

# You can buy church; hey, why not one for your pal

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Psst! Wanna buy a used church? How about eight of them? You have one more day to think about it.

Thursday is, as they say in the real estate game, the day of final reckoning, in what is being billed as the largest one-day sale of churches in the city's history.

"The story here," explained Realtor David Schy, leading a visitor on a tour of one of the properties for sale, stately Nebo Lutheran Church, at 3914 N. Menard Ave., "is of eight congregations who got smaller and smaller. They consolidated into a single congregation. But they couldn't decide which church building to keep. They loved them all." Plus they didn't want the appearance that one congregation was absorbing the others.

The decision they made, others said, mixed tears and hope.

"Yes, there was sadness," noted Dorothy Goos, president of the new congregation, which has 400 members, now known as United in Faith Lutheran Church. "People were leaving places that have many memories for them. They were baptized, confirmed, married and watched their young people marry there." On the other hand, Goos added, "there was hope—that we could really use our financial and our people assets to do more than just maintain buildings."

So it came to pass that the congregations, all eight of them, opted to sell everything and use the proceeds to make a fresh start, together, in a new building to be constructed.

In the meantime, the congregation has been meeting at local high schools and at one of the original churches, the former St. Andrew Lutheran Church, at 5447 W. Addison St. That church is also on the block but with the stipulation that the congregation be allowed to use it in the interim.

Selling churches is, of course, nothing new in Chicago. Former houses of worship have become everything from cabarets to boutiques and, in many cases, resi-

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dential lofts. But never before, real estate specialists suggest, have eight been offered to secular owners on a single day.

"It's the largest offering of churches I'm aware of, certainly in Chicago," said Steven L. Good, chief executive of Sheldon Good & Co., Auctions, who will oversee Thursday's auction. "What's going to happen is that, between 4 and 5 p.m., there will be a parade of developers, as well as religious groups, coming into our offices" at 333 West Wacker Drive.

Each will carry a sealed envelope containing their best thinking, in a monetary sense, based on scoping out buildings, all on the Northwest Side, with what might be called "developer's eye" to assess such amenities as high ceilings, thick walls, stained-glass windows, finished basements and, in many cases, choir lofts with full-scale pipe organs.

Shortly after 5 p.m., the bids will be laid out on a granite table in the firm's boardroom, opened, sorted and evaluated. "This," said Good, speaking of Thursday, "is the most interesting part, waiting

to see who steps up to the table—and for how much."

Nobody, at this point, has any idea how much the sale will bring.

Real estate potential, like beauty, it appears, is in the eye of the beholder.

"Great ceiling heights. It's got volume. You can work with that," gasped Gary Poter, head of Poter Construction and Development Co., as he looked with awe last week at the Nebo sanctuary, a space filled with pews, chairs, tables, a pipe organ and an old rugged cross, all lighted with warm afternoon sunshine spilling through windows of golden glass.

"Lots of space for parking," added broker Rob Baum, pointing up another asset of the church, which comes with an upstairs gymnasium and a stage, suitable for domestic drama.

According to Good staffers, the churches, which range in style from Gothic to converted family residences, will be sold individually or in any combination.

For those who don't want, at this time, to buy a used church, other staffers noted, the sale also offers a chance to pick up a parsonage. It has a four bedrooms, a home library, a fireplace, bay windows and a rear deck, with a nice view of a used church.



Realtor David Schy (from left, above) shows Nebo Lutheran Church at 3914 N. Menard Ave. to developer Gary Poter and broker Rob Baum. Poter (left) looks over blueprints for the house of worship, one of eight Northwest Side churches to be auctioned Thursday. The congregations of the eight are uniting and will use the sale funds to build a new church.

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