

St. Anselm Parish
100 Landham Road
Sudbury, MA 01776

A Caring, Committed, Catholic Community

Archbishop Seán P. O'Malley, OFM Cap.
c/o Archdiocese of Boston
2121 Commonwealth Avenue
Brighton, Massachusetts 02135

Your Excellency Archbishop Seán P. O'Malley:

We submit herewith our Petition To Revoke The Decree Of Suppression Against Saint Anselm Parish, Sudbury. The cover letter from The Most Reverend Richard G. Lennon containing the decree was dated August 24, 2004 and was received at the parish office on August 25, 2004.

We believe that the petition speaks for itself and firmly believe that upon reviewing it you will see the merits of our position and revoke or rescind the decree to suppress Saint Anselm Parish.

Please know that our petition was the effort of much time and careful and prayerful thought and reflects the heart and soul of Saint Anselm parishioners.

We thank you for consideration of our petition and urgently await what we hope will be your decision to revoke or rescind the decree.

May God Bless You.

Saint Anselm Parish Pastoral Council

By: _____
John J. Ryan, Jr.

PETITION TO REVOKE THE DECREE OF SUPPRESSION AGAINST SAINT ANSELM PARISH, SUDBURY

Saint Anselm Parish of Sudbury, in the Archdiocese of Boston, through individual members of its Parish Pastoral Council, as members of the Christian faithful and as persons aggrieved, hereby petitions Archbishop Seán O'Malley (i) to revoke his decree of suppression and (ii) to suspend the execution of the decree pending administrative recourse.

The process as applied to Saint Anselm

The process of reconfiguration was inherently flawed from the start and more particularly so in the case of Saint Anselm Parish. Archbishop Seán identified four important factors which were having a negative impact on the ability of the Archdiocese of Boston to provide pastoral care and to fulfill the mission of the Church. The four factors were:

- Demographic shifts in population
- A decline in the number of priests
- Financial challenges affecting a parish
- The deteriorating condition of properties.

In order to accomplish the goal of reconfiguration, the parishes of the Archdiocese of Boston were divided into 82 clusters. However, many of these clusters, including the cluster into which Saint Anselm Parish was placed, were as small as two parishes. Each cluster was then asked 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? By the very nature of the process, two vibrant, faith-filled, financially solvent parishes with no evidence of the negative factors cited by the Archdiocese were forced to choose between them which one should close. No creativity was shown in this process. There was no attempt to address the factors raised by Archbishop Seán in a manner other than the simple approach of closing a parish or not. No interaction with or involvement of the faithful Catholics in the parishes to be closed was sought. There was no attempt to discover if those Catholics might have come up with solutions to the problem which may have been more productive than that proposed by the Archdiocese. The fact that the process was flawed from the start is evidenced by the fact that 50% of the clusters comprised of two or three parishes made no recommendation for closure, despite the specific request from the Archdiocese.

The failure of the process from its conception is no more evident than in the cluster comprised of Saint Anselm and Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Sudbury. The separate cluster reports submitted from Saint Anselm and Our Lady of Fatima both agreed, without qualification, that both parishes are strong and thriving faith communities fulfilling the mission of the Church in their geographic territory. The reports agreed that both parishes celebrate beautiful faith-filled liturgies; have well run religious education programs; reach out and address the needs of the young and the elderly; assist in a variety of ways the poor and the disadvantaged; and are experiencing continuing growth. Both cluster reports agree that both parishes operate with a

