

## Churches bicker just before merger

By D. Craig MacCormack / Daily News Staff

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**F**RAMINGHAM -- The pastor at St. George's Parish yesterday criticized St. Jeremiah parishioners who last weekend circulated a list of about two dozen proposed repairs, saying the items are more wishes than actual needs.

The friction comes about a week before the church communities are set to merge. St. Jeremiah's will close as part of the Archdiocese of Boston's reconfiguration and its parishioners will join St. George's.

While acknowledging St. George's is looking to install vinyl siding and other ways to modernize the church, the Rev. Frank O'Brien said the list left on cars in the St. Jeremiah's parking lot was over the top.

The list, attributed to the Rev. Ron Calhoun, pastor at St. Jeremiah's, calls for electrical wiring to all buildings on St. George's property, repairs to the "rotting beams" in the eaves and an evaluation of the 40-year-old roof.

"It's not a needs list," said O'Brien, the pastor at St. George's. "It's a wish list." The items are among many compiled by the pastors and the two churches' property committees last fall and sent to the archdiocese, he said.

"They're making it seem like (St. George's is) falling apart," he said of the St. Jeremiah Appeals Committee, which circulated the list this weekend. "They obviously have an agenda, which is to try to stop the closing.

"We'd all like to do that. It's heartbreaking to have to shut down a parish, but they're saying things that aren't true and causing panic," O'Brien said.

There are no costs attached to the list, but Appeals Committee co-Chairwoman Mary Beth Carmody said yesterday Calhoun estimated the total at \$700,000 plus \$120,000 or so for the lift that is now being installed.

"This is not our list," she said. "This is (the pastors') list. There should be no secret about this. People should know how much it's going to cost them."

Calhoun, who will oversee St. George's facility concerns as part of the planned two-pastor arrangement, gave committee members a list of potential repairs last week, said O'Brien, to help them prepare an appeal to the Vatican.

The list shows "major repairs needed" including electrical wiring to all buildings, replacement of rotting windows at the parish hall and repairs to the steel foundations on the bridge from the rectory to the sacristy.

Also on the list distributed by the Appeals Committee are repairs to the church steeple, cement walkways and parking lots, as well as removal of overgrown shrubbery, an updated fire alarm system and a push to deal with a moisture and mold problem on the lower level.

Calhoun did not return phone calls seeking comment yesterday.

O'Brien said the moisture and mold was fixed about eight years ago with almost \$200,000 in repairs. Yesterday, he characterized the lift as "the most urgent thing" on the list.

St. Jeremiah's is set to close May 13 as part of the archdiocese reconfiguration plan. The final Mass is scheduled for Sunday at 10:15 a.m. An around-the-clock vigil is likely to begin immediately after that Mass.

Carmody said archdiocese officials are "doing something that completely conflicts with the stated goals of reconfiguration" by closing St. Jeremiah's and moving those parishioners to St. George's.

Officials were supposed to base closing decisions on demographic shifts in population, a decline in the number of priests, financial challenges and the deteriorating condition of several archdiocesan properties, Archbishop Sean O'Malley has said.

Archdiocese spokeswoman Ann Carter could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Carmody said church leaders have limited the Appeals Committee's access to parishioners through the bulletin and other media, forcing them to leave the fliers on cars at both churches.

This week became particularly hostile when one St. George's staffer, high school religious education director Leslee Willetts, told Appeals Committee members to leave St. George's parking lot because it's "private property," Carmody said.

"They didn't want us to know what it was going to cost to go from St. Jeremiah to St. George's," she said.

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Willets could not be reached for comment.

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