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POSTING

## Discovering Divine Sites for Condos

By [C. J. HUGHES](#)

ANYONE entertaining hopes of someday living in a converted church should not necessarily be heartened by the recent decision by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York to shutter or merge 21 parishes.

“It’s our hope and intention to use those for other forms of ministry,” said Joseph Zwilling, a spokesman for the archdiocese, explaining that nursing homes and schools were the most likely uses for the space.

Yet there are other former houses of worship in [Manhattan](#), and a number of them will soon offer new options in post-ecclesiastical living.

Rhapsody on Fifth Avenue is the name of a new condominium at 127th Street in [Harlem](#) that has commandeered the limestone-and-brick former home of the Gospel Temple Church of America, which held services inside for 50 years.

In November, when construction is scheduled for completion, Rhapsody will have 22 apartments, from 520-square-foot studios to 2,000-square-foot three-bedrooms. Prices will range from \$420,000 to \$1.5 million. Since the sales office opened two months ago, four condos have sold, said Arthur Fefferman, president of AFC Realty Capital, the project’s developer.

Unlike the Mount Moriah Baptist Church next door, the 1917 Gospel Temple building did not have an ecclesiastical look, Mr. Fefferman said. Although its facade is generously decorated with Beaux-Arts garlands and shields, he explained, its understatedness made it easier to convert and to sell.

A similarly neutral facade attracted the Vesta Development Group to a former convent, cater-corner to Stuyvesant Square, at 233 East 17th Street.

A 19th-century red-brick edifice, the former convent does have at least one feature associated with religious architecture: arched Gothic windows. Its 13 condos, priced from \$1.58 million to \$4.95 million, will be ready by April, said Tamir Shemesh, an executive vice president at Prudential Douglas Elliman who is handling the sales, adding that 70 percent had been sold.

Although one four-story unit, still on the market, contains a chapel with 24-foot painted wood ceilings, none of the others bear any trace of their previous functions, Mr. Shemesh said, explaining that “most buyers don’t want it to look too much like a church.”

Two exceptions are Jonathan and Melinda Gould, who are designing a new home for themselves inside

Christ Lutheran Church, at 355 East 19th Street between First and Second Avenues.

A new luxury condo tower, which the Goulds will also develop, will stretch above the church and contain six units, all three-bedrooms. They will come up for sale in late fall, according to Mr. Shemesh, who is also the broker for this project, with a move-in date for spring 2008.

Ecclesiastical flourishes will also be an attraction at a luxury condo to be called the Novare, now under construction in a marble edifice that used to be a Methodist church at 135 West Fourth Street, near Washington Square Park. Flank Architecture, the developer, plans to use the building's dazzling stained-glass windows in six of the eight apartments, which range in price from \$2.2 million to \$5.6 million.

So far, three units have found buyers, said Brian Babst, a senior associate of the Corcoran Group.

Next door to the Novare is the Parsonage, a four-unit luxury condo that DJH Development is building inside the 7,000-square-foot red-brick building where the church's pastors used to live.

The units range in size from 1,000 to 3,100 square feet, and each will have a wood-burning fireplace original to the building. Sales start in the next few weeks; prices will begin at \$1.6 million and top out at \$3.6 million, Mr. Babst said.

"There were three Methodist churches in this ZIP code," he said, explaining how the two properties became available. "Closing one made sense."

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