

Megachurch Hits Debt-Free Status

Despite increased foreclosures among churches, the Rock Church International raises more than \$5 million

The Rock Church International in Virginia Beach, Va., recently saw the last \$ million of its \$14 million debt paid in full—in just three months.

John and Anne Gimenez founded the Rock Church in 1968 and dedicated its first sanctuary debt-free in 1971. The church grew up during the charismatic movement and was home to the Washington for Jesus rallies in the 1980s and '90s. And for Anne Gimenez, those historic gatherings are connected to the latest victories, despite the time gap.

“My husband was a visionary. We never had a mortgage in the early days and we absorbed a lot of the expenses of Washington for Jesus,” Gimenez recalls. “I really feel in my heart that getting this debt paid off so fast is a direct correlation to our willingness to spearhead those meetings.”

The Gimenezes weren't accustomed to functioning with debt. But after nearly 30 years of debt-free operations, The Rock Church encumbered a \$14 million mortgage to build a new 5,200-seat sanctuary for its rapidly growing congregation. The new building opened in 1997 with initial payments of \$100,000 a month.

In December last year, God set in motion a series of events that would bring a jubilee of sorts to the Rock Church. First, the city of Virginia Beach made good on an offer to buy 800 acres of land the church owned to build a park. The cost of the land: \$5 million.

That left a balance of just \$387,000. Church members gave \$87,000 one December Sunday morning. Over the following weeks,

members continued to give all the way down to \$43,000.

And then it happened.

“Billy Wilson was on the platform with us,” Gimenez recalls. “He had just come from Converge21 and was about to preach. During the morning offering, we got the debt down to \$18,000 and he told me he’d give the last \$5,000. A parishioner walked over and gave a \$5,000 offering on his credit card and that took us over the top. Before Billy preached we were debt-free.”

Gimenez calls it a miracle—and an answer to prayer. She remembers walking around the sanctuary praying that God would let her see the building paid off in her lifetime.

It almost didn’t happen. In January 2010, Gimenez suddenly fell deathly ill after a six-week battle with a blood platelet disorder.

After taking a ministry retreat with her daughter, Robin, her heart, lungs and kidneys failed. She was on life support for 18 days. Doctors said she would die, but she miraculously recovered and returned to the pulpit just a few months later.

“I asked God to let me see this building paid off in my lifetime,” says the 79-year-old Gimenez, whose husband passed away four years ago. “He didn’t let me down. It’s an amazing miracle that we could pay off a \$5.5 million debt in these economic times.”