

BY

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CHURCH GIVEN A UNIQUE BUST OF MADONNA

A Catholic church in Bedford-Stuyvesant has received what it sees as the best possible Mother's Day gift: a unique sculpture of the mother of Jesus Christ. In a simple ceremony last Thursday, Our Lady of Victory Church was given a bust of the Black Madonna - a replica of the Virgin Mary cast with a black patina from the Vatican's original mold of Michelangelo's "Pieta."

" The 27-inch high, 67-pound, \$25,000 work of art was given to the church by philanthropist James Grau, his wife Elizabeth Trump Grau - the sister of billionaire developer Donald Trump - and David Newren. Newren is president of New Renaissance Art, a California firm specializing in fine works of art.

It produced the Black Madonna under license with the Vatican Treasury Museum. "How wonderful it is, that this happens in the month of May when we not only celebrate the mother of Jesus, but our own mothers," said Our Lady of Victory pastor the Rev. Martin Carter. The current congregation at the 135-year-old church is predominantly black, and Carter has decorated the exterior of the Throop Ave. house of worship with black images of the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus, as well as Jesus on the cross. This was not lost on James Grau, a longtime supporter of the nearby Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corp., as he considered where to donate the bust. "When I heard black, and I heard Madonna, it was obvious," said Grau. "You know you think of a place to help, of where to put it, and to me, the choice is crystal clear.

" In the past, Grau noted, the surrounding Bed-Stuy community was "a hellhole, riddled with drugs and crime.

" Now that it has improved and keeps improving, he said, the Black Madonna's place in the community will be a plus. His wife agreed, calling the landmark Our Lady of Victory "such a beautiful church," and adding that she was "very happy" with its choice as the recipient of the bust. A grateful Carter noted that his church's new Black Madonna "follows in the footsteps of the many Black Madonnas of Russia, Our Lady of Hurezi, Our Lady of Le Puy, Our Lady of Czestochowa, and many others in the . . . tradition of Black Madonna's in the Catholic Church.