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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE
WORKFORCE

July 15, 2011

His Excellency The Most Reverend John M. Smith
Archbishop of the Diocese of Trenton
701 Lawrenceville Road
Trenton, New Jersey 08648-4209

Dear Archbishop:

I am pleased to learn of your official visit to Cleveland and your interest in particular in the status of the Roman Catholic churches of the Cleveland area.

In previous correspondence with Bishop Lennon regarding the closing of Cleveland-area churches, I expressed concern about the lack of interest shown by the Catholic Diocese in the need for historic and cultural preservation. Roman Catholic churches have existed and thrived through the administrations of the 9 previous bishops over the last 160 years of the history of the Diocese of Cleveland. While I do not question the perceived need for the Diocese to withdraw its ecclesiastical function at any given church, I have an abiding interest in the preservation of the buildings which were built and supported by generations of Catholics and non-Catholics, including friends, neighbors, and the people of the cities in which the churches are located. I have sought clarification on the position of the Catholic Church on the historic and cultural preservation of the buildings which hold or have recently held a Catholic Church presence.

The deeds of title to the churches belong or have belonged to the Diocese of Cleveland, but the rich cultural, ethnic, and religious history they hold belongs to the people of the Cleveland area. The churches are a monument to the heroic efforts of the people of past generations who came from around the globe and built these churches with their hands and their hearts.

Churches which have closed and face possible demolition or loss of public access have been gathering places for immigrants seeking both religious and political freedom. Many of these churches have served as international centers. The nationality groups which founded many of the Cleveland's churches retain close ties with their countries of ethnic origin. Historically and currently, Cleveland is an important international city. The churches of Cleveland and its suburbs serve as focal points for maintaining and renewing our relationship with our global neighbors in our city's ever-increasing need for trade and our nation's constant quest for peace.

These churches, some of which have already been sold, including Annunciation, Blessed Sacrament, Conversion of St. Paul, Corpus Christi, Epiphany, Our Lady of Mercy, Sacred Heart of Jesus, St. Adalbert, St., Barbara, St. Casimir, St. Cecilia, St. Emeric, St. Francis, St. George, St. Hyacinth, St. Lawrence, St. Patrick, St. Peter, St. Procop, St. Rose of Lima, St. Wendelin, and SS. Philip and James in Cleveland, St. Hedwig and St. James in Lakewood, Assumption of Mary in Brook Park, and other churches in the Cleveland area, have served the people of Northeast

Ohio, some for more than a century. Although many people have moved out of the city, the churches still served as focal points for social, cultural and ethnic celebrations. If preserved, the churches can continue to serve as neighborhood anchors to attract people interested in moving back into the city. Left to the elements, they will destabilize neighborhoods and require demolition. This leaves untenable choices in the hands of those left in the wake of the Catholic Diocese's action to scuttle these sacred structures. I believe that the Catholic Church has a responsibility to the people and the neighborhoods and communities which have supported it these many generations.

In my more than 40 years of a public career, I have closely supported the civic and social life of our community, including the religious community in general and the Catholic community in particular. I am proud to do this not only as an alumnus of the Catholic schools but also because of the love, respect, and admiration I have for the work of our parishes. I am also well aware that the great works of these churches are not performed by the buildings, but by the people who support the churches, Catholic and of every creed.

I have asked that the City of Cleveland support the efforts of the people to save these buildings using its full sovereign power if necessary, whether the buildings are used in the future as churches or not. It should be the decision of the people, not one institution, to decide the future of these places of history, culture and community. I ask that you, on your Apostolic visit to Cleveland, take a public spirited interest in preserving Cleveland's legacy by working cooperatively with local civic authorities and the people who are committed to our region's neighborhoods to help preserve the buildings left in the balance. I remain available to discuss this at our mutual convenience during your visit or on another opportunity in the near future. Thank you for your concern about our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis J. Kucinich". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dennis J. Kucinich
Member of Congress

DJK: mg