

International Conference
October 7-11 2009

Religious Houses: A Legacy



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Organized by:

– International Conference –

Conseil du
patrimoine
religieux
du Québec

More and more of our convents, monasteries and abbeys are closing...

Religious Houses: A Legacy

Montréal and Québec City, October 7-11, 2009

CHAIRE

de recherche du Canada
en patrimoine urbain
ESG UQAM

Montréal, September 24, 2009 – More and more of our convents, monasteries and abbeys are closing.... The sale of these imposing religious houses, often located on stately grounds, arouses passionate debate. Should they be preserved as heritage sites? Can we subdivide these properties, and build on them? To reflect on this phenomenon, affecting the entire Christian West, the Canada Research Chair on Urban Heritage (ESG UQAM), in partnership with the Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec and Concordia University, has organized the conference Religious Houses: A Legacy. On this occasion, forty speakers – from across Canada and from other countries as well – will discuss these religious properties and their potential conversion and re-use. They will also consider ways of preserving the memory of religious orders when these monuments and sites take on a new life.

UNIVERSITÉ
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UQAM Institut du patrimoine
Université du Québec à Montréal

Date : October 7 and 8 – Montreal (Concordia University, 1455, De Maisonneuve Boulevard West, Henry F. Hall Building, Room H-110 and D.B. Clarke Theatre)

October 10 and 11 – Québec City (École des Ursulines, 4 rue du Parloir, Aile Marie-Guyart)

Cost : Several levels of registration are available (between \$45 and \$150) depending on the activities selected.

Program and registration: www.colloquepatrimoinereligieux.qc.ca

The members of religious orders are aging, and the orders' assets have not been spared by the economic crisis. Actuarial studies have shown them how much capital they will need to sustain their members—the majority of whom are elderly and ill— and pursue charitable works. Meanwhile, the members of these orders are forced to maintain large buildings according to the high standards dictated by their architectural history. These buildings house precious archives and specialized medical facilities. Sadly, such congregations find themselves putting their properties up for sale in an effort to generate revenues.

On the other hand, the public perceives these properties as heritage sites: parks and iconic monuments occupying a prominent position in the urban landscape and in the collective imagination. The informed public, motivated by an interest in sustainable development practices and a respect for the heritage designation, sometimes pushes for public ownership or at least minimal development or redevelopment.

Municipal authorities are hesitant to put themselves at the centre of the debate. Should they recognize the claims of owners who want to change the current zoning and density to maximize the value of their property? Should they authorize redevelopment projects that further densify the urban fabric on the few remaining large urban green spaces?

This international conference will address a number of issues. For close to forty years, Quebec has witnessed a halting rebirth of its religious houses. Throughout the Western world, successful examples of re-use abound; whether through changes in vocation or as sites of remembrance. Several presentations will also illustrate conversions of convents, monasteries and abbeys in the planning stages.

Open house, October 11, 2009 (1:00 to 5:00 p.m.)

On Sunday, October 11, the conference will conclude with an open house program involving the collaboration of the *Mission Patrimoine religieux*. Twenty of the most spectacular religious houses across Quebec will open their doors to the public.

Information on the Conference

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Requests for interviews

Professor Luc Noppen, Canada Research Chair on Urban Heritage (ESG UQAM), and chairman of the conference organizing committee, is available for interviews about the event and the social issues it raises.

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