

# Mother Emma Lewis Artist Statement

Chloe Becker

Mother Lewis has her arms outstretched toward the church that she founded in Atlantic City, New Jersey, named St. Monica Church. Their Diocese closed the parish in 2015, merging multiple parishes in the area.<sup>46</sup> The painting centers on this closing of the parish, with parishioners and community members processing---almost like a funeral procession----toward the church in mourning; this imagery metaphorically displays the depth of loss this parish community experienced. Above the church, the sky has a faint outline of St. Peter's Basilica from the Vatican. This imagery is used for outsiders to understand that St. Monica Church is deeply historical and important to their church community, as St. Peter's Basilica is to Catholics worldwide.<sup>47</sup> The painting is ultimately reflective of the pattern of historical Black Catholic churches being closed by dioceses across the country---an observation that needs to be taken seriously and studied more to truly understand it's causes in order to prevent it from continuing and repair the damage that has already been done.<sup>48</sup>

The FutureChurch resource packet for Mother Emma Lewis can be found here:

<https://www.futurechurch.org/women-witnesses-for-racial-justice-downloads>

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<sup>46</sup> Peter G. Sánchez, "Mother Emma Lewis and her lasting impact in South Jersey," Catholic Star Herald, November 25, 2020, <https://catholicstarherald.org/mother-emma-lewis-and-her-lasting-impact-in-south-jersey/>.

<sup>47</sup> Jacqueline L. Urgo, "An especially diverse A.C. church hopes to stave off closure," The Philadelphia Inquirer, December 28, 2014, [https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/local/20141228\\_An\\_especially\\_diverse\\_A\\_C\\_church\\_hopes\\_to\\_stave\\_off\\_closure.html](https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/local/20141228_An_especially_diverse_A_C_church_hopes_to_stave_off_closure.html).

<sup>48</sup> Alexander Thompson, "Closures of Catholic schools in Black neighborhoods provoke sense of abandonment," National Catholic Reporter, April 21, 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/closures-catholic-schools-black-neighborhoods-provoke-sense-abandonment>;  
Charles Williams, "My black Catholic church was closed in the name of integration," America Magazine, February 7, 2020, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/02/07/my-black-catholic-church-was-closed-name-integration>;  
Damon Sims, "St. Adalbert Church, home to Cleveland's first black Catholic congregation, faces loss of its building amid diocesan downsizing," Cleveland.com, March 27, 2019, [https://www.cleveland.com/religion/2009/07/st\\_adalbert\\_church\\_home\\_to\\_cle.html](https://www.cleveland.com/religion/2009/07/st_adalbert_church_home_to_cle.html);  
Maudlyne Ihejirika, "Sense of loss on a familiar story as Corpus Christi, 4 other Black South Side parishes merge," Chicago Sun Times, June 10, 2021, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2021/6/10/22528497/sense-loss-familiar-story-corpus-christi-4-other-black-south-side-parishes-merge>.