

DIOCESAN NEWS

Sale of old St. Francis complex to serve Auburn community

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

Barring unforeseen problems, St. Francis of Assisi Church in Auburn will soon hand over the keys for the old St. Francis of Assisi School and church at 192 Clark St., to the Cayuga Seneca Community Action Agency Inc.

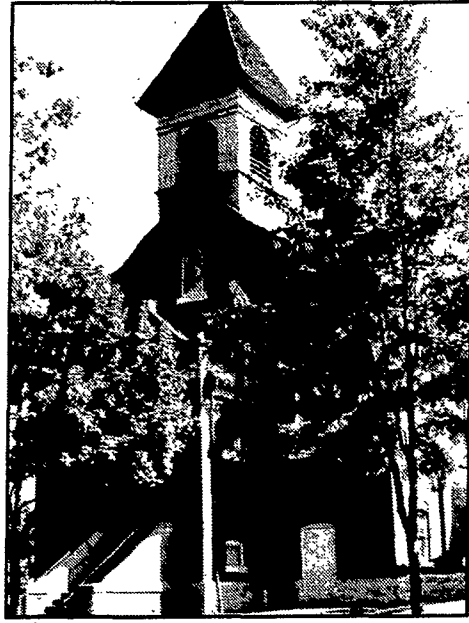
The \$160,000 sale is being delayed as the agency meets final bank requirements, including an environmental study. Both Bishop Matthew H. Clark and the courts have approved the sale.

"I consider it done, yes," Father Robert L. Beligotti, pastor, said. "The whole community will benefit from it."

The Community Action Agency plans to move several of its 18 community programs — including Head Start, emergency services for families in crisis and its thrift shop — into the building.

"Our mission is to open doors and provide services to economically-deprived communities," Gloria Griffin, agency executive director, said.

"We're looking to expand the number of individuals we serve," she said. The old school offers 32,178 square feet and the old church, 5,504 square feet.



File photo

Steep steps were among the factors that led St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Auburn, to sell its former church building.

"It's beautiful," Griffin said. "I know it has a lot of history and a lot of people are sad, but at least they know, as Father Beligotti said, it will be opening doors for others."

It also will apparently open the way to new church programs, through proceeds and money saved on maintenance.

"We're hoping to hire a youth minister and, jointly with (Father) P.J. Ryan and his Cayuga Team Ministry, to hire a director of faith formation," Father Beligotti said. "We're trying to do what the strategic plan is asking us to do. We're trying to cooperate with another parish."

St. Francis of Assisi will increasingly collaborate with neighboring churches, also, to borrow space for occasional large indoor celebrations, for example, that would have been held in the old building.

But summer events will continue at the parish. When Deacon Peter M. DeBellis celebrates his first Mass as a priest June 1 at St. Francis of Assisi, for instance, the church will host his reception outdoors using tents.

St. Francis of Assisi's old church was built in 1908, and the school was built onto it in 1950. In 1958 the new church, at 185 Clark St., was built. Meanwhile, the Athletic Association converted the old church into a gymnasium — which the CYO may still use for basketball on weekends after the sale is completed. St. Francis of Assisi School closed in 1969 when the Religious of Jesus and Mary withdrew members who were

helping to staff the school.

Father Beligotti pointed out that costs to maintain the building have been running \$25,000 a year — though the parish only used it for religious education classes one hour a week fall through spring, Sunday CYO basketball and occasional fundraisers in a downstairs kitchen and hall.

Griffin said that a \$150,000 low-interest loan will cover renovations such as installing an elevator and other requirements for agency programs. She predicted work may begin by late May and the agency's programs may move in by Jan. 1, 1998.

Another Auburn church, Holy Family, will be affected by the move. It will lose its tenant at Holy Family School, where the agency had been running its soup kitchen, Head Start, day care and other programs.

Father Conrad J. Sundholm, Holy Family pastor, has offered the building as a Catholic junior high school. However, assuming that local school planners continue to be uninterested, alternatives will be sought for the school building, he said.

"Anything we do in the future has to include the fact we keep it open for religious education and include the fact we keep it open for (CYO) basketball," he said. "We feel those are crucial to our interests here."

However, because the community agency paid no real rent money but contributed toward the building's utility charges, he said, it won't be the "financial sinkhole" it could have been.

Judge gives Father Emo six-month jail sentence

Father Eugene Emo, 62, was sentenced May 5 to six months in the Steuben County Jail for first-degree sexual abuse. He had pleaded guilty Feb. 11 to one count of the class D violent felony charge.

Judge Donald G. Purple, who at the time of the priest's plea had promised no more than a year in jail, issued the sentence. It includes five years' probation. Because of a calculation for "good time," the actual time served may be four months, according to Steuben County District Attorney John Tunney.

Father Emo was arrested Feb. 16, 1996, and charged with having sexual contact with a male in his 30s who was mentally handicapped. The incident took place in late January 1996 at the priest's residence in Cohocton.

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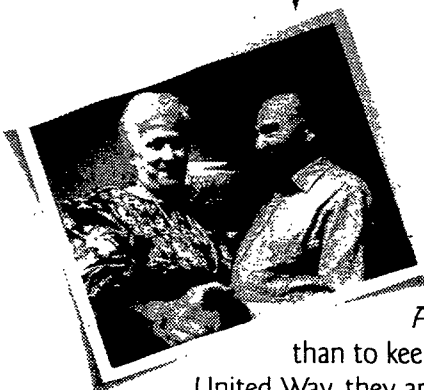
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