

Why Are Chicago's Religious Structures Threatened?

A variety of different forces have converged upon Chicago, and combined with the City's inability to landmark religious buildings, they are wreaking havoc on our Religious Structures. Dozens of landmark-quality buildings – often a neighborhood's most historic and grand – have been demolished in recent years.



St. Boniface Church and School
1352 West Chestnut.
Architect: Henry Schlacks, 1902.



St. Gelasius Church
6401 South Woodlawn.
Architect: Henry Schlacks, 1923.



Corpus Christi Church
4810 S. Dr. Martin Luther King Drive
Architect: Joseph McCarthy, 1901.

Threat: **Redevelopment Opportunity**

Many churches are considered as potential redevelopment sites, often for new residential housing. Owners and developers perceive demolition to be a quicker and cheaper option than adaptive reuse.

In the East Village Neighborhood, Preservation Chicago and other community groups have been fighting the proposed demolition of St. Boniface Church for years. Recently, the Renaissance Revival school building was demolished, beginning stages of which are shown in the photo. Meanwhile, across the city, a battle has broken out in the Woodlawn Community over the fate of St. Gelasius Church. Alderman Arenda Troutman, wanting to save the church, has resorted to using a small technicality in the landmarks ordinance to protect the church. Church officials are threatening a lawsuit in order to regain their demolition permit.

Threat: **Neglect and Insensitive Alterations**

Many of Chicago's aging, yet historic, religious structures are not being handled with care. Recent episodes include a battle over the fate of the Metropolitan Community Church at 4100 South Dr. Martin Luther King Drive (1891, John T. Long). Long-time members of the church were forced to pursue court action when a new pastor heavy-handedly decided to raze the building, intending to build anew. The church is now in the hands of a more respectful owner.

Less than one mile away, much of the glory of Corpus Christi Church has recently been lost, with the removal of its two towering, copper-domed steeples (above). Officials from the Chicago Catholic Archdiocese claim that the necessary masonry repairs would have been too costly.

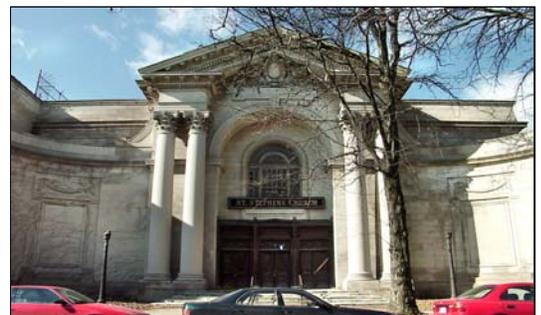


At Left:

Hebrew Theological College
3450 West Douglas Boulevard
Loewenberg & Loewenberg, 1923

At Right:

Tenth Church of Christ Scientist
5640 South Blackstone Avenue
Coolidge and Hodgdon, 1917



Threat: **Abandonment and Decay**

Many of Chicago's congregations and parishes are faced with diminishing membership. Buildings can fall quickly into disrepair, and community leaders lack the tools to protect them from the wrecking ball. *Above Left:* Lawndale's Hebrew Theological College sits boarded and falling into disrepair. *Right:* The Tenth Church of Christ Scientist has been empty and decaying for years. Various attempts have failed to save the church.