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The Rev. Terrence Watanabe, *Vicar of Maui and Lanai*



COURTESY JAMES ORTIZ

Maria Lanakila Catholic Church was still standing after Tuesday’s fire. Scorched trees can be seen beyond the church.

MAUI WILDFIRES

Maria Lanakila still stands, but Waiola Church is gone

By Timothy Hurley
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Despite reports to the contrary, historic Maria Lanakila Catholic Church is still standing amid the ashes and devastation left by the massive fire that destroyed much of Lahaina this week.

The Rev. Terrence Watanabe, vicar of Maui and Lanai, said the evidence of the building's survival is found in photographs taken after the fire showing the sanctuary and the neighboring rectory intact.

"For us, it's like a miracle," Watanabe said Thursday.

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"When we saw the news and saw the church steeple rise above the town, it was a great sight to see."

Not so fortunate is Waiola Church, which just celebrated the 200th anniversary of its founding in May. Waiola, on Wainee Street and formerly

known as Waine'e Church, was razed.

"It's gone, the social hall, the sanctuary, the annex, all of it," Anela Rosa, the church's lay minister, told USA Today on Wednesday. "It is totally unimaginable."

Waiola is the site of a historic mission established in 1823. The graveyard next door is the final resting place for early members of the royal family of the Kingdom of Hawaii, including the church's founder, Queen Keopuolani.

Originally named Ebenezer Church and built in 1832, it became known as Waine'e Church (which means "moving water") until 1953, when it was renamed

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MAXAR TECHNOLOGIES VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

A satellite image shows an overview of Lahaina Square on Wednesday following a wildfire that tore through the area. Inset satellite image shows Maria Lanakila, bottom left, and Sacred Hearts School.



MATTHEW THAYER / THE MAUI NEWS / AP

The hall of historic Waiola Church in Lahaina and nearby Lahaina Hongwanji Mission were engulfed in flames along Wainee Street on Tuesday in Lahaina. Inset, Waiola Church.



COURTESY PHOTO

Screen clipping taken: 8/12/2023 11:46 AM

MAUI

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Waiola (living water). The structure that burned to the ground Wednesday was built in 1953.

Waiola Church has been damaged by wind and fires on several occasions over the years and has always rebuilt. Rosa said she's confident the same thing will happen again.

"This church, this congregation, has a resiliency unlike any other," Rosa said. "That's why I know we will rebuild and be better than ever."

Waiola was one of hundreds of buildings destroyed by a fire in Lahaina Town.

One of the buildings that appears to have largely escaped the flames was Maria Lanikila Catholic Church, which was established in 1846 by the Rev. Aubert Bouillon of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and officially dedicated in 1858.

Watanabe, the pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Wailuku, said that while the historic church is still standing, it's hard to say how much damage the building actually took.

Photos indicate that the Maria Lanakila sanctuary's wooden roof sustained some damage but there's no indication of what the inside looks like. The roof blew off neighboring Sacred Hearts School, so damage is likely to be extensive there.

While he's heartened by the photos showing minimal damage to the church, Watanabe also acknowledged that it is possible that an engineer could inspect the building, determine that it unsafe and recommend that it be knocked down.

"We won't know until we get in there and make an assessment," he said.

Authorities still weren't allowing the public to enter the Lahaina region Thursday as fire crews continued to battle a fire that was at least 80% contained and as personnel were still recovering bodies.

The Rev. Kuriakose Nadooparambil, pastor of Maria Lanakila, and his staff all escaped the fire and found places to stay with members of the Catholic community in Central Maui, although one staffer waited to evacuate until it was almost too late.

"He didn't leave until the palm trees outside were on fire, and there was fire on both sides of the road as he

drove away," he said.

Watanabe said he's met with Hawaii's Catholic leadership and they are interested in coming to the aid of the church and its congregation of 700 to 800 families. The church serves West Maui from Olowalu to Kapalua.

Watanabe said St. Anthony has been inundated with phone calls from people wanting to know how they can help. He said his staff is directing people to established disaster relief funds and to Catholic Charities.

In the meantime, a prayer service for the victims and those displaced by the Lahaina fire will be held Tuesday at 6 p.m. at St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, 1627 Mill St., in Wailuku. People of all faiths are welcome to attend.

Elsewhere in Lahaina, the restored Wo Hing museum and cookhouse, established in 1910, is gone, said Theo Morrison, executive director of the Lahaina Restoration Foundation.

"We are still not allowed into the town so I only know from the footage being released," she said in a text.

Pioneer Inn, built in 1901 by George Alan Freeland, was also leveled by the fire, but Morrison said buildings like the Baldwin Home

Museum and Old Lahaina Courthouse suffered substantial damage but are likely to be salvageable with enough funds thrown their way.

"I do not know the status of the artifacts within the sites however," she said.

The Old Lahaina Courthouse opened in 1860 as a customs house for whaling and trade ships as well as a center for government offices and court functions during the monarchy period.

The Baldwin Home Museum, the oldest home on the island, was built between 1834 and 1835 for missionaries Dwight Baldwin and Charlotte Fowler Baldwin. Dwight Baldwin was the pastor at the Waiola Church's predecessor while he lived in Lahaina.

Both the Baldwin Home and the Old Lahaina Courthouse lost their roofs.

At the two-story Baldwin home, the roof caught fire and fell into the upper floor, where the Lahaina Restoration Foundation office was. The upper floor probably fell onto the lower floor too, Morrison said.

Pretty much all of the town corridor and its historic wood buildings were lost, officials said, along with people's homes and even boats in the harbor.