

Sacred Heart still standing

Church demolition delayed

By FAYETTE NICHOLS

Praying for a miracle isn't easy when your church is about to be demolished, but Sacred Heart parishioners still hope their church can be saved.

While parishioners expected Sacred Heart, 11652 S. Church ave., to be razed today, those plans have apparently been postponed.

According to Vicar General Monseigneur Francis Bracken, the Archdiocese has yet to apply for a wrecking permit to tear the building down.

Such a permit application takes ten days to process, according to the city's Department of Buildings.

Granting that permit would require the approval of state Sen. Jeremiah Joyce (D-28th), who is still acting as the 19th ward alderman.

Joyce also has the option of waiving the application process allowing the Archdiocese to obtain a wrecking permit within 24 hours.

Bracken could not say when the Archdiocese planned to seek a permit, adding that "With the snow, no wrecker would go in there now due to the added risk to his men."

However the demolition date is not likely to be revealed by church authorities.

"I'm not going to arrange for a demonstration out there when the bulldozers come," said Bracken, acknowledging parishioners strong opposition to losing their place of worship.

"We still need time to prepare the church for demolition. We have to disconnect the gas, water and electricity first," Bracken said.

He warned that should parishioners attempt to block the wrecking crew, police action would be taken.

"If they are on church property," he said, "they will have to be taken off. It's a police matter."

Parishioners, many still stunned by the sudden announcement of the demolition on Sunday, are beginning to organize some sort of opposition, even if the building merely remains standing as a historical landmark.

Some say they will appeal

to Joyce to prolong the wrecking permit application process until some compromise use for the church can be found, while others are considering a more physical kind of protest.

Still other parishioners, who believe the demolition is politically motivated by area parishes to bring Catholics back to their neighborhood churches, plan to boycott their parishes.

One Oak Park woman reportedly phoned the Vatican

in Rome and talked to the Vatican City Secretary of State there in the hopes of blocking the demolition of Sacred Heart.

"Cardinal Cody is growing afraid of a confrontation from us. I think he is becoming concerned for his

public image," said one Morgan Park man who hopes Cody will back down on the Archdiocese's plans to destroy the church.

Even though Sacred

Heart is still standing, most of the pews and furnishings have been removed and the paintings of the Station of the Cross taken down and stored.

A life-size handcarved wooden statue of Jesus which cost Sacred Heart members more than \$3,000 is also gone.

"Many of the religious articles like the chalices, the tabernacle and altar were given to the Catholic Youth Ministry center at Morgan

Park High school," said Father John Rudnik of St. Walter's parish.

"The pews and other things were either taken by individuals or given to the Holy Name of Mary parish," Rudnik said.

However, one parishioner said, "Our church was vandalized. We came in Monday morning and someone who had a key was there during the night taking some of the things we paid for out of the church."

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Little Meg Simmerling received her first communion during the last mass held at the Sacred Heart Church, 11652 S. Church. The last of seven children in her family to receive a first communion there, her parents had stepped up the date when she took communion. "She went to all her classes with her sister. But we just wanted to make sure she took it there," said Jack Simmerling. (Staff photo by George Bertozz)