

Dear Editor:

Recently I was gifted with a subscription to the Am-Pol Eagle, which during this period has been saturated with the closing of the Polish churches in Buffalo. Although the religious arguments against closing have been comprehensive, may I weigh in with some observations beyond, but not excluding, these?

Global warming and peak oil both point to the necessity now for people to be looking at our footprint on this earth. These realities cannot but result in sustainable communities, in which the needs of the people for employment, food, other essentials - as well as churches - will have to be met within reasonable walking distance. In the light of this coming certainty, the closing of the churches is short sighted. With our churches gone, will we be relegated to store fronts or no church building at all? If Catholics do not have access to their church, a physical core around which they can unite, it is not unreasonable to expect a further decline in membership, despite the slogan of "faith and grace." This issue applies not just to the churches in Polonia and elsewhere in the city and suburbs, but especially in rural areas.

Traveling in Europe on several occasions, I saw hundreds of religious edifices from soaring cathedrals to neighborhood churches, many of them hundreds of years old, still being maintained and being used despite declining worshipers. Noteworthy architecture and breathtaking art: paintings, mosaics, sculpture, attract tourists who are uplifted and enriched by such beauty and tradition, while Masses continue being offered, now however in the small side chapels. Some have religious museums attached to them; others are of historic as well as spiritual value.

While our churches in Polonia are not ancient, they still represent a wide range of architectural styles and magnificent art: some of these churches were showcased in the WNED production of "Buffalo's Houses of Worship." Beyond their religious significance, they should also be valued for their aesthetic qualities.

Despite Buffalo's national reputation for its architectural heritage, its leadership has had a cavalier attitude toward its treasures, neglecting them (for ex., the Richardson buildings at the NY State Psychiatric Center, the Wollenburg Mill recently lost to

arson), tearing them down for parking lots (as the architecturally significant Larkin Building) and allowing them to be dismantled and left in disrepair (such as the NY Central Terminal). Regrets years later prove costly, as with the recreation of the Martin Darwin Complex, or hopeless as the attempt to restore the beloved Canadiana. Will there be similar regrets years from now about the loss of the Polish heritage as reflected in loss of its churches?

Traveling in Europe on several occasions, I saw hundreds of religious edifices from soaring cathedrals to neighborhood churches, many of them hundreds of years old, still being maintained and being used despite declining worshipers.

More than a century ago, the Irish hierarchy in Buffalo determined that the Polish community had to be brought under its control. One of the decisions was to notify these parishes that the church buildings belonged not to the parishes but to the diocese. The Polish immigrant community, traditionally parochial in its relationship to the church, had no identification with and therefore rejected the authority of the Irish administration. They flatly refused to turn over ownership of their churches on the grounds that they paid for them, and for that reason they belonged to them, to the local parish, not the diocese.

If our illiterate, unsophisticated ancestors could fight for what was so essential to them, should their sacrifices in building and their commitment in saving them not be honored today? Not only should current parishioners of these closing churches but also the immediate and wider communities, as well as the Buffalo Preservation Society, make every effort to save them. Once these are lost, they are gone forever; the external shells, while pleasant in our skyline, do not represent a living religious, aesthetic and communal entity.

The argument is given of insufficient priests for all these churches. My husband's extended family lives in a rural community in Canada, with numerous churches scattered throughout the immediate area. Despite a declining Catholic population due to smaller families, and people moving away to seek employment, as well as a reduced number of priests, all these churches remain open and vibrant. Each has become a missionary church of one in a

larger nearby community. A priest is available on Sundays for Mass and for funerals and weddings. The responsibility for the cost of and maintenance and repair of the churches, the property and the attached cemetery has been assumed by the parishioners, who also provide for religious instructions for the youth. The church has continued to be the heart of each small community, the center not only of religious expression, but a social center, continuing to keep the people of that area bound together.

While there are numerous reasons for the decline of priests, one of the major factors in this area is the closing of the Catholic schools, despite their proven record of providing better education. These grammar schools, have been the feeders to the Catholic high schools, which are now increasingly being forced to shut their doors due to their declining attendance. It is in these schools that children often experience motivation for a religious vocation. One, but primary, cause of this declining student enrollment is that these schools have priced themselves out of the market for many families.

There are two main issues here: money and commitment. Our country is the richest in the history of the world. While there are pockets of poverty and a declining middle class, wealth exists. Americans are generous; any natural disaster confirms this; even hard pressed families contribute in raising millions of dollars in aid. Saving our churches is a matter of locating all available resources, financial and communal, and tapping into them.

This is not just an issue of keeping the heritage and tradition of the Polish community as reflected in its churches alive. It is an issue of an entire extended community seeing value in that which is taken for granted, and recognizing these ecclesiastical structures are not disposable inner city white elephants but assets and sources of pride for the entire community. These churches likewise will prove to be an important resource in the changing world we can anticipate.

Over various periods of time and a variety of locales, people and institutions have worked creatively to keep their churches alive. We need that same imagination, ingenuity and positive approach that made their cathedrals, basilicas and churches viable as spiritual and edifying as architectural gems.

**Sincerely,
Phyllis O'Donnell,**

Am-Pol Eagle
Thursday July 12, 2007
Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I commend you on your article in the Am-Pol Eagle regarding Sister Regina Murphy and the Process of Faith and Grace.

The article really shed some light on what is going on in this process.

My husband and I have really become disheartened by it all. It sure doesn't reinforce our faith in what is going on about church and school closings.

Our thoughts are that those who were or are involved in the Process of Faith & Grace had a predetermined agenda even before it came down to the parish level as to who stays open or who gets closed.

