

## ‘All of Mankind’ mural threatened by church sale

### Coalition forms to help preserve 36-year-old symbol of harmony

By Dana Nelson



**Andrew Nelles- The Chronicle**  
The Northside Stranger’s Home Church, 617 W. Evergreen Ave., is up for sale, which worries the All of Mankind Coalition. The coalition fears the mural will be destroyed if the building is demolished to make way for new developments.

Within the segregated city of Chicago, community and art activists are rallying around a symbol of peace, hope and unity—a mural called “All of Mankind” by Chicagoan

William Walker, which may disappear in the coming months.

The Northside Stranger’s Home Church, 617 W. Evergreen Ave., which houses the fading painting on its exterior walls, is up for sale. Members of the All of Mankind Coalition, which formed to save the mural, fear the sale will result in the demolition of the building and consequently, the destruction of the 36-year-old mural.

“We know that there are some pieces of public art we expect to last for a very long time, if not forever, and we know that there are some pieces that we expect to be temporary and do not last very long,” said Jon Pounds, executive director of the Chicago Public Art Group, which produces art and park designs for communities in Chicago. “But this piece falls in between those two and I believe it calls for a really clear decision on the part of the city and the part of all of us as people if we decide to throw away something like this; if we let it disappear when we have the chance to keep it.”

The “All of Mankind” mural features four figures—one black, one white, one Asian and one Latino—with their hands together in a show of unity and racial harmony. Below the church’s cross, Walker painted the words “Why were they crucified” and the names of

historical figures like Ghandi, Malcolm X, Anne Frank, Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesus Christ.

Although the mural is a message of hope, it also represents some of the worst acts that have been committed through a lack of racial peace, Pounds said. At the time it was created, Chicago was known to be one of the most racist and most segregated cities in America. Walker's work was meant to combat that, and its message has never been damaged by graffiti, like other public works of art, Pounds said.

In response to the possible destruction of the mural, the All of Mankind Coalition formed to advocate for the restoration and preservation of the mural, both as a representation of Chicago's history and a beacon of hope for peace despite cultural differences.

The Coalition is comprised of authors, artists, politicians and business leaders, as well as community activists and architecture enthusiasts. Pounds said they are working to raise awareness of the mural's importance, and what can be done to keep it intact despite the church's fate.

Alderman Walter Burnett, whose 27th Ward includes the church, said he is concerned about the state of the mural because of its long history in the city and its strong message. But he does not know what could be done about its preservation.

"It's a complicated situation," he said. "[The church] is caught between a rock and a hard place."

Pounds said the church was torn between trying to preserve the mural and its inability to pay for the church property any longer. He said the owners did not want to see the mural destroyed, as many other murals have been, but they could not keep the building or make use of it, particularly with low member retention.

The mural is the only remaining piece of art in Cabrini Green, and one of the few murals left from the 1970s in the city.

Pound said its cultural significance is partly because of its history in Chicago's public art; William Walker is credited with the creation of the first community mural in 1967, "The Wall of Respect," on 43rd and Langley Streets. Other neighborhoods in Chicago picked up on community murals and created many throughout Pilsen, Hyde Park, Uptown and Humboldt Park, as well as other communities and cities around the country. Walker then went on to co-found the Community Mural Project, which is now the Chicago Public Art Group.

"The Wall of Respect" was destroyed in 1971 after a fire resulted from unsafe building conditions. The building was demolished and rebuilt, but the mural was lost forever.

According to a report by the Getty Conservation Institute, which works to advance conservation efforts through scientific research, there are no remaining community walls from the 1960s. The Getty Conservation Institute also reported that almost all of the thousands of community murals from the 1970s are gone, with Walker's "All of Mankind" mural one of the few exceptions. It is one of three remaining walls Walker created in Chicago.

Most of the original community walls were demolished to make way for new developments. As Chicago continues to expand, Cabrini Green is one of the locations where new developments are likely to occur.

The mural's location within Cabrini Green, which has long been known as a public housing site, has coalition members worried that the Chicago Housing Authority will eventually destroy the building.

However, Chicago Housing Authority spokesman Derek Hill said the CHA had no plans to buy the property.

Burnett said he wouldn't mind seeing the Chicago Park District buy the property and use it for program space. Otherwise, he said if the building would be destroyed, the mural should be kept intact and moved to a place where it can be restored and preserved.

As of press time, the property is still for sale, and the mural's future is unknown.