

A difficult path for the faithful to follow

By D. Craig MacCormack / Daily News Staff

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FRAMINGHAM -- Aside from the spiritual struggle the move from the place she has called her church for almost 45 years will cause Betty Waters, she will face a physical challenge to get herself to Mass every Sunday.

Waters, 70, is one of the hundreds of faithful who will be displaced when St. Jeremiah parish closes its doors May 13. Her bouts with fibromyalgia and emphysema make the move to St. George's Church even tougher.

Because St. George's is not equipped with an elevator that could bring her downstairs for daily Masses, Waters is nervous about the switch. The long walk from her car to the back door to reach the handicapped ramp isn't easy either.

"We usually have to park across the street," said Waters, a Treeland Drive resident. "In the winter, I won't be able to go (to St. George's). God forbid I fall down. There aren't a lot of parking spaces there to begin with."

The lift system should be ready soon, said Archdiocese spokeswoman Ann Carter. Access to the upper church by ramp has been in place for a while, she said.

Waters can't walk too fast, she said, so she's concerned about having to cross School Street with her husband, Jack, to get to Mass at St. George's.

"The traffic is terrible," she said. "Cars fly down that street, and you always see a bottleneck on Water and Central streets. And, that's before they add everyone from St. Jeremiah's there too."

St. Jeremiah will celebrate its final Mass Sunday, May 8, at 10:15 a.m. The building will close for good May 13 under the suppression decree issued by Archdiocese officials this week.

Some parishioners at St. Jeremiah's are hoping the air conditioning system that was removed last week and sits in storage will fit at St. George's, said the Rev. Frank O'Brien, pastor at St. George's.

He isn't sure why the system was removed two weeks before the closing.

"They've got so much to do, so I'm sure they're doing things when they can," said O'Brien.

First communion Masses at St. George's -- which also includes St. Jeremiah parishioners -- will be broken into four groups this weekend to accommodate the large number of youngsters.

After hearing the air conditioning was taken out of the building and with some uncertainty about the bells dedicated to school teacher Christa McAuliffe, many at St. Jeremiah say they have started to question everything.

"It's very sad there isn't some open dialogue about what the heck is going on," said Maureen Wall, 60, who started coming to St. Jeremiah when she moved to Edgell Drive 29 years ago.

"There's always hope (to keep St. Jeremiah open), but when push comes to shove, I'm going to St. George's. I'm sure they're going to welcome us. That's the Christian thing to do," she said.

Waters is likely to start at St. George's, but she isn't sure she'll stay.

"I'm not committing to any parish right now," she said. "At this point, I'm so disillusioned."

She expects she will "stop in" during the St. Jeremiah vigil, after making stops at St. Anselm's in Sudbury and others across the state. Waters knows she will not lose her faith in the Catholic Church though.

"We're very strong in our religion," she said, referring to herself and Jack. "I'm afraid there's nothing we can do (about the closing). Archbishop Sean (O'Malley) was brought here to do this job. I'm sure he doesn't like it."

Waters has also seen her childhood parish, Mary Immaculate of Lourdes in Newton, and her husband's, St. Bernard's in West Newton, shut down as part of the Archdiocese's reconfiguration.

Photo Gallery



Jack and Betty Waters exit St. George's Church in Framingham. (Ed Hopfmann photo)

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Waters is happy the Rev. Ron Calhoun, pastor at St. Jeremiah, is joining O'Brien at St. George's, she said.

"I always feel like I've learned something from him," said Waters. "He teaches. He doesn't preach. He's such a nice man. He really cares."

"I'm not against St. George's as a church. Father O'Brien has made everyone so welcome and so have the parishioners. Right now, I'm just absolutely disheartened," she said.

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