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Merged parishes now face "taxing" problems

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The Buffalo Roman Catholic Diocesan leaders proposing multiple church closings as a result of the Journey in Faith and Grace are now faced with the prospect that those properties will become taxable soon after they are no longer being used as churches.

According to Buffalo Common Council President Dave Franczyk, this is very likely according to New York State law.

"This development gives further credence to my view that the diocese is moving to close these churches without any plan," he said. "I think this new information should buttress the arguments of those who want to save these churches. These churches are not costing the diocese any money now, but the diocese would have to pay taxes on them if they were no longer being used as houses of worship. So what is the sense in closing them?"

The Buffalo News in its Sunday, Sept. 16 edition stated that according to city assessment records the 16 Catholic parishes in Buffalo that closed recently or are scheduled to be closed have an assessed value of $12.4 million. That could mean a combined city tax bill of more than $400,000, not including Erie County taxes. The city is considering a 6 month grace period from the time' of closing to the time it imposes the taxes.

St. Adalbert Basilica on 212 Stanislaus St., for example is assessed at $1.2 million and would carry a city tax bill of $38,264. Assumption parish in Black Rock which merged with St. Elizabeth and St. Francis Xavier would have a tax bill of $43,142 at the current assessed values of the two closed parishes. The assessed values are likely to be challenged if the properties are not sold.

President Franczyk still believes there is a strategy in the recent actions of the diocese, though he admits that he is only voicing an opinion, not a proven fact.

"I'm beginning to think, and this is only my opinion, but I am beginning to think that what they want is to get rid of the ethnic parishes and the poorer parishes in the City of Buffalo where people really need help," he said, "and just go with the wealthy suburban parishes in Williamsville and Orchard Park. If that is true, it is very sad."

Over all. Councilman Franczyk has a negative view of the Journey in Faith and Grace.

"I don't think it has been a legitimate process," he said. "I think that the diocese had an agenda all along to lose these smaller, ethnic churches with no re-use strategy and no concern for the impact on the city that these closings would have."

The Council President has recently been hearing rumors that other Catholic churches in the city may be closed besides the 16that are already scheduled to be shuttered. On the other hand, there has been at least what seems like a hopeful sign coming out of St. Adalbert's as recently reported in the Am-Pol Eagle.

"I know the pastor of St. Adalbert's has received a letter from the diocese halting the process of closing that church pending the parishioners' appeal," Franczyk adds. "I can only hope that everything that has happened has given them second thoughts."