

Greek Orthodox break ground on rebuilding church destroyed on 9/11

by [Sarah Pulliam Bailey](#) in the [November 26, 2014](#) issue

Leaders of a church that was destroyed during the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City broke ground on a new St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church that will overlook the 9/11 memorial.

The domed building is scheduled to open in 2016—the church’s 100th anniversary. The church has raised \$7 million of about \$38 million needed.

Plans to rebuild the church were stalled by a dispute with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which is in charge of overall rebuilding efforts at Ground Zero. They reached an agreement in 2011.

Earlier this fall, government and church leaders met on a concrete platform surrounded by steel foundation beams to break ground for the church, designed by renowned Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. Calatrava, who also designed the nearby World Trade Center Transportation Hub, said he took his inspiration from the Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Holy Savior in Chora, both in Istanbul.

The future building will be “an iconic house of worship,” said Patrick J. Foye, executive director of the Port Authority. “Just as the Greek Orthodox Church celebrates the birth, mourns the death, and praises the resurrection, today we celebrate the rebuilding and the blessing of the hallowed land on which it will stand.”

The 4,100-square-foot church will fit about 150 people at a time—twice the number that the former structure held.

In 2001, that building was hit by falling rubble from the twin towers.

“Breathing a very heavy air, saturated with the dust of storm, wood, iron, and with tiny particles of human bodies, we remember walking with heavy hearts to the specific place where our St. Nicholas stood as a building,” said Archbishop Demetrios, who heads the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. “The church was not there. . . . We stood there frozen, paralyzed, and cried.”

Some items from the old church were recovered, including a crushed bell, a candelabra, a few Bibles, mangled candles, and two icons, which will be housed in the new church. Relics of St. Nicholas were never recovered.

The rebuilt church will include an interfaith and nonsectarian space for reflection and meditation.

“It will be a refuge for people in need of spiritual comfort, regardless of their specific beliefs or unbeliefs,” Demetrios said. —Religion News Service

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