

Church to Rebuild from the Ashes

Morning Star breaks ground for new construction

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Almost three years ago the congregation of the Morning Star Missionary Baptist church was thrust into uncertainty and tumult when the 87-year-old church was destroyed by a fire.

But Saturday was a cause for celebration, when church members and others who have partnered with the church gathered at the vacant lot to break ground on a new home for Morning Star's 500 members.

The fire, the cause of which was never fully determined by investigators, left the congregation homeless, until Rose City Cemetery & Funeral Home offered them the use of its chapel.

Alberta Phillips, a longtime church member who serves as its historian, said that losing the church was difficult for the congregation. Some members had trouble with the funeral home setting and stopped coming, she said.

"We didn't know whether we would be scattered or what," said Phillips.

Phillips joined the church in August 1955, when it the congregation was about 125 people and located at the intersection of North Kerby Avenue and Fargo Street. The congregation was displaced in 1959 when the Fremont Bridge was expanded, and took over a Lutheran church on Northeast Ivy Street and Rodney Avenue where it remained until the fire.

She had all six of her children baptized at Morning Star, and remembers having to go to other churches for the ceremony because her church's sanctuary lacked a baptismal pool for many years.

During her time at the church, she saw many beautiful weddings and musical performances,



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Morning Star Baptist Church Pastor Rev. Alberta Wayne Johnson (left) leads supporters in a ground breaking ceremony Saturday for the construction of a new church at the site of the former sanctuary which was destroyed by a fire almost 3 years ago.



PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Alberta Phillips, a member of Morning Star Baptist Church for generations, looks forward to re-establishing the congregation on the same lot as the former church in the Eliot Neighborhood at Northeast Ivy Street and Rodney Avenue.

and is particularly proud of Morning Star's work with the poor and young people.

Although the displacement was difficult for the congregation, it drew hope from knowing they would be returning one day, which kept them together. Phillips also said church members are looking forward to re-establishing Morning Star's presence in the neighborhood. "We want them to feel a new era in an old place," said Phillips.

On Saturday, Pastor Albert Wayne Johnson of Morning Star told reporters at the site that because the church was a historic building it has had to meet specific architectural requirements before it could begin rebuilding. He said that the church had to get architects and lawyers to help it meet requirements imposed by the city. They still don't know when the building will be finished.

When asked how fundraising

for the rebuilding was going, Johnson began quoting scripture at length before concluding with, "It's not our church; it's His church."

"I think you got some fundraising to do," quipped a reporter from the local Fox affiliate.

After the press conference, Johnson chatted with pastors from other local Baptist churches that have partnered with Morning Star during its rough spot, while crews set up a stage covered by a canopy.

Later that afternoon, roughly 100 people gathered for the breaking ground ceremony at the vacant lot where Morning Star was once located.

On the stage next to a pile of the church's remains, the Morning Star choir sang rousing songs in between speeches from church members and people who are working to help get it back on its feet.

"Whatever is dead and gone

here will rise again, and will never be destroyed again," boomed Pastor J.W. Matt Hennessee of Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church, who has helped out with fundraising and opened his church's doors to displaced Morning Star congregants.

Rain drizzled down onto onlookers who stood on the lot strewn with rubble and weeds while greetings from Portland Mayor Sam Adams and Gov. Ted Kulongoski were read.

Pastor David Wheeler, of First Baptist, spoke to the crowd about how the tragedy had brought other local Baptist churches closer to together to help out Morning Star.

"I won't be too caught up or swallowed up in my own stuff," he said.

After everyone had spoken, people grabbed shovels and dug them into the soft earth, beginning the first step in Morning Star's resurrection.

High Jobless Rates Could Last Years

Economists say some jobs lost forever

(AP) -- Even with an economic revival, many U.S. jobs lost during the recession may be gone forever and a weak

employment market could linger for years.

That could add up to a "new normal" of higher joblessness and lower standards of living for many Americans, some economists are suggesting.

The words "it's different this time" are always suspect. But economists and policy makers

say the job-creating dynamics of previous recoveries can't be counted on now.

Here's why:

- The auto and construction industries helped lead the nation out of past recessions. But the carnage among Detroit's automakers and the surplus of new and foreclosed homes and empty commercial properties make it unlikely these two industries will be engines of

growth anytime soon.

- The job market is caught in a vicious circle: Without more jobs, U.S. consumers will have a hard time increasing their spending; but without that spending, businesses might see little reason to start hiring.

- Many small and midsize businesses are still struggling to obtain bank loans, impeding their expansion plans and constraining overall economic

growth.

- Higher-income households are spending less because of big losses on their homes, retirement plans and other investments. Lower-income households are cutting back because they can't borrow like they once did.

That the recovery in jobs will be long and drawn out is something on which economists and policy makers can basically agree, even as their proposals for remedies vary widely.

Retrenching businesses will

be slow in hiring back or replacing workers they laid off. Many of the 7.2 million jobs the economy has shed since the recession began in December 2007 may never come back.

"This Great Recession is an inflection point for the economy in many respects. I think the unemployment rate will be permanently higher, or at least higher for the foreseeable future," said Mark Zandi, chief economist and co-founder of Moody's Economy.com.

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