Persecution 27 November 2026 | English article

Marawi's Catholics Get a New Cathedral Nine Years After ISIS Siege Destroyed Theirs

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Nine years after ISIS-linked militants destroyed Marawi's St"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Nine years after ISIS-linked militants destroyed Marawi's St. Mary's Cathedral in the 2017 siege, the city's Catholics have a new cathedral. The Pro-Cathedral of St. Thomas of Villanueva was inaugurated on Friday 20 November 2026 in Balo-i, about 20 kilometres from Marawi, and the pews filled with people who had waited almost a decade to worship under a roof of their own again. Florefe Arenas travelled four hours to be there, carrying a photograph of her slain daughter - because for her, the new church is not a building at all, but proof that her daughter's faith did not die with her.

The inauguration fell on a date the community had circled for months. It coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Prelature of Marawi, which was established on 20 November 1976 by Pope Paul VI. Archbishop Martin Jumoad of Ozamiz presided over the consecration, and the restored statue of Mary Help of Christians - the prelature's patron - was returned to her people, arriving on 18 November to crowds waiting in the drizzle.

Arenas was not the only one who made a long journey for the day. Families from across Lanao del Norte came to the Sto. Tomas de Villanueva parish in Maria Cristina, carrying grief and joy in the same hands. A church can be burned, but the people who prayed inside it carry the altar with them wherever they go - and on 20 November, they carried it home.

What they lost in 2017 was more than a building. The original St. Mary's Cathedral, dedicated to Maria Auxiliadora, was destroyed and desecrated when IS-aligned militants seized the city during the Marawi siege. A deadly bombing in 2023 scarred the community again, and for nine years the Catholics of Marawi have worshipped without the cathedral that once anchored their city.

Marawi New Cathedral Built With ?8 Million From Aid To The Church In Need

The new church rose from an ?8-Million fund raised by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) Philippines through a national solidarity caravan. The caravan drew support from 9 archdioceses, 4 dioceses and 29 parishes across the country, turning a local loss into a national act of rebuilding. Construction is about 80 percent complete, with full completion expected in June 2027.

The builders did not start from nothing. Salvaged materials from the destroyed cathedral were worked into the new church, including framed glass panels rescued from the ruins. The old glass now catches the light in a new building - a quiet reminder, built into the walls themselves, that what was broken was not thrown away.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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