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## 'Still celebrating her'

By **David McLaughlin**/ Daily News Staff  
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**F**RAMINGHAM -- The day the Challenger shuttle exploded after takeoff 20 years ago, St. Jeremiah parishioners packed the church for an impromptu Mass to share their grief.


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 [Christa Corrigan McAuliffe Center for Education and Teaching Excellence:](#) Official website of the center, located at Framingham State College.

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Yesterday, they returned to celebrate the life of teacher and astronaut Christa McAuliffe, who grew up attending the church and whose family is part of the fabric of its community.

"She inspired us to do something with our lives, to take a risk," said Lorraine Dray, who is a teacher like McAuliffe. "Twenty years have gone by, and we're still celebrating her."

Dray was one of the St. Jeremiah parishioners who filled the church for yesterday's memorial Mass in honor of McAuliffe and her father, Edward Corrigan, who died in 1990 at age 67.

Afterward, they gathered in the basement to remember McAuliffe, who was married in the church and pitched for its softball team. She was a woman, they said, who was dedicated to

teaching and hoped through her participation in the space program to spur others to live life.

"She was devoted, involved, faithful. What can you say?" said Mary Shea, who knew McAuliffe as a young girl and called her "a woman of our time."

The Rev. William Roche, who celebrated the Mass, pointed to McAuliffe's life to remind parishioners that they, too, lead lives that are as significant as the teacher-turned-astronaut.

"We are important. We are significant," he said.

Betty Sleczkowski, a retired fourth-grade teacher from the Brophy school, remembered being overcome by excitement when McAuliffe was selected for the space program.

McAuliffe, she and others said, was eager to teach the world about space and had every intention of returning to the classroom.

"It was just wonderful to follow what she was doing," she said. "She made us feel very special. She was such a dedicated leader."

Sleczkowski easily recalls the day of the Challenger accident, when she learned shortly after lunch about the explosion and "fell apart" alone in a classroom.

That day, Jan. 28, 1986, parishioners flooded St. Jeremiah's for a Mass celebrated by Cardinal Bernard Law. Dray brought her young sons. The church, she said, "was where we needed to be."

Today, members of St. Jeremiah are fighting to reverse a decision by the Archdiocese of Boston to close the church. They hope to win a Vatican appeal and keep alive decades of stories and memories, like the impromptu Mass 20 years ago.

"The church was full. There were people all over the place," said Mary Anne Curtis, a friend of McAuliffe's mother, Grace Corrigan. "That's why it's so hard to close this church."

Grace Corrigan and her daughter Lisa Bristol agreed that if she was alive today,



Grace Corrigan, mother of Christa McAuliffe, gets a hug at a mass at St. Jeremiah's Church. (Erin Prawoko photo)

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McAuliffe would be behind those joining the church vigil in an effort to keep it open.

"She'd be here, too," Bristol said. "If she was living in this community, she'd be the one making casseroles and bringing sleeping bags."

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