

Knights of Columbus to purchase Pope John Paul II center

Jerry Filteau | Aug. 3, 2011



CNS photo

WASHINGTON

The Knights of Columbus is buying the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington and will turn it into a shrine to the late pope and a museum of American Catholicism, Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson announced Aug. 2 at the opening session of the Knights' 129th annual convention in Denver.

Anderson did not give a dollar figure for the purchase in his talk, but Detroit Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron said the KofC has agreed to pay \$22.7 million for the center, of which about \$20 million will go to the archdiocese, the major funder of the center, and \$2.7 million to the Catholic University of America, which has a secured interest on the land.

The center is a 100,000 square-foot building on a 12-acre campus adjoining CUA. It cost \$60 million to build, a sum raised entirely by private donations. It opened in March 2001.

The then-archbishop of Detroit, Polish-American Cardinal Adam J. Maida, was the chief driving force behind the center, and as the center failed to reach expected visitor goals, the Detroit archdiocese provided significant funding to subsidize its operation. NCR reported in 2006 that the archdiocese had loaned or guaranteed loans to the center totaling some \$36 million. The figure has grown substantially since then.

Archbishop Vigneron said the roughly \$20 million the archdiocese will receive from the sale "is notably less than the \$54 million in loans the archdiocese invested in the cultural center's design, construction and maintenance," but "the sale will enable us to recoup some of what we invested and will end archdiocesan outlays averaging \$65,000 per month to maintain the building and grounds."

"The \$20 million in cash we receive will help stabilize archdiocesan finances," he added.

Last year the center's board of trustees "headed by Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl of Washington since shortly after Cardinal Maida's 2009 retirement as archbishop of Detroit" decided to separate programmatic activities of the U.S. Pope John Paul II foundation from the John Paul II museum of artifacts and memorabilia housed by the center.

Late last year the Ann Arbor, Mich.-based Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist announced they had signed a purchase agreement with the Detroit archdiocese and planned to turn the center into a house of studies for new members of the order. That agreement fell through, however.

Vigneron said that with "dramatically" changed real estate markets of the past couple of years, "all of the offers we received" over the past 18 months "were clustered in the \$20 million range; the Knights presented the best offer and terms of sale."

Anderson said that for the Knights, the purchase of the property will give the KofC "an opportunity to evangelize and spread the Good News of the Gospel through a new evangelization" that was a frequent theme of John Paul II's pontificate.

"Certainly we are honored to continue to spread his profound and powerful message of hope for our country, our continent and our world," he said.

"This purchase is good for the church, good for the Knights of Columbus, good for the [Pope John Paul II] foundation and good for all those who have faithfully supported the foundation and cultural center over the years," said Dominican Fr. Steven Boguslawski, executive director of the Pope John Paul II Cultural Foundation.

"The Knights of Columbus will bring a new vibrancy to the building," he added. "The shrine and focus on the new evangelization fits perfectly with the original intent of the building and mission of the cultural foundation."

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