

Another Lahaina memorial planned

A new site across town featuring Hearts of Mercy & Compassion crosses will be dedicated Saturday

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By Allison Schaefer



Wednesday marked three months since the Aug. 8 Lahaina wildfires. The memorial consisting of some 100 crosses erected for the victims stood Wednesday adorned with lei, flags and photos at the intersection of Lahainaluna Road and the bypass highway. GEORGE F. LEE

The passage of time was evident Wednesday at the scores of crosses that form a Lahaina memorial on the hillside above the destroyed town. The once lush maile lei that drapes the crosses has turned brown. Notes and objects left by loved ones to honor the spirits of the deceased are fading in the sun. However, newly planted coconut trees at the entrance of the memorial hint of emerging green shoots and hope of recovery to come.

Two representatives from Lutheran Church Charities of Northbrook, Ill., which operates the Hearts of Mercy & Compassion Ministry, were at the memorial to pay their respects Wednesday, which marked three months since the deadly Aug. 8 Lahaina firestorm that claimed the lives of at least 99 people.

The Rev. Chris Singer, LCC president and CEO, and Tim Laabs, LCC project manager, said the ministry has partnered with Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Kahului to create an additional memorial featuring Hearts of Mercy & Compassion crosses, which will be dedicated at 10 a.m. Saturday at Hokiokio Place, between the Lahaina Bypass and Honoapiilani Highway. The community is invited to attend, honor the lives lost and write messages on the white crosses, which feature blue hearts in the center that carry each deceased person's name.

“People are encouraged to sign the crosses,” Laabs said. “In certain tragedies, people sign the top, the back, the sides until every inch gets covered.” Singer, who lost his home to Hurricane Harvey in 2017 and understands the power of prayer and support, said the goal of the ministry is to help people heal after tragedies. “Our goal is for people to be able to express their grief and receive messages of love and hope,” he said.

Singer said the symbolic heart and cross ministry is an outgrowth of the Columbine High School tragedy in 1999, where Greg Zanis of Aurora, Ill., gained national recognition when he constructed and delivered what he then called “Crosses for Losses” as memorials to the 13 people who were killed in that mass shooting. Zanis, who made and delivered more than 26,000 wooden memorials before his death in May 2020, helped communities in the aftermath of mass shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, Las Vegas, Pittsburgh, Orlando and Parkland, Fla., and El Paso, Texas, and from the Boston Marathon bombing and the tornadoes in Lee County, Ala.

Singer said LCC officially took over the program from Zanis in January 2020 and has since responded to many tragedies, including the condominium tower collapse in Surfside, Fla., the Christmas parade attack in Waukesha, Wis., the Allen Premium Outlets shooting in Allen, Texas, the Star Ballroom Dance Studio shooting in Monterey Park, Calif., the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, Texas, and others.

Singer said after a time the crosses are either presented to surviving family members or in some communities like Uvalde have been turned into permanent memorials. He said community discussion is needed to determine where Maui’s Hearts of Mercy & Compassion crosses end up, but said one idea to consider is to place them near Lahaina’s iconic banyan tree.



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