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HOLY FAMILY MEETS GOAL TO STAY ALIVE

David Iyata CHICAGO TRIBUNE January 2, 1991

Faith and prayer have given Holy Family Church a new life, thanks to more than \$2 million in cash and pledges to save the Near West Side landmark, it was announced Tuesday.

"It`s beautiful," said Ruby Welton, a member of Holy Family parish for more than 40 years, who added that she raised her five children in the parish. "Our prayers have been answered."

Welton spoke as the bells atop the 226-foot belfry of the church at 1080 W. Roosevelt Rd. pealed for the first time since the nave was closed in 1984 because of roof problems and falling plaster.

"I want to tell you this morning we not only made our \$1 million cash goal, we surpassed it. We have \$1,011,000 in cash and another \$990,000 in good pledges," said Rev. George Lane, board member of the 130-year-old Catholic church.

About 50 parishioners gathered to hear the good news on the steps of the church on a sunny, blustery New Year`s Day.

The \$1 million will secure the church from the elements by paying for roof repairs, tuck pointing and other exterior work, Lane said. An additional \$2 million would go toward interior renovations, and \$250,000 is to match a

\$750,000 gift from the Chicago Province Society of Jesus. The Jesuits own the church and have pledged the money to set up a maintenance fund.

Donations continue to be accepted at the Holy Family Church office, 1019 S. May St.

Holy Family Church survived the Chicago Fire of 1871 but nearly fell victim in recent years to declining membership and the wrecker`s ball. Its membership today stands at 250 families, down from 4,267 in 1881 and half of its total of only six years ago.

Irene Miranda, president of the Holy Family Parish Council, said that the church lost many members after mass was moved from the nave to an adjoining chapel.

"If we don`t have a church, we die, because we don`t have the space for all of our people," Miranda said.

The Jesuits in 1988 gave parishioners until Dec. 31, 1990, to raise \$1 million to fix the roof. But as of Thanksgiving Day, with less than a few weeks left, the Society for the Preservation of Holy Family Church was nearly \$500,000 short of its goal.

Parishioners repeated the entreaties of Rev. Arnold Damen, founder of Holy Family, who, according to parish history, as the Chicago Fire raged only a few blocks to the east, lit candles to Our Lady of Perpetual Help and prayed that the flames would spare his church. They did.

During Christmas week, the parishioners held a four-night rosary vigil in freezing wet weather on the church steps.

On Sunday, the Feast of the Holy Family, the sanctuary was opened to the public for the first time in six years, and an estimated 3,000 people filed through. Between Sunday morning and Tuesday noon, \$290,000 in new

contributions poured in.

Donations ranged from a clear plastic bag of coins and dollar bills that a 4th grade schoolgirl collected from her West Side neighbors, to \$25,000 from Chicago attorney Philip H. Corboy and \$50,000 from Barrington car dealer Joseph Gentile.

Many donors were alumni of the St. Ignatius College Prep school next door to Holy Family Church, while other major contributors included the Catholic Order of Foresters, Robert R. McCormick Trust, and the Cuneo, MacArthur, Dan & Ada Rice and Donald P. Kelly Family Foundations.