

St. Jeremiah's allowed to hold weekly Mass

By D. Craig MacCormack / Daily News Staff

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FRAMINGHAM -- Parishioners fighting to save St. Jeremiah parish got what they called mixed news last night when Archbishop Sean O'Malley said they can hold weekly Mass, but he won't let the church reopen permanently.

Yesterday's ruling paves the way for St. Jeremiah's Appeals Committee to appeal to the Vatican to spare the church, which closed May 13 and has been in an around-the-clock vigil since May 6.

Appeals Committee members also are waiting for a Middlesex Superior Court appeal to be heard, possibly later this month. That effort asks for a ruling that the church belongs to its parishioners because the land was a gift in the 1950s.

"We'll use every avenue we can to appeal the decision," Appeals Committee co-Chairwoman Jackie Lemmerhirt said last night.

O'Malley, in a letter faxed to Lemmerhirt, said he will allow Sunday Mass to be celebrated while an appeal is made to Rome, but he won't revoke the decree that closed the church almost three months ago.

"The information you provided...leaves open questions about the viability of St. Jeremiah, best intentions notwithstanding," O'Malley wrote in the letter.

"It is apparent to me that St. George (Parish) can accommodate the needs of the local Catholic community. The parish community is willing to address the traffic and parking issues you have raised and to work with you on these matters," the archbishop wrote.

Lemmerhirt last night remained hopeful the church will be saved. Sunday Masses could resume as soon as Aug. 14, she said, and other sacraments can also be celebrated at the church until the Vatican appeal is resolved.

"We believe (O'Malley) will change his mind," she said. "The letter offers us some hope."

Archdiocese spokesman Terry Donilon said O'Malley is impressed by the passion from the Appeals Committee.

"The St. Jeremiah representatives clearly care about the Church and (O'Malley) is appreciative for their willingness to present their case to him," he said in an e-mail to the Daily News last night.

In a press release, Appeals Committee members vowed to push on to overcome "the division" among Catholics in the archdiocese during a "seriously flawed Reconfiguration process."

"The growth in North Framingham cannot be accommodated with one parish," Lemmerhirt said last night.

In addition to the canon law appeal and the civil lawsuit, parishioners will continue to pursue their historical designation on the state and national levels, said Lemmerhirt.

That fight is based on the parish's relationship with Christa McAuliffe, the teacher-astronaut from St. Jeremiah's who died in the 1986 Challenger explosion and the carillon bells system dedicated in her honor at the church.

In the meantime, religious education classes will return to St. Jeremiah's this fall after being shifted to St. George's earlier in the year. The Appeals Committee will continue a nightly rosary, Scripture study and children's summer book club.

Communion services will continue Saturdays at 4:30 p.m. until a Vatican appeal is heard. Several parishes in the archdiocese have appealed to Rome, but none has yet received a response.

"We want to continue to be a part of this Archdiocese and will continue to meet our obligations as Catholic Christians," Mary Beth Carmody, Appeals Committee co-

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chairwoman, wrote in the press release.


"Ours is a vibrant and growing parish, sooner or later the Archdiocese will have to acknowledge this and reward our dedication rather than take action to undermine our faith," she wrote.

Carmody believes the traffic and parking woes at St. George's "would only become increasingly worse with the addition of St. Jeremiah parishioners."

"Unfortunately, Archbishop O'Malley still refuses to recognize the seriousness of these issues," she wrote.

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