



St. Jeremiah's Church

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July 17, 2010

VIA REGULAR AND ELECTRONIC MAIL

His Eminence Seán P. Cardinal O'Malley, OFM Cap.
Archbishop of Boston
Pastoral Center
66 Brooks Drive
Braintree, MA 02184-3839

Dear Cardinal O'Malley,

We write to you once again as Catholics in good standing and parishioners of the suppressed parish of St. Jeremiah in Framingham to request that you revisit this decision and fully restore St. Jeremiah as a parish to serve our Catholic community.

We have now received and reviewed a copy of our Vatican decree and those of the other parishes with appeals. Whatever the language of the decrees, we hope that you have the wisdom to understand that no one has "won" anything by these appeals. Perhaps by now you have come to realize the level of devastation that "Reconfiguration" has cost our Archdiocese. Parishes are where Catholics live their faith. Killing vibrant parishes has devastated the faithful of Boston. As a result of this insult to their faith – especially following on so closely to the sex-abuse crisis -- many Catholics have walked away due to the loss of their parishes. They do not go to their "welcoming" parish; they simply go nowhere. Even Catholics that moved to their "welcoming" parishes do not feel welcome there. We know that only 17% of Catholics in the Archdiocese of Boston attend Sunday Mass on a regular basis. The likelihood now is that that number is much lower. Many Catholics in this Archdiocese feel lost and abandoned. Many have left the parishes they attended after the closing of their parishes because they feel disconnected. The anger in the pews concerning the actions of the hierarchy and their many ill-advised decisions is palpable. These latest decrees will only increase the distrust that already exists between the laity and the hierarchy. The danger of schism is real. This is simply another sad day for our Archdiocese.

Although these most recent decrees appear to give the Archdiocese absolute power to close parishes, this does not mean that this power should be exercised. Perhaps you will recall the adage, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." We pray that you, the Bishops and Vicars, as well as the remainder of the hierarchy, including the

Presbyteral Council and the Archdiocesan Finance and Pastoral Councils, will exercise the apparent power conferred by these ill-advised Decrees with care and thoughtful discretion.

The message received loud and clear from these latest decrees is that NO parish is safe and any dollar that goes into the collection box can be “scooped up” at will by the Archdiocese. It is likely that you will find that collections, which are already down, will decrease even further. This will only further harm the already vicarious financial condition of parishes and the Archdiocese. Taking further action to close and sell the Vigiling parishes, and/or an anticipated further round of “Reconfiguration,” will only further harm the salvation of souls and the overall welfare of the Archdiocese. Each step along the way can be expected to be challenged. One can only wonder when all those in the Archdiocese will realize that closing vibrant parishes is not the answer – and, moreover, that it is not consistent with the Gospel message.

There are better answers and potential resolutions for the challenges facing the Archdiocese, as well as the circumstances of St. Jeremiah and each of the other Vigiling parishes. These alternative solutions will better serve both the needs of the people, as well as the future of the Archdiocese. As you well know, we need to find a way to call our people back. This week you commissioned David Thorp to lead the group, “Catholics Come Home” inviting “inactive Catholics” to once again return to the faith. However, we in the Vigiling parishes have never left home – we have been fighting for the past five years for the right to remain in our precious faith homes. Our faith homes – our parishes – were built, bought and paid for by our parishioners. **Reconciliation, not Reconfiguration, should be the guiding principle in calling our people home.**

Although we understand that the financial circumstances of the Archdiocese are dire, these decisions must NOT, and should NOT, be all about the money. You may recall that there were few times in the Gospel readings that made Jesus angry – one that stands out is his anger toward the money changers in the Temple. Our parishes are not “cash cows” but are the centers of our faith life; they are where people live their faith in the fullest sense. St. Jeremiah and the other Vigiling parishes have held strong for over five years despite many set-backs and adversities, including the most recent decrees. Perhaps this is the way the Spirit is telling everyone that closing these vibrant fully Catholic communities was in error. We would like to work with you and the other organizations of the Archdiocese, to find a better and more Christian way to resolve these issues. A way that will help to preserve, not destroy, the Archdiocese. There are many in our parishes that have special talents and abilities to assist in these endeavors. We hope and pray that you have the wisdom to tap into these gifts, rather than to turn them angrily away.

