

Historic St. Peter the Apostle faces sale

By Matt Palmer

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Transfiguration Catholic Community is working on a sale of the church building for historic St. Peter the Apostle in Southwest Baltimore to a local Protestant church.

Because it was the first church in West Baltimore City, St. Peter was known as the “Mother Church of the West.”

St. Peter the Apostle closed in 2008 and is part of Transfiguration, along with former parishes St. Jerome and St. Martin.

Sean Caine, communications director for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, said Transfiguration’s sale of the property to Carter Memorial Church of God in Christ, a Protestant community, has not been finalized.

Spiritan Father Augustine Etemma Inwang, pastor of Transfiguration, is currently in Nigeria and could not be reached for comment.

“The parish cannot afford the annual and deferred maintenance of St. Peter’s,” Caine said.

Caine said there is no timeline for when the sale could be finalized.

Contrary to published reports, the archdiocese cannot sell St. Peter’s, as it is Transfiguration’s property. St. Peter the Apostle was established in 1842 and Irish immigrants built the church. Designed by architect Robert Carey Long to look like a Greek temple, the church is still beloved by many in the Southwest Baltimore.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore endorsed Baltimore City's designation of the church, built during the 1840s, as a landmark.

Many of St. Peter the Apostle's sculptures and statues have been moved or will be moved.

"Every precaution is being made to safeguard any items relocated from St. Peter's to another parish," Caine said. "It is important to everyone involved that the history of St. Peter's remain alive through the many appointments that have adorned that magnificent church for so many years and will now rest in other Catholic churches. Over the past several years, few people have seen them and now they will have new 'life' again."

Caine said the archdiocese cherishes the parish's historical designation as a landmark and worked with the city to make sure it was achieved.

"While it is unfortunate that there is no longer a Catholic community sufficiently large enough to support St. Peter's continued operation as a Catholic parish, it is good that it will continue to serve as a faith community and will outwardly remain as it has for so many years."

Caine said that St. Peter the Apostle is part of a larger issue in Baltimore City.

"While it is our preference to lease properties, sometimes it is not practical, especially with churches where there aren't always many options for how a former church building is used," Caine said. "There are certainly examples throughout the archdiocese of former church and school buildings now in use in other ways that benefit the community. Of course, this is nothing unique to Catholic churches, as other denominations are faced with many of the same challenges, especially in the city where the shift in demographics has dramatically changed the landscape for parishes and schools."