

Praise the Lord - we are finally beginning the rebuild of that much needed Airline Campus. Destroyed by the waters of Hurricane Katrina, the Airline Campus and Shopping Center, sitting on almost 12 acres, will serve in the coming days as the headquarters and ministry training center for all of our Celebration campuses. When this facility is completed, it will facilitate in great ways our congregation's mission to transform the New Orleans region and impact the world with the ministry and message of Jesus.

God gave us our Airline Campus back in 1996 in a miraculous way. The church that was at that time worshipping there couldn't pay their indebtedness of \$21 million, and were about to have the property sold out from under them to a secular entity by the bond company that carried the indebtedness. After a time of fasting and prayer I called the bond company in Ft. Worth, Texas, and asked to speak to the President of the company. Miraculously they put me through to him, and the long and short of the story is that although they were owed \$21 million, and although they had 3 higher offers than our offer, the bond company sold us the property for \$3.2 million. The bond company also agreed in the purchase agreement to forgive the other church's indebtedness, which enabled that church to purchase our property and both congregation's were able to move forward for the Lord. Everyone who has ever heard that story has said that "the Lord obviously gave the Celebration Congregation their Airline Campus."

Currently at our Airline Campus we are housing Volunteer Ministry Teams in our Activities Center, and our *Celebration Hope Center* Counseling Offices are also located in the Celebration Shopping Center. Our *Celebration Hope Center* currently provides individual, family and addictions counseling for people throughout the New Orleans region. In the future we will also offer life skills and job skills training there. Other tenants in the Celebration Shopping Center enable us to pay the indebtedness on our property.

Our plans are to complete our Worship Center, Connections Area, Children's Ministry Area, and Church Offices in the next year, and then complete our Youth Ministry Facility in the following year. The Worship Center, seating 2300 people, will include state-of-the-art audio and visual technology, and will provide us with a wonderful arena for worship services, church-wide leadership gatherings, conferences for adults and teens, and even Christian concerts. The Children's Ministry Area will be an exceptional and exciting area that every parent in the New Orleans region will want to bring their children to, and it will provide great discipleship opportunities for current and future generations. The Connections area will include a coffee shop, bookstore, fellowship area, and a greeting/information area for guests. Our Youth will worship in our Activities Center until their Ministry Facility is completed. The Youth Ministry Facility will include a state-of-the-art 800-seat worship center and a game room, and will enable us to reach and disciple thousands (perhaps tens of thousands) of teens in the upcoming years. When the Youth move into their facility, we will be able to transform our Activities Center into a Discipleship Center for children and adults.

Our journey to rebuild our Airline Campus has been one of the greatest challenges we've ever experienced as a congregation. When Katrina's waters destroyed the campus we had the highest amount of flood insurance recommended to us, but \$1.5 million was only about 1/10th of what it would cost to rebuild the facilities. However, our insurance company did spend \$2

million to replace our entire roof over the church facility and shopping center, which would have been a need we would have had to address if there had been no Katrina.

In the past 4 years we have focused on:

- Serving the people of our city and region who were negatively impacted by Katrina, and over 140,000 families to date have been served
- Rebuilding lives, families and homes, and also churches in our region
- Building out and furnishing our St. Bernard, Transcontinental Campus and Crescent City Christian School, and refurbishing our River Parishes Campus
- Gathering 1/3 of the funds needed for the rebuild from other churches and our church family through our *A City Transformed: Investing In Eternity* emphasis
- Working with FEMA through Louisiana Public Assistance to gather the funds needed to rebuild our School facility at the Airline Campus (another 1/3 of the rebuild cost)
- Entering into an agreement to sell our Transcontinental Worship Facility (but not our School facility) to the Good Shepherd Hispanic Baptist Church, which would provide the last 1/3 of the funds needed for the Airline Campus rebuild.

Along the way we have had to overcome both the challenges of the national recession and switching contractors. However, we have seen the “hand of the Lord” at work throughout the process, reducing rebuild costs and growing our congregation spiritually and numerically.

It is our intention to provide you with regular updates concerning the rebuild of our Airline Campus, which will serve as our Church Headquarters and Ministry Training Facility. Please note those updates in your worship bulletins, and commit yourself to:

- Praying for our Contractors and our Building/Engineering Team, and praying that the rebuild of the Campus will move according to schedule without any further complications
- Continuing to reach out to people around you, seeking to encourage and minister to them and bring them with you to our worship services and *Life Groups* (which will help us continue growing spiritually and numerically even as we are rebuilding)
- Giving sacrificially above your regular tithes to *A City Transformed: Investing In Eternity* (remembering we can't out-give God, and that He blesses us in proportion to our giving)

One of these days we will all be able to look back and say, “Look at the mighty and miraculous work that God has done in, for and through our church,” and if we are a contributor (rather than just being a consumer) during this time, I am confident that we will receive many blessings both here in this life, and certainly in the life to come.

It is a great joy to be your Pastor, and for our staff and I to serve alongside such faithful and faith-filled people. May the Lord greatly bless all of us as we move forward to take our city and impact the world for Him.

Pastor Dennis

P.S. I will be participating in the “Operation Rebuild” emphasis this Wednesday, July 8. Until August 15, every Wednesday through Saturday we are sending members of our church to partner

with volunteers from California to rebuild homes in St. Bernard Parish. Those joining me will want to be at our Airline Campus at 6:30 am for a breakfast and time of devotion. If you plan to participate, you must be pre-registered with St. Bernard Project. To do so, please let your community pastor know and he/she will be sure to register you with them. I hope that you will make plans to participate either on a weekday or weekend in the coming days, helping people even as you have been helped in times past.