News



Urakami Cathedral is seen in Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 2023, marking the 78th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombing of the southwestern Japanese city. (Kyodo News via AP)

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A Nagasaki cathedral has blessed the final piece to complete its restoration nearly 80 years after being destroyed by the second U.S. atomic bomb dropped on Japan: a reproduction of its lost bell restored by a group of Americans.

The new bell was blessed and named "St. Kateri Bell of Hope," by Peter Michiaki Nakamura, archbishop of Nagasaki, at the Urakami Cathedral in a ceremony Thursday attended by more than 100 followers and other participants.

The bell is scheduled to be hung inside the cathedral, filling the empty bell tower for the first time, on Aug. 9, the anniversary of the bombing.

The U.S. bomb that was dropped Aug. 9, 1945, fell near the cathedral, killing two priests and 24 followers inside among the more than 70,000 dead in the city. Japan surrendered, ending World War II days later.

The bombing of Nagasaki destroyed the cathedral building and the smaller of its two bells. The building was restored earlier, but without the smaller bell.

The restoration project was led by James Nolan Jr., who was inspired after hearing about the lost bell when he met a local Catholic follower during his 2023 visit to Nagasaki. Nolan lectured about the atomic bombing in the southern city and its history about Catholic converts who went deep underground during centuries of violent persecution in Japan's feudal era, to raise funds for the bell restoration.

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"I think it's beautiful and the bell itself is more beautiful than I ever imagined," Nolan, who was at the blessing ceremony, said after he test-rang the bell. He said he hoped the bell "will be a symbol of unity and that will bear the fruits of fostering hope and peace in a world where there is division and war and hurt."

Kojiro Moriuchi, the follower who told Nolan about the bell, prayed and gently touched it.

"I'm so grateful," he said. "I hope Urakami Cathederal will be a place for peace-loving people from around the world to gather."

A sociology professor at Williams College in Massachusetts, Nolan is the grandson of a doctor who was in the Manhattan Project — the secret effort to build the bombs — and who was on a survey team that visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki shortly after the bombings.

Nolan, based on materials his grandfather left behind, wrote a book *Atomic Doctors*, about the moral dilemma of medical doctors who took part in the Manhattan Project.