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Philadelphia Archdiocese aims to ease deficit by selling properties

Lou Baldwin Catholic News Service | Aug. 15, 2012

PHILADELPHIA -- The Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced Monday the planned sale of select real estate holdings, on a case-by-case basis, to address its operating deficit in the current fiscal year.

A deficit of at least $6 million is expected even before any extraordinary costs may be incurred.

Properties included are the previously announced sale of the archbishop's residence in the Overbrook section of Philadelphia, and Villa St. Joseph by the Sea in Ventnor, N.J.

Added to the list are Holy Family Center and a large portion of the adjacent Archdiocesan Pastoral Center parking lot in Philadelphia and the Mary Immaculate Retreat Center in Northampton, Pa.

"To address the cash flow challenges caused by the deficits, the church is faced with hard decisions," Philadelphia Archbishop Charles J. Chaput said in a news release. "It's similar to what families have to do when their expenses are greater than their income. We just can't afford to maintain and hold assets like Villa St. Joseph by the Sea and my residence. Holding on to these properties at this time would be inconsistent with the mission of our church."

Villa St. Joseph by the Sea, a 9,800-square-foot residence that has 11 bedrooms with baths, occupies a half-acre beachfront property. It has served primarily as a summer vacation home for retired priests since 1963. It is scheduled to be sold at auction Sept. 15 by Max Spann Real Estate and Auction Co.

The archbishop's residence, a 16-room mansion, was purchased by Cardinal Dennis Dougherty in 1935 and has been the home of Philadelphia's archbishops ever since. It is expected to be sold in a private sale in the near future.

The archbishop will reside at nearby St. Charles Borromeo Seminary after the sale takes place.

The Holy Family Center, which houses most of the offices of Catholic Social Services, has approximately 20,000 square feet and occupies what was originally the convent of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity, the congregation that formerly administered many of the social programs of the archdiocese.

The Catholic Social Services staff, which has not been reduced, will be absorbed at other facilities.

The Mary Immaculate Retreat Center, located on 452 acres, was originally built in 1939 as a seminary for the Vincentians at a time when Northampton County was part of the Philadelphia Archdiocese; now it is part of the Allentown Diocese.

It was acquired by the archdiocese and operated for a spirituality year for St. Charles Borromeo seminarians from 1991 to 2005. Afterward, it served as a retreat center but was underutilized. It is being marketed by Binswanger.

Projected sale prices for the facilities have not been indicated.

"The decision to sell these properties was not made lightly, but rather after prayer and careful consideration," Chaput said. "Selling these assets will help us as we work to ensure the long-term financial stability and position the archdiocese for future growth. It will also allow us to remain committed to the services and support we provide to the faithful as well as the broader community."

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