



January 14, 2006 - Archdiocese Receives Word From Vatican Regarding Decisions On Ten Appeals

Congregation for the Clergy informs Archdiocese that they have sent responses on ten appealed parish closings.

BRIGHTON, MA - The Archdiocese of Boston has received word from the Congregation for the Clergy of their decisions on ten appeals submitted following the closing of parishes as part of the reconfiguration process in the Archdiocese. The Congregation has affirmed the Archdiocese's closing of the parishes.

Members of ten former parish communities filed appeals petitioning the Holy See to reverse the closure of their parishes: Our Lady of Lourdes (Revere), Infant Jesus – Saint Lawrence (Brookline), Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini (Scituate), Saint James the Great (Wellesley), Saint Augustine (South Boston), Star of the Sea (Quincy), Our Lady of Mercy (Belmont), Sacred Heart (Natick), Saint Jeremiah (Framingham) and Saint Anselm (Sudbury). These parishes were closed between September 2004 and May 2005.

Due to declining numbers of clergy, changing Catholic demographics and significant financial pressures, the Archdiocese of Boston began the process of parish reconfiguration in January of 2004. There was an urgency to the process in light of the severity of these issues. Throughout reconfiguration the Archdiocese has sought to serve the needs of area Catholics by building parish communities that have sustainable resources to provide for the needs of the local community.

"We appreciate the disappointment that this news brings to those who submitted the appeals and all who are saddened by the parish closings," stated Archbishop Seán O'Malley. "This has been a difficult time for our Catholic community. We wish to express our gratitude to the many priests, deacons, religious and parishioners who have generously accepted the need for change in light of our limited resources. While many members of closed parishes have joined, enriched and strengthened neighboring parish communities, others continue to struggle with the effects of reconfiguration.

We have heard the concerns that have been expressed through ongoing discussions and we remain hopeful that we will be able to find ways to address these concerns while responsibly providing for the needs of the entire Church community. We must continue to rely on God's grace to lead us towards a peaceful and prayerful conclusion of this process. The Church will benefit and grow stronger from what we can accomplish together. We pray that all the people of the Archdiocese will renew their commitment to the shared mission of witnessing our faith and working for renewal in the Church."

For further background information on Reconfiguration, please feel free to consult www.rcab.org and http://www.rcab.org/Parish_Reconfiguration/HomePage.html.

Parish Reconfiguration Process and Appeals Background

Parish Reconfiguration Process

Parishes were closed during the reconfiguration process after the due diligence, research, planning and recommendations by Cluster Planning Groups, Vicars Forane, Regional Bishops, the Central Committee and the Meade-Eisner Reconfiguration Review Committee. Based upon the consistent recommendations of these several advisory groups, 62 parishes have closed, involving the closing of 40 church buildings. Also, as part of the reconfiguration process eight new parishes have been formed and the Archdiocese of Boston currently has 303 parishes.

Cluster Planning Groups, were comprised of several parishes, with each parish's Pastor, a member of the Parish Pastoral Planning Council, a member of the Parish Finance Council and a member of the parish staff participating in the meetings.



Vicars Forane are pastors who report to their Regional Bishops and coordinate the work and communications of the priests within a Vicariate, The Archdiocese has 20 Vicariates, each one is a subunit of a region of the Archdiocese and is comprised of approximately 15 parishes.

Regional bishops, also known as Auxiliary Bishops, are the Archbishop's senior representatives to each of the five regions of the Archdiocese.

The Central Committee for Reconfiguration, representing the entire Archdiocese, was comprised of eleven lay men and women, two women religious and five pastors. This committee reviewed the recommendations of every cluster group and the comments of the Vicars Forane and Regional Bishops. They also completed their own research, including demographic studies. The Central Committee gave a final recommendation for each cluster to the Archbishop.

