

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2007

ON A MISSION



STAFF PHOTO BY DONALD STOUT

The Rev Donald Thompson is the new pastor at Metairie's First English Lutheran Church, which is being rebuilt.

Pastor feels the call to help rebuild

*He came
from Colorado*

By Earl Hodges
Contributing writer

While some people may have chosen to permanently leave the New Orleans area in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Rev. Don Thompson took a different route.

"The Lord led me to this area," Thompson said. "And I

have no doubt that this is where I'm supposed to be. I want to be a part of helping the area rebuild."

Thompson, 57, was installed as the pastor of First English Lutheran Church in Metairie earlier this month. He came to First English from Trinity Lutheran Church in Cortez, Colo.

"After Katrina, two members of my congregation in Colorado came here as volunteers to assist with relief work," Thompson said. "When they returned, they described the devastation and said (some parts of) New Orleans looked like a Third World

country."

Even though he had only visited New Orleans briefly in 2000 for a wedding, Thompson said he started thinking about the city and its many needs. At the same time, without Thompson knowing about it, a friend recommended him to the pastor search committee at First English Lutheran Church.

"When I came here to interview with the committee, they said they me wanted me to know exactly what I was getting into," Thompson said. "And they (the committee) insisted that I tour the city and see it for my-

self. They were very open and honest with me."

Thompson said he already knew he wanted to come here. Yet several of his parishioners in Colorado tried to talk him out of it. Thompson didn't let that influence him. When First English extended a call for him to become its pastor — its 10th pastor in its 119 year history — he immediately accepted.

First English Lutheran, located at 3701 Cleary Ave., Metairie, is in the process of building a new sanctuary. The con-

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Church has long history in N.O. area

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gregation has a membership of 450 and draws members from all over the metro New Orleans area.

Thompson estimates that

about 60 percent of the families in the church suffered major loss and damage from Katrina.

"One of my first concerns is to minister to the members of the congregation who lost everything in Katrina," he said.

"But as a church, we are also concerned about reaching out the other parts of the city and ministering to the needs of others as well."

The congregation, Thompson said, is in the process of assess-

ing those needs and developing a plan of action.

"I'm looking forward to the challenges that we face," Thompson said. "And we are praying for the Lord's guidance and leadership."

Church plans dedication by the end of this year

By Earl Hodges
Contributing writer

Organized in 1885 as an English-speaking congregation of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, First English Church relocated from the 1200 block of Franklin Avenue in New Orleans to an unused section of Lutheran High School in Metairie and converted it into a chapel for weekly worship services.

But by the end of this year, members of the church hope to dedicate a new 11,000-square-foot building.

Currently under construction, the new facility is located at 3701 Cleary Ave., Metairie, adjacent to Lutheran High School. It includes a sanctuary which will accommodate 300, a kitchen and four meeting rooms or classrooms.

The sanctuary is being constructed in the traditional style of an 18th century English village church with an 80-foot steeple.

Jim Orth, president of the congregation and a descendant of one of the church's founders, said from 1930 to 1960, First English was one of the five larg-

est Lutheran churches in the country and was the largest in the south with 3,000 baptized members.

"When the building is finished, we think it will become a Metairie landmark," Orth said.

The building was designed by the Mathes Brierre, a New Orleans architectural firm, and is being constructed by F.H. Meyers Construction of Harahan.

The church's historic pipe organ is being refurbished by Patrick J. Murphy and Associates of Stowe, Pa. under the supervision of local organ builder James Hammann.

The altar, which was built in 1890, is being prepared for installation in the new sanctuary. And the church bell, cast in 1911, was completely restored by the Verdin Company in Cincinnati, Ohio, owners of the foundry that originally cast the bell.

"I grew up in First English Lutheran Church and there were a lot of people in the church who had a great influence on my life," Orth said. "The church is in a new location, but we are still dedicated to seeing that we continue to influence future generations."