

A Reprieve For Grace Buildings

POST APR 15 1972

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

The architectural obituary had all but been written for a historic row of Gothic Revival buildings on Fourth Av. owned by Grace Church.

Two of the row of four buildings, whose rare and delicate facades had long been cherished as unofficial landmarks, were scheduled for demolition. They were to make way for a new facility long needed for the church's elementary school and multi-purpose community programs.

Yesterday, Easter Sunday, a foregone loss was turned into a live-hope as spokesmen for the church, the civic groups fighting to preserve the buildings, assorted architectural groups who had acted as intermediaries and local elected leaders, all appeared on the church steps at Broadway and 10th St. to announce an agreement.

The agreement was "to work together to achieve preservation" of the Gothic architecture. A new plan is to be drawn, enough money raised and a new building will be constructed, incorporating the historic facades.

Dr. Benjamin Minifie, rector of Grace Church, noted that Easter Sunday was an appropriate day for such an announcement since it is a "day of hope", promise and resurrection. We've had some emotional times in the past as we wrestled with the problem and we're as enthusiastic as anyone else if it can now be solved."

Bronson Binger, a landmark activist whose full-time job is running the South Street Seaport, spoke for the mediating architectural groups.

He noted that a panel of architects is now working with the church's architects on the new plan and that it looks hopeful.

The lawsuit brought against the church by the Joint Emergency Committee for the Preservation of Grace Church Houses would be dropped, Binger said. The day has come, he added, to take the fight "out of court and into church."

A joint fund-raising drive was also announced, with Joan K. Davidson and Whitney North Seymour Jr. as co-chairmen. Pollanthropist Davidson, whose J. M. Kaplan Fund has already pledged \$20,000 toward a goal of \$450,000, was a member of the Joint Emergency Committee.

Attorney Seymour, an early leader in the fight to gain passage of the city's 1963 Landmarks Preservation Law, is a senior vestryman of the church. Seymour had supported the demolition plan because church funds were too limited to provide for preservation.

May 3 was set as a new deadline. Until then, the church will make no move to demolish and rebuild.