

May 7, 2013

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY
LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING PROPOSED INSTALLATION OF A BARRIER-
FREE ACCESS RAMP AT 131 EAST 10TH STREET – ST. MARK'S IN THE BOWERY**

Good morning Chair Tierney and Commissioners. I am Ann-Isabel Friedman speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. Throughout the planning of this project, over the last 2 years, Church leaders have consulted frequently with Commission and Conservancy staff in planning and developing this design. The Conservancy provided architect referrals and has participated in the development of the presentation for today's hearing.

The Conservancy's Sacred Sites Committee has reviewed the proposed ramp, as part of our recommended approval of a \$35,000 challenge grant towards the \$300,000-\$400,000 restorative components of this project, which will address inadequate portico drainage, and corrosion and deterioration at the 1858, cast iron portico and 1830's cast iron fencing, granite fence curb, and bluestone paving. While the ramp, and not the restorative work, is the focus of this Certificate of Appropriateness review, the ramp and the restoration work are substantially integrated; one would not be possible without the other.

The Conservancy staff and committee were satisfied that the proposed ramp is thoughtfully located to avoid disturbing burials and that it will provide dignified and direct access to this beloved public building, performance venue and religious institution; that the design and materials are well matched and integrated with the existing design and historic fabric of the portico paving, stairs, and entrances; that the light steel railings are sized and finished to have the minimal visual impact in their introduction of new elements to the portico; and that the ramp is a huge improvement over the existing, heavy, non-code-compliant, "temporary" ramp in design, appearance, and relation to the historic fabric of the portico and associated landscape and paving at this highly significant New York City landmark. Additionally, the portico and entrance have continued to evolve over time, and this ramp insertion is consistent with these changes. While the character defining features: the cast iron portico, fencing, and bluestone paving, have remained, more ephemeral elements: light fixtures, a decorative stucco landscape at the masonry pediment, sculptural elements flanking the entrance, the entrance surrounds and the portico ceiling have been altered periodically from the 19-teens through the 1980's.

In addition to being an individual landmark of enormous historical and architectural significance to New York City, the St. Mark's in the Bowery parish complex is an internationally recognized cultural institution and model for the restoration and revitalization of landmark religious properties through comprehensive space sharing and 24/7, intensive public use of this large facility. Having overcome devastating fires in 1978 and 1988, St. Mark's provides rehearsal and performance space for many performing arts companies and arts education programs (the Danspace Project, the Poetry Project, the Ontological Hysteric Theatre, the Rejoice Ensemble, and the Third Street Music School, and the St. Mark's Visual Arts Project, which provides art and photography classes for young people in the community). Internally, church membership has doubled in the last few years under the leadership of their new rector, and with this, use and need for an accessible sanctuary. This well designed, historically and architecturally appropriate accessibility project is exemplary, critically needed, and long overdue.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Conservancy's views.