

St. Michael's Cemetery's Fifth Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony

The Fifth Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony with ornament placing at St. Michael's Cemetery was held on Saturday, December 9th inside of St. Joseph's Mausoleum. More than 250 people came for the prayer service and stayed to place the ornament dedicated to their loved ones on the tree. St. Michael's provided the ornaments to all in attendance.

The tree lighting service was organized by a committee at the cemetery and chaired by Katie LaBella, the Director of Operations.

General Manager Dennis Werner said, "The ceremony is a collaboration between the staff at the cemetery and the leadership at St. Michael's Church. I was very proud of all of the hard work and countless hours by Katie and the staff to make a special night like this happen. At Christmas time, we recall special memories of those who have meant so much to us. This ceremony serves as a way for our staff to honor those interred at the cemetery."

Tony Barsamian, publisher of the Queens Gazette, acted as the MC of the special event. He stated in his opening remarks that, "The significance and importance of this event is emblematic of the role that St. Michael's Cemetery has in our community."

Barsamian then introduced Jeff Miller who started the event by performing a beautiful rendition of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." The Reverend Kate Flexer of St. Michael's Protestant Episcopal Church presided over the blessing of the ornaments and prayer service prior to lighting the tree.

Rev. Flexer said during the opening prayer, "This ceremony reminds us again of God's light shining in our darkness. Whether you have lost someone just this year or many years ago, we know that their light continues to shine as well, in our hearts and memories, and in the larger light of God." She later added, "Holy God, thank you for the gift each of these people has been in our lives. We believe that we will celebrate the treasure of love with them again, when we are all in your presence forever.



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Jeff Miller performing a beautiful rendition of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

(Bottom left) St. Michael's Cemetery General Manager Dennis Werner places an ornament of remembrance on the Christmas Tree.

(Top and Bottom Right) The Reverend Kate Flexer of St. Michael's Protestant Episcopal Church.

May this truth sustain us in the days to come. May the loveliness of the ornaments remind us of those we have lost, and the love you have for all of us."

She then invited the attendees to recite the Lord's Prayer with her. Following the prayer, the lights were turned off and the building was illuminated with the candles that each of the attendees was holding.

Miller led the gathering in a moving rendition of "Silent Night."

Prior to lighting the tree, Rev. Flexer stated, "This time of year, the days are dark and short but God promises us a light that shines in the darkness that is never overcome. So let us light this tree to remind us that God's light shines through anything." When she then lit the tree, the gathering was moved by the awe-inspiring sight.

Miller then concluded the prayer service by performing "O Come All Ye Faithful." The attendees were then invited to process to the tree and place their ornaments.

After placing their ornaments on the tree, the gathering was invited to enjoy hot chocolate and snacks provided by St. Michael's.

Katie LaBella said, "Working with families to find the perfect placement on the Christmas tree for their personalized ornament and observing them taking photos of this heartfelt tribute was truly a special experience. The outpouring of love and recognition for the dearly departed was evident in every captured moment, their memory remaining vibrantly alive in our hearts and mind."

