

Christchurch cathedral search reveals no quake victims

by [David Crampton](#)

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Wellington, New Zealand, March 7 (ENInews)--Following widespread reports that 20 to 22 people had been trapped inside the Anglican cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand after a devastating earthquake, a complete search has revealed there were no bodies in the rubble.

ChristChurch Cathedral's spire collapsed into its bell tower on 22 February when a 6.3-magnitude earthquake hit New Zealand's second-largest city, causing widespread damage. The death toll is up to 166 people and may rise to more than 200 as search and recovery efforts continue. Authorities have estimated that 10,000 of the city's 140,000 homes will have to be demolished and 100,000 are damaged but can be repaired.

The Anglican cathedral dean, Peter Beck, said he wept when he was informed at 1 am on 5 March that no one had been killed in the cathedral. "I just burst into tears, it was astonishing, I was just speechless at that news," he told Radio New Zealand. "We were expecting to have to don our clerical gear and say prayers for the dead. It's just unbelievable and remarkable. We just thank God, thank God so much."

Assistant Urban Search and Rescue Force commander Paul Baxter told a news conference it had been a "surreal feeling" finding no bodies after completing the search at the cathedral. He said searchers retrieved a cross from the high altar and recovered the church bells.

The bell tower and spire were a prime visitor attraction at the cathedral, itself a downtown landmark and it was thought there had been tourists trapped inside. However, Beck said he had had his doubts. "I always had this sense within me that it was a lot fewer than that. Straight after the quake a young woman was in tears and I gave her a big hug. She was telling me that she had just rushed out of the tower just before the quake and there were people behind her. But where 22 came from I have

no idea."