

Hopes rise in Haiti for new Episcopal cathedral

by [Gary G. Yerkey](#) in the [January 25, 2012](#) issue

Among the casualties of the magnitude 7.0 earthquake that devastated Haiti two years ago this month was Holy Trinity Cathedral in downtown Port-au-Prince. Now, with the support of donors from the U.S. and around the world, construction on a new cathedral is expected to begin this spring.

Sikhumbuzo Vundla, chief of operations of the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti, said in an interview that enough money has already been raised to launch the first construction phase as early as this March.

Vundla said that the complex will also include a music school, a vocational school, a primary school and a secondary school as well as a convent for the Sisters of St. Margaret, which were also destroyed in the earthquake. But the fund-raising for and the building of these structures will be handled separately from the cathedral, he said.

Plans call for the new cathedral to be erected on the original site. The primary worship space will be able to accommodate up to 1,000 people. The structure will also house several administrative offices.

J. Zache Duracin, the Episcopal bishop of Haiti, said in a recent appearance at Calvary Episcopal Church in Shadyside, Pennsylvania, that churches in Haiti do the work that governments do elsewhere.

"In many places," he said, "the only institution that exists is the church." The diocese operates more than 200 schools across the country, along with health clinics and other facilities, which will also have to be rebuilt or repaired.

Architectural firms invited to bid on the proposed design and construction have been urged to respect the "memory" of the previous structure by incorporating its "character-defining" features. Those include three surviving murals (out of 14) that adorned the interior walls of the old cathedral and were painted by well-known Haitian artists; the building's cornerstone; and ten bronze bells.

"Be lean and smart," the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti told the architects chosen to bid on the project. "Be a model of efficient and environmentally sustainable construction, a vision for the future of building in Haiti. It should incorporate recycled materials. Be inspiring in appearance, as well as humble and hospitable."

Vundla said that the building will be built in compliance with international seismic and hurricane building code standards. Local Haitian workers and locally procured materials—masonry, tile, metal and wood—will be used in the construction, he said. The building will also be equipped with its own electrical, water and communication systems, so that it will be self-sufficient in emergencies.

Teresa S. Mathes, associate program director at the Episcopal Church Foundation, who is running the fund-raising campaign, said that the response from the "average Episcopalian in the pew" to the rebuilding appeal has been "fabulous." Parishioners from several hundred dioceses and churches have already contributed.

But Mathes said that much more money will need to be raised to complete the work, adding that the total estimated cost of rebuilding the cathedral will only be known once the architect or architects have been selected.

Other sources, who asked not to be identified, said the total collected so far in the so-called "Rebuild Our Church in Haiti" fund-raising campaign, which began in January 2011, is believed to be about \$10 million—the initial budget for construction.

Bishop Duracin said the cathedral was not only a place of worship but also the "cultural patrimony" of all Haitians. "It was a monument, it was a symbol of hope, love, courage, faith and conviction," he said. "If we rebuild the cathedral, it will be a sign of our resurrection."