In order to provide for further evaluation and possible reconsideration of plans for reconfiguration, Archbishop O'Malley established the Meade-Eisner Reconfiguration Review Committee. Sr. Janet Eisner, SND and Mr. Peter Meade chaired this eight-person committee, created to review the reconfiguration process and to make recommendations to help guide the Archdiocese's efforts to serve the needs of the Catholic community. The Meade-Eisner Committee affirmed the majority of the process they reviewed and recommended several changes to previous recommendations or decisions with the goal of achieving better outcomes for the Archdiocese now and in the future.

Appeals

In addition to the opportunity for each parish that was named for closing to appeal that decision to the Archbishop, further appeal was available to the Vatican, by way of recourse to the Congregation for the Clergy. The appeals for recourse submitted to the Congregation are currently receiving responses.

Additionally, previously an individual at Saint Alphonsus in Beverly submitted an appeal for recourse to the Congregation, and then later withdrew the appeal, and on November 3, 2005 the Archdiocese shared the Congregation for the Clergy's announcement that the appeal for recourse submitted by former parishioners of St. William's (Dorchester) appeal had been resolved by the Archdiocese transferring the assets of the former St. William parish to Blessed Mother Theresa parish.

Letter from Pastors of the Receiving Parishes

January 14, 2006

Dear Parishioners,

In January of 2004 after prayerful consideration and consultation with members of the clergy and laity, Archbishop Sean O'Malley announced plans for reconfiguration of the parishes within the Archdiocese of Boston.

Looking to the future of the Archdiocese, and considering several factors such as the changed demographics of the Catholic population fewer vocations to the priesthood, and financial difficulties, it became obvious that we were not adequately positioned to serve the needs of God's people in our local Church. It was evident that serious measures would be required in order to address the situation. Even knowing that this would result in painful sacrifices for many in our local parishes, the Archbishop nevertheless realized that this work was ultimately necessary for the greater good of the entire Archdiocese. Though reconfiguration would lead to fewer parishes the Archbishop made a commitment to develop "stronger parishes better positioned to carry on the work of evangelization, to reach out to young people, to serve senior citizens and our poor, to perform corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and to pass on the faith to future generations."



Although we recognized that the reconfiguration effort was a major undertaking involving significant challenges on many levels, the magnitude of the situation was not something that we clearly understood from the onset, and the various complexities encountered along the way were not fully anticipated.

Among these complexities was a decision made by the Congregation for the Clergy regarding the decrees that were used to close parishes. As explained by the Archbishop, the intent of the decree as well as subsequent closure of the parishes was that the assets and liabilities of the closed parishes be received by the Archdiocese. If the receiving parishes had kept the assets and liabilities of the closed parishes, then some receiving parishes would have become richer and others would have taken on debt. Having the assets and liabilities of the closed parishes go to the Archdiocese and then be redistributed for the good of all was deemed the fairest outcome. However, the Congregation stated that the receiving parish, as named in the decree, and not the Archdiocese, would receive the assets and liabilities of the closed parish. In order for the assets and liabilities to be transferred to the Archdiocese as originally planned, the Archbishop has asked the Pastors of the receiving parishes to determine the amount of assets of the closed parish needed to support their additional parishioners, those coming from the closed parish, and to surrender any claims to the remaining assets and liabilities.

We, the undersigned Pastors of the Receiving Parishes, have consulted with the appropriate members and/or consultative bodies of our parishes and have unanimously agreed to comply with the Archbishop's request.

Reverend George Szal, SM – Pastor, Immaculate Conception, Revere

Right Reverend John J. Ahern – Pastor, Saint Mary of the Assumption, Brookline

Reverend Brian F. Manning – Pastor, Saint Mary of the Nativity, Scituate

Very Reverend Michael J. Bova Conti – Pastor, Our Lady of Fatima, Sudbury

Reverend Richard W. Fitzgerald – Pastor, Saint Paul Parish, Wellesley

Reverend Robert R. Kennedy – Pastor, Saints Monica and Augustine, South Boston

Very Reverend John W. O'Brien – Pastor, Sacred Heart, North Quincy

Reverend Francis E. O'Brien – Pastor, Saint George, Framingham

Reverend Gerard Petringa – Pastor, Saint Luke, Belmont

Reverend Brian R. Kiely – Pastor, Saint Patrick, Natick

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