

Third Church of Christ, Scientist Press Conference
August 7, 2008

Remarks by Mike Silverstein, Commissioner, Dupont Circle Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC 2B)

This is a battle between people who revere architecture...and people who worship God. And yet here, in this city, only two blocks from the White House, the score so far is Philistines 2, Christians 0. The building has been landmarked over the objections of the congregation, and their demolition request has thus far been turned down.

But the record of HPRB gives us reason to be confident. In the months since the landmarking, they have suffered two huge setbacks at the hands of the federal government on civil rights issues. Mr. Richard Lucas – who is here this morning – won a judgment on a disabilities case involving his elderly parents..an ADA case. And Ms. Laura Elkins won a multi-million dollar Fourth Amendment illegal search and seizure case against HPRB. They've lost on the Fifth Commandment and the Fourth Amendment...I guess in this case, they'll be going for the trifecta.

Those of us who live and work in this neighborhood overwhelmingly support the Church. The Dupont Circle Advisory Neighborhood Council – which represents 20,000 residents of this neighborhood voted unanimously to support the Congregation's request. Every one of us on the Commission believes in Historic Preservation, but this building is not historic, and we agree with the congregation there is no compelling need to preserve it. The evidence is overwhelming: no windows, no doors facing 16th or I Streets....no windows in the sanctuary at all. It costs \$8,000 to change a light bulb, because they have to build scaffolding to do it. No insulation...built when oil was \$2.55 a barrel....No HVAC system in the building. They can't even host a daycare because they can't keep a constant comfortable temperature. Even the skylight blinds the organist three months a year!

HPRB has said they will work with the congregation to help solve these problems. One suggestion they have is to build a giant glass bubble over the building. Imagine, another barrier. Christians under glass: an amazing concept, even from a government bureaucrat!

First, they told us landmarking would pose no burden to the church. Then they said they had to turn down the demolition request because it was improper during the landmarking process. Bureaucratic double-talk at its absolute worst. They claim that the church has not exhausted all its appeals. But there is nothing in the First Amendment

that says you have to go to an appeals court to get your rights. Every government agency – even the HPRB – is mandated by law to respect and guarantee our civil rights. When Martin Luther King stood ten blocks from here and cried out, Let Freedom Ring....he didn't qualify that sentence with the words "when you get to the Mayor's Agent."

Be not deceived. Just as God is not mocked, neither are the Constitution and laws of the United States of America. This case now goes to federal court, where the First Amendment right of freedom of religion will be upheld. My greatest fear is that the court will hand down a ruling that will go far beyond this case. And if we lose some of our history to save our freedom, that will be on the heads of those who have violated the freedom and sanctuary of this church. And to the HPRB I say, for whatsoever you soweth, that shall ye reap.