

## Prayers of hope

By D. Craig MacCormack / Daily News Staff

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**FRAMINGHAM** -- Vowing to remain respectful and prayerful as their church nears its final days, a handful of St. Jeremiah parishioners yesterday started an around-the-clock vigil they hope will save the 47-year-old parish.

Some of those who gathered at 11 a.m. in the upper church wondered why their plight garnered so much attention, saying the media blitz on what was intended to be quiet reflection caused them to change their approach by mid-afternoon.

Mary Beth Carmody, co-chairwoman of the St. Jeremiah Appeals Committee, started the vigil herself at about 11 a.m. with a rosary, she said.

Around 3 p.m., some of the vigil attendees thwarted an attempt by parish secretary Helena Siciliano to lock the door as she does each day, saying they promised not to get in the way of the day-to-day operations at the church.

"It's a sin they sent you here to do this," Carmody told Siciliano. They hoped to avoid similar intrusions, said a tearful Carmody.

"Unless it's the Archbishop (Sean O'Malley) to tell us he changed his mind," she added.

Two Framingham Police officers came about a half-hour later, talked to the Rev. Ron Calhoun in the rectory and left the premises shortly after 4 p.m.

Parishioners gathered for the pre-emptive vigil when they heard rumors the locks on the church doors would be changed two days before Sunday's final Mass. That didn't happen, but some vigil-goers hope the last Mass isn't scrapped.

"We don't want to do anything to harm our community," said Jackie Lemmerhirt, co-chairwoman of the Appeals Committee. "We're not causing a ruckus. This is a church. It's our place of worship."

Grace Corrigan, the mother of teacher-astronaut Christa McAuliffe, stopped by the vigil briefly to reflect on the future and support the effort to save the building that houses a bell system dedicated to her daughter.

"We're going to do all we can to keep this church open," she said. "We certainly don't want it to close. It's our home. It's been part of our lives for as long as it's been here.

"Those bells are part of Christa's legacy, and this is the home for them. I wouldn't want to see them removed. Those bells are something I've always enjoyed. It's a pleasure to hear them," said Corrigan.

Earlier in the day, teenager Adam Sell stood alone in the upper church looking toward the altar, saying he and other parishioners have noticed the air conditioner and small lights removed from the church in recent days.

"The first thing that crosses your mind every time you come back is, 'I wonder what they took today,'" said Sell.

Despite the stream of people moving in and out of the church yesterday, Sell's father William said he is confident the vigil will eventually be a bit quieter.

"We're hoping things will remain low-key," he said.

Carmody said she's happy committee members and other vigil supporters were able to juggle their schedules and come yesterday. She expects the vigil to continue until O'Malley or a Vatican council reverses the closing.

"We're here (two days early) because we didn't know what to expect," said Carmody. "We're doing this in the most respectful, prayerful way we can. Canon law says we have the right to speak our minds.

"There are some parishioners who don't agree with us and we want to be as respectful of their feelings as we hope they are of ours. If they cancel that final Mass, I'm going to cry," she said.

There are no indications the final Mass will be scrapped, but already the normal 8 a.m. Sunday service has been canceled. Adam Sell is confident in the resolve of those who gathered for the vigil yesterday.

### Photo Gallery



St. Jeremiah parishioner Mary Beth Carmody, right, hugs parish secretary Helena Siciliano yesterday. (Allan Jung photo)

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"We're prepared for when people come to try to kick us out," he said. "We're just going to continue saying the rosary."

Peter Borre, co-chairman of the Council of Parishes, came to St. Jeremiahto offer "moral support" for the eighth church in vigil in the archdiocese. He said St. Bernard's in West Newton continued with Masses during its vigil.

Lemmerhirt said the move to start the vigil before the final Mass was a decision that was not made lightly.

"We want to establish our presence and show that we're serious," she said.

The presence of croissants and cheese among other foodstuffs yesterday was one sign the vigil attendees were planning for a long stay. Another indication was the sleeping bag and pillow Carmody had in her car.

Adam Sell has been through an overnight vigil before, he said, having spent one night at St. Anselm's in Sudbury. He isn't sure where he will attend Mass when St. Jeremiah closes, but could leave the diocese altogether.

Southborough, he noted, is in the Worcester diocese.

"This is only the last Mass before a brief hiatus," he said.

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