

St. Edward State Park: With “friends” like these... | Letter to the Editor



*Father Michael G. Ryan
Pastor, St. James Cathedral, Seattle*

February 19, 2016 - In 1976, the Archdiocese of Seattle made a significant statement about its role in serving the common good and all people, regardless of denomination.

There is absolutely no question that the sale of St. Edward's Seminary for public use was pursued in order to preserve and care for the historic seminary building as well as the surrounding property. Although Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen could have sold the 316 acres to eager developers and realized a far greater profit for the church, he knew that St. Edward State Park, rightly managed, could continue to contribute significantly to the region, much as the seminary had.

It is thanks to Archbishop Hunthausen's strong moral compass and civic spirit that the people of our state get to enjoy St. Edward State Park today. The Archbishop is a man who has always put the common good first— not narrow or select interests.

The opponents of the current plan to preserve the historic seminary building by transferring rights to a private developer might cite the archbishop's commitment to environmental stewardship in their arguments but they would be mistaken. The handsome 1930s building was every bit as much the impetus for the public dedication of the park as were the extensive acres and the pristine lakefront. They cannot be separated. To allow the building, or any part of it, to fall into decay and ruin (sadly, it is well on its way) is its own kind of sin against the environment, and yes, a sin against the common good. It is not what the visionary archbishop had in mind when he signed his name to the sale.

People who call themselves "friends" of the park are not the friends they think they are. I say this as a dues-paying member of The Friends of St. Edward State Park. Despite their good intentions, the old adage of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face comes to mind. True friends would argue in favor of preserving and enhancing the landmark building, not just the grounds which surround it. True

friends would do everything possible to make sure that generations to come will not only enjoy the beautiful grounds, but the uniquely beautiful building as well. True friends would never allow themselves to champion one worthy cause at the expense of another. The beloved 1930s edifice is as much a part of St. Edward State Park as are the grounds, the playing fields, the hiking trails, and the lakefront. Giving the seminary building a new lease on life as a park lodge with new public amenities will not only save the building for posterity but also greatly enhance the park in the process.

I am not a disinterested bystander. I spent fifteen years of my life at St. Edward's Seminary both as a student and as a teacher. And the priest who baptized me, Monsignor Theodore M. Ryan, is the same priest who, after tramping around that hillside in the late 1920s, recommended to Bishop Edward J. O'Dea that he purchase the land for his seminary. Bishop O'Dea purchased the site with a family inheritance and later told Monsignor Ryan that St. Edward's Seminary was his dream come true. In saying that, I'm quite sure that Bishop O'Dea didn't mean to exclude the building. Neither should we.

If you agree, please take action and send an email or letter of support to State Parks
<http://parks.state.wa.us/857/Saint-Edward-Planning---Seminary>

To learn more about the project, visit: <http://danielsre.com/projects/st-edward-seminary>

Father Michael G. Ryan
Pastor, St. James Cathedral, Seattle