

When a church closes, where does its pipe organ go?

by [Holly Meyer](#) in the [June 7, 2017](#) issue

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.

The 1905 George Kilgen and Son pipe organ is far from unique in needing to be relocated. About 450 other pipe organs are available across the United States, and demand for them 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. “It’s a shame to see something like a pipe organ, especially a good one in good condition, go without a use. . . . 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.”

Whenever a church closes, staff determine which 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 West Nashville church closed last year. Dan Cook, who bought the building earlier this year, is converting it 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, said Dennis Milnar, founder of Milnar Organ Company in Nashville, which restored it in 1969 after it had been burned in a fire.

"It's a lovely instrument," Milnar said. "Everything works like a charm." —*USA Today*

*A version of this article, which was edited on May 22, appears in the June 7 print edition under the title "Church closings leave glut of unclaimed pipe organs."*