

ST. SOPHIA CHURCH

(Kaunakakai, Moloka'i)

• What is it?

Pineapple may have disappeared from Moloka'i as an industry, but the small Catholic church built in 1937 to serve the *sakadas* (Filipino plantation workers) still stands in Kaunakakai.

Moloka'i planner Nancy McPherson says the church is an increasingly valuable artifact from Moloka'i's plantation era. A lot of significant buildings have been demolished by neglect, she says. St. Sophia is one of the last ones left. Interestingly, the church is named not after a Catholic saint, but after Sophia Cook, the wife of the Moloka'i Ranch manager.

• What threatens it?

The congregation wants to replace the aging structure with a new one. Maria Sullivan, who is spearheading the fundraising efforts, says it's not meeting

the needs of the 300 families who attend. It's termite-ridden; it's too small; there are structural problems; people in wheel chairs can't access the building. It's a sad situation.

Even the church's name will be lost in the replacement; the new church will be called the Blessed Damien Church, in anticipation of the canonization of Damien.

At this point, the church has raised \$1.3 million of the \$3 million required for the project, and hopes to hold its first service in the new church on Christmas Eve, 2011.

• What can be done?

Historical preservation advocates such as Kiersten Faulkner, executive director of the Historic Hawai'i Foundation, hope that there's still time to find a compromise. The congregation of immigrants worked and saved to build a fitting sanctuary, she points out. A meaningful way to honor their contributions would be to restore the historic church and to build a compatible addition or annex to accommodate the needs of the pilgrims.

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