

Christchurch quake death toll rises as ruins probed

by [David Crampton](#) in the [March 22, 2011](#) issue

In the New Zealand city named after a place of faith, churches shattered by a 6.3-magnitude earthquake were still yielding up their dead days after the February 22 temblor as clergy and parishioners in Christchurch grieved and searched for safe places to worship.

The death toll reached 154 on February 28, with at least 50 people missing and hundreds injured. About 600 search and rescue workers looked for survivors in the central city, where several major office buildings were completely destroyed, according to media reports. Estimated damage is \$10 billion.

Rescue workers started the grim task of removing bodies from (Anglican) ChristChurch Cathedral as hopes of finding survivors faded, according to press reports and *Anglican Taonga*, a publication of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. A camera lowered into the damaged nave by workers showed no signs of life. The cathedral's spire crumbled in the quake, collapsing into a stone tower.

"No sound, nothing," said one rescuer. As many as 22 people are believed to have been buried in the rubble, but cathedral staff were safe. The church and spire have been a major visitor attraction.

Since many other churches were rendered inaccessible, a range of worship options being considered included schools and open-air meetings. "The bishop is working on that at the moment," said a spokesperson for Anglican bishop Victoria Matthews.

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Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, the city's biggest Catholic church, was damaged beyond repair, and mass was being celebrated at the nearby cathedral college hall. Some Presbyterian and Uniting congregations were unable to meet due to extensive damage to church buildings and to surrounding roads, as well as continuing disruption to power and water supplies.

—ENInews