray takes Monday off to ice climb.

“Some of my other activities are celebrating different religious services such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, visits to the sick and dying, leading liturgical celebrations for Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Academy, being available for spiritual counsel, and spending time greeting people who stop by to visit the new church,” Siray said.

He also works with Bishop McGrattan as the Master of Ceremonies for major celebrations at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Calgary.

“What I am most grateful for in being a priest is being present in both the joys and sufferings that people experience, from the joy of baptizing an infant to mourning with the family when they lose someone they love,” Siray said. “People allow you to enter into some of the most significant moments of their lives and I am humbled the trust people place in me and hope I do my best to honour that trust with authenticity and integrity.”

Siray will be ordained a priest 10 years this June. He began university at McGill, then completed his undergraduate degree in Philosophy at Mt. Angel Seminary near Portland, Oregon and then completed two Masters degrees in Theology, one from St. Augustine’s Seminary at the University of Toronto, and another from the Lateran University in Rome (Pope Francis’ University). He did not live in Rome to complete this degree but did it via his studies at St. Augustine’s in Toronto as the two universities are affiliated with each other.

“During my seminary studies I had a variety of summer jobs from working in a greenhouse to a rebar assembly factory to being a waiter and an archivist assistant at the Diocese of Calgary, but never a full time career,” Siray said.

The construction of the new Catholic Church was mostly completed in May 2020, but they still have some final deficiency work to complete, hopefully by the end of summer 2021, he said.

“Currently, the Province of Alberta allows Places of Worship to have in person services at 15% of the building’s fire code occupancy capacity,” Siray said. “This means we can have around 60 people for a service, with two metre social distancing in place and everyone wearing masks.”

People can attend by registering online at the parish website. A full list of instructions of what to expect and health precautions that are observed are described in the sign-up process. In normal, non-pandemic times, the church can seat 430 people.

“Having limited capacity in the church means we have more weekend Masses to try to accommodate those who want to attend. Most weekends, all of our services are full which is great, but not everyone who wants to attend is able to do so,” Siray said. “Upon entering and exiting the church, we have everyone wear masks for the duration of the service and socially distance people by having them sit in every other pew and at two meters apart from each other. We have a dedicated team of volunteers who help to welcome people, sanitize their hands, confirm their registration and then clean the church thoroughly after each service. Our Masses are much shorter than usual, (short sermons which make many people happy), and no social gatherings after Mass. We are grateful we can join to have services. I have been inspired by how well the people of our parish are willing to make sure our church building is a safe place for us to

Siray thinks we all react to the pandemic differently.

“But I hope people can be both authentic in expressing how they are handling the pandemic, be it well or with a lot of frustration, or probably some combination of both,” Siray said. “Another way to cope with the pandemic can be remembering the names of the Three Sisters, (Faith, Hope and Charity). Faith that we can turn to God and others for help and perseverance in these difficult times, Hope that better days are possible and Charity that we have many opportunities to care for others who have been affected by the pandemic.”

They have 200-300 registered parishioners, many of whom live in the Bow Valley, others who live in Calgary or elsewhere but own homes here and spend most weekends in Canmore, he said.

“We also have many visitors for weekend Masses, though not as many now but we hope to see more return once more restrictions are lifted in our province,” Siray said.

His parents still live in Millarville, he said.

“My father is a family doctor in Black Diamond and my mother a retired school teacher,” Siray said. “I have three brothers (I am the eldest), one is a pediatric dentist in Winnipeg but moving back to Calgary with his family this summer, another brother who is a teacher in Calgary with his family and my youngest brother is a doctor, doing his residency in Golden.”

He finds the Rocky Mountains to be spiritual.

“I have had moments in the mountains where like the Prophet Elijah, who long ago went to the summit of Mt. Horeb to encounter God in silence, that I too have experienced where God speaks silently in the depth of my soul,” Siray said.