



THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

Removal of air conditioners irks parishioners

The Boston Globe

Some say they'll hold vigil anyway

By Lisa Kocian, Globe Staff | April 30, 2005

Parishioners at St. Jeremiah in Framingham say the abrupt and unexplained disappearance of air conditioners from their church hasn't cooled their determination to stage a vigil to keep it open.

St. Jeremiah Church, the town's smallest Catholic church, is scheduled to close May 13 as part of a massive restructuring by the Archdiocese of Boston. Under the plan, St. Jeremiah is slated to merge with the Church of St. George, but some parishioners are working on an appeal of the closure decision and have promised to occupy the church.

Lay leaders contend the missing air-conditioning units may be part of an archdiocesan strategy to discourage worshippers from holding vigils during the hot summer months. If that is the case, the plan won't work, they maintain.

"We can bring fans in," said Mary Beth Carmody, cochair of the parish committee working on the appeal. "We didn't have air conditioning for 30 years."

A spokeswoman for the archdiocese said local clergy made the decision to remove nearly a dozen air-conditioning units. She said the archdiocese was not responsible.

Parishioners said they paid for the air conditioners and they want them back.

Carmody said it was Cardinal Bernard F. Law who inspired parishioners to raise the money needed to install the air conditioners. Law attended St. Jeremiah's 40th anniversary celebration in 1998.

"It was a very hot July day," recalled Carmody. "We had all been talking about the fact we needed air conditioning. Cardinal Law, from the front of the church, said, 'Gee, you know you all could really benefit from air conditioning.' "

So the churchgoers started a capital campaign and raised about \$350,000 for the air conditioners and some other building upgrades, she said.

Last Sunday, parishioners arrived at the church to find the air conditioners gone and only wires and empty brackets in their place between the stained glass windows.

Archdiocese spokeswoman Ann Carter said, "It's my understanding that the air conditioners were removed by a private contractor at the request of the pastor of St. Jeremiah and the pastor of St. George, to be installed at St. George, which is the receiving parish," she said.

Carter suggested calling the local pastors. The Rev. Ronald Calhoun of St. Jeremiah could not be reached. The Rev. Francis O'Brien of St. George, also in Framingham, declined to comment.

Kathleen Heck, who is overseeing transitions for closing parishes for the archdiocese, said worshippers at St. Jeremiah had indicated they wanted the air conditioner units to come with them to St. George.

She said she has been meeting with parishioners from St. Jeremiah regularly, including yesterday morning, and she described a parish that seems divided in its acceptance of the closing.

But lay leaders said in the fall that a survey of parishioners, which drew 180 responses, indicated that 92 percent supported the appeal and 75 percent supported a round-the-clock vigil, if the appeal fails.

Parishioner Bill Sell, a member of the St. Jeremiah appeal committee, said the timing of the air-conditioner removal is suspect, and he questioned why the units couldn't stay in place until the church actually closes. He said the vigil would happen no matter what the weather was.

Not only do some parishioners want their air conditioners back, they're also worried about the bells. The bells at St. Jeremiah are considered a treasure because they were donated in honor of Christa Corrigan McAuliffe, the New Hampshire school teacher and Framingham native who died in 1986 in the space shuttle Challenger disaster. St. Jeremiah was her home parish.

"We are extremely concerned about those," said Carmody. "They are the heart and soul of our community."

Carter said that the bells have been discussed within the archdiocese.

"The archdiocese is committed to working with whatever the Corrigan and McAuliffe families' wishes are with respect to where these bells should go," she said.

Lisa Kocian can be reached at lkocian@globe.com. ■

© [Copyright](#) 2005 The New York Times Company