

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**July 27, 2015**

***Last Rites for a Beloved Manhattan Church Dedicated to Our Lady of Peace, 239 East 62<sup>nd</sup> Street***

They rallied in January with the New York City Mass Mob. They marched through the streets with poster-size portraits of their ancestors, waving Italian flags on Founders Day in April – a substitute for a centennial planned for 2019. The **Deputy Consul of Italy, Ms. Isabella Periotta** and **Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer** joined forces to support them with **New York City Councilmember Daniel Garodnick** and **Joseph Sciame**, the chair of the **Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations**. In May, they opened their church for the **Sacred Sites Tour of the New York Landmarks Conservancy**, celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Landmarks Law. The parishioners of **Our Lady of Peace** have mounted a spirited resistance against the Archdiocese of New York's decision to merge and close their Upper East Side spiritual home.

But since the Archdiocese of New York will close the church at the end of this week, the parishioners will hold a **Last Supper and All-Night Vigil** starting Thursday, July 30 at 7:00 p.m. through the last scheduled mass at 12:10 p.m. on Friday, July 31, until the church is closed and while they wait for a stay of the merger proceedings and the resolution of their Vatican appeal.

"The Vigil will be an extraordinary event for parishioners, friends, and supporters to spend a full night of communication and worship, petitioning for public and private needs, including saving Our Lady of Peace Church," explained **Tami Ellen McLaughlin**, chair of Special Occasions Team.

The all-night vigil, a tradition spanning more than 40 years, will include a rosary procession starting at 7:15 p.m. through the neighborhood, a Solemn Mass at 8:00 p.m. accompanied by the Patriot Brass Ensemble, followed by the candle lighting of the steps and sidewalks outside the church at 9:00 p.m. Other religious traditions will follow throughout the night including the Stations of the Cross, Litanies, confessions, the anointing of the sick - the full panoply of a Holy Week in the Roman Catholic Church. **Father Bartholomew Daly**, pastor of the church will celebrate the last masses with other priests.

At 11:30 p.m., **Rev. Father Christopher Salvatore** and servers and choir from the Church of the Holy Innocents will offer the High Mass sung in Latin, *Missa Salve, Santa Perens*. Holy Innocents, one of the only churches in New York that offers the traditional Latin mass, fought a successful campaign to save their church from closure.

**Sister Kate Kuentler**, the canon lawyer who worked with the parishioners on their Vatican appeal, offered her thoughts on the imminent closing of the church. "While the parishioners of Our Lady of Peace mourn the closing of their church, Cardinal Dolan continues to ignore the people of this faith community that will be disenfranchised on August 1, 2015 - the faith community, the people of God of Our Lady of Peace parish."

"The Cardinal was seen on television yesterday saying, 'As important as a building is, that is not the church, and everything they cherish there. . . can now go on in a new structure.' The Cardinal sees the corporate restructuring of the Archdiocese as a chess game and Our Lady of Peace parish as a mere chess piece," **Sister Kuentler** continued. "He does not see the pain of loss in the hearts of the people or understand that the sacred center of faith, the campus of Our Lady of Peace parish, is held in the hearts and souls of these parishioners. A 2003 study by the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development reports that 40% of merged parishes - where one church closes- decreased in size

(number of households). This is not caused by a decrease in faith by the people, but rather by the lack of pastoral leadership on the part of the bishop or Cardinal who is meant to be a shepherd of the souls given to his care.”

**Dr. Michael A. Chaplin**, great-grandson of Eugenia Merlini, one of the founders and benefactors whose names are carved in marble in the vestibule, said, “*Making All Things New* shouldn’t mean tossing our heritage into a junk pile. In a time when so much is ephemeral, and the only thing that seems to last is conflict, you would think that a church dedicated to peace would be the last place we would want to close.”

**Elizabeth Granville-Smith**, a parishioner and neighbor, also spoke about the need for the church. “Our Lady of Peace is a historically significant and beautifully maintained building in this landmarked neighborhood,” she said. “In addition to serving its dedicated community, the church is convenient for people working in the midtown business districts and tourists. Our Lady of Peace is a busy place with a stream of people walking through its front doors on a daily basis -- a symbol of the energy and diversity of the people that make up the Midtown East community. A visitor from Los Angeles recently told me that losing a culturally significant church like Our Lady of Peace is a tragedy for New York City.”

“We are disappointed that the doors of Our Lady of Peace Church will be locked by the Archdiocese of New York on August first,” said **Julianne Bertagna, President of the Treadwell Farm Historic District**. “The church is the crown jewel of the Treadwell Farm Historic District, a designated landmark by Landmark Preservation Commission since 1967, and has housed a vibrant and financially robust parish and provided a meeting place for many community groups. This closure is a great loss to the neighborhood and the church’s parishioners.”

**Janice Dooner Lynch**, whose grandparents married at Our Lady of Peace and whose family has worshipped at the church her entire life, is the contact person for the Vatican appeal. She says the closing of the church is a denial of due process. “We sent both Cardinal Dolan and the Vatican a request for a suspension, a stay of the merger proceedings until our appeals are exhausted,” she said.

“We sent the Vatican five volumes of information relevant to the history, vibrancy, solvency, and mission of this parish, and they extended their review of our appeal until September first. But the Archdiocese of New York insists on closing the churches on their own schedule, by August 1, 2015. However, the civil religious corporations mergers, dissolution and formation, will not even be complete until a full year later in September 2016.” She asked, “Then, why is it so necessary to close the churches now?”

Meanwhile, Lynch will be there with the rest of the parish at the all-night vigil, praying for its salvation.

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