

# Pastor uses retirement funds to help restore church

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**By Carla Wynn**

*Cooperative Baptist Fellowship*

NEW ORLEANS (ABP)—Pastor Lawrence Gaines has spent \$35,000 of his personal retirement funds to help restore his church building, which was devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

“We’ve gotten to the point now where we just don’t have any other (financial) source to keep going,” said Gaines, pastor of Little Zion Baptist Church in New Orleans, earlier this summer.

But a partnership of Baptist groups stepped in to help rebuild some of the city’s deluged church buildings.

Baptist Builders International, a coalition that has been helping Katrina victims find housing, began rebuilding churches in July. The Louisiana-based group is a partnership between the Progressive National Baptist Convention, American Baptist Churches USA, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the District of Columbia Baptist Convention and the Alliance of Baptists—all members of the North American Baptist Fellowship, a regional branch of the Baptist World Alliance.

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Previously, the organization had helped displaced laypeople and pastors find housing for their families or cover financial losses incurred in last

year's catastrophic hurricane. The group also helped reimburse churches outside New Orleans that housed or fed Katrina evacuees, putting a strain on the host congregations' budgets.

In July, Baptist Builders began providing funding and volunteer labor to aid in the rebuilding process for at least five African-American churches in New Orleans.

The initiative involved volunteers from Baptist Builders' affiliated groups working with local volunteers on church buildings and parsonages. Most of the churches already had started renovation, but they exhausted their resources and needed help completing the job.

"We hope to get a number of churches back operating to quicken the restoration of communities," said Elmo Winters, Baptist Builders executive director, as the group started work. "We understand the church is a central part of the community."

Early on, Baptist Builders made inroads among New Orleans pastors by providing more than 100 personal grants. With church members dispersed nationwide, many local congregations quit receiving offerings from parishioners, leaving a funding shortfall for pastors' salaries and church rebuilding efforts.

"Nobody's sending anything, so the only money I had to work with was mine," Gaines said. Once Little Zion Baptist Church is restored, it will provide a worship space for not only his once-100-member congregation but also other African-American churches whose buildings were destroyed or heavily damaged.

The majority of funding for the \$200,000 project comes in part from a financial contribution the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship received from Canadian Baptist Ministries for Katrina relief efforts. Canadian Baptists helped CBF volunteers restore the community of Lacombe, La., after the

storm.

Restoring churches allows members to continue vital ministries like that of Greater Emmanuel Baptist Church, which before Katrina had a growing ministry among drug addicts.

“It’s devastating for us in the household of faith that were really trying to do our part to turn the city around,” said Louis Jones, Greater Emmanuel’s pastor. “We thought that we were just getting to the point of helping some communities. We were just getting people to find themselves and to also find the Lord.”

Only about one-eighth of Jones’ church members have returned to the city so far. The others are scattered across the country, but he’s still their pastor, calling often to check on them and having traveled several times to perform funerals for members who died since the storm.

Six feet of flooding in his church’s building left major damage, forcing the congregation to relocate its meetings to a Masonic lodge. To enable the church to minister again at full capacity, CBF and other Baptist Builders volunteers planned to help restore the church building and Jones’ house, allowing his own family—whom he had only seen twice in the last year—to return home from Dallas, where they evacuated.

Claudell Hampton, whose home was destroyed, bought a less-damaged house in New Orleans. But he hadn’t been able to restore it.

“I’m living in a (FEMA) trailer, and I thank God that I have a place to stay,” said Hampton, pastor of Triumph Overcoming Churches in Christ. “But it’s a lot of stress. I’m trying really to regroup. It’s stressful, but I thank God that I’m still alive.”

Hampton’s church and New St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church opened their sanctuaries for other congregations to use for worship services. St.

Mark's pastor, Ike Mayfield, worships with his church on the second and fourth Sundays of each month, leaving the remaining Sundays for another church to hold services.

"We had to have help—outside help from churches outside the city ... and the state," Mayfield said. "We could not have gotten back to our mission without their help. Outreach from other churches to us has helped us to outreach to the community—and not only to the community, but our members also."

The pastors said they are committed to revival of their congregations and the city as a whole.

"We're going to come back. Our church is going to come back," Mayfield said. "We're going to build our lives back. Not only that, but when we build our lives and the church back, the city will be built back."

"I look into their eyes and see amazing courage," said Reid Doster, Louisiana CBF disaster-response coordinator. "These pastors are not going to abandon their people but remain deeply committed. We would do well to honor, bless and learn from them."

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