



Pallbearers carry the casket of a Guara family member during a funeral Mass at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Miami Beach July 6. Marcus "Marc" Guara, his wife, Anaely "Ana" Rodriguez, and their daughters Lucia, 11, and Emma, 4, perished in the June 24 collapse of a condominium building not far from the Catholic church. (CNS photo/Shannon Stapleton, Reuters)



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St. Joseph Church in Miami Beach is less than a mile from the Champlain Towers building in Surfside that collapsed on June 24, killing nearly 100 people. Fr. Juan Sosa, pastor of the parish since 2010, told NCR they have lost at least 20-25 congregants, and the community is reeling.

"My role is to be a channel of communication, to be the presence of the Catholic Church in the midst of this tragedy. I am trying to take care of the church and be as available as I can," Sosa said.

In an initial reflection about the tragedy [for the Florida Catholic](#), the pastor wrote:

How do you deal with a group of the faithful who reside at a building that collapses unexpectedly in the middle of the night? The answer emerges out of the very tragedy that ultimately touches everyone that hears of it and watches the rubble: You must be present and available, hopeful that God will restore what is broken and will bring peace to those who wait for news of their relatives and friends.

Hope Sadowski, who came to the U.S. from Cuba in the 1960s and has attended St. Joseph's since 1962, said the last two weeks have been incredibly difficult.

"On Saturday morning, I went to church and the building was there. Sunday when I went to Mass, the building was gone," said Sadowski, who could see the rubble from the collapse from the church parking lot.

Sosa and Sadowski described a deep connection between the collapsed building and the parish.

Couples who were married at St. Joseph's and children who received first Communion there were in the building during the collapse, he said.

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Sadowski's friend Ana Mora, who also attended St. Joseph, was killed in the building collapse. The weekend before the tragedy, Mora had waited after Mass to check in on Sadowski's 9-year-old, Steven, who was recovering from health issues, and to share that she had been praying for him.

"Steven now has a bigger angel," said Sadowski.

St. Joseph's offers Mass in English, Spanish, Polish and Portuguese — reflecting its multicultural parishioners. The worship community grows during the winter when they get visitors from South America and the East Coast. Nearby are Jewish congregations and churches of other Christian denominations.

"This tragedy shows not only the best of humanity's support, but an opportunity for ecumenical dialogue. In and out of the church, we have put aside all of our differences, ideological and political, to grieve and minister together," Sosa told NCR.

St. Joseph's has opened its doors to those grieving, welcoming Catholics and non-Catholics, as well as fire rescue personnel and journalists, for a series of prayer meetings.

"Before and after June 24, 2021, we have been a church known for our hospitality," Sosa said.

As the community continues to grieve, Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski encouraged people across the archdiocese to help one another.

"In the days and months ahead, the remarkable solidarity shown to the survivors and to the family members and the loved ones of those who did not survive, must not be allowed to diminish, for they will need our support and accompaniment for months and years to come," Wenski wrote [in a July 14 column](#) for the Florida Catholic.