

# Free: 1905 church pipe organ in gre

The catch: Costs to move it make deal impractical

By Holly Meyer

RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — A 112-year-old pipe organ in the sanctuary of a now-closed church needs a new home.

The \$500,000 instrument is in good condition and free — if you can pay \$10,000 to \$30,000 to remove it from the old West Nashville United Methodist Church and reassemble it.

But the trouble is that the 1905 George Kilgen & Son pipe organ isn't alone in needing to be relocated. About 450 other organs are available across the United States, and demand is slight, said John Bishop, executive director of the Boston-based Organ Clearing House, which helps save high-quality pipe organs from abandonment or destruction.

"If I have 450 organs listed and I can place 20 a year, I'm doing very well," Bishop said.

The glut of organs up for grabs is in part a consequence of declining church membership across denominations, he said. Fewer people in the pews can lead to low bank balances and church closures.

When a church closes, its staff determines what items in the church may be able to fill a need elsewhere, said Amy Hurd, spokeswoman for the Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church.

"We have repurposed a lot of things," Hurd said. "Organs are problematic because most of our churches already have an organ and they're difficult to move."

The mechanical organ at West Nashville Methodist was shipped by rail from St. Louis and installed in the church in



The former West Nashville United Methodist Church is being developed into an event space, and pipe organ needs a new home. Dan Cook (left), the new owner of the building, is willing to donate

1906, said Dan Cook, who bought the church this year after its closure last year.

He is converting the building into an event venue, and the organ isn't in the plans.

"I don't want to be the guy that sends it to the landfill," Cook said.

The organ has been maintained exceptionally well through the years.

Milnar Organ Co. in Nashville restored it in 1969 after it had been burned in a fire, founder Dennis Milnar said. In the decades that followed, Milnar's company and Fine Tuning of Nashville maintained it, Milnar said.

"It's a shame to see something like a pipe organ, especially a good one in good condition, go without a use," Bishop

said. "But unless there's somewhere active to put it and real interest in funding it, organs like that very, very frequently wind up in dumpsters."

More than dwindling membership in traditional churches is to blame.

The lack of demand is also a result of a rise in a more contemporary worship style that