

## Parishioners frustrated by Vatican ruling

By Charlie Breitrose / Daily News Staff

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Parishioners of doomed local churches yesterday were frustrated by a Vatican ruling that grants their former pastors alone the power to give the Boston Archdiocese the churches' assets.

"To me, it should be up to parish council and the financial council," said Ted Rabidou, who attended St. Ann's Church in Marlborough until it merged into the Immaculate Conception parish.

"If it is left up to the pastor, all the pastors are diocesan priests, they will decide to give it back. If not, the archdiocese will be mad at them and maybe move them."

The Vatican ruled the archdiocese broke canon law by seizing the assets of the churches it closed and said Archbishop Sean O'Malley must now ask the churches' pastors to voluntarily turn over the cash and property.

"It confirms what we've been saying all along, taking assets of parishes is canonically wrong," said Cynthia Deysher, who attends St. Anselm's Church in Sudbury, which is slated to close. "For the archdiocese to be so fundamentally wrong on fundamental canon law, to take assets to pay the debt of an archdiocese, is alarming."

Deysher said she believes the money from the closed churches is being used by the archdiocese to pay debts fueled by financial mismanagement and priest sex abuse lawsuits.

Deysher said. "I think they really ought to disclose what has been written on that."

Rabidou said the ruling was a step in the right direction.

"I was shocked that they would be doing something like that," Rabidou said. "You know that the parishioners of the churches are the ones that paid for the upkeep, to keep them going, so that is the way it should be."

The Vatican should go a step further, Rabidou said.

"The next thing you'll find out is that the building belongs to the people, too," Rabidou said.

The effect of the ruling is unclear to Anne Green, a Hopkinton resident who has attended Natick's Sacred Heart Church since she was born. Parishioners learned last Christmas Eve their church would close.

"The only acceptable outcome would be for us to get the keys to our church back," Green said. "It seems like the archdiocese and the Vatican is trying to circumvent canonical law to prevent that."

Green is skeptical about allowing pastors to have control over the assets.

"I was hopeful," Green said. "I was dismayed to see that they are already trying to find loopholes."

The Archdiocese has already taken Sacred Heart's assets, Green said, and transferred them to St. Patrick's Parish.

"They had no right to give our proceeds to St. Patrick's (Parish), and no right to give the proceeds of the sale (of the church) to St. Patrick's," Green said.

Exactly how much Sacred Heart had is uncertain, Green said. The parish financial council has been unable to get financial records for the past four years, Green said, but the last time they were seen, the parish had more than \$400,000.

Jerry Boule's family helped found Marlborough's St. Mary's parish in the 1800s, but since the archdiocese closed the church he has moved to St. Bernadette's Church in Northborough.

He was appalled to see what happened when the church was closed.

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"They came in like bandits and grabbed all the money we had, the furniture the pews," Boule said.

The Vatican's ruling puzzled Boule, who said it would be too late for St. Mary's in his opinion.






"My reaction, first of all, I don't really understand what's going on. If it comes to pass, why did it take so long?" Boule said. "It would appear, the Marlborough parish is sunk. We no longer have a pastor, and we never filed an appeal."

Even if it reopened, Boule said he would not return. He prefers his new church, noting the different atmosphere in the Worcester Archdiocese.

"I am so content here, it's a whole different world," Boule said. "I have never spent so much time in church as I have this last year."

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