



Maryanne Mendenhall, Ann Capobianco, and Cindy Bolles continued their vigil in St. Jeremiah Church yesterday. (Globe Staff Photo / Suzanne Kreiter)

Treasured items removed as vigil continues

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Altar replaced at St. Jeremiah

By Franco Ordoñez, Globe Staff | May 10, 2005

FRAMINGHAM -- As about six workers began dismantling the altar yesterday in St. Jeremiah Church and removing sacred statues from the wall, parishioner Adam Sell decided to take matters into his own hands.

Sell walked into the sacristy, grabbed a large, metal crucifix, and brought it into a room where the workers wouldn't find it. Later, he hid a wooden carving of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus that had been hanging near the altar.

"I may end up moving it again, so it's completely out of sight," said Sell, 19, looking up at the cross.

On the fourth day of a vigil protesting the closing of their church, parishioners of St. Jeremiah said they were witnessing what they believed was evidence of a new, tougher line by the Archdiocese of Boston on church closings: The pastor, the Rev. Ronald Calhoun, walked into the sanctuary with several workers and began removing treasured items.

St. Jeremiah held its last Mass on Sunday. The Brook Street church is scheduled to close Friday and merge with nearby St. George Catholic Church.

Parishioners said the work continued for nearly two hours yesterday until they persuaded an archdiocese attorney to halt it. But several of the treasured items had already been taken away.

By 11 a.m., the altar had been moved and replaced with an older one. Most of the decorations around the tabernacle, including the ceremonial paschal candle lit at the Easter vigil service, were gone.

"I'm not as sad as much as I am angry," said Mary Anne Mendenhall, 57. "Where is our sanctuary supposed to

be if they're taking it from us?"

Calhoun did not return calls seeking comment. Terry Donilon, a spokesman for the archdiocese, called it a misunderstanding. He noted that it is church policy, not canon law, as some parishoners contended, that restricts how sacred objects can be removed from a church appealing its closing, as St. Jeremiah is doing.

Donilon said the processional crucifix, the blessed sacrament, and the paschal candle, as well as some liturgical chairs, were taken to St. George, so St. Jeremiah parishoners will feel at home. The altar and tabernacle, which were being prepared to be shipped to a church in Johnston, R.I., would remain at St. Jeremiah for now.

"As for the bigger items, it was just a misunderstanding," Donilon said. "We spoke to Father Calhoun about it, and he's perfectly fine with it. We're moving forward toward bringing St. Jeremiah parish into the welcoming parish of St. George."

But Peter Borre, cochairman of the Council of Parishes, a group representing closed churches, accused the archdiocese of waging a more aggressive campaign against churches keeping vigils, calling it a "new get-tough strategy."

Some parishoners at St. Jeremiah wanted to know why church officials could not have at least waited until Friday.

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