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## St. Brigid's saved from wrecking ball by anonymous \$20M donation

BY CHRISTINA BOYLE AND CORKY SIEMASZKO  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITERS

Updated Thursday, May 22nd 2008, 10:12 AM



Willens/AP

Living on a prayer: The 160-year-old church can reopen once repairs are done.

Historic St. Brigid's Church in the East Village was saved from the wrecking ball Wednesday by a \$20 million donation from an anonymous angel.

The huge - and unexpected - cash infusion will allow the nearly 160-year-old church to reopen once badly needed repairs are finished.

"This magnificent gift will make it possible for St. Brigid's Church to be fittingly restored with its significant structural problems properly addressed," [Edward Cardinal Egan](#) said.

Egan did not reveal the identity of the donor, only that it was a "he" and that the "unexpected but very welcome gift" was given after a private meeting at the cardinal's residence.

Archdiocesan spokesman [Joseph Zwilling](#) also declined to name names, but he shot down speculation about one possible suspect. "I will tell you it was not [Matt Dillon](#)," he said.

The actor fell in love with the Gothic-style church when he filmed it for a scene in his movie, "City of Ghosts," and has been a vocal supporter of saving the church.

Another church champion, radical socialist turned real-estate developer [Michael Rosen](#), insisted he was not St. Brigid's savior. But he said he knew the gift was coming and believed the donor was from the community.

"It's a beautiful gift to the community," he said at the half-gutted church on Avenue B. "It's the highest form of charity to give money anonymously."

City Council member [Rosie Mendez](#), who represents the lower East Side, called the gift "a Godsend."

"We rejoice today in the miracle that has saved our church," added [Ed Torres](#), chairman of the Committee to [Save Saint Brigid's](#).

An overjoyed [Allan Mont](#) tacked a poster to the scaffolding covering the church's yellow facade that read, "Thank You, Lord, for answering our prayers."

"In this crazy world we live in, people say miracles don't exist," said Mont, 50, who had two kids baptized and regularly attended Mass at the church until it was closed three years ago. "I would like to prove somebody wrong."

Ten million dollars of the donation will be spent on restoring the church, which was

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built by Irish immigrants escaping the Great Famine - and became a haven for the waves of Catholic immigrants that followed.

Another \$8 million will go to support St. Brigid's school and \$2 million will go toward an endowment for the parish "so that it might best meet the religious and spiritual needs of the people," the archdiocese said in a statement.

Rising costs, falling attendance, and crumbling conditions caused the church to wind up on Egan's hit list in 2001. The archdiocese argued it was too dilapidated to save. Church supporters led by attorney [Marisa Marinelli](#) were able to stave off demolition with a series of legal challenges. "We had no idea this was about to happen," she said.

The church's cornerstone was laid on Sept. 10, 1848.

[cboyle@nydailynews.com](mailto:cboyle@nydailynews.com)

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**NYCCrocheter** May 22, 2008 8:58:17 AM [Report Offensive Post](#)

Much as I dislike Cardinal Egan, he does NOT have a "hit list," like a career criminal. That's standard Daily News anti-Catholicism. He has a group of churches which are: 1) literally falling apart; 2) neglected by a "community" that never attends church, never puts a nickel in the collection basket; 3) lost in a wave of non-Catholic gentrification and sentimental slop by "community activists" like Mr. Rosen who see the buildings as cutesy neighborhood museums. When the Church has \$ 20 million, it has to go to the poor, charities, hospitals, schools, not museums to serve less than 100 people.

**Sighe** May 22, 2008 9:18:39 AM [Report Offensive Post](#)

I think it's wonderful that a church of this historic value has been saved from the wrecking ball. It is a win-win situation for the Archdiocese and the Lower East Side and the City of New York. For all the cynical comments, that the money could have been better spent, remember that the parish of St. Brigid's helped the poor in that area throughout its history. It will once again become a church parish. The generous donation of \$20 million is astonishing. This is truly a miraculous quixotic, walter mittyish chapter in the history of New York City. It is on a par with the movies, Going My Way, The Bells of St. Mary's, It's a Wonderful Life. We should thank God and rejoice and be glad that a man of faith who had the wherewithal to rebuild a church community and school for today and with clear regard for its future found the grace to do so. God bless him.

**Sighe** May 22, 2008 9:24:56 AM [Report Offensive Post](#)

Should also add The Miracle on 34th St.

**Tom Mariner** May 22, 2008 10:06:31 AM [Report Offensive Post](#)

The entire Lower East Side of Manhattan is being thought of as an historical district to protect it for us and our children. St. Brigid's is in every way deserving of preservation, not only for the part it played in welcoming first Irish and then Latin immigrants to our shores, but for the architectural significance. Once you understand the unique "inverted ship" supports and the story of how they were designed and the precious stained-glass windows that once graced the upper levels, you can see why it should be a permanent part of New York. The fact that the first act of workmen who would have demolished the church was to brutally smash the priceless one-of-a-kind windows is an icon of what will happen to all we hold dear in our city unless we act. The church sits on Tompkins Square Park, the site of '60's squatters and then night-time police raids, is now a lush haven where area residents sit under th trees to read and people watch. Once can imagine a transformation much like the a

**CinStar** May 22, 2008 10:31:17 AM [Report Offensive Post](#)

This Church has much historic value acquired over past centuries. For those who think that we should not save it in order to reroute this money to other places where it is also needed, well they obviously are not aware of such value this church has to most residing on the lower east side. I know it has impacted my life much as a former student of the school, who's mother formerly worked in the office and who have had the honor to know and love Maria Tornin, RIP, who fought valiantly along with many others to save our Church. We know Maria is smiling down upon us..

**FlushingGirl** May 22, 2008 10:52:44 AM [Report Offensive Post](#)

I'm so happy this church is being saved! I don't believe that the News is anti-Catholic. A lot of Catholics don't like Egan or his policies, either.

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**Ray Acevedo-Flores** May 22, 2008 12:03:49 PM [Report Offensive Post](#)

Thirty-nine years ago, I graduated from St. Brigid's School. Back then, the Lower East Side continued to be a haven for the displaced, the hungry, and the poor. The church was able to expand through the community, and assist in programs that helped many of our youth and elderly. It is my hope that the mission that St. Brigid's provided back then, be rekindled with the new generation of parishiners. Despite the gentrification and extremely high rentals, there still exists those who have remained in the neighborhood and are in need.

**Marquez** May 22, 2008 4:05:37 PM [Report Offensive Post](#)  
That should pay another 20 little boys - get busy molesting, priests!

**kellybrigdbrown** Oct 3, 2008 11:48:38 AM [Report Offensive Post](#)

Everything that Brigid would ask of the Lord was granted her at once. For this was her desire: to satisfy the poor, to expel every hardship, to spare every miserable man. Now there never hath been anyone more bashful or more modest or more gentle or more humble or more discerning or more harmonious than Brigid. She was abstemious, innocent, prayerful, patient: she was glad in God's commandments: she was firm, humble, forgiving, loving: she was a consecrated casket for keeping Christ's body and His blood: she was a temple of God. Her heart and her mind were a throne of rest for the Holy Ghost. She was single-hearted (towards God): she was compassionate towards the wretched; she was splendid in miracles and marvels: wherefore her name among created things is Dove among birds, Vine among trees, Sun among stars... She is the prophetess of Christ; she is the Queen of the South; she is the Mary of Gael. God Bless our Beloved St Brigid for if we love her we are also loving of the

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