

St. Anselm Parish, Framingham and Sudbury
A Caring, Committed, Catholic Community

March 8, 2004

Most Reverend Richard G. Lennon
Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia
Archdiocese of Boston
2121 Commonwealth Avenue
Brighton, MA 02135

Dear Bishop Lennon:

We are writing in response to your letter of January 10, 2004 and the requests made by Archbishop Sean regarding reconfiguration in the Archdiocese of Boston. We have met several times with representatives of Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Sudbury, exchanged information with them (including the suggested inventory), toured each other's facilities and discussed the situation at length. Copies of the inventories and other background information are attached.

The representatives of the two parishes did not agree on the substance of a report in response to your questions and are submitting separate reports. The report from Our Lady of Fatima recommends the closing of St. Anselm on the basis of size. Although we agree that size is a relevant criterion, we do not believe that their conclusion adequately addresses other important issues. First and foremost, it does not address the needs of our substantial deaf community, a distinct cultural and linguistic group. Second, it does not adequately consider relevant issues associated with the real estate involved. We are, therefore, providing our analysis in this letter.

In addition to an answer to the questions posed in your letter, we understand that Archbishop Sean is looking for us to provide good advice, well thought out and with an understanding of the challenges. In order to give that advice, we believe we should provide you with background information and our analysis of the situation in our section of North Framingham and in Sudbury.

Background

Based on our meetings with Our Lady of Fatima, we would make the following observations:

1. Both parishes are strong and thriving faith communities fulfilling well the mission of the church in our geographic territory. Both communities
 - celebrate beautiful liturgies;
 - have well run religious education programs;
 - reach out to address the needs of the young and the elderly; and
 - assist the poor and disadvantaged in a variety of ways.
2. The population in North Framingham and South Sudbury has been growing very modestly. Attendance at St. Anselm has held steady or grown modestly over the past several years. We understand that attendance at Our Lady of Fatima has fallen approximately 20% since 2001.
3. Both communities operate with a financial surplus and are free of debt. St. Anselm and Our Lady of Fatima have deposits with Chancery of approximately \$550,000 and \$500,000, respectively.

4. St. Anselm has two buildings: an 11,000 square foot church (originally designed to seat 800) with an 11,000 square foot hall and a 3,800 square foot rectory, on approximately 6 acres of land located on the south end of Sudbury, close to the Framingham town line. The property is assessed at \$1,275,700. The buildings at St. Anselm are in fine condition and the worship space has been modified and updated. There are no deferred maintenance items and a substantial renovation of the parish hall was completed in the fall of 2003, including the construction of 13 classrooms.
5. Our Lady of Fatima also has two buildings: a 6,800 square foot church with a 6,800 square foot hall and a 5,000 square foot parish center attached to a 6,000 square foot rectory. The church worship space seats 410 people. The parish hall and rectory space house 13 classrooms as well as office space. The buildings are located on approximately 6 acres of land (of which approximately 4.8 acres are useable after wetlands are considered) not far from the center of Sudbury. The property is assessed at \$1,515,000. We understand that approximately \$100,000 in maintenance at Our Lady of Fatima has been deferred and that the worship space has not been significantly updated. We also understand that the parish has had plans to build a new church or to expand the existing building following the end of the reconfiguration moratorium on construction. Estimates and architectural plans developed by Our Lady of Fatima approximately three years ago indicated construction costs of between \$5.5 million and \$7 million.
6. Both communities are committed to assisting inner city parishes in need of help. Our Lady of Fatima already has a sister parish relationship with Holy Family Parish in Dorchester. St. Anselm supports various inner city parishes through tithing grants and Catholic Schools contributions and would also like to have a sister parish relationship.
7. St. Anselm is the smaller of the two parishes. One half of the parishioners live in Framingham and the other half in Sudbury. Its smaller community is viewed as a great blessing to its parishioners and has fostered strong lay participation in a wide variety of areas. Under the guidance of the current and former pastors, the parish has already reconfigured by building an organizational structure led by a part-time pastor and supported by a deacon, a full-time pastoral associate, and strong and well formed lay commissions who handle many of the day-to-day functions in the parish. The commitment, formation and organizational structure of the parish make it an engaging alternative for fulfilling the church's mission in a period of declining priestly vocations.

