

Defiant faithful push on

By John Hilliard / Daily News Staff

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FRAMINGHAM -- Defying a decision of the Archdiocese of Boston, parishioners of St. Jeremiah Church expressed their faith at a Communion service yesterday.

"I'm overwhelmed by the outpouring of the community," said Mary Beth Carmody, co-chairwoman of the St. Jeremiah Appeals Committee. "It can only come from the grace of God."

At yesterday's service, about 50 parishioners gathered to receive Communion and listen to "reflections" on gospel readings. Instead of using the large altar at the head of the church, parishioners conducted the service at a small table nestled among the pews.

A speaker at the event -- who did not want to be named -- told parishioners the Communion service fulfilled the obligation for a Sunday Mass. He said baptized Catholics have the right to express their faith.

"Everyone who has been baptized is a priest," he said. "The priesthood of the laity is real."

Together, parishioners gathered around the altar and prayed with joined hands before receiving Communion.

Despite the outpouring of faith, the Archdiocese of Boston has rejected the service as fulfilling the obligation to attend Sunday Mass.

Last week, Bishop Richard Lennon said all Catholics must attend Sunday services unless it is physically impossible. Communion services -- like yesterday's event at St. Jeremiah -- do not fulfill that requirement, he said.

The Appeal Committee's Carmody challenged that position, and said several "well-established" canon lawyers believe the service held at St. Jeremiah met that obligation.

"It is completely authorized by canon law," she said, and had been done in the past at St. Jeremiah.

She said the Communion service is not intended to replace Sunday Mass -- Carmody herself will not stop attending Mass at a Catholic church.

"We invite people who feel they need to go Mass on Sunday to absolutely (do so)," she said. "Everyone has to decide for themselves."

Archdiocese spokesman Terry Donilon said the church remains firm in its decision to close St. Jeremiah's doors and move parishioners to St. George in Saxonville.

"It's important to remind people that St. Jeremiah is a closed parish," he said, and that a "vast majority have moved on in a very positive and prayerful transition."

Donilon said the transition was not an easy choice for the archdiocese.

"The archbishop is a thoughtful, caring individual," Donilon said. "The decision that was made was done after a lot of thought and care."

Carmody said her church will continue the fight to keep St. Jeremiah open, and hopes to convince the archdiocese leadership. Parishioners filed their latest appeal with the archdiocese last Friday.

"We're hopeful the archbishop will have the courage and wisdom to do what is right," she said.

Parishioner Bill Phillips said he attended yesterday's Communion service to support his church. He disagreed with the archdiocese's position on the service.

"That's on them. We didn't do this to our church," he said.

Communion services are held at St. Jeremiah Church on Saturday at 4:30 p.m. and Sunday at 10:15 a.m.

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