

Today is closing day at St. Jeremiah's

By D. Craig MacCormack / Daily News Staff

Friday, May 13, 2005

FRAMINGHAM -- At St. Jeremiah's, a group of parishioners desperately hoping to keep their church open won't need to look for bad omens on this Friday the 13th. Their beloved parish is due to close forever today at noon.

More than 100 people have signed the guest book at the back of the church since a vigil started a week ago, two days before the last Mass at the parish that opened in June 1958.

Other than a crush of media over the weekend and an attempt by some to move sacred articles to a parish in Johnston, R.I., the vigil has remained peaceful and uneventful since it started, said Appeals Committee Chairwoman Jackie Lemmerhirt.

That could change today, when locksmiths may show up to finish the job they started last week before suddenly reversing course, she said. Lemmerhirt isn't sure what to expect, but she knows many supporters will be there just in case.

"I'm hoping it's an anticlimactic day," she said yesterday.

Police presence has been limited for the first week, said Lemmerhirt, just as Chief Steven Carl had said it would be -- barring any outlandish behavior. She said she doesn't expect arrests to become part of the vigil.

Lemmerhirt saw a FedEx truck at the rectory yesterday, and she said she thinks it might have been delivering the archdiocese's revised decree of suppression.

No one was at the rectory yesterday to open the envelope.

Lemmerhirt said she expects the new appeal will be largely the same as the 12-page version submitted by the committee last week, aside from pointing out two errors in the original decree -- since corrected by Archdiocese of Boston officials.

A handful of retirees manned the parish yesterday during the 24-hour-a-day sit-in to quietly protest St. Jeremiah's closing. Among them was John Silva, 79, a lifelong Framingham resident and one of the St. Jeremiah originals.

"This is my church," said Silva, taking a break from reading a Tom Clancy novel during his Thursday afternoon shift. "I don't like this whole thing at all. I'm trying to do all I can to keep (the church) going."

Silva's wife, Barbara, who died about 15 years ago, founded the Girl Scouts program at St. Jeremiah, despite her Baptist beliefs, he said. He said he feels like his role is small in the vigil but he knows having support is important.

"I just keep praying," he said. "I know (Appeals Committee members are) working hard to get something done. We've got a real good team of people who are making this go."

Lemmerhirt said she expects the vigil to expand in the next week or so to include more children. To that end, Fridays could become pizza or movie and popcorn night, she said, starting May 20. No plans have been finalized yet, she said.

While Silva may pitch in a few bucks for food, his contribution to the annual archdiocese appeal hasn't been quite as generous in the past few years since the sex abuse scandal became public.

"Right now I'd rather donate to this cause," he said.

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