

Keeping faith for 150 years

HOLY FAMILY | Landmark church, among oldest in city, survived Great Fire, threat of demolition

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One of Chicago's oldest churches is celebrating its 150th anniversary Sunday.

Holy Family Catholic Church, 1080 W. Roosevelt, has overcome many obstacles over the years: the Great Fire of 1871, a planned demolition announced 20 years ago and another fire in 2003.

The Rev. George Lane, a Jesuit priest, helped organize a preservation group in 1988 that raised \$5 million to restore the building. The main part of the church was closed from 1984 to 1994, and worship moved to a small room behind the altar.

"The church wasn't safe. Plaster was falling," said Lane, who heads Loyola Press.

Another \$2 million was raised by the parish for ongoing improvements.

"This church is now at the center point of a new, exciting residential neighborhood and a commercial



John Neeson and granddaughter Johanna Tario are descendants of Catherine O'Leary, in whose barn the Fire started. | PHOTO BY SHANNON CLAIR

renaissance," said Lane, who has never led the parish but once lived in clergy housing there.

The church is owned by the Chi-

cago Jesuits and leased to the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Another Jesuit priest, the Rev. Jeremiah Boland, is the parish's administrator.

Cardinal Francis George will lead the 9:45 a.m. worship celebration Sunday, which will be followed by tours from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The cardinal's paternal grandmother, Mary Connelly George, was baptized at the church in 1870.

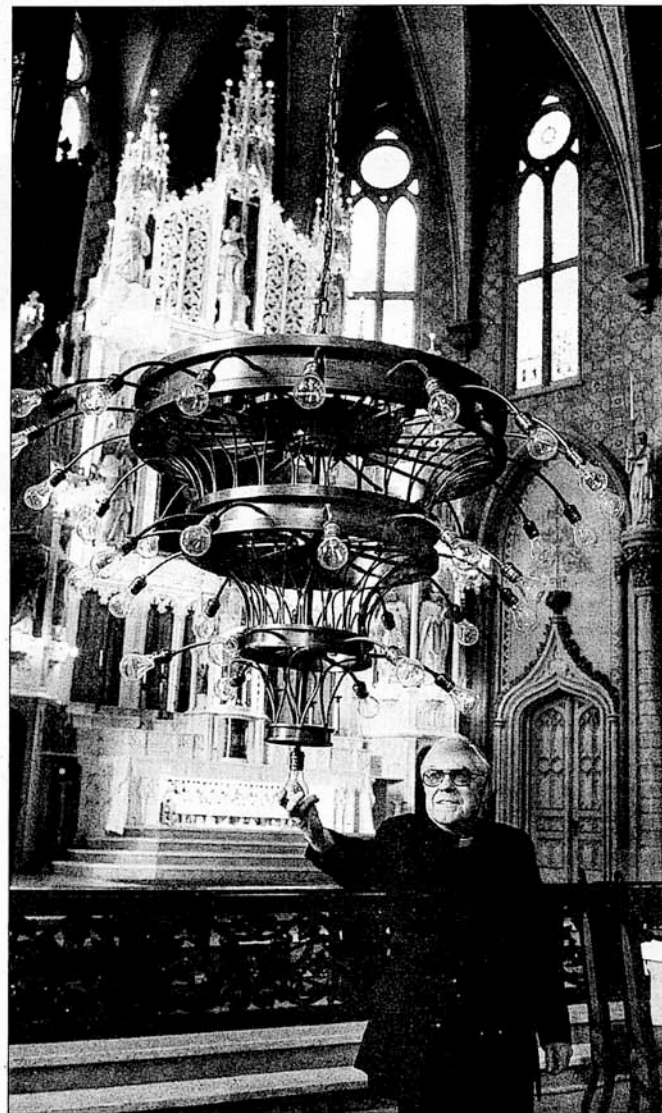
John Neeson, 82, of Beverly, is among the many people who worked for the building's salvation.

His great-grandmother, Catherine O'Leary, was a member. She's most famous for being falsely blamed for the Great Fire, which started in her barn.

A third of the city's population ended up losing their homes.

"This church will always be tied to my family," Neeson said. "And it will always be significant to Chicago."

It just goes to show, he said, the importance of keeping faith in hard times.



The Rev. George Lane is inside Holy Family Church. He had a role in its restoration, although he has never led the parish. | JOHN H. WHITE-SUN-TIMES