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## Business

# Land-rich but cash-poor, church weighs its options

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St. Mary's Episcopal Church is looking for a real estate developer to acquire part of its property in Moiliili for private redevelopment, an arrangement that would allow the cash-strapped church to continue and expand its charity work in the community.

A more than century-old church in Moiliili — where Hawaii's late U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye attended services as a youth — has long helped the needy. Now it is looking for help — and not only the divine kind.

St. Mary's Episcopal Church envisions seeking a real estate developer to acquire part of its 1-acre property for private redevelopment and also enhance congregation facilities by preserving a historic chapel and building new spaces for worship, meetings and a preschool.

The arrangement, which could involve selling or leasing part of St. Mary's land, is intended to produce a cash endowment for the church to continue and expand charity mission work that includes providing short-term housing for domestic abuse victims, distributing groceries to seniors, feeding the hungry and filling car gas tanks of the working poor.

The Rev. Gregory Johnson said the redevelopment effort is critical to sustaining a relatively small and poor church, and could be repeated by other community organizations that own valuable land but lack financial resources.

"We're hoping this will become a model for other parishes — not just Episcopal parishes, not just Christian parishes, but any community whether they're religious or not," he said.

St. Mary's is in particularly need of revenue and new facilities.

Its original chapel is 99 years old. Its congregation is small — 85 parishioners — and primarily comprises seniors on fixed incomes and families living at or below the poverty line. And its collections don't cover its budget, which was \$251,297 last year.

"Truth be told, St. Mary's has been bleeding red ink since 1998," Johnson said.

Even in a more historical sense, St. Mary's has represented the poor serving the poor. The parish was founded in 1902 a few blocks away from its current site as a school to educate Chinese immigrants who were subjected to the Chinese Exclusion Act, which the United States imposed locally when it annexed Hawaii in 1898. St. Mary's also operated an orphanage and a free medical dispensary in its early history.

St. Mary's has been at its current location at 2062 S. King St. since 1911. A chapel was erected in 1917 and is nicknamed Soldier Chapel after its builder, a retired Civil War brigadier general who raised \$27,000 for construction. The name also is a tribute to Inouye, who grew up in the neighborhood and attended church services.

Johnson said building the chapel was a difficult undertaking. "Remember, it's a poor community," he said.

Nearly 100 years later some things haven't changed. "They didn't have any money in 1917, and we don't have any money in 2016," Johnson said. "It's still a poor community, which is why we have to seek redevelopment of our property."

Johnson, a 1969 graduate of Radford High School and a former U.S. Air Force chaplain, retired in 2007 from his job as a university professor of religious studies and

humanities when the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Hawaii, Robert Fitzpatrick, asked for his help to improve stability of the church.

After a stint at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Aiea, Johnson, 65, moved to St. Mary's two years ago and found lead paint peeling off the walls of Soldier Chapel. He said it was hard to raise \$20,000 needed to address the safety issue.

Today electricity works in just half of Soldier Chapel, and the building needs more rehabilitation, which Johnson said can't be supported by parishioners.

"I'm not going to go to a senior on a fixed income and ask them to cough up some money," he said. "You have to go outside the community for that."

Kris Kim, owner of Mama Woo's BBQ Korean Restaurant next to St. Mary's, said she supports Johnson though sometimes his ambitions seem too big, especially with the homeless. "He tries to help a lot," she said.

Johnson, who refers to the homeless as "our guests," said homelessness is an unrelenting issue. During a recent morning tour of the church, he called out to a couple of guests in the parking lot: "Rosie, I'll get you some food in a minute. Hey, Roger, did you get some good grinds today?"

St. Mary's receives assistance from other organizations such as the Institute for Human Services to serve the homeless and others in need. But it's not enough. "The needs don't stop," Johnson said. "They're increasing. That takes a revenue stream (to pay for)."

Redevelopment scenarios for the church property envision the highest use will likely include a high-rise residential building, though it's up to developers to present their own ideas.

The height limit on the property is 150 feet, and the BMX-3 zoning allows commercial and residential use.

The mauka half of the property, which fronts Young Street and includes a school building along with a house with three bedrooms made available to the needy, would be easier to redevelop. However, other plans can be considered.

St. Mary's anticipated issuing a request for proposals last week but postponed the move so further assessment can be made of the terms in the request.

Some redevelopment requirements being considered include restoring Soldier Chapel, which has been moved before and could be moved again, giving the church a priority opportunity to buy an agreed-upon number of residential units and making 30 percent of any residential units affordable.

Mel Kaneshige, a retired development executive for local hotel firm Outrigger Enterprises, is assisting the church. He said the church's ministries will be a factor

when considering proposals, along with any financial benefits.

The city values the St. Mary's property at \$9.8 million for property tax purposes.

Johnson said that with the right partner the church will be in a better position to serve the community as it has for more than a century. "The Lord provides," he said. "You don't do this on your own."