

CHURCH-STATE FEUD IN INDIANAPOLIS

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Most readers have heard of grand old churches turned into party halls. Holy Cross in Indianapolis should not be one of them.

In 2024, St. Philip Neri parish assumed responsibility for the long-closed Holy Cross campus on the Near Eastside. After a thorough look at the structure, the parish reached a hard but responsible judgment: the church building is unsafe and prohibitively expensive to restore, and the only prudent step is demolition. Engineers point to serious deterioration, including rusted anchors and loosened stones. Repair estimates run in the seven to eight million dollar range. Meanwhile, the parish spends close to one hundred thousand dollars a year just to carry an empty, dangerous building. That's money needed for ministry and for maintenance of St. Philip Neri's own historic church.

Then Indianapolis City Hall stepped in. The Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission rushed an emergency designation that froze any removal of the structure. In April 2024, the Metropolitan Development Commission made that status permanent by a six-to-one vote. On October 1, 2025, the Historic Preservation Commission denied the parish's demolition request and reaffirmed the landmark status. Essentially, the City has the building in a legal straitjacket.

The activists' pitch is distasteful but all too familiar. They say to sell, touting examples of churches repurposed as event venues and assure everyone that buyers are waiting. That glib advice ignores what Catholics know in their bones. A church

that once housed the Blessed Sacrament is not just another piece of real estate. Once an intact church is sold, the parish loses control over what happens five, ten, or fifty years from now. The clergy at St. Philip Neri refuse to roll the dice on sacrilege. Removing the structure removes the risk; that's stewardship, not stubbornness.

Let's talk about fairness. The City wants a showcase without paying for it. It forbids the parish from abating a hazard, and then expects a small Catholic community to carry the bill indefinitely. St. Philip Neri is already caring for its own landmarked campus, which is older than Holy Cross and still serves the faithful. The parish is not a cash machine for municipal government's whims.

The law backs common sense. The federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act and Indiana's Religious Freedom Restoration Act prohibit government from piling substantial burdens onto religious exercise unless it uses the least restrictive means to serve a truly compelling interest. Forcing a parish to pour nearly six figures into a building it cannot safely use, while ignoring less restrictive options such as controlled deconstruction, recorded covenants on future use, or partial salvage, fails that test. The First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause likely points in the same direction.

There is also the Constitution's protection of private property. The Fifth Amendment says government cannot load the cost of a public amenity onto one private owner without compensation. When regulation turns a private property into an unsafe, unproductive liability and the City refuses either to allow a remedy or to condemn the site, that is confiscation in practice. If the City truly wants a museum piece, it should buy one.

Now, St. Philip Neri intends to appeal the latest denial in November. The parish will continue to make its case through

the proper channels, and it will do so as a matter of conscience. Holy Cross is not a canvas for event planners. It is a once-consecrated place that deserves a dignified end.

If you want to help, pray for the people of St. Philip Neri parish. Tell Indianapolis officials to respect religious liberty, safety, and basic fairness. A church is a sacred trust. Treat it that way.

Contact the City of Indianapolis Metropolitan Development Commission: PlannerOnCall@indy.gov