News
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Founded in 1924 by a New Jersey nun, the Monastery of the Angels is home to a community of cloistered Dominican nuns who devote their lives to Scripture and prayer. (RNS photo/Alejandra Molina)

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For nearly a century, the Monastery of the Angels in the Hollywood Hills served as home to a community of cloistered Dominican nuns who devoted their lives to study Scripture and to pray for those who came to them for guidance and penance.

But the community dwindled as the nuns aged and some died from COVID-19. In early 2022, the monastery closed, but its chapel, gift shop, and beloved peanut brittle and pumpkin bread business have remained open.

Now, the North American Association of Dominican Monasteries, which the monastery was a member of, has partnered with the Dominican Friars of the Western Province as they prepare to launch a public process to explore future options for the restoration and use of the nuns' nearly 4-acre historic property.

A request for proposals is expected to be released in early April.

"Our sisters loved the Hollywood Hills community, and we look forward to working with the friars, interested parties, and the neighborhood to ensure our beloved monastery can continue to be a blessing to all," said local prioress Sister Maria Christine, president of the Association of North American Dominican Monasteries, in a statement released March 9.

Christopher Hanzeli, a spokesperson for the Dominican Friars of the Western Province, said having a public process is crucial "to gather as many creative and interesting ideas as possible" to protect the monastery's future.

"We wanted to be open to whatever the Holy Spirit wants from this process," Hanzeli told Religion News Service.



A handful of people visit the chapel on Dec. 8, 2021, for midday prayer at the Monastery of the Angels in Los Angeles. (RNS photo/Alejandra Molina)

Though independent in their operations and civil structures, the friars and nuns are part of the same global Order of Preachers, known as the Dominicans, founded by St. Dominic in the 13th century. The organizations "collaborate in their shared mission to preach the Gospel," according to the statement.

Fr. Gerard Francisco Timoner, the head of the Dominicans, advised Fr. Christopher Fadok, who leads the Western Dominican Province, to work with the nuns to find a way to protect the legacy of the property, Hanzeli said. The organizations negotiated an agreement in late 2022 that was finalized this February. Terms of that agreement are confidential, Hanzeli said, with the process being directed by the Western Dominican Province.

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The closure of the monastery reflects the struggle of church leaders across the country who are grappling with what to do with their buildings as their congregations shrink.

Among those working to help repurpose religious property is Dominic Dutra, author of *Closing Costs*, a new book about reimagining church spaces that could be put to work for ministry.



Dominic Dutra (RNS photo/Bill Reitzel)

Dutra, a Christian with years of real estate experience, will be leading the monastery's request for proposals and said the priority is keeping the building within the Dominican Order, as well as retaining the chapel and the candy- and bread-making business.

"You can have that architectural look and build, none of which we want to really change, but we've got to find somebody that wants to come in and actually use the property in that fashion," Dutra said of the monastery building, which was designed around 1947 by famed architect Wallace Neff.

With numerous stakeholders involved, such as the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the Dominican Order, Dutra said it's important to have a public and transparent process in figuring out the next steps for the monastery.

"Beyond that, it's obviously a very important piece of that community. We need to be very sensitive to surrounding residents, community, the city of Los Angeles ... We want to make sure that it's not perceived as something that's going on in the background," he said.

Neighbors and preservationists have feared that the property — that many refer to as a "retreat" and an "oasis" amid the clamor of the city — was at risk of closure or being sold.

An online petition seeking to save the monastery has garnered more than 4,700 signatures. Los Angeles residents say the monastery is "loved by people of all faiths" and represents "kindness in an ocean of distraction, indifference and preoccupation."

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Last year, advocates announced they were in the process of incorporating The Monastery of the Angels Foundation of Los Angeles as they sought to acquire the monastery to care for and maintain the property "as a Catholic sacred space."

Behind that effort were Kim Cooper and Richard Schave, L.A. historians and preservationists who run a tour company exploring the city through an architectural, historical and spiritual lens; Rob Hollman, a nonprofit consultant whose clients have included PBS SoCal, Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation and Preserve Orange County;

and Brody Hale, president of the St. Stephen Protomartyr Project, an organization that works to preserve historic Catholic churches and sacred spaces.

Hale found it encouraging that there would be a public process to figure out next steps for the monastery. In his line of work, he has often encountered religious orders making decisions about their buildings behind closed doors without public input.

"I have not seen anything quite like this for a former monastery property," Hale said. "This is obviously far better than that."

"I hope they will choose an option that will allow the monastery to remain a Catholic sacred space," he added.

This story appears in the **Transforming Sisters' Assets** feature series. View the full series.