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City Gospel Mission wants to relocate

Written by Mark Curnutte



The City Gospel Mission in Over-the-Rhine has been feeding the hungry for 50 years. This picture is from Thanksgiving in 1975. / Enquirer file photo

OVER-THE-RHINE – City Gospel Mission, one of Greater Cincinnati’s most respected social-service agencies and a fixture at Elm and Magnolia streets for 50 years, is going to relocate.

The nonprofit’s first choice of a new location is on Dalton Street in the West End, north of the main U.S. Post Office, 1.2 miles away. The new location is expected to be the former Trane Parts building at 1809-1811 Dalton St., on the corner of Dalton and Findlay streets.

The move would require City Gospel to undertake a capital campaign of \$7 million to \$8 million and provide shuttle bus service for its clients and residents back to other services Downtown and in Over-the-Rhine.

Paul Spence, City Gospel's vice president of development, confirmed the move Thursday morning. His goal is for the move to be completed by the end of 2012 at the earliest and spring 2013 at the latest. An official announcement is expected to come in two weeks.

"City Gospel Mission wants to do what's best for the people we serve, for the City of Cincinnati ... and for our new neighbors," Spence said.

The cost of rehabbing an existing building on Dalton Street and building additional administrative space is an estimate, Spence said.

City Gospel Mission, which opened in 1924 on Vine Street, provides 36,000 nights of shelter annually, runs addiction recovery programs for men (Exodus) and women (Having the Courage to Change), and offers tutoring and mentoring services.

In September 2009, City Gospel opened two rehabbed houses adjacent to its sanctuary on Magnolia Street. Those homes, a \$1.2 million redevelopment project, provide 10 beds of transitional housing for Exodus participants and were designed to provide a safe haven for men away from the temptations of their old neighborhoods.

"We'd like to keep those," Spence said.

City Gospel owns its property and buildings, valued at \$676,600, according to Hamilton County property records. The building is expected to be sold to developers.

"We are land-locked," Spence said.

City Gospel has 46 men's beds in Over-the-Rhine. Its women's program offers 46 beds at four locations in Mount Auburn. City Gospel serves breakfast and dinner every day of the year in Over-the-Rhine.

The nonprofit, which does not accept government or United Way funding, is supported both financially and with volunteers from dozens of suburban churches, including Northminster Presbyterian in Springfield Township.

City Gospel has been part of an intricate network of agencies, including the Drop Inn Center two blocks south on Elm Street, and an array of Christian churches that have served the needs of homeless and poor people in Over-the-Rhine for two generations. These nonprofits are within walking distance of the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Service on Central Parkway.

“We would have to get our residents a bus or other transportation,” Spence said.

A few members of the Exodus program, eating lunch of fish and pasta Thursday, said they wouldn't be too inconvenienced by a move to Dalton Street because its program is largely self-contained. The men said they did walk to medical and dental appointments in Over-the-Rhine. Kye Gilland, 27, who said he is a recovering heroin addict from Hamilton, said the planned separation of Exodus participants from the general homeless population – planned in a new building – would help eliminate temptation.

“They tend to bring what's out there in here,” he said.

City Gospel's current location is one block north of Washington Park, site of a \$47 million redevelopment project, to which the City of Cincinnati is contributing \$14 million.

City Gospel is preparing a capital drive for its new facilities, Spence said. It will run concurrently with the \$3 million that the YWCA of Greater Cincinnati is seeking for a new women's homeless shelter that will replace the current 42-bed shelter for women at the Drop Inn Center.

Josh Spring, director of the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless, said City Gospel had expressed desire to move to a new location but is concerned that its move to the West End could kick-start the drain of social-service agencies and poor residents from Over-the-Rhine and Downtown.

“The Drop Inn Center's mission (emergency shelter) is different from City Gospel Mission's, and the Drop Inn Center's current location is more important to the people it serves,” Spring said.

The decision to move the women's shelter was announced late last summer by the Cincinnati/Hamilton County Continuum of Care for the Homeless. It is an agency that applies for and distributes federal and state money for care of homeless people.

The Drop Inn Center had sought to keep the women's shelter. Officials there said the shelter costs \$350,000 a year to run.