financial surplus and are free of debt. Both parishes have appropriate worship space. The cluster reports agree that the buildings at Saint Anselm are in excellent condition. There are no deferred maintenance items and a substantial renovation of the parish hall was completed at Saint Anselm in the fall of 2003. Both cluster reports agree that Saint Anselm is also the home to the Deaf Community Center (DCC) which offers over 300 deaf people of all faiths the opportunity to meet their religious, social, educational, and communication needs. DCC became part of the Saint Anselm community in the summer of 2002 after Catholic Charities closed the DCC facilities in Framingham. There developed a very close relationship among the hearing and deaf members of the community at Saint Anselm. The deaf were mainstreamed into parish life at Saint Anselm and play an active role in the life of the community. The relationship which developed between Saint Anselm parish and the DCC is, itself, evidence of the manner in which Saint Anselm parish reconfigured far in advance of the current process in order to address the issue of the declining number of priests. Saint Anselm 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 the day-to-day functions of the parish. The part-time pastor was able to service the needs of the existing parish at Saint Anselm and also serve the needs of the DCC simultaneously. This organizational transformation of Saint Anselm parish resulted in a very special community of highly committed Catholics eager to live the Gospel. Rather than being part of the problems which were the subject of the reconfiguration process, Saint Anselm parish developed a model of parish organization and structure which allowed it to offer the same depth and breadth of programs and services that any larger parish could offer. Saint Anselm parish has become a model of a caring, committed, catholic community dedicated to fulfilling the mission of the church in an amazing way never before presumed to be possible.

However, this jewel of a parish was forced by a flawed process into a cluster of two vibrant, faith filled, financially solvent, growing parishes dedicated to fulfilling the mission of the Gospel and instructed to pick one to close. The process, as configured, resulted in a forced closing of a parish which faced none of the problems identified by Archbishop Seán as demanding reconfiguration and one which had already reconfigured to address those very issues. Such a result is exemplary of the kind of situation which calls for reconsideration and revocation of the Decree.

Failure to consult with the Presbyteral Council

The Decree to suppress Saint Anselm Parish was the product of a foregone conclusion by the Archbishop made without true or meaningful consultation with the Presbyteral Council. The Decree, therefore, is invalid under Canon Law.

Canon Law requires the diocesan bishop to consult with the Presbyteral Council prior to suppressing a parish. Canon 515, §2. That did not occur, in form or substance, before Archbishop Seán decreed the suppression of Saint Anselm Parish. Indeed, the introductory paragraph of the Decree essentially concedes that this decision was made only by the Archbishop based on his own consideration of the situation:

I, Archbishop Seán Patrick O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap., Archbishop of Boston, having carefully considered the pastoral situation of **SAINT ANSELM PARISH** in **SUDBURY**, Massachusetts, have come to the determination that Saint Anselm Parish in Sudbury should be suppressed.

Although the Decree also states that Archbishop Seán “consulted” with, among others, the Presbyteral Council, the “consultation” did not occur until May 7, 2004, long after the adoption of the reconfiguration model, the formation of local clusters, and the receipt of initial recommendations for closure. By that time, the Council was essentially asked to simply support a decision that had already been made. That process violated the requirement that the Presbyterate share responsibility with the Bishop for the “portion of the people of God...entrusted to” him. Canon 369. The conclusion to suppress Saint Anselm Parish was made first, and the process to justify that decision followed. Such procedural irregularities are precisely the type of issue subject to review on Appeal from a Decree.

There is ample evidence that the decision to suppress Saint Anselm was part of a preordained selection process in which the Presbyteral Council played no part. Saint Anselm is a vibrant, financially secure parish with a resident pastor and active laity. It was not on the initial list of parishes the local clusters recommended for closure. Nevertheless, the Archbishop added Saint Anselm to the list of parishes slated for closure when he announced the listing on May 25, 2004. There is no evidence that the decision to add Saint Anselm to the list of parishes to be suppressed was ever the subject of true consultation with the Council, but rather was selected by the Archbishop without consultation with the Council.