We are parishioners of St. Adalbert Basilica (it will always be a basilica in my heart). All of my 67 years have been associated with St. Adalbert's and we have very emotional ties to our church.

We are all praying and writing to the bishop to keep our church open. Once again I applaud you for all the information you have shared with us. Keep up the good work.

Liz Taylor,
Hamburg

Dear Editor:

As a parishioner and lector at St. Adalbert Basilica I must write to say that the closing of our basilica is a travesty.

Yes, Bishop Kmiec, we have been, are and still will remain a basilica regardless of your stance.

How can you decide we are no longer a basilica just because you want to close our parish. And, why leave the Response to Love Center independent when all these years it has been and got its start from St. Adalbert Basilica and our beloved late Pastor Rev. Joseph Bialek.

Somehow the equations are not adding up here.

What makes it doubly hard is even Father Thad has deserted us. This so-called Journey of Faith must be stopped. Enough damage has been done to enough Catholics and students who have already lost their faith.

We are fighting this and with God's favor on us and enough publicity our case may yet get to Rome despite our bishop's refusal to do so.

He wants our parish closed and he doesn't care what people want.

Barbara O'Brien,
Cheektowaga

Dear Editor:

I am writing in regard to the decision to close St. Adalbert Basilica. I would ask the bishop to reconsider. St. Adalbert's deserves to be open. It stands as a shining example of what can be done in the inner city by a strong parish family with determination, hard work and faith.

We have many ministries within our parish, notably the Response to Love Center which was founded and maintained by the parish to serve all of the community regardless of religious affiliation.

We have a special spiritual connection with St. Peter's in Rome and we are a basilica as the Catholic diocese itself has called us for 100 years.

St. Adalbert Basilica is a vibrant, well-maintained, financially viable parish that serves as a beacon of light and hope for all the people on the East Side of Buffalo.

Instead of closing us the bishop and the whole diocese should be encouraging and celebrating its existence.

Ann Blass,
Buffalo

Am-Pol Eagle
Thursday July 12, 2007
Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am writing to you to express my deep sadness about the closing of St. Adalbert Basilica. I know that to people on the outside it is only a restructuring and we will still exist when merged with St. John Kanty's, but to myself and a lot of other parishioners this is like being wiped off the map never to exist again.

As most people are well aware the members of St. John Kanty's are not going to want anything to change in their parish just because we are entering it,, that is normal, and to a certain point to be expected. We will have little or no voice in the new "merged" church. This is one of the main things that bother me, that we will lose our voice and personality in this merging.

One of the other things that is deeply troubling about this situation is the fact that our pastor, Fr. Thad, and all of the nuns of the parish seem to have knuckled under to pressure from an outside source on whether the church should remain open or not. I have noticed that the nuns, who regularly attended church services, are no longer present, and they also no longer show up at any church functions. Fr. Thad just says that he has to side with his boss, Bishop Kmiec. I feel abandoned and betrayed by the very people in our religion who are supposed to give spiritual guidance and comfort in times' of change. I am deeply disappointed by this.

I am also upset that it seems that all of our financial resources have been taken away from us to allow the closing of our church to be smoother, but still allow the church's administration to have the financial benefits of our parish "cash cows" namely our cemetery and our Response to Love Center. This is very suspicious and extremely troubling.

The final thing that is troubling me is the constant bickering, especially in the newspaper, about whether or not our church is a basilica or not. It seems strangely timed that all of a sudden when it is important that we not remain open that we are told that we are not a basilica. Why were we allowed to believe this lie, if in fact it is one? I am very troubled by the church administration's handling of this, and the other issues listed above.

I understand that change is necessary in all things. But the way that these changes are being handled is extremely suspect and smacks of ulterior motives. This has been a very disappointing process for me and a lot of other parishioners. This has not been a positive journey in faith for any of us.

Sincerely,
Amy Herdlein,
Cheektowaga

Am-Pol Eagle
Thursday July 12, 2007
Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

After reading Sunday's front page of the Buffalo News (July 1, 2007), I can honestly say that I have never been so ashamed to say that I am a Catholic.

The Council tried to call the closings "ethnic cleansing", but after seeing all the names of the churches that are closing, it can only be called one thing "CITY CLEANSING"... and no one can come up with any good reason not to call it that. I really had no idea about the churches in the Genesee-Bailey-Kensington area.

If you are a senior who has happened to hang in there in the city, you my dear folks, are just out of luck if you think you are going to be able to go to church nearby.

And, a response to another elderly senior who has to use a walker was simply this: the churches that are still open are on a bus line, hop on!

The bishop is certainly out of touch if he thinks that riding a bus on a Sunday morning is an easy thing. As I said to him in a recent letter, maybe he could lend Fr. LiPuma to some of the seniors and give them a ride right up to the front door and then pick them up when it is finished! Oh I forgot, he is the bishop and only he has that luxury.

It is time that we all realize that these deals with the closings have all been made months ago. The diocese just wanted the members to think that they had a say, when in fact, the names of the closing parishes were already on the list and all the talking in the world would not change it. Talking no, but money maybe.

Father prayed this past Sunday, the day of the closure announcements, for the diocese and the parish. Where were his prayers for the parish in these last months before the decision came down? It is too late now to pray. The deal is done!

And throughout all of this, no one has mentioned where are the priests going that have been displaced. None of them seem very concerned, but probably those deals have been made too already. As Father Bocianowski told me, "There are 70 priests now and only 40 openings." So, I guess you have to do what you have to do to be one of those 40 that will have a job.

If your church is closing, why stay and wait to see that tragic event? Start giving your envelopes to a church staying open. Why make a closing church richer only to close a couple of months from now?

Barb Brader,
Cheektowaga