



Churches host foreclosure workshops

BY PETE DAVIS

While there is no quick or easy solution to the foreclosure crisis currently engulfing Queens, a rare combination of politicians, non-profit organizations and church leaders are attempting to decrease the record-high rates by educating citizens about the dangers of subprime mortgages.

United States Senator Chuck Schumer and Brooklyn Diocese Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio recently announced a campaign where non-profit groups would bring foreclosure prevention education directly to Queens and Brooklyn parishes where high rates of foreclosures are prevalent.

“This partnership with the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens will make sure that the families most in danger hear directly from their spiritual leaders about how to get help and receive the best advice in the country from local community groups to help save their homes,” Schumer said.

Nearly 35 people attended the first Queens workshop at St. Catherine of Siena Church in St. Albans on Sunday, February 24.

Reverend Bill Sweeney, the Pastor of St. Catherine of Siena since 2004, read in a newspaper article that his parish’s zip code - 11412 - had the highest rate of foreclosures in the city, so he told Reverend Alfred LoPinto at Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens that if St. Catherine’s could help, he would be happy to host a workshop.

“They were very helpful in telling those [attendees] how they can get in touch with people that are professionals who can help with this issue,” Sweeney said.

Representatives from Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens, **Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project (NEDAP)**, Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) and ACORN Housing are expected to lead the workshops.

Nina Valmonte, an Associate Director for Parish and Community Outreach at Catholic Charities, said that representatives from the different agencies do a great job in educating those at risk of foreclosure, but even more must occur to eliminate the problem.

“We need to do more than just respond to an immediate crisis,” she said. “We also need to deal with the systemic problems that allow this to happen.

Meanwhile, Frank DeRosa, a spokesperson for the Brooklyn Diocese, said that although it is not normal for the church to host programs, the urgency of the situation warranted such action.

“The church does try to help people in various concerns, and this is such a major one right now that the

Brooklyn Diocese has taken a leadership role,” DeRosa said.

The next Queens workshops will take place at St. Leo’s in Corona on Sunday, March 30 with a session in English at 11 a.m. and one in Spanish at 12:45 p.m.

In addition to the seminars at area churches, Queens residents will have another chance to receive education and tips to avoid foreclosure as part of a joint venture of New York State Democratic Senators, the New York State Banking Department and mortgage companies entitled “Operation Protect Your Home.”

The workshops, which will take place from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Campus Magnet High School on Saturday, March 1 are open to the public, but borrowers whose mortgages are about to reset or those who are already late with their payments will be given priority.

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