NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Nuns join with Chicago neighbors in efforts to keep new strip club out

Michelle Martin Catholic News Service | Jul. 6, 2012

CHICAGO -- The Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo and scores of their neighbors in Chicago are really hoping that the owners of a nearby soon-to-open strip club will "get it": They don't want that kind of business in their backyard, and they are not going to be quiet about it.

The Scalabrini sisters and more than 100 neighbors in Stone Park and Melrose Park and their supporters gathered Monday to pray that the club -- to be called Get It -- will not open.

The bar backs up to the convent's property line, looming over the sisters' vegetable garden. An adjoining block of neat, modest single-family homes runs along its side.

The club will feature alcohol and partially nude dancers on a site that was formerly a factory.

The sisters say the club will degrade the community, depress property values and create dangerous situations for children who sometimes play in the alley that runs along the property.

It will also further harm the reputation of the community of about 5,000 people, which already has at least five adult entertainment venues, according to a community group calling itself United for a Better Stone Park.

"We want to create a safe, secure community for our children," Scalabrini Sr. Alma Rosa Huerta Reyes said.

The vigil Monday started with participants releasing white, helium-filled balloons into the hot evening sky. Markers were available for people to write their prayers on the balloons before sending them heavenward.

"For justice and love," one read.

"Peace," read another.

After the balloon launch, the group moved into the convent's basement, where the air still felt cool, despite the power having been out since a violent storm tore through the area the day before.

A gasoline generator powered emergency lights behind the altar on which the Eucharist was exposed while most of the room stayed in darkness. Representatives of local groups -- from the Sons of Italy to the Hispanic charismatic prayer group at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Melrose Park -- took turns coming forward to lead prayers and hymns.

"Today is a testimony of spiritual courage" said Scalabrini Sr. Noemi Silva. "We come together as a community with prayer and hope, for the safety of the community, its children and its aged, to eject the strip club and others of its kind. We are a people of hope, hope for a better Stone Park."

Pat Zito, who lives in Melrose Park across from the convent, said she doesn't want to see any more adult entertainment in the area, and especially not adjacent to the convent, where she attends daily Mass.

Zito said she is especially concerned about the message that will be sent to the novices, young women who have come from countries including India, Mexico, the Philippines and South Africa.

"They are missionaries who have come to us," she said. "They depend on us to support them."

Melrose Park Village Trustee Arturo Mota also attended the prayer vigil, saying that he will continue fighting the establishment.

"It's right in their backyard," he said.

Get It received approval from Stone Park in 2010. The village had initially turned down the proposal but reversed course after the club's owner sued. The village said it sent out courtesy letters about the necessary zoning change to neighbors, but the sisters never received theirs, apparently because the village had the wrong address. Such letters are not required by law.

It was originally rumored that the club would open in April -- perhaps on Good Friday -- but it remains closed and road construction on Lake Street, which the front of the bar faces, makes it difficult for drivers to get access to the site.

The club's website says only that it is "coming soon" and touts the contributions the club will make to the local tax base and charitable contributions to the Stone Park Fire Department. It also says the property is "fully fenced," the building is soundproofed and outdoor lights are directed away from neighboring property.

While the club is in Stone Park, the convent property straddles the property line between Stone Park and Melrose Park. It is home to about 30 women, including active and retired sisters and six novices from all over the world.

Peter Breen of the Thomas More Society, a Chicago-based public interest law firm, sent the club owners a "cease and desist" letter, claiming that Get It would violate an Illinois law that does not allow such businesses near churches because of the convent's chapel.

There has been no response to that letter, according to United for a Better Stone Park.

Source URL (retrieved on *08/27/2016 - 14:10*): https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/nuns-join-chicago-neighbors-efforts-keep-new-strip-club-out