



Laidlaw Memorial United Church

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April 1, 2021

Greetings!

I am writing to appeal for the preservation of St. Giles United Church on Main Street, Hamilton. While I understand the financial dynamics of a church building in need of repair, and the complications of adaptive reuse, I would argue that the preservation and adaptation of the main part of the building is a better plan than the expense and waste of demolition.

My interest in the fate of the St. Giles building is twofold.

First, the building has historic interest as one of two Presbyterian edifices that were transferred to The United Church of Canada in 1925. It is, I believe, both for The United Church of Canada, and for the City of Hamilton, and particularly for the neighbourhood, important to retain this history by retaining the edifice, though adapted to new uses. Adapting the building would certainly be preferred for environmental reasons, but also as an important historic place. Laidlaw and St. Giles have long been 'cousins' in that history, and the original organ from St. Giles was installed at Laidlaw in the 1920s.

Second, but also primarily, there are former members of St. Giles, as well as members of the local community, who consider the building at St. Giles an important local asset that need not be torn down to be adapted for other uses, including affordable housing. As we settlers have begun to learn, ownership is not as clear a concept as we might assume. Consulting with the local and broader community about the use of land and buildings is not a luxury, but a necessity if there is to be justice, peace, and progress. I can remember when St. Giles Church housed innovative and progressive community advocacy groups, and perhaps the future can embrace that past as a library, community hub, and affordable housing location.

It seems that asserting ownership; and attempting to pull down the building in the name of economics, rather than doing the demanding and creative work of adapting the building to new uses, including housing for people and local and municipal services, is short sighted. I would plead for communication and cooperation instead of adversity. There is no benefit to be gained by opposition or maneuvering. The energy and resources of New Vision Church, and the local community members and groups, including former members of St. Giles Church, will be better spent working together to find a solution that embraces cooperation, creativity, and resourcefulness.

In the mean time, until a process for community input and cooperation can be achieved, and a clear decision about the heritage value of the St. Giles building can be made, it would be better to suspend any permission for demolition of the building. There is a real opportunity for creating an adapted space that will benefit our City, and the local community around St. Giles Church. It will certainly be a better outcome if, when a proposal for adaption comes forward, there is cooperation and community support, rather than opposition. That cooperation and support will save a great deal of resources that might otherwise be wasted on opposition. There is a deep tradition in The United Church of Canada for decision making by consensus, rather than by authority or assertion of 'ownership'. I plead for the wisdom to provide time and resources to achieve a broader consensus before taking decisions and actions that cannot be reversed.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

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