

Greek Orthodox church to rebuild at Ground Zero

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Ten years after St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church was destroyed by falling rubble from the World Trade Center towers, church leaders have reached an agreement to rebuild at Ground Zero.

The church, founded by Greek immigrants in 1916, sat in the shadow of the twin towers and was the only religious building to be completely destroyed during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Under the current agreement, brokered by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, the church agreed to drop a lawsuit filed in February against the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which controls rebuilding at Ground Zero.

The agreement, announced October 14, marks a major win for the small church, which insisted on sticking to a preliminary agreement to exchange its original location on Cedar Street, now part of a vehicle security center, for a larger piece of property on nearby Liberty Street.

The agreement allows St. Nicholas to build a 4,100-square-foot church and interfaith bereavement center on Liberty Street in exchange for dropping all litigation against city officials. "With this agreement, we are continuing New York's collective healing, restoration and resurgence," Cuomo said in a statement.

Port Authority spokesman Steve Coleman said construction on the church is scheduled to begin in 2013.

Stavros Papagermanos, a spokesman for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, said some funds have already been raised for reconstruction, but he could not say how much the project would cost or how long it would take.

As part of the agreement, the Port Authority will pay for all below-ground construction and the church will pay for anything built above ground. "There will be no payments made by the Port Authority to the church," the statement said. Officials

said construction will also have no impact on the World Trade Center site.

"Our pledge is to be a witness for all New Yorkers, that freedom of conscience and the fundamental human right of free religious expression will always shine forth in the resurrected St. Nicholas Church," said Archbishop Demetrios, leader of the Greek Orthodox archdiocese. —RNS