

# Save Our Churches

## Save Our Neighborhoods

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Brainstorm 2/23/08

### **In what ways do the church centers positively affect our neighborhoods, region, and state?**

- They are repositories of memory
- They provide help to residents of neighborhood
- They provide beauty and aesthetic pleasure to neighborhoods
- They provide a spiritual home, a place for service to community
- They provide stability and sense of safety to neighborhoods
- They provide part of the economic benefit of cultural tourism
- They provide sense of belonging and security; a sign that faith is alive and working in a neighborhood
- They provide landmarks for communities
- They provide a means to save a neighborhood by anchoring other properties and encouraging upkeep
- They provide a spiritual place to call home and a center for faith and fellowship

### **In what ways can we actively involve current and former parishioners in the effort?**

- Use church as venue for concerts, passion play, special events etc.
- Work with UB to develop a tract on church architecture
- Invite visiting Master/PhD students to study local church architecture; do the same with religious art
- Each church could have a Save Our Churches representative and committee
- Sell the idea that this is a mission
- Create a parish “family album”—invite everyone to bring in old photos to be reproduced
- Provide increased security in and around parish complexes
- Get a small announcement in each church bulletin about Save Our Churches program
- Encourage weddings, wedding anniversary parties or galas etc.
- Get input from city officials on neighborhood revitalization
- Create alumni organizations
- Use block club contacts
- Personal contact is most effective—committee to Bishop?
- Improve the Catholic schools and one may increase church membership
- Partner with Albright-Knox on a religious art program
- Phone/write past members of threatened churches to see if they would be willing to contribute to a trust fund for maintenance of their ancestral church

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- Recognize that ethnicity is important to the city, e.g. festivals, feasts, etc.
- Launch an effort to light all churches on Holy Thursday
- Expand number of churches that have masses in German, Italian, Polish, and Latin
- Involve architects, engineers and architectural and engineering students in upkeep issues
- Demand a direct linkage to Diocese to provide needed information and help in this process
- Get parishioners behind specific neighborhood projects that generate goodwill (and maybe coverage)
- Send a newsletter to former parishioners
- Use direct mail to publicize parish reunions, masses, receptions
- Be part of “Doors Open” event
- Create an area-wide organization representing all 60 threatened parishes
- Highlight tours of open, closed, abandoned, dilapidated churches to illustrate need for mission
- Engage the successful committee of Corpus Christi
- Keep Bishop and others informed of our efforts in hopes of recruiting them
- Take out full-page ad in Buffalo News
- Photograph the one-of-a-kind architecture to promote saving buildings/church
- Reach out to confirmation classes for public service
- Create website
- Reach out to other parishes through their bulletins for help, “adoptions” and financial support.
- Form a steering committee and invite all former or present parishioners to a general meeting
- Provide transportation to masses and events
- Call for Diocese-wide revenue sharing
- Develop criteria to determine what structures are most important to save
- Gather contact info by having a raffle or contest with a prize
- Invite leaders of individual parishes to come up with ideas for local input
- Contact families who have had funerals and invite them back for memorial masses

### **In what ways can we communicate to citizens and leaders the architectural, historic, and religious significance of our church complexes?**

- Network with other successful groups
- Bring church constituencies together
- Identify groups that are involved and what their missions are
- Have firms donate architectural and engineering services
- Contact national preservation groups
- Communicate strategy; there are manifold stakeholders in multiple facets of church building importance
- Commission photographic survey, archival record
- Look to other cities’ models

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- Publicize opening hours
- Have an annual church walk, tours
- Reach out to neighborhood residents
- Develop church tours for students and market to faculty
- Create ongoing schedule of updates/outreach and disseminate to media
- Communicate to the neighborhoods with a small local newspaper
- Engage the Diocese
- Know the likely covenants to be attached by the Diocese to any sale or lease of church property
- Have churches designated as landmarks
- Enlist priests and nuns interested in saving churches
- Define the issue as a community or civic issue, not a religious one

