

SURVEY OF ST. JEREMIAH PARISHIONERS SHOWS STRONG SUPPORT FOR APPEAL AND PRAYER VIGIL

FRAMINGHAM, MA (October 30, 2004) — In a parish-wide survey conducted at St. Jeremiah Parish this past weekend, parishioners indicated exceptionally strong support for the ongoing appeal of their parish closure and for a prayer vigil to occur at the parish if the appeal is not successful.

Following Mass this past weekend, and at parish-wide meetings, parishioners were asked to voice their opinions concerning these two important issues in the wake of the announcement by the Archdiocese that the parish has been selected to close. More than 92 percent of parishioners responding stated that they support the appeal. During the meetings parishioners stated that they are encouraged and renewed by the efforts of the parish Appeal Committee and fully support continuing on all fronts. Nearly 60 percent of those responding say they will provide financial support for the Appeal.

"We knew our parishioners supported our efforts, but until we received the survey results, we didn't realize how overwhelming that support was," noted Mary Beth Carmody, a member of the Parish Council and co-chair of the Appeal Committee. "We are working on gathering data to support our appeal and have requested documentation from the Archdiocese in several letters since June. We have not received any documents that were requested. It's unfortunate that the Archbishop will not at least honor our requests for information. We are trying our best to engage the Archdiocese in productive and open communication, and wish they would respond in kind. To date, they have not done so."

The second question on the ballot was to gauge the support of St. Jeremiah parishioners' for a 24-hour prayer vigil in the event the appeal is not successful. Three-quarters of parishioners responding are in support of a vigil. Many have volunteered to participate in such an undertaking.

One issue that has fueled the support for the appeal and prayer vigil is the serious traffic, parking and safety issues that will confront all Catholics who will attend Mass and Religious Education programs at St. George's Church, now that St. Anselm's is in Vigil and after St. Jeremiah closes – which is expected to be December 1. St. George's is located at the intersection of Hamilton and School Streets in Framingham, which is heavily traveled and crowded. In addition, the parking lots at St. George's cannot adequately accommodate St. George's current parishioners. With the addition of two parishes whose numbers triple that of St. George's, the parking and traffic pressures will increase and will result in significant safety issues. These issues already confront the people of North Framingham since the Religious Education programs of St. George, St. Anselm, and St. Jeremiah merged this fall. The problems are expected to continue and get worse with the influx of more than two thousand additional families to St. George's. The problems cannot be alleviated by building additional spaces as there is a building moratorium in Saxonville and St. George's is located on a flood plain.

Another concern for safety and access is that there is now no handicap access suitable for disabled parishioners. Although there are currently plans to install an elevator, the handicapped parking spaces are located too far away from the Church to be useful to these parishioners. A number of elderly and disabled parishioners have stated that they will stop attending Mass because of the physical impediments at St. George's. St. Jeremiah is accessible for wheelchairs and parking is just 20 feet from dedicated seating for anyone with physical disabilities. Residents of Heritage Assisted Living attend Mass regularly at St. Jeremiah.

The traffic, parking, safety, and handicap access issues were never considered or discussed during the Cluster Reconfiguration process, nor were they mentioned in the Cluster Report. These important issues certainly were not considered by the Central Committee of the Archdiocese, nor were they part of Archbishop O'Malley's discussion with the Presbyteral Council, which averaged fewer than 15 minutes of discussion on the more than 125 parishes initially considered for closing.

Despite these obstacles, frustrations and flaws in the process, the St. Jeremiah Appeal Committee is working on a number of possible solutions and options to help make the parish and the Catholic Church in Boston stronger. "This isn't about not needing to reconfigure; it's about the flawed process and critical information ignored in the cluster report, and by the Central Committee, and the Archbishop and the Presbyteral Council when deciding which parishes to close," Jackie Lemmerhirt, chairperson of the St. Jeremiah Parish Council and co-chair of the Appeal Committee stated.

"In addition to these concerns, there are more than 700 new homes being planned for the North Framingham area that is served by St. George, St. Anselm, and St. Jeremiah parishes. The Archdiocese needs to look beyond their immediate need for cash, which they are taking by appropriating the closing churches bank and church accounts and liquidating parish assets, to the next three-to-five years and beyond. The Archdiocese is closing churches because they need money now, but what will the Church do when these new homes are built and thousands of new families seek out a Catholic Church? How will we adequately serve our Catholic community in North Framingham? St. Jeremiah is a vibrant, growing parish whose buildings and facilities are in excellent physical condition with room to grow. The decision to close St. Jeremiah is a profound mistake. The Archdiocese did not fully understand or consider the implications of closing such a parish in an area targeted for such immediate growth. This process is not 'one size fits all.' Each cluster and parish is unique and should be considered so," said Carmody.

The St. Jeremiah Appeals Committee is part of the recently created Council of Parishes that was formed to fight the closing of vibrant parishes and also to facilitate information sharing and strategic planning by parishes closed or selected for closure. Background on St. Jeremiah Parish can be found online at www.stjeremiah.org.

Contacts: Mary Beth Carmody at (508) 877-9178 or (508) 277-8269 or
Jackie Lemmerhirt at (508) 788-0525.