

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 1998 SESSION

CHAPTER 258

An Act to amend and reenact § 57-15 of the Code of Virginia, relating to property held for religious purposes.

[H 707]

Approved April 7, 1998

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 57-15 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 57-15. Proceedings by trustees or members for similar purposes.

The trustees of such church diocese, congregation, or church or religious denomination, or society or branch or division thereof, in whom is vested the legal title to such land held for any of the purposes mentioned in § 57-7.1, may file their petition in the circuit court of the county or the city wherein the land, or the greater part thereof held by them as trustees, lies, or before the judge of such court in vacation, asking leave to sell, encumber, extend encumbrances, improve, make a gift of, or exchange the land, or a part thereof, or to settle boundaries between adjoining property by agreement. Upon evidence being produced before the court that it is the wish of the congregation, or church or religious denomination or society, or branch or division thereof, or the constituted authorities thereof having jurisdiction in the premises, or of the governing body of any church diocese, to sell, exchange, encumber, extend encumbrances, make a gift of, or improve the property or settle boundaries by agreement, the court shall make such order as may be proper, providing for the sale of such land, or a part thereof, or that the same may be exchanged, encumbered, improved, or given as a gift, or that encumbrances thereon be extended, and in case of sale for the proper investment of the proceeds or for the settlement of such boundaries by agreement.

When any such religious congregation has become extinct or has ceased to occupy such property as a place of worship, so that it may be regarded as abandoned property, the petition may be filed either by the surviving trustee or trustees, should there be any, or by any one or more members of such congregation, should there be any, or by the religious body which by the laws of the church or denomination to which the congregation belongs has the charge or custody of the property, or in which it may be vested by the laws of such church or denomination. The court shall *either (i) make a decree for the sale of the property or the settlement of boundaries between adjoining properties by agreement, and the disposition of the proceeds in accordance with the laws of the denomination and the printed acts of the church or denomination issued by its authority, embodied in book or pamphlet form, shall be taken and regarded as the law and acts of such denomination or religious body or (ii) at the request of the surviving trustees and after notice in accordance with law to all necessary parties, make such order as may be proper providing for the gift of such property to any willing local, state or federal entity or to a willing private, nonprofit organization exempt from taxation under § 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, provided the court finds that (a) the property includes a historic building or landmark so designated by the Commonwealth and (b) the purpose of such gift is historical preservation of the property.*

The court may make such order as to the costs in all these proceedings as may seem proper.

2. That an emergency exists and this act is in force from its passage.