

St. Jeremiah files its appeal with Vatican

By D. Craig MacCormack / Daily News Staff

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FRAMINGHAM -- The group fighting to keep St. Jeremiah's parish open for good this week filed its appeal with the Vatican, hoping to get something none of the other closed churches have received: a response.

In the 10 months since the first church in the Archdiocese of Boston filed its appeal in Rome, none of those that were rejected by Archbishop Sean O'Malley have heard anything beyond acknowledgment that the appeal was received.

But Jackie Lemmerhirt, co-chairwoman of the St. Jeremiah Appeals Committee, said yesterday she is confident the group's appeal will be successful.

"Our arguments are very strong," she said.

The appeal, said Lemmerhirt, includes about 35 pages of arguments and about 30 or so more pages of exhibits that closely mimic the appeal to O'Malley that led him to allow St. Jeremiah to hold weekly Mass starting last Sunday.

Committee members sent the appeal to Rome on Thursday, said Lemmerhirt. It includes information noting the "supreme conflict of interest" in the mechanism that gives local pastors responsibility for what happens to its church's belongings once the church is closed.

Committee members say the church belongs to parishioners.

There is no timetable on when St. Jeremiah's committee will hear about its appeal, but O'Malley's decision to allow Sunday Mass at the church says that setup will continue until all legal avenues have been exhausted.

St. Anselm in Sudbury appealed its closure order to Rome last fall. Members have yet to hear about the permanent status of the church. In the meantime, St. Anselm -- like St. Jeremiah -- remains in an around-the-clock vigil.

St. Jeremiah closed May 13, but the vigil started a week earlier amid fears that archdiocese officials would try to change the locks before the final weekend of Masses ended May 8.

Meanwhile, attorneys for the vigil-goers have filed a motion in Middlesex Superior Court asking the court to prevent any sale or other transfer of St. Jeremiah's parish while the group's lawsuit is pending there.

Mary Beth Carmody, co-chairwoman of the appeals committee, said no action is likely in the superior court matter until next month. The main lawsuit asks for all possessions to be considered property of the parishioners, not the church itself or the Archdiocese of Boston.

Carmody said she is also confident that the appeals committee is putting together a strong case to save its church. Seeing about 300 people at the first Mass in three months last Sunday adds further bounce to her step, she said.

"Good things are happening," said Carmody.

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