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Volunteers rebuilding Waco church

By Deseret News | Sept 19, 1999, 11:00pm PST



WACO, Texas (AP) -- A libertarian talk show host and volunteers used shovels and pickaxes over the weekend to begin rebuilding a church at the site of the Branch Davidians' compound fire six years ago.

A fire during the 1993 government raid leveled the compound, killing leader David Koresh and about 80 followers. Austin talk show host Alex Jones, 25, said Sunday he wants to rebuild the church as a memorial and to increase publicity about the FBI's possible role in the fire.

"This is about saying the witch hunt of 1993 is over," Jones said as he and about 60 people who accompanied him to the fenced-off hillside began digging foundations for a 38-by-40 frame church.

The deadly fire April 19, 1993, ended a 51-day standoff between Koresh and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and FBI.

Jones said he chose now to build a memorial and church because of a recent admission by the FBI that agents had fired potentially incendiary tear gas canisters at the compound the day it burned, despite years of statements to the contrary.

Attorney General Janet Reno earlier this month appointed a special counsel to



Government officials maintain that Branch Davidians, and not federal agents, set the fatal fire.

A wrongful death suit filed against the government by relatives of those who died is scheduled to go to trial next month.

"All of it -- it's all about public opinion. We know that now is the perfect time, that's why we're doing it," Jones said.

The project is expected to take two to three months.

Koresh follower Clive Doyle, who survived the 1993 fire, said Sunday he has been leading 12 to 20 people in Bible studies near Waco and likely will lead services at the new church.

Koresh's stepfather, Roy Haldeman, 71, a retired carpenter who had lived at the compound, said that he felt good about the project. Stoically looking over the workers, he said the project's significance was "too deep" to explain.

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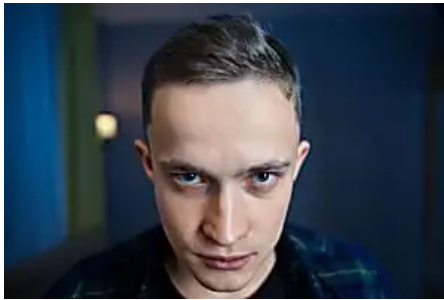
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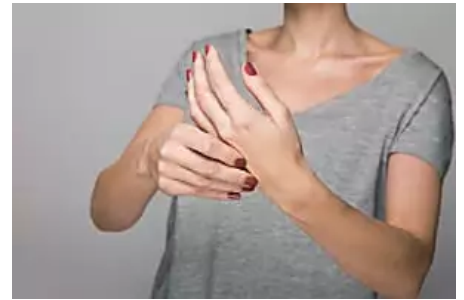


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