

Editorial – Battling the all-powerful

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Dan Bosley is a day late and a few million dollars short in his bid to halt the church closings in Western Massachusetts wrought by the all-powerful and holier-than-thou Diocese of Springfield. The time to have called for public discussion of the church closings would have been during the so-called "listening sessions" during which the diocese heard only from a selected few.

Still, one has to admire the North Adams Democrat's pluck in taking on the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, even if some will criticize him for political posturing. We know Mr. Bosley well enough to assert that he is genuinely upset about the church closings, particularly those of St. Stanislaus in Adams and St. Francis in North Adams, and concerned that very few of the parishioners got to have their voices heard before the deeds were done.

Not that it would have made much difference. For all its own posturing about "pastoral planning" and "careful consideration," the diocese knew what it wanted to do and went ahead and did it, the needs of the communities be damned. Mr. Bosley was right on in calling the actions of the diocese "heavy handed," "short-sighted" and "financially driven."

Dismissing the legislator's complaints and his call for a moratorium on church closings until more public discussion can take place, Diocese flack Mark Dupont whines about the "separation of church and state." He misses the point. The point is about the separation of the church from its parishioners. Mr. Bosley is not calling for any kind of government intervention. As a public servant and a member of the community who is not without clout and influence, he is simply calling for the parishioners -- and the community at large -- to be allowed to get more involved than the diocese has let them.

Some of these churches are historic landmarks. All of them are held near and dear by the faithful who have worshipped in them and experienced some of the most important moments of their lives in them. Shutting them down and in some cases, undoubtedly, dismantling them, will have a devastating effect. The "real people," as Mr. Bosley calls them, should have a say, rather than bowing to the arbitrary Lord and Master in Springfield.

Mr. Dupont also pontificates that the diocese knows full well how to run its business. Really? Then why is it in such financial trouble? Mr. Dupont goes further in ridiculing Mr. Bosley for not having a plan -- asking how in God's name the diocese is supposed to staff all the churches with its current lack of priests. Well, one plan would be to involve the laity, as the pastoral planning committee had said for months it was trying to do. Does

every church really need a priest, when a deacon or lay minister could easily lead services and conduct the necessary business at hand?

We quote from the Rev. Msgr. John J. Bonzagni, director of pastoral planning for the diocese, from his Dec. 5, 2007, letter to the editor of the Transcript: "Pastoral planning is not about closing churches; it is about having a conversation with the faithful throughout the diocese about church, ministry and service. We seek to devise a blueprint that will best utilize all of our assets -- priests, lay ministers, deacons, the laity and buildings -- for the spread of the Gospel."

With all due respect, that conversation with the faithful never really took place, and Mr. Bosley is now calling for it to happen.

All that said, there appears to be little hope for mourning parishioners in beating angry fists against the solid wall of resistance from their stalwart leaders, who simply say the discussion is over. The "real people" may have the inclination but they don't have the money to buy the churches outright. Their only recourse, it seems, is to leave the Catholic Church -- or to rise up and rebel, en masse, mount organized protests and hurl these modern-day moneylenders from the temple.