

**The Parish Pastoral Council and Parishioners
St. Jeremiah Parish**

41 Brook Street
Framingham, MA 01701

October 11, 2004

Sr. Janet Eisner, S.N.D.
President, Emmanuel College
400 The Fenway
Boston, MA 02115

RE: Reconfiguration Committee; Archdiocese of Boston

Dear Sr. Janet and Members of the Committee:

We are members of the Parish Council of St. Jeremiah Parish in Framingham. St. Jeremiah Parish is one of the 82 parishes selected by Archbishop O'Malley to close. After the announcement last week, we are cautiously hopeful that your committee's review of the process will be independent, thorough, complete and helpful to all in the Archdiocese affected by the process of reconfiguration. Unfortunately, that has not been our experience with the Archdiocese to date during this process. Therefore, we write to express some concerns, as well as to make some suggestions that may help to assist your committee to ensure that its role is one that is independent and productive for all in the Archdiocese of Boston.

Our concerns and suggestions are as follows:

1. **Timelines:** One of the primary problems associated with the reconfiguration process to date is that it was presented and implemented so quickly that the process and its impact was not carefully considered and the results impossible for many parishioners to accept and absorb. Your review of the process while the closings proceed will inevitably lead to the same result. Today is October 11, 2004. The closings are presently scheduled to be complete by December 31, 2004. A review of the process itself, as well as information relating to even a sampling of the 82 parishes set to close is impossible within that time frame.

Thus, we suggest that it would be appropriate for your committee to request that the Archbishop suspend closings while your review is ongoing. That is the only reasonable way for your committee to have a fair and honest opportunity to adequately review the process.

2. **Your Mission:** Based upon the information released in the press, it is not clear exactly what mission your committee has been given by the Archbishop. Your mission does not appear to be well defined. It is important that your committee has a well-defined mission and that your mission be clearly and accurately described to the public in order for your committee to assist the Archbishop in restoring the trust that presently is lacking. One major problem throughout this process has been a lack of communication by the Archdiocese, as well as communication of information that has not been accurate.

Thus, we suggest that your mission must be well-defined and that your mission is published. This will help limit public expectations to ones that are reasonable and ensure your committee's credibility as your mission is undertaken and completed.

3. **Information Gathering/Testimony:** In order to fully understand how the process was implemented at the cluster level, it's important to review the documentation submitted, as well as to speak with lay participants in the process. Press reports indicate that the process was conducted and implemented differently from cluster to cluster. In addition, the information/data provided by some parishes to support their recommendations was not "fact-checked" and may have been (as happened in our cluster) inaccurate.

Thus, in order for the committee to properly review the process across the Archdiocese, your committee should undertake a review of documentation submitted by the parishes in the clusters, as well as hear from participants in the process, in order to ensure a thorough and effective review of the process throughout the Archdiocese. Of course, this will take time and is one of the reasons for our recommendation in paragraph 1 above.

4. **Cross-border Considerations:** Another flaw in the process was that it restricted clusters to parishes and concerns defined by city/town borders. Thus, for example, one cluster was told not to consider the impact or information concerning the closing of a parish adjacent to their city or town. So, for example, we in Framingham were told not to consider whether St. Linus in Natick or St. Anselm's in Sudbury would close. The closing of both St. Anselm's and St. Jeremiah's – so close to one another – and the resultant impact of both closings on the presumed "welcoming" parish, St. George's in Framingham, was not to be considered by the cluster. The result is a serious adverse impact on the Church in North Framingham and South Sudbury that was not considered by the clusters or, presumably, by the Archdiocese.

Thus, in its review, the committee should not limit its considerations to strict city/town borders, but should review relevant cross-border considerations and impacts of the process.

5. **Failure to Explain Why Parishes Were Chosen:** The Archdiocese has failed entirely to explain why healthy parishes, such as St. Jeremiah in Framingham,

have been chosen to close. Our parish did not meet any of the stated criteria announced by the Archdiocese. This resulted in some (not all) of the distrust of the Archdiocese and the closing process. Our parish has requested the Archdiocese, on several occasions, to provide documents that would explain the rationale for our closing. However, to date we have been denied access to this information and/or documents. The lack of communication is an egregious flaw in the process.

Thus, in fairness to the closing parishes, at the very least an adequate explanation for why a particular parish was chosen for closing should be provided to the affected parishioners.

- 6. Visitations:** It is imperative that your committee takes the time to hear the voices of the parishioners of the affected parishes. It may be impossible to visit all 82 – but you should visit some of the closing parishes in each region of the Archdiocese to ensure an appropriate review of the process and understand its impact across the Archdiocese.

We extend an invitation to you and/or members of your committee to come visit with us at St. Jeremiah and recommend that you take the time to visit other closing parishes in all regions of the Archdiocese as well.

- 7. St. Jeremiah's Status:** We at St. Jeremiah stand ready to assist your committee in any way possible. We would, of course, like you to take a close look at our parish – the closing of which will seriously and adversely affect our ability to serve the mission of the Catholic Church in North Framingham and South Sudbury. We feel strongly that we have more than adequate grounds for an appeal to the Archdiocese, as well as to the Vatican. We have compiled significant information that was not previously considered by the Cluster or the Archdiocese. We stand ready to submit such information to your committee. In addition, we invite you to visit our website at www.stjeremiah.org. Please let us know whether you will consider information regarding our parish.

As Parish Council we are reviewing all options necessary to protect the interests of our parishioners and our mission here – not because we are simply grieving the loss of our parish and feeling ill-treated by our Archdiocesan hierarchy during this flawed process (which we are and we do) – but because we are dedicated and concerned Catholics who are sincerely interested in fulfilling the mission of OUR Church in our little corner of the world. We are anxious to work with you to restore trust in the process and, hopefully to bring an end to this terrible crisis in our Archdiocese.

We stand firm in our faith and will pray that your mission – however defined -- will prove successful!

Respectfully yours in Christ,

The Parish Council and Parishioners
Of ST. JEREMIAH PARISH

cc: Most Reverend Sean P. O'Malley, OFM Cap.
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