



Perris Press Release

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Future Looks Brighter for St. James the Lesser

More than 1,200 people braved cold and blustery weather on May 5 to take part in Perris' St. James the Lesser Catholic Church annual fundraiser festival.

A sense of excitement was in the air as The Rev. Edmund Gomez spoke during an outdoor Mass to the assembled crowd, which included several Perris elected officials who also attend services at the 107-year-old parish. The church has acquired a 12-acre site at Nuevo Road and Dunlap Drive for its new campus, which will include a sanctuary, community room, multipurpose center and religious education buildings. St. James currently is hemmed in a small lot in Downtown Perris, and its existing church building has grown far too small to accommodate its 70,000-parishioners.

Decades of donations and fund-raising also have raised sufficient money to begin building a new complex, although a construction timetable has not been finalized.

Speaking on the City of Perris stage that served as a platform for the outdoor service, Gomez thanked the congregation for their faith, persistence and support of the new church. About 500 people assembled under a large tent and another 700 or so stood outside during the service.

"This is the day the lord has made—it's cold and it's windy but it's His nonetheless," Gomez said. "Today we are standing room only. But soon, there will be a church big enough for everyone to sit."

Gomez said that St. James' church encompasses Catholics from Perris, Mead Valley, Good Hope, Juniper Flat, Nuevo and other areas—all who will benefit from the new location.

"We are a big church in a small building," he said. "The new building will help, but it is the people who make the church."

Dignitaries included Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, City Council members Julio Rodriguez and Rita Rogers, Perris Police Chief John Hill and Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley. Busch said that his family has been associated with St. James for decades. His son, Barry, attended classes at St. James Elementary School and was married in the church. The Mayor's grand-daughter, Holly, was baptized in the church.

"We are very fond of St. James church—it's been a big part of our lives here," Busch said. "This is a great day not only for the church but for our entire community. The church has been bursting at the seams with new membership. A new church building is of the utmost importance."

Councilman Rodriguez has spent his entire life as a member of St. James and teaches catechism to parish youth.

"Today you see the impact of peoples' faith on a community," Rodriguez said.

Rogers told the St. James congregation that she felt "so humbled and honored to be here to worship with you."

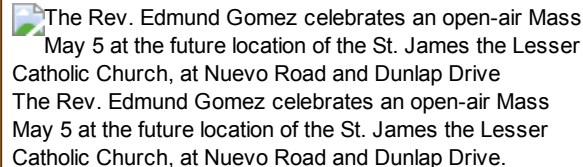
Supervisor Ashley said he has called St. James his home church for 41 years and that his wife has been a member dating back to the 1940s.

"It is really wonderful to see everyone here as we get so close to building our church," Ashley said. "We have had a super-church in Perris for decades and now we'll finally get a building we can all fit into!"

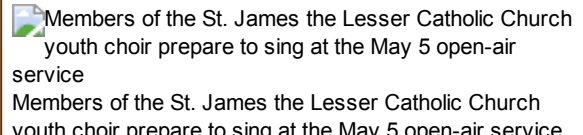
The weekend festival included kiddie rides, an assortment of food vendors, musical performances, remarks from representatives of the Mexican consulate in San Bernardino and the appearance of several "charros," Mexican cowboys with their dancing and prancing horses.

Parishioners like Sofia Medina were delighted with the weekend festival, despite the lack of cooperation from the weather.

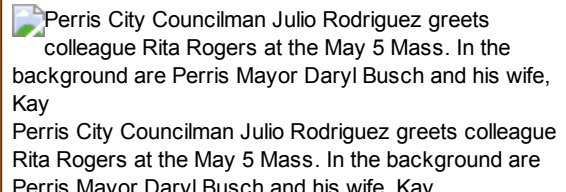
"I'm so proud," she said. "Everyone enjoyed themselves and had a great time."



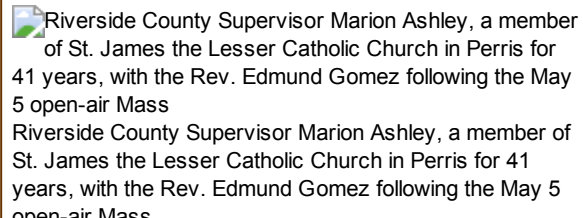
The Rev. Edmund Gomez celebrates an open-air Mass May 5 at the future location of the St. James the Lesser Catholic Church, at Nuevo Road and Dunlap Drive. The Rev. Edmund Gomez celebrates an open-air Mass May 5 at the future location of the St. James the Lesser Catholic Church, at Nuevo Road and Dunlap Drive.



Members of the St. James the Lesser Catholic Church youth choir prepare to sing at the May 5 open-air service. Members of the St. James the Lesser Catholic Church youth choir prepare to sing at the May 5 open-air service.



Perris City Councilman Julio Rodriguez greets colleague Rita Rogers at the May 5 Mass. In the background are Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and his wife, Kay. Perris City Councilman Julio Rodriguez greets colleague Rita Rogers at the May 5 Mass. In the background are Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and his wife, Kay.



Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley, a member of St. James the Lesser Catholic Church in Perris for 41 years, with the Rev. Edmund Gomez following the May 5 open-air Mass. Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley, a member of St. James the Lesser Catholic Church in Perris for 41 years, with the Rev. Edmund Gomez following the May 5 open-air Mass.