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Residential Real Estate

Pope's old Dolton house tells a familiar south suburban story



By Dennis Rodkin

Gift Article



Credit: Redfin

This photo from a 2024 listing shows the house before a recent round of rehab.

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Just as Pope Leo XIV turns out to be a regular South Sider — he's [a fan of the White Sox](#) and [dines at Aurelio's Pizza in Homewood](#) when visiting family — his childhood home in Dolton is typical of its time and place.

The little three-bedroom brick house on East 141st Place was built at the start of the south suburbs' postwar

population boom, lost value as the area's housing market sagged decades later, went through foreclosure and then was picked up by a flipper-rehabber. It couldn't be more typical of the trajectory of the south suburban housing market in the past seven decades.

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Since Robert Francis Prevost's selection as the 267th leader of the Roman Catholic Church, his childhood home and the church he attended in those days have become the subject of [a petition](#) calling for landmarking — and if it happens, the house might be able to tell the story of its region as well as the story of its most holy former occupant.

The house "has taken a typical journey reflecting the demographic changes caused by historic discrimination in south suburban housing markets that have led to persistent value decline," John Petruszak, executive director of the South Suburban Housing Center, told Crain's in an email. "Dolton was an exclusively white, blue-collar community at the time that the Pope's family built the home. The demand for suburban homeownership by Black Chicago families moving to the area increased and spurred a cycle of white flight in the late 1970s to 2000."

As [The New York Times](#) and others have reported, in September 1955, Mildred and Louis Prevost brought their newborn third son, Robert, home from Mercy Hospital to their house on East 141st Place in Dolton.

The couple — he was a Navy veteran and school district administrator and she was a school librarian — had bought the house newly built in 1949 and were paying \$42 a month on their mortgage, the equivalent of about \$501 in today's dollars.

At the time, Dolton was a booming suburb, part of the inner ring including Skokie, Oak Lawn, and others that have boundaries with Chicago and were thus among the first beneficiaries of the postwar housing boom.

New homes were going up all over Dolton and other close-in suburbs, and as the notion of moving out of older homes and apartments in the city caught on, prices rose. In archived editions of the Chicago Tribune from those years, new-home prices in Dolton rose from 1946, when asking prices were the equivalent of about \$130,000 in today's dollars, to \$198,000 in 1949 and to \$232,000 in 1958.

The population of what had been largely a truck-farming town [more than tripled in the 1950s](#) to about 18,700, according to the U.S. Census.

The draw to the suburbs was new, larger housing, superhighways for the age of the automobile and, of course, [white flight](#) from the city's growing Black population. But the revelation in recent days that Mildred Prevost, mother of the future pope, had a mixed-race heritage — [confirmed to The New York Times](#) by another of her sons

— puts a twist on that aspect of the story.

Before marrying Mildred, Louis Prevost lived in an apartment on Ellis Avenue in Hyde Park. They married in 1949 and bought the Dolton house, 16 miles south of Hyde Park, the same year. The couple not only participated in the postwar baby boom by having three kids in six years, Louis Prevost also helped accommodate the little boomers by getting new schools built.

As superintendent of School District 169 in Bloom Township, Louis Prevost led the effort in 1952 to convince voters to support a \$124,000 referendum — \$1.5 million today — to fund adding six classrooms and a gym to a school outside Chicago Heights. "Right now our old gym is being used as two classrooms," he told the Tribune at the time. "Every bit of space is taken up for regular classwork, and there is no place for indoor exercise when the weather is too bad to send the pupils outdoors."

Mildred Prevost died in 1990, and six years later Louis Prevost sold the Dolton house after owning it for 47 years. He died the following year, in 1997.

Louis Prevost sold his family's longtime home for \$58,000 in 1996. That's equal to \$118,200 in today's dollars, a value the house has not matched in the three decades since. Although the present owner, rehabber Pawel Radzik, had it on the market in January at \$219,000 and later cut it to \$199,900 before he yanked it off the market when it was discovered to be the new pope's old house, those asking prices are not the guarantee of value that a closed sale price is.

The loss of value "reflects the consequences of the documented targeting of Black families with predatory mortgage products in the late 1990s, setting them up for failure, until the market collapse around 2008," Petruszak wrote. "High mortgage default and foreclosure rates in Dolton and surrounding south suburban communities of color led to abandonment of properties after the families were forced out and created concentrations of REO bank-owned homes, exacerbating value decline." (REO is "real estate owned," the term used for foreclosed properties that banks own.)

In 2016, the homeowner who had bought the home 20 years earlier from Prevost fell into foreclosure for a 2009 mortgage of about \$55,900, the Cook County clerk's records show. In 2018, the lender that took over the property sold it for \$9,000.

Around the time of the foreclosure, [a neighbor told the New York Post this week](#), drug dealers were operating out of the house.

Also during those years, the housing market in [Dolton](#) and other south suburbs in Cook County was struggling under the weight of a shrinking jobs base and concomitant declining incomes. Property taxes more than doubled in Dolton between 2005 and 2019, according to [a report from the Civic Federation](#). The Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University showed the rate of foreclosure was still high in the late 2010s [in Dolton](#), running at more than twice the rate in Cook County overall, and the number of "extremely low value sales," or homes sold for under \$20,000, was high in the town.

On the block of 25 houses where the new pope grew up, at least four other properties went through foreclosure in the 2010s, the Cook County clerk's records show.

Radzik's homebuying entity, DPR Homes, bought the property in May for \$66,000, from the couple who paid \$6,000 for it six years earlier.

In time-adjusted dollars, DPR Homes paid 57% of the amount Louis Prevost got for the home in 1996.

Radzik did not immediately respond to Crain's request for comment, so it's not possible to know how much he

spent on the rehab before putting the home up for sale in January at \$219,000.

As with the Prevosts' baby-boom years, the area's decline in value and the foreclosure wave, the house on East 141st Place is now riding another trend: a [rehab wave](#) that in the past decade has improved thousands of homes in Chicago's South Side neighborhoods and south suburbs.

Radzik's firm, based in Manhattan, has purchased at least 23 low-value homes since November 2023, the county clerk's records show. They include a foreclosure on Dante Avenue in Dolton purchased for \$57,500 in April 2024 that was rehabbed and sold in February for \$172,500.

Another house in Dolton, on Cottage Grove Avenue, is for rent at \$1,950 a month about a year and a half after DPR Homes bought it for \$57,500 from a foreclosure entity.

DPR Homes isn't the only foreclosure flipper at work in Dolton. A house on Dobson Avenue sold for \$250,000 in April, six months after a court-ordered foreclosure sale. A foreclosure rehab on Madison Avenue also hit the market at \$225,000 on May 9, the same day Radzik took Pope Leo XIV's childhood home off the market, reportedly to figure out his next step.



By Dennis Rodkin

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He bought Oberweis Dairy, Mackinac Island ferries and now an \$85 million Florida mansion