

Mom wants window, memory to live on

By David McLaughlin / Daily News Staff

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FRAMINGHAM -- For more than 40 years, a small stained-glass window inside St. Jeremiah's has stood as a memorial to Tommy Roper, a 17-year-old Framingham High student who died in a car accident.

Today, with parishioners fighting to keep the church open, Roper's family is left wondering what might happen to the window, built into a doorway in the entrance to St. Jeremiah's.

"It's a very religious family, and they wanted something with his name on it to be there forever," said Roper's sister, Pat Gisler, a nurse at Los Angeles Children's Hospital who was 20 when her brother died.

Roper's mom, Edith, 89, who lives in Greenville, S.C., called the Daily News this weekend after reading the paper's coverage of St. Jeremiah's closing. If the church shuts its doors for good, she wants to know the fate of her son's window and a second one dedicated in her family's name.

"If they take them and throw them out, it'll be a shame," she said.

Tommy Roper died in 1964 while riding in a car he and some friends had borrowed from a woman. His mother said he adored St. Jeremiah's, and donations made to the church in his name paid for the two windows.

Their fate -- along with others inside the church donated by St. Jeremiah's parishioners - appears uncertain.

Archdiocese of Boston spokesman Terry Donilon said the Roper family should write to the archdiocese. A priest there, he said, will "try to come to an understanding with the family based on supporting documents and a variety of other factors."

When asked where the windows could end up, Donilon said he did not want to discuss hypothetical situations. "I think we should look at it in terms of a process, and this is the first step," he said.

Inscriptions inside St. Jeremiah's entranceway describe the history behind the windows that adorn the church doors. Roper's reads, "In loving memory of Thomas J. Roper Jr. Gift of St. Jeremiah's CYO." His window is called Refuge of Sinners, according to the inscription, but it was not clear yesterday exactly which one belongs to him.

The other window, named Mystical Rose, depicts a rose and is dedicated to Edith Roper's parents. It reads, "In memory of Peter and Maria Petrucci. Gift of Thomas Roper Jr."

If the ongoing vigil to keep the church open fails, Edith Roper said she would be willing to take the windows for her own church, which ironically may be rebuilt because it has become overcrowded.

"I know she's upset," Pat Gisler said of her mother. "I wouldn't think they would destroy them. Those are beautiful works of art. It's hard for her because she's very religious, and it's very upsetting."

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Photo Gallery



This stained glass window was dedicated to the memory of Tommy Roper 40 years ago. (Allan Jung photo)

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