

Church is more than a building



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Steve A. Yount, director of field operations for Matthews Construction Co. Inc. of Conover, discusses progress on welding with welder Robby Bolick at Penelope Baptist Church in Long View. The church sanctuary was destroyed by a early morning fire on Feb. 8, 2009.

Penelope Baptist still working on sanctuary after 2009 fire; Mission hasn't lost a beat

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HICKORY

The walls are up for the new Penelope Baptist Church sanctuary. Church members, who saw flames destroy their 120-year-old worship space last year, don't plan on hiding behind those new walls.

A fire in February 2009 gutted the sanctuary. Work on a new one was originally scheduled to finish in October. This winter's cold, wet weather slowed down the construction, pushing the target date to Christmas, said Senior Pastor David Grinnell.

Meanwhile, new church outreach programs are go-

ing strong. The hot meal ministry that began in January has grown weekly, with the church shuttling people from the Salvation Army shelter and Hickory's Soup Kitchen every Saturday. Last week, the church served 204 meals in one day. The Faith & Deeds cloth-

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Matthews Construction employee Robby Bolick works on rebuilding the sanctuary at Penelope Baptist Church.

PENELOPE: Church destroyed by fire going strong

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ing and household store also opens twice a month. It provides low-cost items for people who can afford to pay a little and vouchers for those who can't.

"It's really touched our members' lives," said Todd Ward, the minister of music at Penelope Baptist Church. "We're face to face with those folks who have need."

Grinnell said as long as members spend their time helping others, they don't have time to worry about the things that go wrong — the fire, the historic building that is no more, the completion date that got pushed back, all the things that could happen to delay it further.

Responding to the church mission to feed the hungry and clothe those who don't have clothes, coupled with the tragedy that leveled the former sanctuary, has created a sense of unity among members, Grinnell said.

Attendance also is growing. The pastor said the church has had non-holiday weekends with as many as 280 people, far more than before the fire. There are so many more children in the church, members had to add a new children's minister job.

Investigators with the ATF said last year that damage to Penelope Baptist's 120-year-old sanctuary was so severe they could not determine the cause of the fire.