

## St. George barely handles confirmation crowd

By Jennifer Kavanaugh / Daily News Staff

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**FRAMINGHAM** -- The fight between local parishioners and the Archdiocese of Boston is partly a tale of two churches, their fates bound by the fact that one is supposed to close and the other is not.

St. Jeremiah parishioners entered their ninth day of vigil yesterday, in their fight to keep open the Brook Street church. A little over a mile away, St. George Church was bursting at the seams, as it held a confirmation service for local youngsters, including parishioners from St. Jeremiah.

The confirmation service was a jubilant time for many local families, though the fight over St. Jeremiah's future lingered in some minds, from the St. Jeremiah parishioners who wished they were back at their own church, to the St. George members wondering how the place got so packed.

"The grandparents are sitting, so that's all I care about," said Tracy Williams, whose 17-year-old daughter, Amanda DeGouff, was being confirmed. A problem at the bakery with Amanda's cake had forced Williams to arrive late. She couldn't get a seat, but she still beamed. "I'm very proud of her."

Williams said she worries about what will happen if all of the people from St. Jeremiah do end up at the School Street church.

"We're not happy," Williams said. It's not that St. George's parishioners don't welcome their neighbors," she said. "The more the merrier. It's just the room, they're going to have to add on."

A group of St. Jeremiah parishioners have been fighting the archdiocese's decision to close their church, starting the vigil and filing appeals with the church hierarchy.

On Friday, the parishioners filed a lawsuit against the archdiocese in Middlesex Superior Court, framing the conflict over property rights. If St. Jeremiah fails to stay open, parishioners are supposed to go to St. George.

Because it attracted families from other parishes, yesterday's confirmation at St. George required many people to park blocks away and stand at the back of the church, if not outside.

One woman, who identified herself only as Lynn, a St. Stephen parishioner, waited outside with a hand-made sign to congratulate her nephew, a St. Jeremiah parishioner who was being confirmed inside. She said people at the other churches in town are paying attention to what is happening.

"I think everyone's upset," she said, pointing to where people were standing just inside the doorway. "As you can see, it's very crowded, less than standing room only."

A few hours later, more than 50 St. Jeremiah parishioners held a communion service in lieu of a full Mass. Like a regular service, it featured readings and prayers, but then parishioners formed a circle around the altar, holding hands as they said the "Our Father," and many of them waited until everybody received the wafers so they could eat them at the same time.

"Some of the vigils, they really like that," said the man leading yesterday's service, who later declined to identify himself. "It really gives them a sense of community."

Mary Beth Carmody, one of the vigil leaders, said the communion services aren't new to the parish, and what had been done yesterday was "completely in keeping" with church policies. She declined to provide details as to where the communion wafers had come from, only that they had been consecrated and come from another parish.

Earlier in the day, Carmody had been at the St. George service, as a confirmation teacher. Through the year, she said, she had students from several area parishes in her class, and enjoyed that coming together of the different parishes. But being at St. George yesterday was strange, she said.

"It was different, and I didn't feel like I was home over there," she said.

Many of the parishioners seemed to enjoy the service yesterday. Gerry Arndt, who lives right nearby and has been a parishioner for the past 40 years, said he hadn't been to a communion service like that before. He said he hadn't really known they existed.

"I thought it was absolutely beautiful, very appropriate," Arndt said. "I look forward to going to more like this."

Arndt said he cannot understand why all of this is happening, and what the archdiocese would want to close a parish as

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financially sound as theirs. He said he believes the parishioners will prevail.

"I have faith in the Lord," Arndt said, "that He will let us remain open as a parish."

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