



Clergy, family urge support for foreclosure victim

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Danny Nunez and his extended family have enjoyed life at 24 Larchwood Road in Methuen. Nunez bought the two-family house in 2003, living with his wife and three children in a second-floor apartment, while five other family members live in a first-floor apartment.

Soon, though, the Nunez clan could be forced onto the street because Wells Fargo Bank has commenced foreclosure proceedings.

Yesterday, Nunez and a group of supporters, mostly clergy and others associated with the activist group Merrimack Valley Project, took to the streets in Lawrence to rally against what they called unfair and fraudulent practices by the giant, California-based bank.

"Everyone has been hit hard by the economic downturn," said Victor Jarvis, pastor of Ebenezer Christian Church, where the rally was held. "But Wells Fargo, which received a significant bailout from the federal government, will not negotiate. This is wrong. We will not stand for this kind of taking advantage of hardworking people."

In fact, Wells Fargo received \$25 billion in bailout money, aimed at keeping the bank solvent in the midst of the country's devastating financial crisis, brought on at least in part by a plunging housing market.

That plunging housing market can be traced back to homeowners like Nunez, who bought his house in 2003 for \$300,000, but which is now worth about \$150,000.

The principal and interest, at \$2,200 a month, are killing him, he said. He wants relief.

"I am asking Wells Fargo to allow me to continue being a citizen of Lawrence and Methuen," said Nunez, who is an active member of Ebenezer Christian Church and a leader of the Merrimack Valley Project, which organized the rally on the steps of the church.

After the rally, attended by about 50 people, Nunez said he has worked hard the last couple of months to have his loan modified, working with Neighborhood Legal Services and others to stop the foreclosure.

But his efforts have been in vain.

"They denied me a modification and just kept asking for more and more money," said Nunez, whose wife lost her job a year ago, making it even more difficult for him to make the monthly payments, which he is now behind on.

"I just got a letter that the foreclosure is in process," he said.

Rally organizers agreed that the action yesterday was symbolic, but that it represents a larger problem going on across the country.

"It's not just Wells Fargo," Jarvis said. "People are losing their homes everywhere."

He said the purpose of the rally was to help a parishioner, but also to highlight a serious problem that continues, despite the fact that less attention is being paid to the foreclosure issue as the debate over the wars and health care are waged in the media.

Foreclosures continue to be a problem in the Merrimack Valley, particularly in Lawrence and Methuen. Foreclosure petitions — the first step in the process a bank must go through to seize someone's home — went up 5.4 percent over the first eight months of 2009 compared with the first eight months of 2008, from 427 to 450. In Haverhill, they went up 40 percent, from 202 to 278, according to the Warren Group, a real estate tracking firm in Boston.

In Methuen, where Nunez lives, petitions went up 71 percent, from 122 to 209.

Jeffrey Gill, rector at Christ Church Andover, also a member of the Merrimack Valley Project, said the rally helped put a human face on a huge national problem usually defined by dry statistics.

"The banks are foreclosing on people and then turning around and selling the houses at prices the former homeowner, like Danny Nunez, could have afforded," he said. It doesn't do any of us any good for a family like Danny's to lose their home."

Lisa Vinikoor, lead organizer for Merrimack Valley Project, said the nonprofit organization hopes yesterday's rally will be enough to jump-start negotiations between Nunez and Wells Fargo.

"We put out the call today," she said. "We hope they hear loud and clear, and we'd

like an answer that's fair and just to him by Nov. 8. If not, we'll have to look at what to do, and escalate."

She said it's unclear what the next step would be if Wells Fargo continues to ignore their pleas.

"We are looking for a response," she said. "If we don't get one, we'll be looking at our next strategy to get a win for Danny."

An e-mail to Wells Fargo media relations was not immediately returned yesterday.

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