



Walls of faith

Volunteers come to Twin Falls to help construct church facility

By Andrew Weeks
Times-News writer

While churches might aim to help build faith, it is people who build church facilities.

In the case of Eastside Southern Baptist Church in Twin Falls, where a 6,000-square-foot auditorium is being built where the church's former annex once stood, the people are a group of senior volunteers from Louisiana and Texas.

The group, Volunteer Christian Builders, travels the country building houses of worship for local Southern Baptist congregations.

"We build about 35 churches a year all over the country," Bill Self of Malakoff, Texas, said.

He and his wife, Jeanne, are one of 10 other retired couples who are in town for the next three weeks constructing the new church facility.

It's a different line of work than he did professionally, but now it's old hat.

Several years ago at age 55, Self, then a chemist, retired but found too much time on his hands. At about the same time he heard his pastor preach about witnessing for Jesus. Like Moses, however, Self wasn't inclined to words. After reading a newspaper article about the volunteer organization, he decided to use his hands.

"Now I work for the Lord," Self, 79, said, reminiscing about his nearly 25 years with the group. He claims to have witnessed heaven's help during his time as a volunteer, including workers being protected from harm, weather working out in answer to prayer and, perhaps most important, he said, an inner peace that comes from helping others.

That doesn't mean there aren't challenges.

One of the toughest things for James and Patsy Delberry of Grantsville, Texas, who have been volunteers with the group for about five years, is being away from their 16 grandchildren, James said. The couple is away for about three to four months a year, he said. The Selfs are on the road for about five to six months.

But they enjoy traveling the country — "seeing what the Lord has made," James said — and meeting other Christians.

WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

To learn more about Volunteer Christian Builders: www.vcbuilders.org.

Volunteers with the group come from a variety of professional backgrounds. Those working in Twin Falls include high school administrators, college professors, engineers, firemen and a motorcycle policeman. James Delberry was a tool-and-dye maker. Wives help their husbands as much as

possible, often hauling clothes to the laundromat and performing other tasks throughout the day.

No special skills are needed to join VCB, which has about 1,000 members countrywide. Basic requirements, Self said, include a desire to serve and the ability to be financially self-sustaining. Volunteers receive hands-on training by working on actual construction projects.

"Once a person does a few buildings they've about got it down," he said, noting it takes about a year or so to feel comfortable in the job.

Most of the volunteers are Southern Baptists, which comprise most of the churches they build.

Eastside Baptist was selected as a project after the church pitched a proposal to the group's project coordinator in Angleton, Texas. Self, a crew chief, then chose the project for his own group, partly because it was in the same region as other projects he was scheduled to work on.

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Photos by ASHLEY SMITH/Times-News

Tony McGuire, left, of Bossier City, La., and Troy Allen, of Arlington, Texas, work on building a wall Wednesday afternoon at Eastside Baptist Church in Twin Falls. They are part of Volunteer Christian Builders, a nonprofit group of about 1,000 members who travel the country helping congregations construct church buildings.

Auditorium replaces former church annex

By Andrew Weeks
Times-News writer

"Holy Smokes," shouted John Martinez, associate pastor of Eastside Southern Baptist Church in Twin Falls, as he and other congregants watched flames overtake the church's annex building.

That was last October. Today the congregation is shouting a different tune, as a 6,000-square-foot auditorium is being built on the spot where the annex once stood.

A group of senior citizens from Volunteer Christian Builders is doing the initial work, which began Monday and will take most of July, said John Requa, chairman of the church's build-

ing committee.

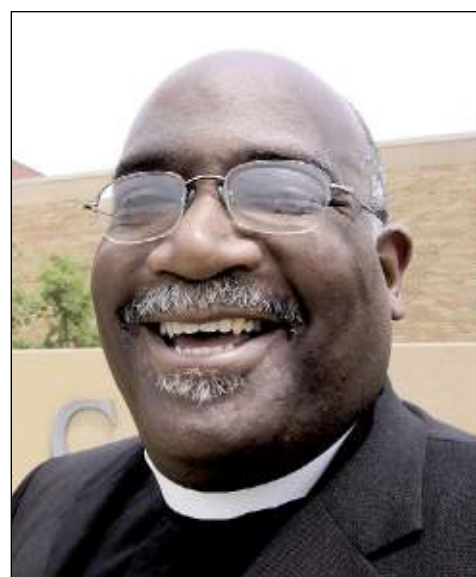
The new facility will serve as the main worship hall — Requa calls it an auditorium — but also will include a nursery, kitchen and restrooms, he said. Sunday school, which moved from the annex into the existing building when the annex was destroyed, will remain in the current facility.

Cost of the new building is about \$55 a square foot — or \$330,000 total — Requa said. Money comes from church members.

"We don't hold yard sales or anything else to raise money," he said. "It's done as the Lord lays it upon the hearts of the people to do it."

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Eleven couples from Volunteer Christian Builders have come to Twin Falls to help build a new auditorium for Eastside Baptist Church. The group will have the 6,000-square-foot facility completely enclosed by the time they leave on July 31. They began work on the structure Monday.



AP photo

Bishop Gregory Palmer poses for a photo in Springfield, Ill. Fifty United Methodist bishops in the United States will roll back their salaries by 4 percent next year in what Bishop Palmer, president of the Council of Bishops, says is a gesture of solidarity with others hurt by the global economic downturn.

50 Methodist bishops agree to pay cut

By Ken Kusmer
Associated Press writer

INDIANAPOLIS — One of the nation's largest Christian denominations is addressing the nation's financial crisis with what it hopes will be a spiritual teaching moment as well as a cost-saver.

Fifty United Methodist Church bishops in the United States will roll back their salaries by 4 percent next year in what Bishop Gregory Palmer of Springfield, Ill., president of the Council of Bishops, says is a gesture of solidarity with others hurt by the global economic downturn.

The salary cut is one of the strongest statements taken yet by a faith group as U.S. churches respond to a recession that has

left growing numbers of people jobless and hungry. Other denominations have eliminated jobs, frozen salaries or canceled mission trips.

United Methodist leaders say the move, approved in May, is an acknowledgment that churches are hurting too and there's less money to go around. But some Methodists said the bishops' action would have been more effective — and might have saved some church jobs — if it had come earlier.

"Some of these things should have been thought about six, eight, nine months ago," said Darcie Chamberlain of Indianapolis, a 49-year-old sales representative who's been out of work since January.

Bishop Michael Coyner of Indianapolis, one of four bish-

ops on the finance council, said he and his fellow bishops know their church is hurting.

Two United Methodist boards have cut more than 90 jobs, and the denomination's publishing house will not distribute payments to retired clergy for the first time in 50 years. Only 17 of the 63 regional U.S. Methodist conferences paid their full share of the denomination-wide expenses last year, down from 23 in 2007.

The bishops' salaries will fall back about \$4,700 annually to their 2008 level, \$120,942, on Jan. 1 from \$125,658 currently. The annual pay, based on a formula, is set by the denomination's General Council on Finance and Administration, which voted in May to accept the bishops' recommendation. The

money comes out of denomination coffers.

"None of us bishops are going to starve ... but it is a good reminder that many people, many pastors, and many congregations are going through tough times," Coyner said in a note to his Indiana pastors and lay leaders.

Other denominations and faith groups have also made cuts:

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has cut executive salaries, fired 25 people and ended a weekly radio program.

- The Presbyterian Church (USA) has frozen salaries, furloughed employees for a week and cut department budgets.

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