

'Our parish never really dissipated,' organist says

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When St. Emeric, a Hungarian Catholic church near the West Side Market, closed June 30, 2010, under the order of Bishop Richard Lennon, many of the parishioners scattered to other churches.

But a core group, anchored by people like Miklos Peller of Westlake and Eva Szabo of South Euclid, worked to keep the congregation together, hoping that their appeal to Rome would reverse the decision.

They held prayer services each week outside the closed church and worshipped together at St. Colman Church on West 65th Street, where the Rev. Bob Begin, who is not

Hungarian, celebrated Masses with music and prayers in the Hungarian tongue.

"Our parish never really dissipated," said Peller, 71, who had been the organist in the church for 34 years.

Peller said St. Emeric had about 650 parishioners when it closed, two-thirds of whom were regulars.

He said that now that Lennon has agreed to reopen the church, he expects most of the regulars to return.

"We're all waiting for the bishop to call us and tell us what the next steps are," he said.

Peller said the parish had about \$750,000 in the bank when it closed. "We expect all the funds back," he said.

And, he said, the Rev. Sandor Siklodi, the former pastor who is now in Chicago, wants to come back.

"We're ready to open," Peller said.

Lennon agreed that while St. Emeric was under appeal, the parish's Hungarian Scout troop could use the church social hall for

events.

Last Christmas, during an event, Peller slipped into the sanctuary to check out the organ.

"The organ is in good shape," he said. "The whole church is in good shape. Now we wait."

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Parishioners from St. James Church celebrate outside the church Tuesday after hearing that Bishop Richard Lennon would not appeal the reopening of 12 churches, including St. James, in the Cleveland Catholic Diocese.

CHURCHES

FROM A1

Schulte-Singleton fought to reopen St. Patrick

And she followed Lennon Sunday after Sunday as he closed churches, sometimes confronting him face-to-face after the final Masses.

"I'm not one to be shy," Schulte-Singleton, 53, said in a recent interview. "I do what I have to do. That's how I was raised."

Schulte-Singleton, who grew up in West Park in the nearby Our Lady of the Angels parish, moved with her husband and children into St. Patrick parish in 1990.

Initially, she was not involved in parish activities, but an accident — one of her daughters lost two fingers from an exploding firecracker — changed that.

Schulte-Singleton said she was surprised by the outpouring of support from parishioners who brought food to her home and baby-sat her two other kids while she and her husband attended to their daughter in a hospital.

"That really showed what St. Pat's was all about," she said. "The parish became part of my family. And then I became really involved with the parish."

In May 2010, six days before St. Patrick was to close, Schulte-Singleton, wired with a hidden tape recorder, had a meeting with Lennon at the diocese's offices in downtown Cleveland.

The parish council president said it was her last-ditch effort to change the bishop's mind. "I was a little bit nervous," she said. "I looked into his eyes and tried to reason with him."

But the bishop's mind could not be changed.

On Sunday, May 30, 2010, Lennon said the last Mass at St. Patrick and granted parishioners' request to pray a rosary before the place was locked up.



Patricia Schulte-Singleton placed this message of gratitude outside St. Patrick Church on Rocky River Drive now that Catholic Bishop Richard Lennon decided not to appeal a Vatican tribunal ruling that the closing of a dozen churches in his diocese be overturned. Schulte-Singleton was among a number of St. Patrick parishioners who worked to reopen the church.

Schulte-Singleton said he allowed her to be the one to lock up while the congregation exited through a side door.

"I locked the outside front doors and the ones inside the vestibule," she said. "I was crying, but I said to myself, 'We'll be back.'"

"I then walked up the center aisle, looking at the crucifix on the altar. I was the last parishioner to leave."

Schulte-Singleton, who lives a five-minute walk from St. Pat's, did not join another parish. She drifted from church to church for Sunday Mass and sometimes didn't go at all.

"Until Rome tells me I'm not a parishioner of St. Pat's," she said, "I'm a parishioner of St. Pat's."

Last month, Rome told her she was still a parishioner of St. Pat's when a Vatican tribunal issued decrees saying Lennon violated procedures and canon laws when he closed St. Patrick and 11 other churches that appealed.

Lennon had 60 days to appeal the rulings, but on Tuesday he said at a news conference he would reopen the 12 churches, which have been sitting empty and padlocked. "It's time for peace and unity in the Diocese of Cleveland," he said. Through a spokesman, he used the same words when asked to comment on Schulte-Singleton.

The bishop gave no timetable for reopening the churches, saying he needs to restaff them, return sacred artifacts that were removed for safekeeping and clean up the properties.

GAMBLE

FROM A1

Church secretary now faces hard choice

Now she's in a quandary, with the announcement that St. Adalbert will reopen.

"Those who have joined other parishes are probably having the same problem I'm having," she said. "We're comfortable where we are. Do we go back?"

Gamble wonders whether she could belong to both parishes.

"I don't think I want to leave Our Lady of Lourdes totally," she said.

But St. Adalbert is in her heart. It's a 10-minute walk from her house. It's the place where her five children were schooled. And

it traces its roots to Cleveland's first black Catholic church, established in 1922.

That church, Our Lady of Blessed Sacrament, was on East 79th Street. But in 1961, it was in need of major repairs, so the diocese closed it and the congregation migrated a few blocks into a dying Bohemian church, St. Adalbert.

In their new home, members of the congregation painted the faces black on the statues left behind by the Bohemians. They also built a school, which is still functioning.

"We can go back and build again," said Gamble. "I've got my sleeves rolled up. I've got my bucket ready. And I'm waiting to go home."

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PROTEST

FROM A1

Szczepanik had deep roots in 2 parishes

When Lennon came to St. Mary to say the last Mass, Carol Szczepanik took her mother, then 82, into the church, but Carol boycotted the Mass, joining about 45 protesters who stood outside with signs condemning the bishop.

"My mother said, 'You know, you're going to go to hell,'" said Szczepanik, 58. "I said, 'No, Mom, I'm doing the right thing.'"

Szczepanik, who is a lawyer, took her protest signs from church to church, Sunday after Sunday, as Lennon closed and merged parishes with final Masses.

Lennon closed St. Mary and Holy Trinity in Bedford Heights and merged the parishes with St. Pius X in Bedford. The bishop renamed the new parish Our Lady of Hope.

Szczepanik and her mother joined St. Rita in Solon, but she continued her grass-roots protests and filed an appeal in Rome

"My mother said, 'You know, you're going to go to hell.' I said, 'No, Mom, I'm doing the right thing.'"

Carol Szczepanik

seeking to overturn Lennon's closing order. On Tuesday, the bishop said St. Mary will reopen.

Szczepanik is ready to return to the place where she sang in the choir for 25 years; the place where her father's funeral was held in 1999.

Szczepanik said that more than 220 St. Mary parishioners have already signed up for various committees to reopen the church.

"I'm going to write Bishop Lennon a letter and tell him that we've got all these committees organized to help you reopen our church," said Szczepanik. "We want to get things rolling."

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