## **In what ways might we manage or design the church movement to save our church centers?**

- Educational awareness committee - know what funds and resources are available
- Neighborhood or parish watch to protect property
- Financial assessment of properties/artifacts within churches
- Committee to deal with local government, higher levels
- Establish committees: Preservation / artifacts / organs / bells / memorabilia; Finance; Building protection; Repairs and Maintenance; Re-use; Communications; Outreach; Education
- Historic ownership committee
- Historical significance of musical instruments - part of preservation committee
- Prepare a Public Service documentary on historic churches
- Nationwide or worldwide study
- City church committees need to meet with churches in the greater (WNY) area to participate (a larger community issue )
- Partner with Catholic colleges and high schools
- Have pastors and parishioners submit ideas [to Diocese, which] can support any changes or advise why an idea is not viable
- Each threatened parish needs committee representation - committees need to meet from all threatened parishes to represent their strengths to the bishop
- Diocese should be strictly held responsible for upkeep of properties that are closed
- Keep priests in residence at rectories as overseers and protectors of property
- Engage communities through existing “Good Neighbor Planning Alliance” system: empower neighbors & businesses

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- Accountability from the Diocese for each closed church congregation
- Let bishop Groz [St. Stan's] have in-put into this situation - has been totally disregarded
- Find out the legalities of the church closing: Who owns the parish property? Who has the rights to the parish fund?
- Do the parishes have any say in what happens to closed parish artifacts
- Have parish members form core groups
- Publish an article in WNY Heritage Magazine
- Where does the money go from the closed church? The Diocese or the new cluster church. Who is auditing the figures? What about the furniture, statues, etc.
- Publish the need for volunteers to high school- students need community service hours-free labor and increase awareness
- How do we protect historic religious arts / heritage to stay in WNY.
- Audit each church that is proposed for closing
- National search for funding in keeping our churches open. Funding for preservation of artistic artifacts and statuary.
- Not a Catholic problem but a community problem
- Rise above ethnicity
- Information tree for each parish
- Displaced priests have no place to go and do not have any place to live. Support these displaced priests.
- Establish a preservation plan and historical record of the beautiful star class windows. Eventually publish a book of all the churches - stained glass windows and their stories.
- Maintenance strategy for interim use
- Encourage the Diocese to reverse its sprawl inducing and reinforcing policies
- Explore the full roots and ramifications of the Church's tax exempt status and the rights it gives communities to protect themselves from abandoned properties.
- Can the New York Secretary of State declare that certain policies and actions are contrary to the the public trust, Canon Law notwithstanding, and compel changes?
- Close uninspiring and funtionalistic churches in favor of architecturally and spiritually uplifting ones

## **In what ways might we fund the promotion, protection, and repair of church centers?**

- Lease space or rent for events
- Sell printed/audio/video/downloadable tours
- Guided architectural tours
- Corporate, group, and individual sponsorship
- Concerts

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- Alumni foundation
- Dedicate a percentage of state lottery/casino receipts to historic preservation
- Private development as housing
- Light manufacturing, shops
- Sue utilities to lower prices
- Tax breaks for utilities offering discounts to churches
- Operate farmers' markets on properties
- Solicit donations from home improvement stores/landscaping companies/builders suppliers
- Solicit help from community groups
- Develop windpower on properties (windmills in steeples!)
- Establish a course in history and restoration practice of churches. Hold it in churches. Charge for it.
- Establish a preservation school and have students repair and maintain churches as they learn
- Give school buildings to small-to-midsize companies for HQ's
- Publish book on endangered churches
- Rent space to daycare centers
- Sell naming rights
- Rent towers for telecommunications
- Move/open branch libraries on church grounds
- Market complexes as mini convention centers and meeting space
- Enlist Save America's Treasures program
- Get listing on New York State "Seven to Save" list
- Rent to adult learning centers
- Pro bono help from architects, engineers, accountants, MBA's, builders, academics
- Use Community Reinvestment Act to get banks to support efforts in otherwise red-lined neighborhoods
- See what other countries are doing with their abandoned churches
- Solicit foundations
- Partner with other organizations
- Hold fish fries and ethnic dinners
- Operate a Mega Bingo
- Find "sister churches" in other parts of the world
- Designate buildings as landmarks to qualify for government funding
- Exert political pressure to revise current understanding of separation of church and state to better secure government funding for churches, as churches play an important social role regardless of one's creed.
- Create Public Service Announcements for tv, radio stations