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## Faith still alive at closed parishes

By [Lisa Gentes / Daily News Staff](#)

Monday, December 26, 2005 - Updated: **12:56 AM EST**

**T**hey sang hymns in churches decorated with white lights, mangers and poinsettias, and as members of two local parishes celebrated Christmas yesterday, they shared one prayer. For the Archdiocese of Boston to reopen their churches.

About 100 people filled the pews at St. Anselm's in Sudbury and sang "O Come O Ye Faithful," accompanied by a choir and band. They offered up a prayer for their own church. "For our parish, as we celebrate our second Christmas in vigil...that we be granted fully functioning parish status in the new year."

Yesterday's Mass was the second Christmas Mass the congregation celebrated since the Archdiocese of Boston suppressed St. Anselm's in September 2004.

Framingham resident Joe Robinshaw, a church greeter and 32-year parishioner, has been sleeping in the church building every Monday night as part of the constant vigil. He said although this is the parish's second Christmas in vigil, he's hopeful for change in the new year.

"We think we'll have our permanent priest start next month, in January," Robinshaw said.

Yesterday's attendance was small compared to Christmas Eve Mass, which included a children's Nativity pageant, and attracted a crowd of about 400 Saturday night, he said.

At St. Jeremiah's in Framingham, parishioners also offered up a special intention.

"For our parish, that St. Jeremiah's will be reopened as a parish to serve the community for generations to come."

St. Jeremiah's has been on around-the-clock vigil since May. Appeals Committee co-Chairman Jackie Lemmerhirt said it was its first Christmas Mass in vigil, although the church holds Mass every Sunday. Archbishop Sean O'Malley approved weekly Sunday services in August.

"We're glad to have Mass on Christmas," Lemmerhirt said after the service, which was followed by coffee and conversation, in the basement hall.

The Rev. William Roach celebrated Mass for the first time at St. Jeremiah's yesterday, before a packed church of nearly 300. On Christmas Eve, about 200 attended the evening communion service, Lemmerhirt said.

She said the Appeals Committee has not heard a word on their appeal to remain open, but she's hoping to hear soon. The committee filed an appeal with the Vatican in Rome in August.

The parish remains in vigil 24 hours a day and volunteers are continuing to pitch in, she said. "People are getting more and more a sense of community," she said.

After Christmas Mass, Ann Crete was signing up for vigil shifts. The Framingham resident and parishioner for nearly 33 years said speaking of her closed church makes her emotional. "But I think today was wonderful, to see so many people at a suppressed church," Crete said.

Parishioners at St. James the Great Church in Wellesley celebrated their second approved Mass in 14 months Saturday at 5 p.m. with the former pastor and had a standing-room-only crowd, said the single parishioner keeping vigil at the Worcester Road church yesterday.

"It was just like a miracle, a little taste of heaven," she said, having been at the Mass attended by approximately 700 people. She spent the night and stayed throughout Christmas Day. At least one parishioner has been in the church 24 hours a day since the archdiocese deemed it not financially viable and changed the locks

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on the doors. The vigil-keepers cannot leave until they have been relieved by someone else. No one has a key.

The archdiocese, she said, gave the church permission to hold the Mass, the only one since the Feast of St. James months ago. The church has been officially closed since Oct. 31, 2004.

The church still holds a service Sundays at 10 a.m. and is waiting for an answer to an appeal to the closing filed with the Vatican.

That didn't stop them from decorating with poinsettias and a donated arrangement from Jack Payne Florists in Wellesley, holding a pageant with children "dressed like little angels," and getting reacquainted with old parishioners who have been attending Mass at other churches - or not at all - until close to 7 p.m. The Mass ended at 5:45 p.m.

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