As we all know, the Spirit works in mysterious ways. We also believe as Catholics that some good comes of every challenge in our lives, both physical and spiritual. We understand that there is great concern for the pastoral staffing of our parishes in the changing times in our Church, in view of the clergy shortage and limited resources, especially in the present economic climate. In looking forward, you have commissioned the Office of Parish Life and Leadership to engage in a “culture of planning” for the emerging needs of our parishes. One important element in planning for our future needs is the formation of lay ministers who, among other things, will step forward as volunteers to assist and fill the gaps in pastoral ministry. As you are aware, we here at St. Jeremiah have

done just that. With your blessing, we have been operating for the past five years as a parish in all but name. We have had Mass every Sunday and on most holydays. We have run our Religious Education program for those students who otherwise would not attend any such program. Our children have been Baptized, received First Communion and Confirmation – all with your blessing. You have also granted us funerals for deceased parishioners. At your request, we have welcomed and shared our facilities with another Catholic Eastern Rite congregation, the Syro Malabar Catholics of Boston. We have accomplished all of this with just “visiting” priests. The vast majority of the work has been accomplished by volunteers in lay ministry. We have truly been walking the “Gospel Road.” This is exactly the kind of *enlightened active laity* that the Church and our Archdiocese will need going forward if we are to cope with diminishing resources and a shortage of clergy in the 21st Century. This is the kind of Parish that will not over-tax the resources of a pastor; we will be at his side working for the good of the parish. Moreover, the Archdiocese in its “culture of planning” would greatly benefit from our experience at St. Jeremiah, as well as the experience and dedication of the other Vigiling Parishes. **Our dedication, sacrifice and commitment to our Catholic faith should be rewarded by recognizing us officially as a parish in the Archdiocese of Boston.**

For the reasons set forth above, as well as many others, we pray that you, the College of Consultors, the Presbyteral Council, the Finance and Pastoral Councils, as well as the other offices of the Archdiocese, will reconsider the decisions of the past. Whatever plans that may be already under discussion should include discussion with the parishioners of the affected parishes. The only way to resolve these Vigils “prayerfully and peacefully,” and to reintegrate our parishioners into our Archdiocese so that we can help rebuild, is to begin to heal the devastating wounds inflicted by this struggle. As we said above, **Reconciliation is the key.** For the past five years, the essential element that has been missing here is OPEN COMMUNICATION. For five long years there has been nothing but silence from the Archdiocese. We have repeatedly asked for open dialog and mediation only to be met continually with the standard comment that you were “waiting for Rome to rule.” Well, now that that has happened. We have arrived at a point in the road that requires your action. We hope and pray that before any action is taken that there will be an opportunity for productive dialog with the affected parishes and that any action taken will be a positive step toward reconciliation and unity!

Although Rome has spoken, we must all recognize that you still have the absolute discretion to determine what will happen to St. Jeremiah and the other Vigiling parishes. You have a golden opportunity for a teachable moment. A moment to call these Catholics home and to make amends. In order for that to happen, we must find positive and imaginative ways to reconcile and heal these communities and the Archdiocese as a whole. Dictates from the top will only further entrench any opposition and squelch any positive communication. We need to come together prayerfully to TALK about a way to resolve these challenges and we need to do this in the way that the Gospels tells us – we must relate to one another in a Christian way. Jesus reminded us that we are called “to love God with our whole hearts, our whole minds and our whole souls, AND OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELF.” We, your neighbors and fellow Catholics, only asked to be treated in accordance with this “Greatest Commandment.”

We continue to pray that you have the strength and courage to act in the manner that Jesus commands us with respect to St. Jeremiah and the other Vigil communities. We also pray that the remainder of our hierarchy, including the College of Consultors, the Presbyteral Council, the Archdiocesan Finance and Pastoral Councils and the priests and pastors involved in the process, will support you in setting out the Christian process that is necessary to achieve a peaceful and prayerful resolution of the Vigils. Please keep in mind that it would have been much easier for the parishioners of St. Jeremiah, as well as those in the other Vigiling parishes, to simply have walked away from the Catholic Church as so many already have. The decision not to do so remains a challenge for us every day, but our continued commitment evidences our dedication to our Catholic Church, as well as to the Archdiocese of Boston. We all share the same sense of purpose and direction: To preserve the salvation of souls, the Roman Catholic Church and the Archdiocese of Boston -- not just for the short term but for the long term. We need to join together to call ALL Catholics home, especially those Catholics who have fought for five long years to preserve their precious, vibrant faith communities. Let us listen to the Holy Spirit. Let us work together to achieve these goals.

We thank you for your consideration of these important matters and hope to hear from you soon that the dialog will begin. God bless you!

Sincerely yours,

The Appeal Committee and
Parishioners of St. Jeremiah Parish

By: */s/ Mary Elizabeth Carmody*

MARY ELIZABETH CARMODY

cc: Members of the College of Consultors
Members of the Presbyteral Council
Members of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council
Members of the Archdiocesan Finance Council
Very Rev. Thomas Foley
Episcopal Vicar & Secretary of Parish Life and Leadership
Rev. David Couturier, OFM CAP
Liaison to Pastoral Associates
Rev. John J. Connolly
Special Assistant to the Cardinal
Mary Ann McLaughlin
Director of the Office of Worship & Spiritual Life
David Thorp
Catholics Come Home
S. E. R. Monsignor Pietro Sambi