

West Angeles COGIC Builds Mammoth Facility

In an economically challenged community in Los Angeles, an 11-story building—with the tallest stained-glass structure in the world—shines like a beacon of hope in its neighborhood.

The facility, which is supported by a four-story parking garage and topped with a 103-foot steeple is the new home of the West Angeles Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Its presence means more than a spiritual impact upon the area because West Angeles COGIC generates millions of dollars in jobs and revenue in the local community. According to Deborah Pegues, chief financial officer for the church, West Angeles secured the largest financing agreement of any church in the country.

Bishop Charles Blake, pastor of the 18,000-member church—the largest in COGIC—said the reason for locating the ultramodern, massive facility in the middle of such an economically challenged community is simple. “The inner city ultimately will determine the direction and the life of our entire nation,” he said. “Strong churches need to be in the heart of the city.”

Crenshaw Boulevard in South Central Los Angeles became a pathway to a long-awaited dream on April 28 as more than 5,000 people paraded from the church’s old location to the new building several blocks away. As congregants, TV reporters and dignitaries—including actress Angela Bassett—entered the huge sanctuary, a 200-member mass choir sang, and praise dancers and flag wavers worshiped God.

Members said the new West Angeles Cathedral is the result of years of planning, prayer and financial sacrifice. "The faith of our members and the community has been strengthened by this project," says Bishop Blake. "Now we are ready to confront any challenge."

Blake now preaches during two Sunday-morning worship services instead of five, thanks to a banquet facility and plenty of overflow space to handle latecomers. During a monthlong celebration in April, preachers including T.D. Jakes, Robert Schuller and Noel Jones ministered at the facility.

West Angeles has more than 80 community ministries for such services as emotional rehabilitation, literacy training, legal assistance and AIDS counseling.

—Valerie G. Lowe in Los Angeles