

Battling Babylon

Benny Perez in a 'war' to save his church campus



Benny Perez isn't wrestling against flesh and blood—but he is wrestling. The pastor of The Church of South Las Vegas, a 4,000-member charismatic megachurch in Henderson, Nev., is battling a Babylonian system to save his campus from foreclosure.

"This is a spiritual battle," he says. "The enemy loves to stop churches by using money. We are one building away from feeding and clothing more people, reaching more youth and children, and helping more prostitutes. This is not about a bank. It is a principality and a power."

The Church of South Las Vegas paid \$4.5 million for 3.3 acres of Las Vegas Valley land three years ago. In March, that land appraised for \$475,000—a 90 percent decline. The church owes a combined \$7.7 million on the property and land. It appraised for \$2.3 million. Perez is \$5.4 million upside down.

The real battle began when the bank wanted to collect \$1.8 million in church offerings. When Perez tried to negotiate to reduce the principal of the \$7.7 million loan in line with actual property values, the bank refused.

After prayer and legal counsel, the church decided a strategic default was the best stewardship move. It stopped making payments on the loan on May 1. The bank subsequently filed suit against the church on June 17. And in July, the church filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy to save its campus.

"People are asking if it is biblical to do a strategic default and declare bankruptcy," Perez says. "For us, it is a stewardship issue. Would you keep throwing thousands of dollars into a black hole? "

By filing for bankruptcy protection, the church doesn't have to leave the property—for now—because foreclosure is stayed. But it could wind up losing its current home.

“Hopefully these banks will come to their senses and start working with churches that are helping the communities. This church isn't a business. There are lives at stake.”