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## Priests sent to celebrate Easter Masses at closed parishes

ON: 4/1/2005, BY CHRISTINE TOLFREE, IN: LOCAL

In an apparent gesture of good will, Archbishop Seán P. O'Malley sent priests to celebrate Easter Masses for Catholics of three parishes closed in reconfiguration — St. Albert the Great in Weymouth, St. Anselm in Sudbury and Star of the Sea Parish in Quincy.

St. Albert's and St. Anselm's have held round-the-clock vigils since closure last September and appealed the decision to shutter their churches. The archbishop sent priests to both for Christmas Masses as well.

"Archbishop Seán P. O'Malley recognized that there was a pastoral need among these two parish communities whose members strongly desire to celebrate the Easter liturgy together," said an archdiocesan statement announcing the Masses.

"I think [the archbishop] wants them to know that even though all of this difficulty has gone on, he still values them as members of the Church," said Father John Sassani, the Archdiocese of Boston's director of spiritual development, who was sent to celebrate Mass at St. Anselm's.

After Archbishop O'Malley also agreed to send a priest to a closed Quincy parish, Catholics from the former church dropped plans to hold a Mass at a local Protestant church celebrated by a priest suspended from ministry for marrying. A Mass celebrated by a suspended priest would be considered illicit by the Church.

Father Michael Drea, parochial vicar at St. Ann Parish in Wollaston was sent to celebrate Easter Mass for Catholics from the former Star of the Sea Parish, which closed last October. The Mass was celebrated at Squantum Elementary School.

"In light of our love and respect for the Church and our desire to experience unity as Catholics, we were pleased to learn of the archbishop's offer to provide for this Mass," Sean Glennon, co-chair of Friends of Star of the Sea, the group organizing the alternative Mass, said in the statement.

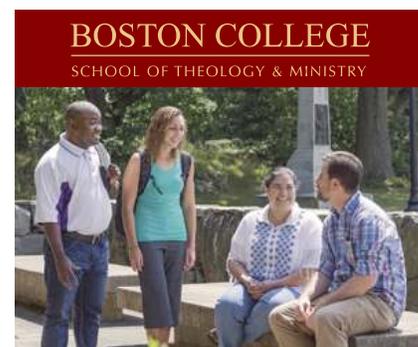
Archbishop O'Malley will also ask representatives from the Reconfiguration Review Committee to meet with representatives from the former parish, the statement added.

Some Catholics from these former parishes hoped that Archbishop O'Malley's compromise of sending priests to celebrate Easter means their parishes would eventually reopen.

"The fact that we have a priest here today is a sign of hope for the community that decisions will be changed," said Deacon Joe Ramrath of St. Anselm's.

AP materials contributed to this report

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