There may be a presumption that smaller parishes are unable to offer the same depth and breadth of programs and services that larger parishes can. The experience at St. Anselm is contrary to any such presumption. The lay faithful have recognized and accepted their proper role in fulfilling the mission of the church, and amazing things have happened.

8. St. Anselm is also the home to the Deaf Community Center (DCC), which offers over three hundred deaf people of all faiths the opportunity to meet their religious, social, educational and communication needs. DCC became a part of the St. Anselm community in the summer of 2002 after Catholic Charities closed the DCC facilities in Framingham. There is now a very close relationship among the hearing and deaf members of the community at St. Anselm. The deaf have been mainstreamed into parish life and play an active role in the life of the community. Descriptive information concerning DCC is attached.
9. In addition to DCC, St. Anselm has 35 separately identified and active ministries. It has made a special effort to reach out to survivors of clerical abuse in light of the incidents over the years in the town of Sudbury and has been recognized by many survivors of clerical abuse for its support and help.

10. Our Lady of Fatima has 39 separately identified ministries that are active or in various stages of development. It is home to the Sudbury Community Food Pantry, which distributes food to people from at least twelve communities with the support of individuals, schools, churches, synagogues, businesses and service organizations. It also has a very active youth ministry program.
11. Having been asked to cluster with Our Lady of Fatima, we have not participated in any cluster discussions involving Framingham.

Archbishop Sean has identified four principal reasons for reallocation of parish resources: changes in demographics, decline in the number of clergy, parish financial difficulties and the poor state of certain properties. As to the relevance of those issues in North Framingham and South Sudbury, we would note the following:

- There have been no significant changes in demographics in this area for several decades. The population in the area has been growing slowly, but steadily.
- St. Anselm has already reconfigured to require no more priestly resources per capita than substantially larger parishes. Our Lady of Fatima appears to be an average size parish for the archdiocese of Boston.
- Both parishes are in good financial condition.
- The St. Anselm properties are in fine condition. We understand that Our Lady of Fatima believes that they can raise the funds necessary for renovation and construction.

Analysis

Your letter of January 10, 2004 asks us to answer the question: If the Archbishop needs to close a parish in your cluster for the greater good of the Archdiocese, how would you recommend that your cluster of parishes be reconfigured and why? We have been told by our Vicar that the second question in your letter is not relevant to a cluster of only two parishes. Below is our analysis of the options of closing either Our Lady of Fatima or St. Anselm.

Closing Our Lady of Fatima would involve the dislocation of approximately 1,000 people who regularly attend Mass there as well as 910 children in the religious education program. Relocation to St. Anselm would require families in North Sudbury to travel an additional 2.5 miles and to cross Route 20, an East/West traffic artery. In order to house all of the activities conducted by Our Lady of Fatima, additional space may be required at St. Anselm. The church building would probably have to be renovated to add seating and additional parking may be needed. Although the combined square footage of the hall and parish center at Our Lady of Fatima is approximately the same as the hall at St. Anselm and the number of classrooms are the same for both parishes, it may be desirable to build a parish center for the combined community. The St. Anselm real estate would easily accommodate those changes but the cost would probably exceed its deposits with Chancery.

Closing St. Anselm would involve the dislocation of approximately 375 people who regularly attend Mass there as well as 231 children in the religious education program. Relocation to Our Lady of Fatima would require families in North Framingham and South Sudbury to travel an additional 2.5 miles and to cross Route 20, an East/West traffic artery. In order to house all of the activities conducted by St. Anselm, additional space would be required at a facility where the existing parishioners already plan major construction. It is not clear whether the real estate at Our Lady of Fatima could accommodate the necessary additional space and the cost has not been determined.

