

Vigil keeps parishioners close, hopes high

By Lisa Gentes / Daily News Staff
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FRAMINGHAM -- It's been six months since parishioners at St. Jeremiah's took up a 24/7 vigil in hopes of reopening their parish, and yesterday, their faith and prayers were still going strong.

About 150 congregants attended the regular Sunday Mass and gathered, as they normally do, in the church basement afterward for "coffee and conversation."

Yesterday's Mass made no mention of the anniversary; however, parishioners said they're confident and hopeful their Vatican appeal to reopen their church will be affirmed.

"We're even more hopeful than we've ever been," Appeals Committee co-chairman Jackie Lemmerhirt said after Mass. "We're very hopeful we'll reopen and our appeal will be successful."

The archdiocese closed the parish in May, and parishioners began an around-the-clock vigil May 6. Volunteers, who sign up for a vigil shift, have been keeping vigil in the Brook Street church ever since.

St. Jeremiah's is one of the only parishes in vigil that has Sunday Mass and the only parish that Archbishop Sean O'Malley granted approval to hold religious education classes, according to Lemmerhirt.

The parish will be holding two baptisms on Nov. 13, and will also be holding a Thanksgiving dinner this month, she said.

Fellow Appeals Committee member Lorraine Dray, in the basement having coffee with fellow parishioners, said her faith inspires her to keep the vigil going.

"God is what keeps me coming back," the 46-year parishioner said. "We have faith that Archbishop O'Malley is going to reopen our church."

Dray said parishioners pray the Rosary every night for the church to reopen.

Since St. Jeremiah's began holding Mass after its closing, many Catholics have returned to the parish, she said.

"We have faith that people will come back to church and see this kind of faith community exists to them," Dray said.

Since the closure, the vigil has brought the parish closer, she said. The vigil has made the community "stronger in faith. The church should be rejoicing," she said.

Parishioners John and Phyllis Olszewski of Framingham have been attending St. Jeremiah's for more than four decades.

John's been a parishioner for 47 years, and Phyllis for 46 years. John said he's keeping vigil "because it's necessary. We'll be here forever," he said after yesterday's Mass.

And his wife said she's confident her church will reopen. "Oh, we know we're going to stay open," she said.

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Christina Schmitz, left, keeps Gerry Duncan company. (Erin Prawoko photo)

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