

Court Rules Parishioners Holding Vigil Are Trespassing

Parishioners who have occupied their Massachusetts church for 11 years in an effort to prevent the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston from shuttering it are due to speak Thursday on a ruling by the state's top court that they are trespassing.

Massachusetts' Supreme Judicial Court on Wednesday upheld the ruling of a lower court earlier this year that found that parishioners of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini did not have the right to continue to occupy the church and told them to end their vigil.

The Archdiocese of Boston asked the parishioners to abide by the court's ruling and end their occupation of the church, the last of a half-dozen parishes that were occupied after church officials in 2004 announced plans to close some 70 parishes as the clergy sex abuse scandal began to take a heavy toll on church finances.

A group of parishioners has occupied the 30-acre (12-hectare) property in waterfront Scituate, south of Boston, continuously since that time. Representatives for the group said on Wednesday they were still evaluating their options, which they would discuss with reporters on Thursday.

They had argued to the court that since parishioners' donations had paid for the church's construction in the 1960s and maintained it since, they shared an ownership interest in the property. The court rejected that argument.

"That's something people didn't realize until this latest round of closures, that parishioners don't own the church," said Nick Ingala, a spokesman for Voice of the Faithful, a liberal-leaning Catholic group that was formed to promote

parishioners' voices in the wake of the abuse scandal.

"These people in Scituate have certainly made their voice heard," Ingala said. "It may not have had much of an effect but they have delayed the closure." {eo}

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