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## Lakeview church is rebuilding from ground up

Services have been held at two sites

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**By Bruce Nolan**  
Staff writer

A Lakeview congregation of evangelical Christians once scattered by Hurricane Katrina reassembled at the vacant site of their destroyed church Thursday to kick off construction of a bigger, \$11 million replacement.

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"Today is our day of return," the Rev. Keith Collins, pastor of Lakeview Christian Center, told a crowd of city officials, neighborhood leaders, contractors and church members.

"The Saturday before Katrina struck, we put a sign on the door saying 'Services Canceled.' We had no idea we'd never hold services in that building again."

Katrina filled their church with nine feet of water. Months later, the congregation bulldozed it and acquired some neighboring lots to expand its footprint. On Thursday, it started construction of a more visible successor church on roughly the same site, on Fleur de Lis Drive at the edge of Lakeview behind the headquarters of State Police Troop B.

The story of the independent, conservative congregation is typical of hundreds of other congregations.

Displaced across the South, members of a congregation that had numbered about 800 located one another shortly after the storm by cell phone and e-mail. Two weeks after their evacuation, 170 members crowded in and around Collins' Destrehan home to pray together and chart their future.

Many of the church's families lived in Metairie, said Collins. Their losses tended to be substantial, but not total.

In subsequent months a smaller congregation knitted itself back together. Now numbering a little more than 500, it has met in borrowed churches in Boutte and Kenner. The church holds services at First Assembly of God Church in Metairie on Saturdays, and at the Clearview Palace Theatre on Sundays, said Collins.

City Council members Arnie Fielkow, Shelly Midura and a representative from Mayor Ray Nagin's office praised the congregation for its faith, tenacity and investment of hope in Lakeview.

Denise Thornton, founder of the Beacon of Hope Resource Center, a rallying point for Lakeview's recovery, cheered the church's return and its charitable work among its neighbors.

"This is probably one of the biggest commercial or church projects taking place around here," said Collins. "The visibility will be encouraging. This will help boost confidence and encourage people to make a future in this part of the community."

Construction is expected to take about 15 months.

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Bruce Nolan can be reached at [bnolan@timespicayune.com](mailto:bnolan@timespicayune.com) or (504) 826-3344

Construction of the replacement building for the flooded Lakeview Christian Center is expected to take about 15 months. The new building, shown in this rendering, will be larger than its predecessor.