Abstract:

Preserving the “Diocese of Immigrants”: Strategies for the Continued Use of Brooklyn’s Historic Catholic Churches

Author: Megan Rispoli
Advisor: Carol Clark

Following the extensive reorganizations of the Roman Catholic Archdioceses of Detroit, Chicago, Boston, and New York, the Bishop of Brooklyn initiated a “Pastoral Planning Process” in 2005. Given the complexity of issues confronting many of Brooklyn’s Catholic churches – the decreasing size of congregations and escalating costs of maintenance, the diminishing number of priests and overabundance of church buildings – it is likely that, in the end, multiple churches will be merged or closed by the Bishop.

With the re-planning of the Diocese of Brooklyn expected to continue for two years, this is a truly opportune time to consider the social, historical, and architectural value of Brooklyn’s Catholic churches and propose strategies for their preservation. This thesis presents the public value of historic urban religious buildings; a history of the Diocese of Brooklyn, the “Diocese of Immigrants,” from 1853 to the present; and finally, a series of historic preservation practices that could be implemented prior to and following church consolidations to effect the full, active use of these buildings as centers of religious life and community service.