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Home > News & Opinion > Local/ Regional News

## Christa's closing church sets vigil

By Lisa Gentes/ MetroWest Daily News  
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**FRAMINGHAM** - Celebrating the final Mass at St. Jeremiah's parish, parishioners packed the pews and filled the upper balcony to pray together one last time as a congregation yesterday.

The home parish of teacher-astronaut Christa McAuliffe, with its bells dedicated to her memory, is due to close May 15 and parishioners began an around-the-clock vigil in the church Friday.

"We're celebrating the last Sunday Mass that could ever be celebrated in this holy place," the Rev. Ronald Calhoun, the pastor, said in his homily. He said parishioners have often lived in a "veil of denial" that their "wonderful parish" would close.

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"Finally, reality set in," he said, counseling against the vigil. His homily was met with a standing ovation. Afterward, parishioners hugged and cried together, bidding farewell to their church.

More than 110 families signed up to participate in the vigil, which will continue until the archdiocese changes its mind or the appeal is accepted by the Vatican in Rome, said Mary Beth Carmody, co-chairwoman of the congregation's appeal committee.

"I'm feeling sad and angry and hopeful, all at the same time," Carmody said, adding she is hopeful the archdiocese will change its mind about the closing and if not, she said a canon appeal to Rome is bound to succeed.

"We're trying to tell the archdiocese that they need to start listening to their parishioners and need to start listening to the people in the pews," added Jackie Lemmerhirt, co-chairwoman of the appeal committee.

"We wouldn't be here if we didn't believe in miracles," parishioner Frank Reilly said.

Friday, the Archdiocese of Boston said in a statement, "We hope the people of St. Jeremiah will find the strength and resolve to effect a peaceful, orderly and prayerful transition to the welcoming parish (of St. George's)."

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