

COGIC unveils 20 new affordable housing units, a symbol of its return

By [Jane Roberts](#), Daily Memphian

Updated: November 09, 2022 4:26 PM CT | Published: November 09, 2022 3:57 PM CT



Church of God in Christ presiding Bishop J. Drew Sheard leads a ribbon-cutting ceremony for 20 new affordable housing units on Wednesday, November 9, 2022. (Mark Weber/The Daily Memphian)

Seventeen months ago, in a swell of COVID cases, the Church of God in Christ quietly poured the foundation for 280 Vance Flats and then started calling vendors and suppliers to see if they could possibly hold the line on rapidly-doubling prices, the best hope of getting the project done.

With the 20,000 COGIC saints in the city, the denomination Wednesday, Nov. 9, presented the finished project — 20 affordable housing units in a gleaming, three-story building, along with a palpable sense of accomplishment.

COGIC Holy Convocation returns to Memphis after 12-year hiatus

“Our occasion is just to celebrate what we’ve done,” Bishop Darin Burns, COGIC’s director of economic development, said as the morning sun warmed the newly paved and striped parking lot at 280 Vance Ave.

“We’ve still got a little bit of dust, but we are getting so many calls on rental, I don’t even know what to do,” he said.

The one-bedroom units, with stainless steel appliances and fenced and lighted parking, are priced below market rate, a nod to the need in Memphis. Last week, the city’s housing summit identified a 30,000 gap in safe, affordable housing units.

“The city of Memphis needs more affordable housing, but we want quality, affordable housing. We don’t want to treat people like they are second-class citizens,” Presiding Bishop J. Drew Sheard said.

Vance Flats was built with \$3.8 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. As the owner, COGIC paid 10%. The property will be managed by a private vendor, Ambassador Management.

Financing for Klondike redevelopment clears first hurdle

The newly finished homes are next to the 81 affordable units COGIC built in the early 2000s. With the church’s decision to move its annual convocation back to Memphis, the global denomination has several plans in the works, including 120 additional affordable housing units in Downtown and 100 units of senior housing it plans to build near Mason Temple, starting next year.

The most expansive is the plan to renovate the former Monastery of St. Clair in Frayser, closed since 2020, into the Church of God in Christ Kingdom World Mission Center. That operation will be a village of support, including housing for 35 pregnant women or new mothers, plus neighborhood medical and dental services.

With 13 states, including Tennessee, having full-abortion bans, Sheard says the denomination is stepping up to fill the gap for women who now will be raising children they didn’t expect to have.

“I think one of the major problems of our country is that many are saying ‘don’t have an abortion,’ but we’re not making provisions for the child and the mother afterward. That’s what we are trying to do,” he said.

While Sheard is in town this week, he is meeting with the partners to iron out the memorandum of understanding for the project, he said.



“The city of Memphis needs more affordable housing, but we want quality, affordable housing. We don’t want to treat people like they are second-class citizens,” COGIC Presiding Bishop J. Drew Sheard (left) said during the ribbon-cutting ceremony with Bishop Darin Burns (right). (Mark Weber/The Daily Memphian)

The denomination has also partnered with Waste Management Inc., with its national footprint in landfills, recycling centers and dozens of landfill gas projects, to provide jobs and job training programs.

[COGIC convocation returns to Memphis](#)

The focus, Sheard said, is to ensure that people who are overlooked and underserved have opportunities for a second chance.

The attention Wednesday was on the new housing project, an outward symbol of COGIC's return to Memphis, where until 2010, the annual convocation had been held since 1907.

Shovels from the ground-breaking decorated the ribbon-cutting ceremony, a reminder of what it took to build a \$4 million project during a global pandemic.

"This was a field of mud," Burns told the crowd, which included representatives from Grinder Tabor Grinder, the general contractor; Self-Tucker Architects and B. J. Douglass, HUD senior project officer.

The economic outlook wasn't much brighter. In that environment, COGIC persevered, said Marty Regan, attorney with Lewis Thomason, also a partner.

The Works' mobile grocery hits the streets in North Memphis

"Darin was on the initial phone calls with me with HUD. ... And the question was: 'Is there a market? Can you make it work? Is this doable?' By the time we finished with HUD, they were calling him and saying, 'Are there more things we can do together?'"

"I think that is representative of you were able to transform even our federal government that had doubts about this," Regan said.

The problem was that HUD had issued the financing, then the pandemic shortages and supply chain issues emerged.

For COGIC, building a project with fewer units wasn't an option, nor was raising the rent threshold.

"The contractor and architect, we just came together as a team to find a way forward," Burns said.

"Everyone had to get creative on how we save money," he said, which among other things, included calling the material suppliers and explaining the mission.

Homes for Hearts prepares tiny house for second resident

“We’re not doing this for income. We’re doing this for the community,” Burns said. “Many of them helped the best they could. They gave discounts. They found ways to continue to hold the pricing as long as they could.”

That included the contractors and subcontractors, he said.

“I know they didn’t have to do that with labor costs. That’s the Memphis community,” he said.

“I credit everyone for not asking for more when they could have done so.”

TOPICS

[280 VANCE FLATS](#) [PRESIDING BISHOP J. DREW SHEARD](#) [DARIN BURNS](#)



Jane Roberts

Longtime journalist Jane Roberts is a Minnesotan by birth and a Memphian by choice. She's lived and reported in the city more than two decades. She covers business news and features for The Daily Memphian.