



October 28, 2003

Department of Planning and Development
Commission on Chicago Landmarks
33 North LaSalle Street, Suite 1600
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Regarding: St. Galasius Church

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, I am writing in support of the Archdiocese of Chicago in its opposition to the imposition of landmark status on St. Gelasius Church building. The Council is composed of some forty of the chief leaders of the Chicago area's Roman Catholic, Jewish, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental, Islamic, and Protestant communions and institutions. Its president is the Rt. Rev. William Persell, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago.

Like the Archdiocese, we believe that the Chicago Municipal Code specifically prohibits the City from imposing landmark status on church buildings without the consent of the owner. Since the Archdiocese has made clear that it does not consent to landmark designation for St. Gelasius, its wishes should be honored, according to the law.

We also believe that the government does not have the right to force any religious denomination to maintain a church building after a religious organization has made the difficult religious and pastoral decision to close the building. Religious organizations should not be forced to devote their limited ministry resources to the historic preservation of church buildings. Forcing a church to do so violates a church's right to religious liberty, which is protected by both Federal and Illinois law.

Although historic preservation is a worthy community goal, religious organizations must focus on the needs of people before buildings. Churches must not be constrained by the need to maintain buildings which no longer serve the church's mission. Churches and other recognized religious organizations must have the right to make internal decisions about how to allocate their ministry resources without undue government interference.

I call upon the Commission to respect the right of all religious organizations to control the use of their religious buildings, subject to appropriate building, health, and safety codes, and therefore urge the Commission to recommend against landmark designation of St. Gelasius Church.

Sincerely,

Rev. Paul Rutgers
Executive Director

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