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Most Reverend Bishop Robert Gruss
Bishop of Saginaw
Diocese of Saginaw
5600 Weiss Street
Saginaw, MI 48603-2762

Deacon Rick Warner
Director Parish Life
St. Mary Catholic Church/Nativity of the Lord Parish
220 West Donnie Street
Alma, MI 48801

Dear Bishop Gruss, Deacon Warner, and Parishioners:

As Michigan's State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) from 1989 -2020, and current board member of Docomomo-US-MI (Michigan chapter of the Society for the Documentation and Conservation of Monuments of the Modern Movement), I recently learned that leaders of the Saginaw Diocese and the Nativity of the Lord Parish are once again proposing the demolition of the St. Mary Catholic Church in Alma designed by William Wesley Peters of the Taliesin Fellowship and protégés of Frank Lloyd Wright. This building is a Michigan landmark and every effort should be made to preserve it and bring it back to life.

While head of the State Historic Preservation Office, we initiated the Michigan Modern Project to recognize the importance of Michigan as a design center and national leader in the Modern Movement. St. Mary Church was identified as a significant building of the modern period and its eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places was acknowledged, though not pursued by the Diocese. I determined the church important enough to include it as one of only 34 buildings in Michigan from the period 1928-2012 to feature in a book "Michigan Modern: An Architectural Legacy" (published by Visual Profile Books, 2018) with beautiful photographs by architectural photographer James Haefner. This

book placed your church among Michigan's most important modern architecture icons such as Cranbrook Educational Community by Eiel Saarinen, General Motors Technical Center by Eero Saarinen, McGregor Memorial Conference Center by Minoru Yamasaki, St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church by Marcel Breuer, just to name a few. There is no question of the importance of this remarkable church to Alma and to Michigan's architectural heritage. It's demolition would be a great loss.

In 2017 I lead a bus tour of architects, architectural historians and preservationists from across the country throughout lower Michigan from Detroit to Holland. Knowing of this beautiful church in Alma, I made a special effort to take the group north to visit St. Mary Church. The group was so impressed, though dismayed by the condition at that time, they reached into their pockets and donated \$1,000 toward preservation of the church. Not much perhaps, but certainly an indication of what the architecture of this church means to people. As thousands of Midwesterners travel north on 127 to recreate in Michigan's beautiful natural resources, many venture off to see this remarkable building, bringing visitors to Alma.

Historically, religious structures were meant to inspire and one can't help but be inspired by this dramatic building. Your parishioners and Michigan citizens and visitors deserve to continue to be inspired by this building. I encourage you to engage a qualified preservation architect to determine true cost of stabilization and upgrades to the building and devote the cost of demolition and new construction to the rehabilitation of this important building to once again return it to an asset to the diocese, the town of Alma, and the state of Michigan.

Sincerely,

Brian D. Conway

CC: Jim Grace, Financial Chair, St. Mary Church
Zack Durocher, Parish Council Chair, St. Mary Church
Michael MacDonald and Rosemary Horvath, Gratiot County Herald
Rick Mills, The Morning Sun
Mayor Greg Mapes and Commission Members, City of Alma, Attn Aeric Ridley, City Manager.
Martha MacFarlane Faes, Depute State Historic Preservation Officer, MEDC
Joe Frost, Community Development Manager, Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
Liz Waytkus, Docomomo-US
Debby Kawsky, Docomomo-US-MI