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## Church vigil causes fracture in parish

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### Protest continues; others move on

By Franco Ordoñez, Globe Staff | May 9, 2005

FRAMINGHAM -- Shirley Livingstone may have played the "Lord is My Hope" hundreds of times in her 34 years as organist at St. Jeremiah Church. But playing it yesterday, she said, moved her in a mighty way. It may have been the last time she played her favorite hymn at the church, which is scheduled to close Friday.

"All I can say is I really love it here. And I've met the greatest people" she said, before becoming overcome with emotion. "I can't say anymore."

As a vigil of 12 to 20 people protesting the church's closing entered its third day, the Rev. Ronald Calhoun, the church's pastor, presided over the final Mass at St. Jeremiah yesterday. The Brook Street church is scheduled to close May 13 as part of the massive restructuring by the Archdiocese of Boston. Parishioners have been directed to worship at the Church of St. George in Framingham.

The vigil, though peaceful, has fractured the parish. While a growing number of parishioners have signed on for the vigil -- the eighth since closings were announced last year -- a debate has emerged over whether the parishioners should continue to fight or accept the archdiocese's decision to close the church.

"There has been a lot of friction among parishioners, between those who think we should vigil and those that think we should move on," said Tom Tierney, 62.

Following the reading of the Gospel, Calhoun, the pastor since 2001, compared the story about Jesus' discussion with God about life after death to the church closing, telling parishioners that the closing of their building doesn't mean the end of their faith.

"Thankfully, we have a new home. See you at St. George's next week," he said, which was followed by a standing ovation.

Several parishioners who spoke to the Globe after the service said that despite their strong emotional ties to St. Jeremiah, they were prepared to heed Calhoun's words.

Lorraine Hall, 75, and her husband, Edmund, 81, said they attended the church's first Mass in 1958, and now the last one. They expect to be one of many families in a pew at nearby St. George's on Sunday.

"We're still Catholic. And we're still a member of the church," said Lorraine Hall. "I just feel that we're going to a Catholic church, and we're all going together. And it will be fine."

Calhoun declined to answer questions about the closing. Deacon William Koffel said each member of the church dealt with the closure, and the vigil, in his or her own way.

"It's a day of many mixed emotions," he said. "It's hard because there are many memories tied into this place. Many families have grown up here. It's like losing a family home."

The archdiocese, however, believes the majority of the parishioners support its decision to merge St. Jeremiah, St. George's, and St. Anselm Parish in Sudbury into one parish.

"They understand it's a sad event," Terry Donilon, a spokesman for the archdiocese, said yesterday in a telephone interview. "There are a lot of memories in that church. But at the same time, they've worked hard,

and they've turned a sad moment into a positive and spiritual event. In many ways, that demonstrates a strengthening of the Catholic community."

Mary Beth Carmody, co-chairwoman of the parish committee, which is seeking to appeal the closing, said she has a list of more than 110 individuals and families who have agreed to help.

"Our parish should not be closed," said Carmody, who said she slept Friday and Saturday next to the organ and under a statue of the Virgin Mary. "This vigil will last as long as necessary.

"Everyone has to make up their own individual decisions," she said. "If people want to move on, they can. But I'm sure there will be some people who will attend Mass on Sunday at St. George's, but still support the vigil."

Vigil leaders say the church has 1,597 registered families, is in excellent condition, has \$450,000 in the bank, and a young population that is growing.

"If you meet all that criteria, how can you say that the church should be closed?" asked Bill Sell, a member of the parish committee.

The church laid out tissues in all of the pews in anticipation of yesterday's emotional ceremony. Few went unused.

Several parishioners brought cameras to capture a last moment, such as the choir singing its final song. Others walked out of the building carrying a copy of the church's weekly book of Scriptures.

"After so many years, it's hard to say goodbye to things," said Lorraine Dray, 50, who had a copy of the missal tucked under her arm, as she prepared to take part in the vigil.

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