

Vatican considers East Side parish plea

Closing of St. Adalbert on hold amid appeal

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The closing of St. Adalbert Catholic Church is on hold as the Vatican considers an appeal from parishioners to keep open the basilica-style church on the East Side.

But if the Vatican's Congregation of the Clergy moves quickly on the matter, the planned closure will proceed as scheduled, according to officials with the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo.

A closing Mass is scheduled for Nov. 25; two weeks later, the parish is scheduled to merge with St John Kanty.

The two parishes have been advised by the diocese to continue their planning efforts as they await word on the outcome of the appeal, said diocesan spokesman Kevin A. Keenan. However, canon law dictates that a parish must remain intact while an appeal is made.

"During the time of this appeal, the diocese is not able to alter the canonical status of a parish," he said.

A group of St. Adalbert parishioners initiated an appeal in July with the help of a canon lawyer after an announcement by Bishop Edward U. Kmiec that the 121-year-old parish on Stanislaus Street would merge with nearby St. John Kanty on Broadway, resulting in the closing of the St. Adalbert Church building.

"Generally, we felt the process was kind of skewed a little bit, and because of this, possibly errors occurred," said longtime parishioner Stanley A. Kowalski Jr. "Now we have to wait. We think we have a good case, but then it's like any court — we're at the mercy of the court."

Kowalski is part of a group known as Save

Saint Adalbert that planned a news conference for this morning to announce that the church will remain open for as long as the appeal continues.

Many parishioners have not been made aware of the development, he said, because the diocese made no announcement, as it did when the bishop declared that the church would close. "Now that the process has been put on hold, very little is being said about it," Kowalski said.

Diocesan officials were not surprised by the appeal, given the deep bonds that many Catholics have with their churches, Keenan said.

"The emotion we're seeing confirms the love people have for the church," he said. The diocese is roughly a third of the way through an intensive pruning of parishes, part of a planning effort known as "Journey in Faith and Grace." Kmiec hopes to reinvigorate parish life throughout the eight-county diocese and to plan for a rapidly diminishing number of priests. The diocese had 274 parishes, missions and oratories in 2006; so far, 80 of them have been chosen for some form of restructuring, typically merging or linking with another parish.

The diocese deliberates each of the changes for parishes in concert with canon law and ultimately should be able to proceed with plans for St. Adalbert, Keenan said.

"As long as the bishop follows due process," he said, "in most cases, the Vatican has decided in favor of the diocese."