

Church swarmed with new students

By Kathy Uek / News Staff Writer

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FRAMINGHAM -- Local Catholic church closings have saddled St. George's with several hundred additional religious education students and overflowed parking lots.

Because of the reconfiguration, religious education, which began yesterday at St. George's Church in Saxonville, now includes students from St. Jeremiah's in Framingham, St. Anselm's in Sudbury as well as students transferring from St. Bridget's parish.

Religious education classes are held after the 8 a.m. Mass, after the 10:30 Mass and, because of the overflow, on Monday and Tuesday afternoon from 4 to 5:15 p.m., according to Mary Beth Carmody, a member of St. Jeremiah's parish council, a member of the Parish Appeal Committee and a confirmation teacher.

Jackie Lemmerhirt arrived yesterday at 8:40 a.m. to take her 8-year-old twins to the 9 a.m. religious education class. "The 8 o'clock Mass was in progress when we arrived," said Lemmerhirt. "The church parking lot was full, the street was lined with cars, people were going in the wrong driveway and the parking lot across the street was full, so we used the parking lot in back of the church. I also saw families coming from across the street toward the church who had used the Walgreens parking lot because there were so many cars. Although everything was orderly, it was packed."

Lemmerhirt's biggest concern will be the extra congestion this afternoon and tomorrow when religious education classes end.

"We have to look at the number of cars exiting at 5:15 (p.m.) when the Hamilton and School street intersection has already been noted as a problem by the Town of Framingham because of the volume," said Lemmerhirt, also a member of St. Jeremiah's parish council and the Appeal Committee. "Tomorrow at 5:15 there will be approximately 100 cars leaving St. George's at the same time commuters will be trying to make a left turn from School onto Hamilton (beside Walgreens) or from Hamilton making a left onto School."

Lemmerhirt thinks there is a bigger problem.

"I think it's definitely one to watch," she said. "There is a wider implication. When St. Jeremiah's parishioners start coming to Mass at St. George's, there are going to be even more cars."

St. Jeremiah's is expected to close Dec. 1, bringing parishioners to St. George's for the first Sunday in Advent, which is also the beginning of the liturgical year. Sudbury's St. Anselm's is still holding a vigil.

Lemmerhirt will be concerned weekly. "Logistically I don't think this is going to work," she added. "Everyone is making every effort. The staff at both parishes are going above and beyond to make this work, but I'm not sure that it's possible just because of the number of people trying to fit in those parking lots and along the street."

The impact of the traffic and safety concerns is one part of the basis in St. Jeremiah's appeal, according to Mary Beth Carmody.

"It is one of the issues not fully taken into consideration when doing the reconfiguration process both locally and by the archdiocese, and one, only one, that forms part of our basis for our appeal."

The parish hall at St. Jeremiah's was renovated two years ago to provide beautiful classroom space for its religious education program, according to Carmody.

"It's all paid for," she said. "We have a big parking lot and we don't have the intersection St. George's has."

Both Lemmerhirt and Carmody think the religious education population at St. George's will increase from 125 to 799.

"It's closer to 800, when you consider there were 625 attending religious education last year at St. Jeremiah's; 125 at St. George's, plus some from St. Anselm and approximately 40 transferring from St. Bridget's. Some of the students at St. Anselm's will be home schooled."

But the Rev. Frank O'Brien, pastor of St. George's disagrees. "The number increased from 180 to about 500," said O'Brien. "There was no problem this morning, the first day of religious education. We will keep an eye on it and adjust the schedule accordingly. They came in for religious education at 9 (a.m.) and left in time for the 10:30 Mass and there was no Mass after the next classes at 11:30. I'm concerned but I don't think it is dangerous."

"It has been and continues to be something we will be careful of," he added. "When the parents begin attending Mass after Thanksgiving, then we'll take another look at it."

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