

March 18, 2008

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE N.Y.C. LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING THE PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, RECTORY, AND PARISH HOUSE, AT 201-255 WEST 99<sup>TH</sup> STREET IN MANHATTAN AS A LANDMARK**

Good day, Chair Tierney and Commissioners. I am Ann-Isabel Friedman, speaking on behalf of The New York Landmarks Conservancy.

The Conservancy supports the proposed designation of the St. Michael's Church complex, at 201-255 West 99<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, as a New York City landmark.

Designed by architect Robert W. Gibson and completed in 1891, the church combines elements of Romanesque and Byzantine styles with its limestone walls, asymmetrical massing, prominent corner tower (visible from 40 blocks away), rounded-arched openings, and red Spanish-tile roof. The building's large sanctuary and crossing contains a wide variety of windows, memorials, and decoration executed between 1893 and 1920 by notable American decorative arts studios, including Louis Comfort Tiffany, Maitland Armstrong, J & R Lamb, and Charles Connick. The ten-bell chimes in the 150 foot tower were manufactured by Meneely & Co. of Troy, New York.

Since 1990, or ten years after the Commission first heard this item in 1980, the congregation has worked with the Conservancy on various restoration projects, from its terra cotta tile roof to its magnificent apsidal suite of Tiffany windows. The windows, and their state of the art fiber-optic lighting system, have been featured in two issues of the Conservancy's publication for stewards of historic religious properties: *Common Bond*. St. Michael's has been listed on the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places since 1996. Canon George W. Brandt has been a member of the Conservancy's Advisory Board and Sacred Sites Committee since 2006.

In addition to its conscientious stewardship of its historic buildings, St. Michael's has also been forthright about various efforts to develop portions of its property, generating the income needed to maintain, program, and ensure the future of this large and important complex. As St. Michael's has completed plans to develop the property to the northeast of the church, including alterations to the non-visible rear of the parish house to enhance accessibility and maximize use, as reviewed by the Commission under the Notice of Review process, they have voluntarily shared these plans with the Conservancy. The church leadership and their architect have sought and responded to the Conservancy's recommendations about the design and materials of the proposed new building.

We're gratified that 28 years following its initial consideration, the Commission is moving forward with the designation of this large complex, which anchors an important corner, and block, of the city. We're hopeful that the Commission will be moving forward with other religious property designations soon, and would like to remind the Commission of the Conservancy's completed surveys of Manhattan and Brooklyn Roman Catholic Churches, which we have previously shared with you. We'd also like to note our recently completed survey of Brooklyn synagogues, and current surveys of Queens Roman Catholic Churches and synagogues. We look forward to sharing the results of the synagogue surveys with you, and would be happy to review our recommendations for landmark designation for the completed Manhattan and Brooklyn surveys at your convenience.

I thank you for the opportunity to present The New York Landmarks Conservancy's views.