

• OPINION •

Landmarking Saint Brigid's Church

The Final Phase In The Effort To Save What May Be Considered An Irish Icon

By Christin Marie-Angela Creighton

FOR TWELVE YEARS the faithful but aging and graying former parishioners who make up the core of the Committee to Save Saint Brigid, and their varied supporters, have pushed against the wind, fighting an uphill battle to save a building they consider sacred ground, a piece of their heritage, and a spiritual refuge.

Along the way St Brigid has suffered closure, decommissioning, and being sold off to a secular institution. That the struggle continues at all is a source of wonder to many more faint-hearted. Yet, the fact that St Brigid is still standing—fully intact—might be seen as miracle in itself, and is certainly a testament to the multied efforts, tenaciousness, courage, and, not impossibly, the prayers of its faithful.

Having been faced with a developer who would demolish and replace their church with condominiums, having watched their church traded for cash on the open market, having placed their own mortal selves in the way of perceived spoilers and thieves at her door, one might say these faithful have been to Hell and back for the sake of this church.

Bailing out now in what may be her final stand is not an option they consider.



Above: One of the twelve Statues of the Apostles, commissioned from Seamus Murphy Workshop, Cork City, Ireland, which adorn exterior of Saint Brigid's right above main doorway. The leaders of the 1916 Uprising are said to be represented by the faces on these statues.

The long struggle to save St Brigid's Church has come down to obtaining San Francisco landmark status for both interior and exterior, inside and out.

The landmark ordinance the Committee is seeking was carefully fashioned over a year ago by the city planners. It allowed full protection for all the interior and exterior features St Brigid supporters have long held dear.

By late October this ordinance had been unanimously approved by both the Landmarks Board and by the Planning Commission.

St Brigid people were celebrating.

Then, within a hair's breath of final passage, the ordinance was stopped dead in its tracks as new owner,

Elisa Stephens of the Academy of Art University, apparently entertained second thoughts. Stephens had purchased the St Brigid property from the Archdiocese supposedly with full knowledge of imminent land marking and had originally declared her support; but now she was coming out against the ordinance in legal fashion.

At the Land Use Meeting last December, Stephens spoke of various fears and hesitations she now harbored, which were then echoed in similar style by Supervisor Michela Alioto-Pier, who had previously voiced total support for preservation.

What especially concerned both Stephens and Alioto were the provisions protecting the interior of the building. The meeting adjourned with the St



Above: detail of Saint Brigid's Cross from St Brigid Stain Glass Window, Harry Clarke Studios, Dublin, Ireland.

Brigid ordinance postponed until "sometime in the next year."

Because she represents the

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JOE DIGNAN

2nd District in which St Brigid sits, it is Alioto-Pier's position to introduce this legislation before the Land

Use Committee. To this date, we are still waiting for the ordinance to be officially re-introduced and voted upon.

In the meantime, alternative versions and plans have been unofficially discussed and proposed, but the St Brigid faithful have stuck to the original ordinance and refuse to settle for something watered down, or one that protects only the outer façade.

As Joe Dignan, Chair of the Committee to Save St Brigid, stated in a recent mail-out to his supporters.

"For the long term, we're not going to be fooled by a proposal that would protect only the four walls, when the treasures inside could be gutted out at any time. We hope you won't either."

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