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Pastor Dwayne Jones of Mount Aaron Baptist Church plans to build an addition and parking lot and has reached out to Kaleida Health to see if it will lease the lot during the week for its workers. Mark Mulville/Buffalo News

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Church hopes being near Medical Campus helps its growth plans

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A small congregation on Genesee Street is praying that its proximity to the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus will help the church's plans to grow.

Mount Aaron Missionary Baptist Church wants to build a 4,500-square-foot addition to its facility at 540 Genesee St., less than a mile from the Medical Campus where parking is expected to be at a premium.

The church's plans also include a new parking lot with space for 30 cars, and Pastor Dwayne Jones has reached out to Kaleida Health to see if the health care provider will lease the lot during the week for its employees and patients.

"They need parking. We (will) have a brand new parking lot," Jones said. "What a wonderful marriage between the medical corridor and an inner-city church. It is a win-win situation."

A spokesman for Kaleida Health could not be reached on Tuesday to comment.

The church has raised about two-thirds of the \$150,000 needed to pay for the addition and parking lot. Jones on Tuesday appealed for others from outside the congregation to assist.

"We're taking dimes and nickels and trying to make it become reality," he said. "No matter what, we're going to break ground this year, but we're trusting that Buffalo is going to help us complete it."

Donated funds will allow the church to build a new sanctuary and convert the current worship space into a dining room that can be partitioned into four classrooms, he said.

Mount Aaron provides meals for seniors and after-school tutoring for kids, and opens its doors to community groups, said Jones, a retired Erie County sheriff's deputy.

"The stronger the church is," he said, "the stronger the community is."

Jones said the church already has received city Planning Board approval for its project. It also has approval from M&T Bank for a small mortgage but wants to stay debt-free. Architect Kevin V. Connors of eco_logic STUDIO drew up the designs.

The current church was built in 2007. The congregation's previous site at 538 Genesee was destroyed in 2004 when the roof of the former warehouse building collapsed following heavy rains.

The congregation, which has grown from 40 people to about 300, purchased six vacant neighboring parcels, cleaning up the properties and installing fencing.

State Sen. Timothy M. Kennedy, D-Buffalo, said during a news conference Tuesday that the growing presence of the church has helped decrease crime in the neighborhood.

"Pastor Jones has put in countless hours of work to grow his church and lift the entire community," Kennedy said. "Mount Aaron has become a beacon of hope and safe haven for our community to gather, and they're just getting started."

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