

Lightning Fire Burns Brownsville Sanctuary

The Assemblies of God building that has hosted the Pensacola Outpouring suffered an estimated \$1 million in damages

The hallowed grounds of one of the nation's most famous revivals were not exempt from the fury of an electrical storm that pounded portions of Pensacola, Fla., on the evening of July 4.

Lightning-induced fire caused an estimated \$1 million in damages at Brownsville Assembly of God's main sanctuary, closing the 11-year-old building for repairs until late fall and forcing church officials to move services to a new Family Life Center on the Brownsville church campus.

However, the sanctuary's extensive damage from smoke, flames and water is being viewed as a precursor to "incredible blessings," pastor John Kilpatrick said.

Lightning struck a plumbing pipe that was protruding from atop the right-front portion of the sanctuary's roof at about 7 p.m., according to Kilpatrick. The roof caught fire, and more damage was caused as the jolt traveled down the pipe into the sanctuary's electrical room, severely damaging the building's \$800,000 sound system, pew padding, carpets and more.

No one was in the sanctuary at the time of the fire because staff and parishioners had been dismissed from a regular Thursday night prayer meeting for the July 4 holiday, Kilpatrick said.

As local radio and TV reports quickly spread word of the fire, hundreds of church members gathered outside to watch firefighters battle the flames for seven hours—a fight lengthened by the fire’s move beneath layers of roof shingles, decking and electrical conduit, Kilpatrick said.

Onlookers watched as firefighters slammed axes into the roof of their church home while flames and smoke billowed into the night sky. Kilpatrick said it was the worst electrical storm he has seen hit Pensacola.

“We live in the lightning capital of the whole nation here in Pensacola,” he said. “We’ve had lightning strikes before—we even took down our steeple because it kept getting hit.”

Kilpatrick praised church members for their resilience to overcome every attack the enemy has thrown their way during the revival’s seven-year run.

“There’s a saying I have been preaching here for quite a while, and that is everything that happens—everything—is Father-filtered,” Kilpatrick said. “I could hear these church members repeating this saying as I stood next to them watching the firefighters work. It didn’t dampen their spirits or set them back.”

Regular services continue in the church’s Family Life Center, which opened in 1999 and can seat up to 2,600 people. The old sanctuary, dedicated on Jan. 13, 1991, can seat 2,200 people. Services will be moved into the old sanctuary by Thanksgiving, Kilpatrick said. Brownsville’s members are seeing the fire’s destruction as a blessing in disguise, he noted.

"I was walking around the sanctuary praying recently, and after years of seeing thousands of people come through here for the revival, I could see a lot of repairs that were needed," Kilpatrick said. "The fire damage is covered by our insurance, which has a \$1,000 deductible. What the enemy intended for evil, God has surely turned to good."

Ficon Inc. of St. Louis—the builder of the old sanctuary—has promised Kilpatrick that the repairs will make the building almost like brand-new.

"I told the congregation back in May that we are entering into a time of incredible blessings, and we have really come under attack," Kilpatrick said. "Along with incredible blessings comes incredible times. It's proportionate. It's usually first the attack and then the blessing."

Almost every pastor who has called the church to extend their condolences because of the fire has also requested Kilpatrick to pray for them, as well, because they too are under spiritual attack.

One posting on the Internet suggested that the fire was a sign from God that more revival is on the way.

"I can't understand everything that is going on, and neither can you," Kilpatrick said. "But in the end we will see God turn this in a powerful our benefit and to His glory."

Billy Bruce