News

The Village of Dolton, Illinois, has bought Pope Leo XIV's former childhood home for $375,000. (Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0/Maximilian775)

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The Village of Dolton, Illinois, has bought Pope Leo XIV's former childhood home for $375,000.

A village spokesperson confirmed the purchase of the home officially closed on July 8.

"We are currently working to have the property solicited as a historical site," Nakita Cloud told OSV News. "This can open the door for federal and state funding opportunities tied to historic preservation, tourism development, and community revitalization. It also provides us the opportunity to attract philanthropic and nonprofit partnerships that support cultural and educational initiatives."

Cloud also confirmed the house was not purchased under eminent domain and included all applicable realtor and auction fees.

Residents expressed mixed feelings about the proposed purchase of the house at 212 E. 141st Place.

In early May, days after the pope's election, Donna Sagna Davis, a resident who had been living next door for more than eight years, told OSV News she witnessed fights, shootings and she suspected drug dealing there until two years ago, when the home was vacated and put up for sale. She said she welcomed the village's interest in taking ownership of the property and making it a historical site.

Residents voiced their opinions at a special village board meeting July 1, prior to the board's vote to purchase the pope's childhood home.

One resident, concerned about the risk of default, asked "where the revenue is going to come in from that house? ... And how is that going to help the homeowners and taxpayers here?"

Another resident, The Rev. Ryan Reese, who pastors Trinity Lutheran Church in the nearby suburb of Lansing, Illinois, said Dolton had serious infrastructure needs,

particularly deteriorating roads. He said leaders needed "to be mindful of addressing the issues the city has while trying to address the debts and the lawsuits," which it faced under the leadership of former Mayor Tiffany Henyard. She is under federal investigation for claims of misusing village funds for personal reasons.

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The village, just south of Chicago, has a poverty rate of 20% — almost double that of the state of Illinois — according to the 2023 U.S. census community survey. It was once a suburb where manufacturing jobs were plentiful. The loss of these jobs, starting in the 1980s through the early 2000s, along with other factors brought about the decline of the town where then-Robert Prevost grew up.

However, local media continue to report significant foot traffic at the pope's boyhood home, with people stopping to pray.

Sagna Davis said the peace and quiet that descended along with the visits of people coming to the house to pray has been a welcome sight. She said she had been praying for her neighborhood to show more reverence to God.

"Beyond the potential for funding, this acquisition allows Dolton to create a landmark destination that can draw visitors, spark local pride, and stimulate small business growth in the surrounding area," Cloud, the village's spokesperson, said. "We see it as a powerful step toward strengthening Dolton's identity, increasing economic activity, and preserving a piece of meaningful history for future generations."