

St. Jeremiah's last Mass

By Lisa Gentes / Daily News Staff

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FRAMINGHAM -- Celebrating the final Mass at St. Jeremiah's, parishioners packed the pews and filled the upper balcony to hear the last homily, receive the last Communion and pray together one last time as a congregation yesterday morning.

The parish is set to close May 15 and parishioners began an around-the-clock vigil in the church Friday in an effort to remain open.

"We're celebrating the last Sunday Mass that could ever be celebrated in this holy place," the Rev. Ronald Calhoun, the pastor, said in his homily.

Calhoun said the past year has been a roller coaster of emotions, including the devastating decision by the Archdiocese of Boston to close the parish.

"Finally, reality set in," he said, adding that parishioners have often lived in a "veil of denial" that their "wonderful parish" would close.

Holding vigil against such injustice would leave parishioners bitter and cynical, he said. "So instead, let's remember who we are and who we have been over the years," he said.

The parish has weathered the storm with silent strength and dignified grace, he said.

"We will go on with our faith...we leave this blessed space asking God to lead us on to the light, and God will not abandon us," he said. "See you at St. George's next week."

The pastor's homily was met with a standing ovation from the crowd. After Mass, parishioners hugged and cried together, bidding farewell to their church.

Frank and Bernadine Reilly were two of those longtime parishioners who left in sadness. The Framingham couple has been parishioners for the past 55 years.

Both plan to participate in the vigil in hopes of keeping their church open.

"We wouldn't be here if we didn't believe in miracles," Frank Reilly said after Mass.

Fellow parishioner Mary Beth Carmody said she was feeling a variety of emotions. "I'm feeling sad and angry and hopeful, all at the same time," the co-chairwoman of the appeal committee said, with tears in her eyes.

Carmody said she's hopeful the archdiocese will change its mind about the closing and if not, she said a canon appeal to Rome is bound to succeed.

More than 110 families signed up to participate in the vigil, which will continue until the archdiocese changes its mind or the appeal is accepted by the Vatican in Rome, she said.

"We're trying to tell the archdiocese that they need to start listening to their parishioners and need to start listening to the people in the pews," added Jackie Lemmerhirt, co-chairwoman of the appeal committee.

"They're closing churches that shouldn't be closed," she said.

The appeal committee chairmen said the parish is financially stable and growing.

Cynthia Deysher, co-chairwoman of the Council of Parishes, who also attended the final Mass, said the whole re-configuration process is unfair and the council supports "any vibrant parish that wants to protest (its) closing."

She said St. Jeremiah's is a healthy community and it's unfortunate it has been slated to close. The parish is one of eight that's holding vigil to protest their closing, she said.

Friday, the Archdiocese of Boston said in a statement it continues to "recognize the difficulty and profound sadness associated with the closing of any parish, however, we hope the people of St. Jeremiah will find the strength and resolve to effect a peaceful, orderly and prayerful transition to the welcoming parish."

And there was a bit of a scuffle outside the church, as local media cameras were blocked by an unidentified priest, known only as Father Bob from Rhode Island, from filming.

Deysher and Carmody said there was an agreement with the pastor that no media were to cover the Mass. But after the Mass, a reporter was told to leave the property immediately while interviewing parishioners inside the church, and brusquely

Photo Gallery



Parishioner Elisabeth Jutkiewicz wipes away tears as she leaves the last Mass at St. Jeremiah's. (Mike Springer photo)

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escorted outside by the unnamed priest.

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