

Historic Virginia Church Near Quake's Center Begins Rebuilding

A historic church in Virginia remained empty this Sunday as it awaits repairs to its building, damaged by an earthquake last month.

Gilboa Christian Church in Cuckoo, Va.—located near the epicenter of the earthquake on Aug. 23—still stands, but is surrounded by yellow caution tape.

The earthquake's impact is plainly visible on one side of the brick building, built before the Civil War. According to , "A jagged section of bricks juts out, like a jigsaw puzzle knocked askew. On the other side, where the front and side walls meet, there's a large gap from the roof to the floor. There's serious damage inside; outside, gravestones were toppled."

"It's just heartbreaking," Peggy Albright, who has attended services at the church for nearly 80 years, told *The Daily Progress* of Charlottesville, Va.

The sanctuary's four walls were cracked by the earthquake, making the building unsafe to occupy. Volunteers planned to salvage what they could over the Labor Day weekend and start working on shoring up the sides until they can begin to rebuild.

"We're told that in terms of safety, the entire walls of the original church will have to be torn down and rebuilt," John Turner, pastor of the 50 to 75-member congregation for more than 25 years, told the Associated Press. "The hope is to rebuild the church as close to the way it looked before the earthquake."

Since the building cannot be used, church members are meeting in a nearby community center in the meantime. The members have agreed to raise an estimated \$350,000 to restore the building.

"We know the congregation is the church, not the building," Turner said to AP. "The mission of the church will continue as we work to rebuild."

Gilboa church leaders, who held a press conference Friday, are asking for donations from community members and beyond to help pay for the church restoration.

"It's certainly a financial challenge. We've already drafted a letter" to potential donors "that would go out as far abroad as we can find places to send it," Turner told .

Louisa, Va., attorney and congregation member Jack Maus—who is also leading the fundraising campaign—led the congregation in worship on the Sunday following the quake.

"It was very emotional, and hopefully, healing," Turner said, as reported by the online paper. Dealing with the quake's aftermath, "is one of those things that's hard to do. But what you try to do as Christians, instead of asking, 'Why me?' ask, 'Why not me?' With faiths all around the world, there are similar kinds of things. This time, it was us."

The rebuilding process is expected to take up to one year.