

Michael Jenkins: After 'refocusing of the vision of God,' Peace Palace on track to be finished by year's end

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A view of the Peace Palace, a Unification Church convention and training center, under construction at 6590 Bermuda Road, on Monday, April 7, 2014.

They're running behind schedule, but followers of the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon are still bringing a "Peace Palace" to America's gambling mecca.

The Unification Church, known for its mass weddings, extensive business holdings and cult-like founder, plans to finish construction of its three-story, 93,000-square-foot convention and training center on Bermuda Road at Sunset Road by year's end, according to general contractor Steven Kwon.

A few years ago, church leaders were slated to finish the project, dubbed the Peace Palace, by early 2013. They wound up starting construction only last April, though.

Kwon, president of GKG Builders, attributed the delay to a project redesign, saying the church scrapped its plans and hired new architects, engineers, interior designers and others.

After church founder Moon died in September 2012, "there was a need for a refocusing of the vision God had given to him for the Peace Palace," said Michael Jenkins, director of the church's Office of Business Investment and Asset Development.

Current plans call for a convention and training hall that holds 700 to 800 people, marble flooring and two grand staircases in the main lobby, a cafeteria, a bookstore and roughly 50 rooms for lodging, according to Kwon.

The center also will feature a museum dedicated to Moon, whose name spawned the derisive nickname for church followers, the Moonies.

It will cost \$10 million just to build the shell of the facility.

According to Jenkins, Moon envisioned the Peace Palace hosting "marriage seminars, family tourism as well as peace education to bring reconciliation" to youth gangs, the Middle East and beyond.

The facility will host programs and workshops to "strengthen marriage and family" and "help build a safer and more wholesome community," Jenkins said. It also will be available for non-church conferences, training seminars and other private events.

All told, church officials hope to draw about 2,000 visitors a month to the facility next year.

Over the past decade, the Unification Church has held gatherings at the Aria, the Flamingo, Caesars Palace, the M Resort and other local venues. According to Jenkins, the church will continue holding large-scale events at local resorts and will host smaller groups at the Peace Palace.

The church bought the Bermuda Road site for \$11 million in spring 2011, property records show. It initially planned to develop a boat-manufacturing facility, Won Mo Boats, alongside a Peace Palace, but the boat plans fell through.

In March 2012, Clark County commissioners approved a permit to let the church start building a convention hall. The project was expected to wrap up by January 2013.

Moon founded the Unification Church in 1954 in Seoul. About 20 years earlier when he was a teenager, he claimed, he was praying on a Korean mountaintop when Jesus appeared to him and asked him to create the kingdom of heaven on Earth.

He recruited followers around the world and built a corporate empire, with real estate holdings; a gun manufacturing business; a ballet company; and newspapers and magazines in Asia, Europe, South America, Africa and the United States, according to news reports. Among other things, he founded The Washington Times, a conservative daily, in 1982.

Artist illustrations of the Peace Palace, a Unification Church convention and training center, are shown on a desk at a GKG Builders office Monday, April 7, 2014.