The closing of either Our Lady of Fatima or St. Anselm would be likely to have several profound adverse effects on the deaf, the St. Anselm community in general and on the Framingham residents who are part of the St. Anselm community in particular. These are detailed below:

- DCC was forced out of its home of 30 years in Framingham in 2003. They have now been successfully integrated into a new community, which has been made possible in part because of the small size of the community. For the deaf to be mainstreamed into another community, they need to have the opportunity to become familiar with the people and their expressions in order to effectively read lips. The small community at St. Anselm has made that possible. In a larger, combined parish, it seems highly unlikely that this ministry could be any where near as effective as it is now. The deaf also need space and facilities. They are well accommodated in this regard today at St. Anselm where they have access to large and small meeting areas, a kitchen, a chair lift to bring disabled down stairs and a function hall. If St. Anselm and Our Lady of Fatima were combined at either location, the facilities would be inadequate for their needs and the needs of other existing ministries.
- Throughout the 40 years of its existence, St. Anselm has thrived as a small, close knit community. A combination with the Our Lady of Fatima community would permanently change that dynamic, which has been so cherished by the community. The combined community might benefit from the organizational structure, training and commitment of St. Anselm parishioners, but it would be a tremendous challenge to retain that culture if the St. Anselm parishioners represent a small minority of the population.
- The Framingham residents of St. Anselm now represent 50% of the parish. In any combination with Our Lady of Fatima, they would represent around 10% of the parish. This would likely result in a sense of alienation from the community.

As requested by Archbishop Sean, we have attempted to picture a way to bring together these parishes in a way that would strengthen them both. As requested, we have dreamt and we have planned. We have concluded, however, that any combination of these parishes would be detrimental to the mission of the church in North Framingham and Sudbury and to the ministry to the deaf in the Archdiocese of Boston.

It is obviously difficult and painful to choose among parishes, but we would do so, if we thought we had a basis for making a decision. We do not believe, however, that there is a rational basis for choosing which parish should close. Closing either parish will be detrimental in different ways. As a result, we respectfully report that we are unable to answer the question presented to us. We would be pleased to meet with or provide any necessary additional information to you or your advisors.

We do believe, however, that significant enhancement of the Archdiocesan Ministry to the Deaf could be accomplished by coming together to form a stronger and larger community merged into one Deaf Catholic family under one roof at St. Anselm. As Fr. Fitzpatrick has indicated in his cover letter, this is the direction in which planning for the Deaf is presently moving and the parish would be delighted to help that plan come to fruition. Under such a merger, the Apostolate for the Deaf headed by Fr. Michael Medas ministering to more young Deaf families would come together with DCC where the focus has been more on Deaf Seniors. Rather than a reconfiguration with Our Lady of Fatima Parish, we recommend that our small vital parish continue to reach out and warmly welcome the Deaf into our parish life. With this vision, the Deaf can effectively be served from a central location at Saint Anselm (very close to the Learning Center for Deaf Children in Framingham, an important focal point for the Deaf population), with outreach to the North (at the New England Home for the Deaf in Danvers) and to the South Shore with Fr. Murphy in Weymouth, as well as in Boston itself.

Please know that we understand the difficult decisions that are before you and our Archbishop. Please also know that you are in our prayers as you consider the alternatives.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

/s/ John Fitzpatrick

Fr. John Fitzpatrick

/s/ Cynthia Deysher

Cynthia Deysher

/s/ Kristin Fay

Kristin Fay, Religious Education Coordinator

/s/ Richard Hornor

Richard Hornor

/s/ Congetta Koetteritz

Congetta Koetteritz, Deaf Community Center

/s/ William McQueeney

William McQueeney

/s/ Joseph Ramrath

Deacon Joseph Ramrath

cc: Fr. Michael Bova Conti
Bishop Walter Edyvean