



**ARCHITECTURAL
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6 November 2002

Pat Malicki
President, Windsor Region Branch
Architectural Conservancy of Ontario
275 Ford Blvd.
Windsor, ON N8S 2E4

Re: Annunciation Church, Stoney Point and St. Joachim Church

Dear Pat:

As requested and arranged by the Windsor Region Branch, I visited the above captioned churches on 28 October accompanied by Mr. Gary Minal of the Diocese of London. Mr. Minal was open and candid about the condition of the two churches and shared with me the original reports as prepared by Alan Avis Architect in relation to their condition and the requirements for their upgrading.

Based on this visit, the conversation with Gary and a perusal of the reports, I offer the following comments:

- The reports fairly represent the condition of the two churches, although I disagree in a minor way with the technical description of some of the failure mechanisms (notably plaster damage). There is no doubt that maintenance would be required at both of the sites although this is normal for buildings of all vintages and is not unique to these two.
- Prices identified in the reports are fair and reasonable and reflect the extent of work necessary to bring these to full contemporary standards. I must point out that the intent of both documents was to spread these costs over a ten year period which would reduce the level of difficulty for the parish to raise funds for the requirements on an annual basis. As well, some discretion could be used in the implementation of the reports in terms of various aspects of the works proposed.
- I would suggest that some of the costs at Annunciation could be considerably reduced if a less expensive roofing option was selected albeit with the understanding that the longevity of the roof would not be the same as the recommended copper system. As well, the replacement of the spire could be deferred. The combination of these two items could reduce the proposed capital budget by as much as \$500,000.
- The budget at St. Joachim might also be affected by an amendment in the method of plaster repair. Replacement of plaster on the beams and consolidation of the remainder from the attic (a method I have used in several instances) may be a more practical and cost effective approach. To condemn a church as a result of plaster falling from a few of the tie beams is, in my opinion, a bit extreme. This is particularly given the fact that the total budget envisioned for the first stage upgrade of St. Joachim is presented as approximately \$500,000 with a total cost of just under \$1,000,000 – not large sums for a building of this size and quality. The total budget proposed over the 10 year period need not all be expended immediately – some items such as crushing of wooden beam ends have been progressing for many years and there will likely be many more years before a failure might be envisioned. In the meantime, monitoring of the problem areas could be conducted to ensure that the subject areas do not begin to deteriorate at a more rapid pace. Other portions of the work, such as shingle replacement, could be looked at with a view to lower cost work. Mr. Minal stated that it is his goal to ensure that all of the work done on these churches be done in such a manner that they will last 300 years. This is laudable save for the problem a higher cost repair might cause if it results in demolition of the building. These costs should be revisited.
- Mr. Minal was in accord with the notion that both churches can be restored technically and that the issue is more one of available resources and the will to accomplish the restoration of each.

Based on these observations, I would suggest that the issue is more one of politics than whether it is possible to upgrade these buildings. In this light, I also offer some comments:

- The proposal is that these two churches (plus a small one of more recent vintage in Comber) be demolished and replaced by a centrally located church of new construction. This does not make a whole lot of sense to me, given that Annunciation Church is relatively centrally located and of a size which would probably meet the requirements of the new church. While there may be a prevailing attitude that no money should be spent on the older buildings because, once repaired, they would still be “old” I must respond by saying that, within 25 years, the new church will also be “old”. Because of the light-weight nature of most modern building construction technologies, a new building would probably require maintenance at a much higher level than a fully restored Annunciation after the 25 years had elapsed. Indeed, it is my opinion that at the 25 year point the roofing of the new church would require complete replacement and the windows, most likely thermal glass, would also require complete replacement. Maintenance costs at the new building would, therefore, likely be higher than for a properly maintained and restored building such as Annunciation. If such maintenance costs are to be reduced or avoided, the construction materials and methods for the new church would have to greatly exceed the average costs for new construction which would drive the cost of the new church to levels several times higher than those required to restore the existing. The existing buildings were built to a higher standard than we are typically currently willing to pay today. Indeed, the general intent of the design and construction of these buildings was that, with proper maintenance, they would last indefinitely. Most buildings using modern construction materials and methods are designed to last approximately 25 years. There is simply no comparison – the existing buildings are of significantly better quality than that which is available using current construction practices and standard budgets.

- Beyond the issue of longevity and value for money, the location of these churches as the hearts of their individual communities cannot be overstated. The original root of the word “religion” means “coming together” – which is what a community is and describes perfectly the setting in which both churches find themselves. Not only do the churches serve the communities in which they are located, the communities serve the churches by protecting them from vandalism and providing the people to populate them every day of the week. This advantage will be lost if a new site is chosen in a location which requires commuting by car. How do seniors get there if they cannot drive? How do children get there – must they be put on buses for this visit as well? What is the relationship between school and church, so important in the Catholic family – will the schools be relocated also?

- The capital cost of a new church will greatly exceed the cost of the restoration of these two churches even if the new church is built to basic 25 year standard. Does this make fiscal sense? And what of the issues of conservation and effective use of resources – should the church throw away a viable resource and create something which will need substantial revision in one generation?

Ultimately, the disposition of these buildings will come down to the wishes of the Parish and the Bishop. I cannot enter into the politics of this issue, however, as that is a task for others. It is my understanding that one of the major issues is the declining size of the Parish and the need to consolidate operations. If this is the case, the most sensible option would be to restore Annunciation (at a cost considerably lower than that of a new church) and use this as the centralized facility. If there is a concern that Christmas and Easter mass might not be accommodated (in the happy event that more people turn out and the decline is reversed) then additional masses could be held on those days. For the rest of the year, the church would be of more than adequate size to accommodate the parish.

As to St. Joachim, it is a beautiful building and the core of its community. If the will of the community is as strong as some suggest, perhaps it could be acquired by the community and restored as a meeting hall if the disposition of the building proceeds. Recently, I was involved with a community of only 100 people who, in the course of one year, raised over \$500,000 to restore their church in what could only be described as a series of miracles. In the event that, in future, the parish congregation once again expands, this historic and beautiful church could be re-sanctified to the Glory of God.

I trust this visit and the comments made are helpful and useful in the effort to preserve these important buildings. Please keep me informed of the progress the community is making in this regard.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Borgal OAA MRAIC CAPHC
President
Architectural Conservancy of Ontario

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and places of natural beauty or interest*