

CHURCH, 136, UPSET OVER FORCED CLOSE

St. Monica's in Jamaica Is
on Site for York College

By ROBERT D. McFADDEN

The oldest Roman Catholic church on Long Island, a little red brick building in Jamaica, Queens, known as St. Monica's, may be forced to close, along with its elementary school, at the age of 136. The move would affect 1,300 parishioners and 280 pupils.

In a mood of anger and frustration, 50 parishioners gathered yesterday in the church hall, at 94-20 160th Street, to discuss the projected closing and steps to preserve the parish identity.

The church, which includes a convent and rectory, is on two and a half acres in the midst of a 49.8-acre site selected by the city last August for the permanent campus of York College, a \$58-million senior unit that will become part of the City University. Tattered old homes, junk yards and parking lots now dot the impoverished area.

The St. Monica parishioners, 90 per cent of whom are Negroes, have been told by their pastor, the Rev. Joseph J. Laffan, that the church school will be closed, probably at the end of the term in June, and that the pupils will have to be absorbed by surrounding parochial schools.

However, Earl Childs, chairman of the Parents to Save St. Monica's, told parishioners yesterday that nearby parochial schools were filled to capacity and had waiting lists.

"We're not against York College," Mr. Childs told the lay gathering. "But we want to know what's going to happen with our 280 children. We

can't get anyone to tell us, including the bishop."

Bishop Francis J. Mugavero of the Brooklyn-Queens diocese has made no firm decisions on the future of St. Monica's parish, Father Laffan said in an interview yesterday. "because there is no firm timetable for the college's construction."

However, Father Laffan, who ignored an invitation to attend the parishioners' meeting, said that the church probably would be razed and the school abandoned.

"I appreciate sentiment, but you've got to face reality," said the 60-year-old priest, who has been St. Monica's pastor for two years. "The church's demise is in a good cause."

Studies on how to accommodate St. Monica's parishioners and elementary pupils are under way, he said. One proposal calls for housing the church in a "multi-purpose building," along with facilities for adult education and day-care for children.

That suggestion has drawn sharp criticism from parishioners, who contend that such a facility would rob St. Monica's of its identity as a church.

Parishioners resolved yesterday to "flood" Congressmen, city councilmen, judges and church officials with letters appealing for construction of a new school and church for St. Monica's.