



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND**  
Chair

**ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.**  
District Manager

March 7, 2008

Robert B. Tierney  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Municipal Building, ninth floor  
One Center Street  
New York, NY 10007

Re: Church of Saint Vincent de Paul in Chelsea

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board 4 is writing to urge you to designate the distinguished Church of Saint Vincent de Paul, which is one of the most handsome and prominent structures on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, the historic Main Street of Chelsea. Members of the congregation and representatives of the French/Francophone community have appealed to the Board to help save this church, which they have informed us is scheduled to be closed and sold for the value of its site, located close to one of the most rapidly growing sections of the area between Greenwich Village and Midtown.

As you are doubtless aware, the building has been declared eligible for the State/National Historic Register, but the archdiocese has refused to accept listing. The building is distinguished not only for its handsome façade, which is a demonstration piece of the French qualities of elegant and rational Neoclassicism, but also for its importance to the French and wider Francophone communities. On a trip to New York after he had become a leader of the French Republic General De Gaulle presided over a dedication of memorials to the Franco-American dead of the two World Wars in the church. The building contains a rare unified group of ten certified Tiffany windows commemorating the life of the patron saint of the church; it would be a major artistic loss if the windows were to be removed from the locations for which they were designed and the group broken up. There is considerable evidence that this was the first integrated Catholic parish in the United States, and the diverse group of parishioners that approached the Landmarks Task Force of the Board is in itself convincing evidence that the church has remained a remarkable example of the interracial, interethnic, and international integration that is part of the pride and vitality of New York City.

The petitioners, and an officer of the Board as well, confirmed that the church, unlike some others, retains and serves a significant and integrated congregation. In this case it

seems clear that it is not lack of membership that is the main factor driving the closing and sale, but the financial needs of the archdiocese.

The Board believes that other options should be explored. Among them might be designation of the building as a City landmark, a transfer of development rights to the north side of the through property which it partially occupies by means of a 74-711 action that the designation would make possible, and building on this less historic portion of the site. A major tower could be possible under the high floor area allowed on the wider north portion of the lot, which could not be used for residential purposes without a 74-711 action because of the M1-6 zoning. Such action would be consistent with the Chelsea 197-a Plan as originally filed by the Board if preservation of this historic building were to be regarded among social goals justifying the change.

Sincerely,



Jean-Daniel Noland  
Chair, Manhattan Community Board 4



Edward Kirkland  
Chair, Landmarks Task Force

Cc. Borough President Scott Stringer  
U. S. Representative Jerrold Nadler  
State Senator Thomas Duane  
Assembly Member Richard Gottfried  
Council Speaker Christine Quinn  
Cardinal Egan  
David Brown, Esq.  
Ann Friedman  
Olga Statz, J. D.