

Galveston church returns to sanctuary two years after Hurricane Ike

October 1, 2010

GALVESTON—Worshippers once again gathered in the sanctuary of [First Baptist Church in Galveston](#) Sept. 12—two years after Hurricane Ike struck Galveston Island.

While many of the faces are the same, Pastor Ray Meador says it is a different church.



Pastor Ray Meador shows where the water filled the facility at First Baptist Church in relation to previous storms that flooded the church building.

“We buried old First Baptist Church, Galveston,” he said. “The first time we

met after the hurricane was at a funeral home in Texas City. That was the funeral for old First Baptist Church.”

Minister of Music Jay Carnes, 43, was a member of the church’s cradle roll. He agreed the church he grew up in is not the same one that meets now.

“The storm did more for me and more for the church than anything else could have,” he said. “The storm reminded us that the church is so much more than the building.

“That’s not to take away from the excitement of being back in the building. I’m as excited as anybody, but we’ve learned what the church is,” said Carnes, who has served bivocationally the last dozen years. After the storm, the church initially met at the funeral home Carnes operates.

“It’s a new church. The storm brought so many good things. God had to bring us to our knees to see it,” he continued.



Pastor Ray Meador returned to the pulpit in the sanctuary of First Baptist Church in Galveston on Sept. 12—two years after Hurricane Ike devastated the church’s facility.
(PHOTOS/George Henson)

The celebration of the church moving back into its sanctuary began when about 250 people from around the country came to a Saturday “thank you” lunch. Invited guests included people who had worked at the church as volunteers or sent money to help with the recovery.

“It was a good day,” Meador said. “The Lord blessed. It was just a time to say thank you to so many people who had blessed us.”

The crowd was so large the meal had to be served in the newly refurbished sanctuary, which Meador admitted worried some who thought the carpet might be damaged by spills.

“This is God’s house; this is God’s tool; this is God’s instrument. ... We don’t worship the carpet. We didn’t even think we were going to get carpet, but God gave us carpet.”

While a meal in the sanctuary won’t happen often, Meador said, it was only possible because the storm destroyed the fixed seating that had been in place before it hit. Seawater rusted out the theater seats that had been in the sanctuary, and the estimated cost to refurbish them was \$150,000. Instead, the church bought folding chairs for about \$5,000.

As soon as possible after the storm, the church started meeting back on the island in the church’s chapel, which seats about 120. When the congregation outgrew that facility, worshippers moved to the fellowship hall, which seats about 200.

As that meeting space neared capacity, renovation allowed the church to move back to the sanctuary, which has about 325 chairs in it. Before the storm, it had seating for about 650.



Volunteers placed plywood across the top of the seats in the sanctuary at First Baptist Church in Galveston, and clothing and other items were spread across them so people whose homes were damaged by Hurricane Ike could take whatever they needed.

“I remember the first time we met back here after the hurricane. We met in the chapel. There were two people who introduced themselves, and they’d both been members for 30 years, but didn’t know each other because they’d come in and gone out different doors,” Meador said.

While the numbers in attendance roughly equal what they were before the storm, Meador senses a difference in spirit.

“Right now, there’s a closeness, a commonality about it, a concern for missions. They’ve seen missions work in their lives. Churches gave sacrificially so we could do what we’ve been able to do. It’s something more than I can understand,” Meador said.

Since the storm, the church has exceeded each of its mission offering goals. In the past, the church set goals rather arbitrarily, Meador said. “Sometimes we got it; sometimes we didn’t. Now, people are more concerned. I think God has touched us, and I pray it stays the same way.”

