

Vatican supreme court upholds closing of 10 Boston parishes

WASHINGTON - The Vatican supreme court has denied the appeals of parishioners trying to save 10 parishes in the Archdiocese of Boston from closing, according to a spokesman for a group fighting the closures.

Peter Borre, co-chairman of the Council of Parishes, which was formed to oppose the archdiocese's 2004 decision to close 64 churches, said he learned of the May 7 decision by the Supreme Court of the Apostolic Signature from a canon lawyer representing the group in Rome.

The decision from the Vatican's highest tribunal means that the archdiocesan process to close the parishes - suppression in church parlance - complied with canon law.

The decision also means that parishioners have no further recourse within the church to bring their concerns to church officials.

Parish representatives and the council will meet in early June after they receive the official documents from the court before deciding its next step, Borre told Catholic News Service. He did not rule out the possibility of a lawsuit to overturn the closings based on civil law violations.

In a statement posted on its website May 17, the archdiocese declined comment on the court's action "until such time as we receive a formal decision from Rome."

The parish closings under a massive archdiocesan reconfiguration plan was controversial, with many Catholics believing the effort was undertaken to help raise funds to pay settlements to victims of clergy sexual abuse. The archdiocese repeatedly has denied that funds from the sale of parish property was used or will be used for such payments.

In its statement on the website, the archdiocese reiterated its stance regarding the proceeds of the sale of church buildings.

Since the closings, parishioners have led round-the-clock vigils at three churches: St. Frances Xavier Cabrini in Scituate, St. James the Great in Wellesley and St. Jeremiah in Framingham. The vigils show that the faith communities at each site remain vibrant, the Council of Parishes has maintained.

A year after the original suppression order, Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley of Boston reopened three of the parish sites as either chapels or as a rectorate.

In addition to the parishes where the vigils continue, the others involved in the supreme court decision are Infant Jesus-St. Lawrence in Brookline, Our Lady of Lourdes in Revere, St. Anselm in Sudbury, Sacred Heart in Natick, St. Jean d'Arc in Lowell, St. Mary Star of the Sea in Squantum section of Quincy and St. Michael the Archangel in Lynn.

Cardinal O'Malley of Boston had said no action would be taken against the people involved in the vigils until the Vatican issues its ruling.

Borre told CNS the vigils in all likelihood will continue.

"So the cardinal can kick the can down the road and continue to play a waiting game or he can call in the police," Borre said. "The question I would ask is, in today's environment, is that a new story line that the Roman Catholic Church is going to want?"

The archdiocese said in its statement that it "continues to seek a prayerful resolution to all of the vigils."