

Legislation Text

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Recognizing the 250th Anniversary of Old St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church Philadelphia's oldest Catholic Church in continuous service.

WHEREAS, Old St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church was founded on South Fourth Street in 1763 by Father Robert Harding, a Jesuit, as an off-shoot of St. Joseph's in Willings Alley, the earliest Catholic chapel in Philadelphia. St. Mary's became the first Catholic Parish Church in the City, eighty years before Philadelphia was founded and thirteen years before the Declaration of Independence was signed. An elementary school was established for the parish in 1782 to educate the children in the area; and

WHEREAS, Old St. Mary's Church welcomed many important historical figures. Early pew holders included Commodore John Barry, Father of the American Navy; Thomas Fitz-Simons, a signer of the Constitution; George Meade, grandfather of General George Gordon Meade; General Stephan Moylan, aide-de-camp to George Washington; and Matthew Carey, leading publisher of the early days of the Republics; and

WHEREAS, On the fourth of July, 1779, the first public religious commemoration of the Declaration of Independence was held in St. Mary's Church. At the close of the Revolutionary War, the armies of the Republic and France joined in a Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving and adorned the chancel of St. Mary's with the captured British flags; and

WHEREAS, In 1808, Old St. Mary's Church was designated the first Cathedral in Pennsylvania when Pope Pius VII created the Diocese of Philadelphia, which included all of Pennsylvania, Delaware and the western half of New Jersey. The first three Bishops to serve the Diocese of Philadelphia from the Cathedral Church of St. Mary's were: Right Reverend Michael Egan, O.S.F.; Right Reverend Henry Conwell; and Right Reverend Francis P. Kenrick. The Most Reverend Martin N. Lohmuller served as Pastor of Old St. Mary's Church during the Bicentennial of these United States; and

WHEREAS, Old St. Mary's Church was enlarged in 1821 and was reoriented in its interior in 1886. During a period of church-burning during the Anti-Catholic Riots of 1844, this church emerged unharmed. Following the Civil War, Philadelphia's population moved westward, making St. Mary's parish a district of banks, insurance houses and office building, deserted after nightfall; and

WHEREAS, Old St. Mary's is the oldest Catholic Church building that exists in its same location in the City of Philadelphia. In its 250th year, St. Mary's continues to be a thriving parish that meets the spiritual needs of citizens and visitors to Philadelphia. The Society Hill neighborhood is blessed to have the Church among its many historical sites; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby recognize the 250th Anniversary of Old St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the Archbishop of Philadelphia, Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. and Monsignor Paul DiGirolamo, the current Pastor of Old St. Mary's

Church, as evidence of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.