

O'Malley to reopen church in Squantum Fate of Framingham parish undecided

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By Michael Paulson, Globe Staff | July 6, 2005

Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley, nearing the end of his reconsideration of parish closings, yesterday announced that he is reopening a Squantum church for once-a-week worship, though the church has been shuttered since October and was already put up for sale.

O'Malley, in a statement the archdiocese issued while he is on retreat, also said he would take an additional 30 days to reconsider the fate of a Framingham parish that parishioners have occupied since shortly before it was closed in May. In a sign of hope for the Framingham parishioners, O'Malley agreed to allow the reinstallation of air-conditioning units in the church; protesters had been sweltering inside the church this summer because the pastor ordered the system's removal.

Since July 2004, O'Malley has closed 63 parishes, and then fully reopened one, St. Albert in Weymouth. But he has altered nearly one in four of the closing decisions, reversing some closings, allowing some parishes to remain open for partial use as chapels, and delaying decisions about others.

"The archbishop said he would listen, and he did," said Peter Meade, an executive vice president of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts, who is cochairman of a lay-dominated commission on the closings with Sister Janet Eisner, president of Emmanuel College. "But at the end of the day, when you go to somebody and say your parish has to close, it's bad news, and people are troubled by it."

O'Malley appointed the Meade-Eisner Commission to review the most controversial elements of his effort to close 83 of the archdiocese's 357 parishes.

The panel had recommended the reopening of Star of the Sea Church on Quincy's Squantum peninsula and the reconsideration of the closing of St. Jeremiah Church in Framingham.

In Squantum, parishioners said they were delighted with O'Malley's decision to allow their church to be reopened for one Mass each Sunday, but said they would also push to have baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

Star of the Sea parish closed Oct. 24, but caught the archdiocese's attention when Squantum Catholics said they would hire a married priest to say Easter Mass on the peninsula rather than go to a sanctioned Mass elsewhere. O'Malley then acted, allowing a diocesan priest to say Mass in the Squantum elementary school and agreeing to reconsider the closing.

"This is certainly a step in the right direction, and I appreciate Archbishop O'Malley for finally recognizing that a mistake was made in closing Star of the Sea in the first place," said Sean Glennon, the parish's music director and organist who is a cochairman of the Friends of Star of the Sea organization.

Glennon said he last saw the inside of the church in January, when a real estate agent showed the property to an Episcopal congregation.

In Framingham, where parishioners have filed a canonical appeal and a civil legal challenge to the closing, a leader of the vigil expressed cautious optimism. O'Malley said he will meet with parishioners of St. Jeremiah, as well as with parishioners representing St. George, the nearby parish that he had initially asked to absorb St. Jeremiah.

"We are very encouraged by these developments," said Mary Beth Carmody, a vigil leader at St. Jeremiah.

According to the archdiocese, the Meade-Eisner Commission raised the money to pay to air-condition the Framingham parish again.

O'Malley also has agreed to meet with parishioners of St. Anselm in Sudbury, a parish he closed, but later agreed to reopen as a chapel of St. George in Framingham.

St. Anselm parishioners, still occupying their church, are seeking clarification of the level of worship and educational programming they would be allowed as a chapel; some have argued that because South Sudbury abuts North Framingham, O'Malley should leave St. Anselm open rather than add to the unsettled state of the Catholic Church in that area.

O'Malley still faces the problem of four other closed parishes that remain occupied. They are in East Boston, Everett, Scituate, and Wellesley.

The commission has agreed that those parishes should remain closed.

Michael Paulson can be reached at mpaulson@globe.com. ■

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