



Reprieved parishes sing alleluia!

By Marie Szaniszló

Friday, June 17, 2005 - Updated: 05:29 AM EST

In the latest round of changes to his controversial plan to close more than a quarter of his archdiocese's parishes, [Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley](#) yesterday reversed his decision to shutter three churches, and gave four others a reprieve that will keep them open at least temporarily.

Separately, leaders of Sacred Heart church in Weymouth, destroyed by fire a week ago, will today announce plans to build a new church, a source close to Sacred Heart told the Herald last night.

On the broader question, O'Malley accepted an archdiocesan committee's recommendation to allow St. Mary of the Angels in Roxbury and St. Isidore in Stow to remain open, and to make St. Lawrence in Brookline a chapel of St. Mary, another Brookline parish.

"Our goal was to save our church, and we did it," said Warren Hutchison, a parishioner of St. Lawrence, one of a handful of churches that has held round-the-clock sit-ins to keep from being shuttered. "We're prepared to prove we're deserving of another chance."

A fourth parish, St. Susanna in Dedham, will remain open until March 2008, when O'Malley will re-evaluate his decision.

"It's wonderful," said the pastor, the Rev. Stephen Josoma. "A lot can happen in three years."

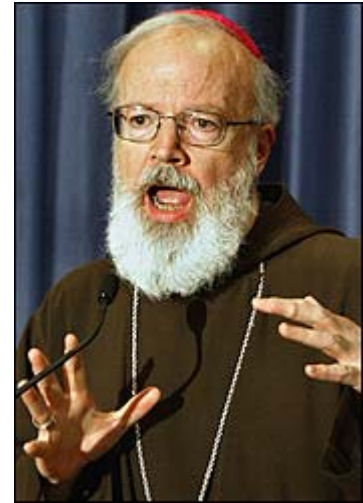
The archbishop also accepted the committee's recommendation not to set a closing date for St. Peter Lithuanian Church in South Boston, and to rescind closing dates for St. Pius X in Milton and Sacred Heart in Watertown. But he would not say whether they would remain open permanently.

"It is my hope and prayer that the decisions announced today will be received with an open heart," O'Malley said in a statement.

The archbishop announced the closing of more than 80 parishes last year, citing changing demographics, a shortage of priests and a financial crisis brought on by plummeting donations in the wake of the clergy sexual-abuse scandal that began under his predecessor.

His decision prompted ongoing sit-ins and lawsuits arguing that parishioners, not the archdiocese, own the churches - something the head of the U.S. Conference of Bishops has claimed in an attempt to fend off lawsuits by clergy sexual-abuse victims in the Diocese of Spokane, Wash.

"What (O'Malley) has done is take a series of small steps back, rather than . . . stopping what has been a flawed process all along," said Peter Borre, a member of the Council of Parishes, a group opposed to the closings. "Reversing a predictable error after making people go through months of agony and uncertainty? I don't think there's much credit in heaven for that."



Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley.
(File)

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