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Pope denies appeal of Boston parish closings

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After a lengthy appeals process, the Vatican has ruled that nine Boston-area Catholic parishes should be closed despite six-year vigils and other forms of protest from parishioners.

In a letter dated Dec. 15, the Vatican?s Secretariat of State said Pope Benedict XVI had ?decided not to accept? an appeal from the Council of Parishes, which represents parishioners fighting to keep their churches open.

The decision brings new pressure to end a drawn-out standoff between the Archdiocese of Boston, which closed 66 parishes in the wake of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, and groups of disgruntled parishioners who continue to occupy five church buildings after years of round-the-clock vigils.

Peter Borre, chairman of the Council of Parishes, said the Archdiocese could still reverse its decision, as it has in past cases, and re-open the parishes in question. He?s working toward that outcome, he said.

Vigil keepers, meanwhile, remain resolute. Jon Rogers, spokesman for the vigil at St. Francis X. Cabrini Parish in Scituate, said his group could potentially negotiate to buy the property or to see it put to a new diocesan use. Either way, the building must remain a site of worship, he said, and his group has a separate appeal pending with the Vatican.

Archdiocesan authorities ?can give us what we want,? Rogers said. ?Or they can arrest us.?

The archdiocese is ?not interested in applying pressure,? according to spokesman Terrence Donilon, but ?would welcome additional talks? to end the impasse.

?We?re getting to the point where it?s really time to move on,? Donilon said.

?That should not come as a signal that we?re ready to take some kind of aggressive action. We?re not. We?re not interested in that. But we do have to find a way to end these? vigils.

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