

St. Stan's will appeal its closing

By Meghan Foley, North Adams Transcript

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ADAMS -- Parishioners of St. Stanislaus Kostka, like their counterparts of St. Francis of Assisi in North Adams, will fight the decision of the Diocese of Springfield to close their church.

About 150 parishioners met at the Elks Lodge for an often emotional discussion Sunday night about what the next steps should be for the Polish parish, the only one of its kind in the Berkshires.

"It's very important. I feel like our heritage is being ripped away from us," Becky Zepka of Cheshire said.

"We want to keep our church," said Joan Maznicki of Adams.

Laurie Haas of Adams said she sent a petition signed by herself and six other St. Stanislaus parishioners to the diocese by express mail Saturday morning appealing its decision to close the 103-year old church. An ad hoc committee representing St. Francis sent a similar letter to the diocese on Friday (as stated in its letter to the editor in the Transcript on Saturday).

In her appeal, Haas said St. Stan's should be the surviving church in Adams and could be renamed as the other parishes merge with it. She argued it was better for the diocese to close St. Thomas and Notre Dame, the other two Adams churches, because they are located in commercially attractive areas, while the viability of St. Stanislaus School, which relies on the church's facilities, would be jeopardized.

"I want to see the school thrive, and having the church close next door to it is not a good sign," agreed Wesley Scalise of Adams, one of the other parishioners who signed the appeal.

The diocese's decision to close St. Stanislaus as well as St. Thomas Aquinas was announced at Masses held Aug. 9 and 10 at Adams Catholic churches. Under the diocese's plan, the two parishes would merge with Notre Dame de Sept Douleurs under the name of Pope John Paul the Great. The St. Stanislaus School will remain open.

The decision to close St. Stan's came as a surprise to most Catholics in North Berkshire, including the Rev. Daniel J. Boyle, pastor at St. Stanislaus, St. Thomas and Notre Dame.

"It was a shock St. Stan's was chosen to be closed," Boyle said Sunday afternoon while attending the final Polish picnic of the summer with about 200 people at the Polanka Pavilion.

At Sunday night's meeting, Peter Borre, co-chairman of the Council of Parishes in Boston, offered advice to parishioners about what they might do to save their church.

"I'm not out to change the world. I'm out to save parishes," Borre told the crowd.

He urged parishioners to form a committee to organize themselves and decide how they want to fight the diocese's decision. He said they should try to reach out to other parishes in the area that will be closing. In addition to the two churches in Adams, the diocese has announced the closing of St. Francis of Assisi and Our Lady of Mercy in North Adams, as well as North American Martyrs in Lanesborough.

"By weight of the numbers you have here, you are the core, the nucleus," Borre said.

He suggested parishioners withhold money from the offering and instead give it to the committee they organize, which would then offer to pay the church's operating funds.

In addition, Borre spoke about using vigils as a way to keep the church open.

The Council of Parishes is the umbrella organization for each individual church in the Archdiocese of Boston threatened by closure. Under Canon Law, Borre said, a parish has 10 days to file an appeal from the time a notice of decree to suppress or merge a church takes place. He said the diocese gets around that by not giving the church a written decree; therefore the parish has to assume the 10-day period begins when the diocese's intention to close the church is announced.

"If you don't get your first shot back in that 10-day window, you have lost, procedurally," Borre said.

If the bishop does not respond to an appeal within 30 days or stands by his decision, parishioners could appeal to the Congregation of the Clergy in Rome, Borre said. He said no decisions have been made, however, on the 14 appeals filed with the Congregation of the Clergy on behalf of Boston parishes more than a year and a half ago.

He said if a decision came back to close a parish, the next and last step would be to go to the Vatican Supreme Court.

"If you get there, it will cost you some money," he said.

At the Polanka Pavilion, some wondered if the Polish picnics, which were popular from the 1970s through the 1990s and revived again in 2004 would continue if St. Stan's were closed.

"If somebody can find it in their heart to keep it going, we're going to hope for the best," Frances Brooks of Adams, one of the organizers said.

Father Boyle said the event, which is presented by The Catholic Community of Adams, would continue.

"We fully plan to keep this alive and well," he said.