

## Sacred objects removed from church

By David McLaughlin / Daily News Staff

Tuesday, May 10, 2005

**F**RAMINGHAM -- St. Jeremiah's parishioners fighting to keep their church open with an around-the-clock vigil watched in shock yesterday as sacred church objects were dismantled and moved out of the building.

A day after St. Jeremiah's final Mass on Sunday, vigil participants said another group of parishioners and the church pastor broke down key artifacts integral to Catholic worship, including the altar and statues of Mary and Joseph.

"My stomach's churning," said Cindy Bolles, who watched with a handful of others from the back of the church.

The work sent parishioners scrambling to save the items by calling officials at the Archdiocese of Boston and the attorney general's office. They said the objects were paid for through donations and belong in the church as long as its appeal to stay open remains alive.

"We gave money to St. Jeremiah's Church at 41 Brook St. and it belongs at 41 Brook St.," said parishioner Bill Sell.

The archdiocese stepped in yesterday and made clear to the Rev. Ron Calhoun, the church pastor, the items should not be removed. Spokesman Terry Donilon called the incident "a misunderstanding," though he said he could not speculate why the work began in the first place.

"Some things were mistakenly viewed for removal, and that's not going to happen," he said.

Still, the altar was moved out of the church yesterday afternoon, according to Adam Sell, Bill Sell's 18-year-old son who is also participating in the vigil. Parishioner David Murphy, who built the altar, moved it himself, an apparent violation of church law as well as an agreement the archdiocese has with the attorney general.

A man who answered the phone at Murphy's work said Murphy did not want to comment. Calhoun also could not be reached for comment.

A woman who walked out of the church carrying a moving box said, "We're going to our new home," when asked what she and others were doing. She declined further comment and walked back into the church after placing the box in the back of a pickup truck filled with vases.

Mary Beth Carmody, a co-chairwoman of St. Jeremiah's appeal committee, said an archdiocese official told her the altar would be returned to the church. Canon law prohibits it from being removed, she said, and no gifts can be taken out without approval from the attorney general's office.

Carmody insisted the actions of her fellow parishioners were not sanctioned by church or civil law. "It's an outrage," she said.

Adam Sell said the church also lost Eucharist hosts, holy oils and the red sanctuary candle, which is supposed to burn continuously in every church to represent the presence of Jesus Christ. Sell said vigil holders were planning to light another candle for their nightly rosary service.

The front of the church, which is scheduled to officially close its doors this Friday, was also stripped of many sacred decorations. The tabernacle and its altar were moved away from the wall and a tapestry that hung above it was rolled up and left on a pew.

Statues of Mary and Joseph that hung above the confessional rooms were taken down along with an American flag and a Vatican flag that hung from the choir loft. They were rolled up and left at the front of the church.

"This whole situation is very sad. It should never have happened in the first place," said parishioner Jackie Lemmerhirt.

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### Photo Gallery



A truck loaded with worship objects from St. Jeremiah's Church sits outside. (Allan Jung photo)

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