

A rebirth for West Side church

**'A SPECIAL PLACE' |
Our Lady of Angels
plans to reopen**

BY ROBERT HERGUTH

Gerald and Irene Andreoli were students at Our Lady of the Angels when 92 classmates and three nuns were killed in a fire at the school. Both were severely injured.

They didn't know each other until they met at the hospital, but they became friends and eventually married at the parish church on Aug. 19, 1967.

When the Archdiocese of Chicago closed the church building at 3800 W. Iowa in 1990, they were shocked, even though they hadn't lived in the neighborhood for years.

"Then we were kind of sad to see all those memories go. We thought we might never see that church again," Gerald Andreoli said.

Now, a small Franciscan mission that has occupied the old rectory for four years is poised to fulfill a dream held by many former parishioners: It's planning



The Rev. Bob Lombardo at Our Lady of the Angels Church. | BRIAN JACKSON-SUN-TIMES

to reopen the church as a place for Catholic worship.

"It'll be a part of the mission here," the Rev. Bob Lombardo, who runs the Franciscan community, said of the 71-year-old structure. "So we'd be able to host groups, have masses for large groups of people, prayer times for the neighborhood... special events."

The church won't be taking on the role of a regular parish, Lombardo emphasized.

There won't be a daily mass schedule, set times for confessions or Sunday school programs.

Instead, the church building will help accommodate the volunteers and services at the mission, which helps oversee a community center at the former parish hall and holds food and clothing giveaways, health fairs and spiritual retreats.

Lombardo said the extra space also should expand outreach to the West Side

neighborhood that once revolved around the parish, but in recent decades has been mired in poverty and crime.

Lombardo isn't certain when the church might reopen, because money must be raised to cover repairs.

For Andreoli, 64, of Bloomingtondale, the church was "a fixture from our childhood... a fixture to our lives."

"We'd like to see that altar where we got married," he said. "... It's a special place."

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