

PAGE AYRES COWLEY ARCHITECTS, LLC

636 Broadway, New York, New York 10012 T. 212.673.6910 F. 212.673.6869

18 March 2008

Commissioner Robert Tierney
Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Letter in support for the designation of St. Michael's Church

Dear Commissioner Tierney,

No important decision is made quickly, and while St. Michael's may have taken the long road to designation, this day comes at just the right time to demonstrate the positive motives for historic preservation.

There needs to be a distinction between the museum preservation of buildings "frozen in time" and enlightened conservation that encourages a forward looking activity, namely stewardship. This designation represents many of the good reasons why churches, along with other building types, should be preserved:

- Churches are useful resources capable of serving a modern purpose.
- A good building can last a long time and with extended maintenance, almost indefinitely.
- They are associated with rituals of religion and power (temples, churches and memorials) express pride and cultural achievement.
- They are celebratory, essentially works of art and the product of a distinctive and creative minds, with exemplary stone carving, stained glass, etc.
- They remind us of associations – the birth, marriages and deaths of neighbors.
- Buildings are aesthetically pleasing and picturesque and add to the character and sense of place to a neighborhood.

St. Michael's pastoral staff, their congregation and all of the professionals who have worked hard to preserve this important church are to be congratulated.

"Whatever good in its kinde ought to be preservv'd in respect for antiquity, as well as our present advantage..."
Nicholas Hawksmoor, 17 February 1715

"Preservation presents an unparalleled opportunity to correct some sense of alienation which is so characteristic of modern society. It affords the opportunity for citizens to regain a sense of identity with their own origins of which they have been robbed by the sheer process of urbanization."
James Marston Fitch, 1990

I hope that this designation can serve as an example of why preservation of religious buildings is so important in a time of great change and development in this city.

Sincerely yours,

Page Ayres Cowley, FAIA, RIBA