

# Greek Orthodox rally to rebuild Ground Zero church

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NEW YORK (RNS) With cries of "Rebuild now! Rebuild Now!" parishioners and supporters of a Greek Orthodox church that was destroyed in the 9/11 attacks rallied at Ground Zero on Sunday (June 26) in hopes of resuming negotiations to rebuild the church.

St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey have been at odds for several years over the cost and exact location of the rebuilt church.

"Shame on the Port Authority to take this long to rebuild our church," Nicholas A. Karacostas, supreme president of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, a national Greek-American group, at a rally that drew about 100 people to the site of the former World Trade Center.

"It's a crime, it's a crime for us to beg them to rebuild the church in its rightful place."

Less than three months before the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, the church's pastor, the Rev. John Romas, said he and his flock are frustrated that negotiations have been stalled for almost a year.

"Let us hope our prayers will be answered," Romas said.

The Port Authority is in charge of the overall rebuilding efforts at Ground Zero. St. Nicholas, a small parish whose history dates back to 1916, stood in the shadows of the trade center's twin towers and was the only house of worship destroyed in the attacks.

The uncertain future of St. Nicholas has sometimes been described as a reflection of larger problems at the World Trade Center site, where rebuilding has been marred by delays, political infighting, financing problems and bureaucratic snafus.

While rebuilding St. Nicholas is considered a small part of the overall rebuilding efforts, the negotiations over the church have been particularly sour. Earlier this year, frustrated church officials filed a lawsuit against the Port Authority over the delays.

The Port Authority and the church had a preliminary agreement for a land swap in which the church would give up rights to its former site on Cedar Street and rebuild at a larger property on Liberty Street.

The Port Authority did not respond immediately for comment about the rally or the criticisms made by the church. But officials had previously said talks with St. Nicholas got bogged down over what they called the church's escalating demands.

At the Sunday rally, a number of speakers noted that prominent political leaders -- including New York Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg -- had championed the cause of a controversial Muslim cultural center near Ground Zero, but supporters of St. Nicholas said they had experienced nothing but frustration.

"We're just very frustrated it's taken so long," Karacostas said in an interview. "And there's still nothing to show for it."