



PRESS RELEASE

INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

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(Chicago, September 2008) - A descendant of Queen Victoria and Czar Alexander II and an acclaimed Chicago-born tenor will come together on Saturday, September 27th, to support the restoration of the Shrine of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, an architectural jewel once condemned to the wrecking ball. Internationally acclaimed tenor Trevór Mitchell will be performing Baroque works and traditional Spirituals for a benefit recital at 3:00 pm at the south-side historic landmark. Coming from Germany to be the honored guest of the event will be Paul Duke of Oldenburg, a friend of the Institute of Christ the King, the society of priests that is carrying out the restoration of the church. His Highness is an activist in both the political and social arena, promoting the cause of family values in Germany. A convert to the Catholic Faith, he will speak briefly about his experience with the beauty of the Latin Mass.

The church building being restored, built in the 1920s for the German-Irish St. Clara Carmelite parish and renamed St. Gelasius Church in 1990, had been recently shuttered and subsequently gutted in preparation for its planned demolition. While many advocacy groups successfully rose to save the architectural gem, the Archdiocese of Chicago offered the building to the Institute of Christ the King, which is based in Florence, Italy, and has carried out other restoration projects at its churches in the United States. Msgr. Michael Schmitz, head of the Institute in the U.S., accepted the challenge of bringing the church back to life and raising funds for its restoration. Since the Institute's arrival in 2005, the church is again functioning as a parish and attracting a growing number of faithful. Repair of the building's exterior has already been carried out. Proceeds from the recital are for the installation of the electrical, plumbing and HVAC systems that are needed for its normal functioning. Others contributing their presence to the cause alongside the Duke of Oldenburg will be Alderman Willie Cochran of the 20th Ward, and Mr. Wolfgang Drautz, the German Consul for Chicago.

A majestic limestone structure standing prominently just a few blocks south of the University of Chicago, the Shrine of Christ the King was designed by revivalist architect Henry Schlacks in the 1920s, as the new home of St. Clara Carmelite Church. The south side parish had been founded in 1894 to serve the German immigrants who had settled in the area attracted by work generated through the World's Columbian Exposition. The parish grew to be one of the vibrant churches in the Woodlawn neighborhood. St. Clara, later named St. Gelasius, was throughout the decades an integral part of life for the successive groups that made up the community throughout the years: Germans, Irish, Puerto Ricans and African Americans. In the 1970s and 80s parishioners and their

Carmelite pastors collaborated as one of the Woodlawn groups that successfully resisted the gang culture which once paralyzed the area. In fact, some say that a fire that severely damaged the building in 1976 was not unrelated to this struggle. But as numbers dwindled, and much needed repairs to the structure could not be carried out, the decision was made to close the parish and to demolish the building in 2003.

However, many interest groups and individuals in the city and beyond mobilized to save the church. Architectural experts and preservationists argued the unique value of the edifice as a rare sample of Indiana limestone structure, and a singularly beautiful product of Schlacks' work, fashioned in Roman neo-renaissance style. Activists hinged on the church's historic presence and significance to the community. Their combined efforts were successful, and the church was declared a Chicago landmark in 2004. Ironically, it was the fact that it had been closed and no longer functioned as a church that made it immune to a city ordinance barring church buildings from being landmarked.

Even as the well-publicized controversy over the building was at its height, the Archdiocese of Chicago offered St. Gelasius Church to a society of priests with ample experience in restoring buildings and growing parishes. The Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest is dedicated to bringing to the forefront the store of cultural and spiritual wealth of the Catholic Church, including the traditional liturgical rite in Latin (given special impetus last year by Pope Benedict XVI with his papal document *Summorum Pontificum*). Based in Florence, Italy, the Institute operates churches in Europe and the United States, as well as missions in Africa.

Relying on the fact that the ancient Latin liturgy attracts people across groups of age, language, background and culture, the Institute's Superior for the United States, Msgr. R. Michael Schmitz took on the project on the south side of Chicago. He moved the US headquarters of the Institute to the adjacent rectory, and settled in to begin the unlikely project of bringing this shuttered church back to life, repairing its outer shell, and refashioning its gutted interior. Assisting him in this task is Abbé Alexander Willweber, a member of the Institute who recently received a medal of recognition (*Bene merenti*) from Pope Benedict XVI for his artistic work in restoring the many churches and chapels of the Institute here and in Europe. As architect on record, the Institute has contracted with classic architect William Heyer, trained at the Pratt Institute of New York City and the School of Classic Architecture of Notre Dame University.

Paul Duke of Oldenburg, of German, Russian and English royal lineage, is one witness to the power of the Latin Mass in breaking barriers. It was the beauty of the traditional form of the Latin Mass that first brought him to explore the Catholic Church. Msgr. Schmitz, while still living in his native Germany, introduced the nobleman to this liturgy and instructed him along the way that eventually led him to enter the Catholic Church. His Highness will come to Chicago exclusively to lend his support to his friend's project by being the honored guest at the benefit recital.

What better artist to occasion such an event than Trevor Mitchell, acclaimed as "simply the most uniquely beautiful and easily produced tenor instrument most people will ever hear." Known for his superb musicianship and interpretive skills, the African American tenor is at ease in music of all periods and styles. Mr. Mitchell's career as a soloist has taken him across the United States as well as to Austria, Italy, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and other countries of Europe. He is also a member of the professional nine-voice ensemble "Chicago a cappella." At the benefit recital, which will take place inside the historic church building, Mr. Mitchell will draw from the Sacred Baroque repertoire and classic Negro Spirituals, genres in which he particularly specializes and which date from the

same period. He will be joined in this unique program by violinist Marty Davids, known for his expertise in early music, and pianist Terree Schofner-Emrich, who will also play a period organ.

Msgr. Schmitz commented, “While we naturally hope that this event will attract a portion of the funds urgently needed to continue the restoration of our Chicago landmark church, we also offer the recital as a sample of the contribution we plan to make on an ongoing basis to the diverse cultural tapestry that makes up this area of Chicago. Our Shrine of Christ the King, dedicated to the traditional Latin liturgy, even in its current state of restoration already attracts visitors from across the nation.”

Tickets are \$25.00 and can be purchased at the door; those interested are encouraged to call ahead for reservations as space may be limited. Contributions are gratefully received. Telephone 773-363-7409; 6401 S. Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, 60637.

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