News



Marileidy Paulino of the Dominican Republic rings the Olympic bell Aug. 10, 2024, as she celebrates after winning gold and setting a new Olympic record in the women's 400-meter final during the 2024 Paris Olympics. The bell, specially cast for the Games by France's Cornille Havard foundry in Normandy, will be placed inside the newly restored Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris during every Mass once the cathedral officially reopens in December. (OSV News/Aleksandra Szmigiel, Reuters)

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During the Paris Olympic Games, track and field champions rang the bronze bell located close to the finish line at Saint-Denis' Stade de France. In December, that same bell will ring in the newly reopened Notre Dame Cathedral during the most sacred part of the Mass.

"We were contacted a few months ago by the Paris Organizing Committee, to see if we would be interested in this bell for Notre Dame," the cathedral's rector-archpriest, Father Olivier Ribadeau Dumas, told OSV News. "And we accepted this proposal."

The bell, weighing 1,103 lbs., was made for the occasion of the Olympic Games by the Cornille Havard foundry, dubbed "the last bell makers of France," located in Normandy at Villedieu-les-Poêles, a small French commune, some 24 miles northeast of famous Mont Saint-Michel.

The foundry produces bells for France's largest churches and cathedrals. In 2013, it produced nine new bells for Notre Dame to mark the cathedral's 850th anniversary. Installed in Notre Dame's north tower, their role was to ring for the cathedral's daily services. The same company was responsible for the restoration of eight of these nine bells, after they had been damaged during the fire of April 15, 2019.

The cathedral's largest bell, known as "le bourdon Emmanuel," is located in the south tower. It dates back to the time of King Louis XIV, at the end of the 17th century, and it rings for historic events, as it did at the end of both World Wars. Emmanuel was not affected by the fire in April 2019 and on special occasions continued to be operated manually as the electrical system overcame renovation.

"It has rung several times since the fire, at Easter and Christmas, and for special occasions such as the death of Pope Benedict XVI," Ribadeau Dumas told OSV News.

"The Olympic Games bell is not destined to join those of two cathedral towers,"

Ribadeau Dumas explained. "It will join two other bells, newly cast by the same company, which will be placed inside the cathedral, in the gallery, not far from the organ. These three bells will ring together during Mass, at the moment of the consecration. They will replace the bells that were used for this purpose at the crossing of the transepts, before the fire completely destroyed that site."

Ribadeau Dumas confirmed that the cathedral bells did not ring during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, contrary to what media reports stated. He did not wish to go back over the moments of the controversial ceremony, where "The Last Supper" was parodied. "What is important is that these two weeks of Games have been a strong moment of fraternity and unity," he insisted. "This fraternity is very precious."

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"These Games have celebrated life, and … relationships", Ribadeau Dumas said. "Thomas Bach, president of the IOC (International Olympic Committee), spoke Aug. 4, on the square in front of Notre Dame, about the links that can be created between sport and religion. That is what we need to remember," he emphasized.

"The unity created by what was experienced in Paris during this period is important, and we need to emphasize what forges bonds," Notre Dame's rector told OSV News. "We will try to do the same when we host the Paralympic Games, which will show the strength of life at the heart of vulnerability." The Paralympic Games in Paris take place Aug. 28-Sept. 8.

Ribadeau Dumas said instead of focusing on the negative comments, he preferred to salute the choreography of hundreds of ballet dancers and firemen who were deployed at another part of the opening ceremony, on the quays and rooftops of Paris.

"This sequence honored the carpenters, and the stone sculptors, who brought Notre Dame back to life. It spoke of the strong spirit of fraternity and unity that also prevailed during the Notre Dame restoration project. It was magnificent," he said.

"Now, we must remember that Notre Dame is not just a piece of heritage," the rector said, months before the highly anticipated reopening of the cathedral Dec. 8.

"It is first and foremost a spiritual place of worship. We are not, of course, going to erase the cultural dimension from the Notre Dame project. But we are now looking forward to the time when the Catholic faithful will be able to enter as worship resumes there. That is what matters most."