The Archbishop made no secret of his initiation of a “reconfiguration process,” or that the process would ultimately result in the suppression of numerous parishes in the Archdiocese. However, this solution to the problems of lower mass attendance, the declining number of priest, and other financial challenges affecting various parishes was not made in consultation with the Presbyteral Council. The Presbyteral Council was not even in existence until the reconfiguration was already well under way and the process had gone through numerous levels of review and decision. The Council should not have been presented with the ultimate issue (i.e. suppression of parishes) as the only issue for determination. It should have been consulted earlier in the process on whether parishes should be suppressed at all to address the problems of the Archdiocese and, if so, how many and which ones were proper candidates for suppression. The Bishop should have sought the advice of the Presbyterate on these ultimate, underlying issues. Canon 515, §2. Instead, the Presbyterate was presented with a predetermined result suppression. The Council should not be asked to simply approve a decision regarding suppression the Archbishop has already made. The need and requirement of consultation exists at earlier steps. Once the problems leading to suppression were identified, the Council should have been invited to fully participate in formulating solutions, which may or may not result in suppression of parishes. J. Provost, “Some Canonical Considerations On Closing Parishes,” *The Jurist* 53 (1993) 363-370. “It would be a mistake for the planning process to complete a total package, and then inform the Presbyteral Council on the results. Even though in some sense this is indeed consultation (that is, the Presbyteral Council could recommend against the package, or recommend major modifications in it) the impression can be given that the Council is being

brought in too late for its advice to be significant. That impression would seem to be in violation of the Council's role in Canon 515, § 2."

At the very least, the Archbishop should have consulted with the Presbyterate regarding the merits, *vel non*, of suppressing Saint Anselm Parish, which is a healthy, vibrant, financially stable model of a small Catholic Community. Canon law requires procedural and substantive fairness by the Church in its treatment of the people of God. "The Christian faithful...have the right to be judged according to the prescripts of the law applied with equity." Canon 221, §2. Fairness requires that the rights of the Catholic faithful at Saint Anselm be protected. The injustice of the proposed suppression of Saint Anselm Parish must be reversed.

The unanticipated and unforeseen reaction

The suppression of St. Anselm Parish has had the unintended and unnecessary effect of causing far more pain and suffering among the hearing, hearing impaired and deaf than could have been reasonably been anticipated by anyone. Because the hearing, hearing impaired and deaf parishioners of St. Anselm had worked so hard to reconfigure their parish over the past several years, to expand its mission and its services, to maintain and even upgrade its facilities and to address in advance the very factors first raised by Archbishop Seán in January 2004, few if any believed that the parish would actually close and the Decree would issue. As a result, when it was announced that St. Anselm would close the impact among the Catholic faithful was devastating. Parishioners have become disillusioned, disenfranchised, depressed and alienated. Many have lost direction and tensions have increased among a loving people. Many, and especially the deaf, have become frightened. The deaf, who are already disadvantaged, and in a very real way detached from the world which surrounds them, have now been told for the second time in two years that they have lost their home. St. Anselm had provided Mass in sign language, social activities in an ideal physical location and the very real opportunity to interact with the hearing in a context consistent with the mission of the Gospel. The physical proximity of St. Anselm to DDC's original home in north Framingham made transportation for the deaf a non-issue. A move beyond this area, a move to any area which may not be as physically or spiritually uplifting, now frightens many people, especially the elderly, who already carry the burden of physical separation from the world around them.

Such unanticipated pain, such unforeseen suffering by Catholic faithful dedicated to the teachings of the Gospel and to furthering the divine message of salvation is not necessary. A reversal of the Decree would heal the pain and allow the vibrant, faith-filled, financially secure parish of St. Anselm to continue God's work for all in this corner of his vineyard.

Conclusion

The community of St. Anselm Parish aspired to be the very kind of community contemplated by the Acts of the Apostles. The devoted parishioners have sought community in the breaking of the bread and in prayer. They have believed together and sought to add to their number and provide for those in need, whether spiritual, physical or financial. They have done

so while being a burden to no one else. They have done so with gladness and sincere hearts. Certainly, this is the kind of community to be saved. This is the kind of community which should continue the work of the Gospel. This is the kind of parish for which the Decree should be revoked. Justice requires no less.

For the reasons stated, the Parish Council, through its members, respectfully requests you reconsider and revoke the Decree.

May God Bless You.

Saint Anselm Parish Pastoral Council

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