

Houston church still rebuilding, reaching out after hurricane

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HOUSTON—When Houston Northwest Church recently welcomed children and their families to the congregation’s newly constructed HNW Kids Building, it marked a milepost in recovery and rebuilding after Hurricane Harvey.

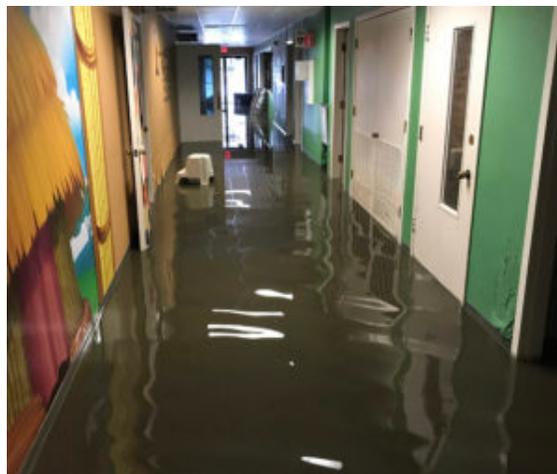
Harvey hit the Texas Gulf Coast in August 2017, flooding almost every building on the Houston Northwest Church campus and causing \$14.5 million in property damage.

“Our worship center was the only one that didn’t take on three to four feet of water,” said Karen Stamps, director of connections and communication at the church.

In the immediate aftermath of the hurricane, the worship center became the staging area for mud-out disaster relief teams and a distribution hub for supplies and assistance in the community.

Building had to be demolished

The floodwaters caused extensive damage to the church’s adult and student facilities, but its children’s building was most severely affected.



Floodwaters caused by Hurricane Harvey filled the former children's ministry building at Houston Northwest Church. The building had to be demolished due to structural damage, but the church recently held the grand opening of its new HNW Kids Building. (Photo courtesy of Houston Northwest Church)

Years earlier, the church's original sanctuary had been converted into the building that housed the congregation's children's ministry. The 40-year-old building had not been constructed with reinforced steel beams designed to withstand severe storm damage. Structural damage was so severe, the building had to be demolished.

"The area where the kids' building stood was repurposed as green space for community use," Stamps said.

For more than two years, Houston Northwest Church offered limited children's activities in temporary space on campus. Students relocated to a nearby YMCA. Adult Bible study groups either met in homes or temporarily

suspended operation until the renovated adult building reopened in January 2019.

In mid-December, the church held a ribbon-cutting ceremony marking the completion of its newly construction HNW Kids Building. The facility includes several worship venues, classrooms and multiple play areas.

Grand opening featured outreach events

In January, the church observed the grand opening of the HNW Kids Building with a series of outreach events over several weekends.

“We’re grateful for the support of our community and church family during our rebuilding phase, and we look forward to sharing this new space with our neighbors as we bring up future generations to know Jesus,” Pastor Steve Bezner said.



Houston Northwest Church brought in more than 40,000 pounds of snow, giving

Houston children had a rare opportunity to play in the snow. Snow Jam was one of several outreach events sponsored by the church to mark the grand opening of its new kids' building. (Photo courtesy of Houston Northwest Church)

On Jan. 11, the church offered a breakfast reception for families who live in an apartment complex behind the church campus. [FamBlitz Live](#)—a high-energy event with games and music designed to involve whole families—immediately followed the reception, and activities continued the next day with [KidzBlitz Live](#).

The next two Sundays featured a Winter Wonderland theme. On “Frozen” Sunday, Jan. 19, the church invited families to enjoy hot cocoa and have their photos taken with volunteers dressed in costumes portraying characters from the popular Disney movie.

For “Snow Jam” on Jan. 26, the church filled the lawn outside the children’s building with more than 40,000 pounds of snow. Children who rarely—if ever—see snow in Houston threw snowballs and sledged down a snow-covered slide.

In the process, visiting parents had opportunities to get acquainted with each other and with families who already were part of Houston Northwest Church.

“We’ve been glad to see parents lingering in the kids’ building—sitting down and visiting with each other, not rushing out right after the service,” Stamps said.

Prior to Hurricane Harvey, the church's children's ministry averaged just under 400 in attendance, she noted. Since the new building opened, the number of children and volunteers has surpassed 550.