

Senior saints help young couple birth a church

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)—The 16 or so remaining members of [Lakeview Baptist Church](#) in New Orleans didn't fit the bill of a church-starting core team. All senior adults, 70 and older, they lacked youthful energy but compensated with experience and vision.

When they met church starter James Welch in 2008, members still were grieving Hurricane Katrina and the loss of their homes, community and what had been their church. The congregation dreamed of one last selfless act that would continue the church's rich legacy long into the future.

Willing to change

"If we want to reach the world, we have to be willing to change," said Phyllis Dixon, a member of Lakeview Baptist since 1960, when she joined with her husband, Ed. "Those who aren't willing to change won't go anywhere."



Worship at Harbor Community Church. Lakeview members offered Welch their church building

and merged with the young church he had been forming. To help Lakeview members cope with their sense of loss, Welch brought in a grief counselor to walk them through the process.

Although merging a young church plant with an aging congregation wasn't always easy, Welch said, they've tried to do it in a healthy way.

"We gave (the grieving process) about a year just to help Lakeview through it," Welch said. "It's been cool, because it gave them a group of young people who love them. Many of them have gone home to be with Jesus, so we got to celebrate with them at their funerals. Some of them, once it was all complete, decided to be a part of churches like they were a part of in the '70s and '80s. And there are four of them who have remained a part of our church and have gotten connected with community groups."

Harbor Community Church

Welch and a core team of leaders launched a new congregation, [Harbor Community Church](#), in 2011. The new church has grown to more than 200 in attendance, most of whom have come to faith in Christ there, Welch said.

James and Amy Welch's hearts broke when they learned about Hurricane Katrina's damage to New Orleans in August 2005. After they expressed their intense call by God to help the beleaguered city, Sojourn Community Church and Crossings Community Church, both in Louisville, Ky., sent the couple to New Orleans in March 2006.

"We wanted to put our faith in action," Welch said. "We really wanted to be a part of gospel renewal in an area, and New Orleans just seemed like a place where we could practically live out our faith."

For the first few years, Welch simply focused on helping the city get back on its feet, doing everything from cleaning up damaged houses to rebuilding new ones. As the rebuilding work became more specialized, the

couple switched gears and started an arts center in the community in partnership with some friends.

Building ties with artists

Through the arts center, Welch continued building relationships with the diverse lot of artists who were returning to the city. As people came to faith in Christ, he formed small groups to help disciple them and continued to dream about starting a church once the city was back on its feet.

About three and a half years after Katrina, Welch realized he needed a physical building to begin consistent worship services, and New Orleans Baptist Association connected Welch with Lakeview. The partnership helped both churches. Lakeview members were able once again to invest their resources into a growing church. Welch and his team received a building and a team of New Orleans tutors.

“God gave them to us,” Welch said. “They coached us a lot in terms of what it means to live in New Orleans. Mr. Wheeler (one of the Lakeview members) knew how every neighborhood had changed in the city, literally, over 85 years—what the demographics were and what the psychographics were.”

The Dixons have remained an active part of Harbor throughout the changes, and appreciate the way Harbor’s younger people have treated them like family and have welcomed and appreciated their involvement. The Dixons even have been “stand-in” grandparents for the Welches’ children during Grandparents Day at school.

“It has been a thrill for my husband and I to see the church grow,” Phyllis Dixon said. “All the young people and the children are there. It has been a great blessing to have joined with them and have them working with us now.”