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St. Jeremiah grateful to hold Christmas Mass

By **D. Craig MacCormack** / Daily News Staff
Saturday, December 24, 2005

FRAMINGHAM -- In a year that has seen their faith tested more than ever, St. Jeremiah's parishioners can at least take comfort in knowing they can spend Christmas Day at their own church.

The holiday falls on a Sunday this year, meaning the church will host its regular 10:15 a.m. Mass on Christmas, said Appeals Committee co-Chairwoman Jackie Lemmerhirt.

"It's even more special to think about having Christmas Mass at our church this year," she said. "Everyone expected St. Jeremiah's to be closed at this point."

The Appeals Committee started its around-the-clock vigil at St. Jeremiah's May 6, one week before Archbishop Sean O'Malley ordered it to be closed as part of a reconfiguration.

O'Malley gave the weekly Mass his blessing in August, and St. Jeremiah's has been more crowded every week, said Lemmerhirt. Last week, more than 200 people came to see the annual children's holiday pageant.

That Mass saw youngsters act out events associated with the birth of Jesus in a Bethlehem manger, which is celebrated on Christmas Day. Children played the role of wise men, shepherds, the Virgin Mary and Joseph, among others.

The Rev. William Roche will serve as celebrant for St. Jeremiah's Christmas Day Mass. The event will include a heavy dose of the church choir, which is expected to sing "a lot of music" to kick off the holiday, said Lemmerhirt.

"It's obviously more special than one of our regular weekly Masses," she said. "The church will be decorated and the choir will add holiday music."

St. Jeremiah's will also host a communion service at 4 p.m. today, moving up the start time of 4:30 for its usual weekly offering. Because of the holiday, the church organist will play at the communion service.

Lemmerhirt hopes the strong support and high turnout will eventually be enough to persuade O'Malley to reopen St. Jeremiah's. Many of the parishioners now attend Mass at St. George's in Framingham or other parishes in the area.

"We continue to make the point (to O'Malley) that we're a thriving parish that's growing," said Lemmerhirt, noting Appeals Committee members send Mass attendance figures to the archbishop each week.

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