

Church reopening buoys hopes

By D. Craig MacCormack / Daily News Staff

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Organizers at two of the region's church vigils said yesterday they hope Archbishop Sean O'Malley continues re-examining decisions on the 63 closed churches after deciding to reopen St. Albert's in Weymouth Tuesday.

Cynthia Deysher, chairwoman of the St. Anselm's Church parish council, said leaders of that church's 9-month-old vigil will meet with O'Malley next month to talk about the parameters of the Sudbury building reopening as a chapel.

And Jackie Lemmerhirt, co-chairwoman of the St. Jeremiah Appeals Committee in Framingham, said she expects to hear by Monday whether O'Malley will grant the committee's appeal and reopen that facility.

"I don't know how (the St. Albert's reopening) is going to affect us," said Lemmerhirt. "Obviously the archdiocese is willing to change its mind when it makes decisions it later feels were wrong, so that gives us hope."

St. Albert's was informed March 31 about plans to reopen it after O'Malley followed recommendations from the Meade-Eisner Reconfiguration Committee, but it took more than two months to make it official.

The Rev. Laurence J. Borges, who has been co-pastor at St. Stephen's Church in Framingham, will serve as pastor at St. Albert's. He spent six years there in the 1990s.

St. Anselm's parishioners heard that same day about plans to make it a chapel but have yet to meet with O'Malley.

Deysher, who has led the vigil at St. Anselm's since August, said she has learned a lot by watching how St. Albert's vigil participants have conducted themselves since they became the first church to begin a sit-in.

"They did a phenomenal job at being faithful, respectful and firm in their resolve," said Deysher of the St. Albert's vigil attendees. "A lot of (the reason behind O'Malley's decision to reopen it) is because of how they conducted themselves."

Vigil-goers at St. Albert's plan to sleep there at least until a parish council meeting tomorrow, when they will get more details on whether the church will get its \$200,000 from parish collections, be able to run Sunday and weekday Masses, and can get the parish records returned to the building.

St. Anselm's supporters say they want to hear more about what it means to be a chapel before they decide whether to give up their vigil, said Deysher. She hopes it means the church is fully functional but does not have a priest who is officially assigned there.

"It has to be in a form we're comfortable with," said Deysher. "We've been in vigil for more than nine months, and we're not going to stop that if we're not comfortable with what the future holds for us."

Archdiocese officials told Lemmerhirt they will contact her only if the archbishop accepts the group's appeal and will reopen the church. The committee sent its appeal to O'Malley May 20, she said.

Other churches whose appeals were denied have gotten formal letters, said Lemmerhirt, but she does not know if St. Jeremiah's will get one.

"We were told if we don't hear anything, assume the appeal has been denied," Lemmerhirt said.

St. Jeremiah's is among 63 of 357 parishes in the archdiocese closed after attendance lagged and priests retired in the wake of the sex abuse scandal. Almost 20 others could close as part of the continuing reconfiguration.

Craig MacCormack can be reached at 508-626-4429 or cmaccorm@cnc.com

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