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Bishop to reopen 12 closed Cleveland parishes

Michael O'Malley Religion News Service | Apr. 17, 2012

CLEVELAND -- Roman Catholic Bishop Richard Lennon on Tuesday (April 17) announced that he will reopen 12 churches whose closings were reversed by the Vatican last month.

The 12 parishes had filed appeals with the Vatican after Lennon, between 2009 and 2010, closed 50 churches in the eight-county diocese, citing changes in demographics and shortages of priests and cash.

Originally, reports indicated that there were 13 churches that had won appeals. But Lennon said this morning that only 12 had appealed.

Lennon said that he had decided not to appeal the Vatican rulings, adding that "it is time for peace and unity in the Diocese of Cleveland."

The 12 churches had appealed to the Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy, arguing they were vibrant, self-sustaining parishes that should not be closed. The panel ruled that the bishop did not follow church laws and procedures when he closed the churches.

The churches have been standing empty since their closings. The diocese, which has sold a number of closed churches, could not, under church law, sell a church or its contents while it was under appeal.

Lennon received official word of the Vatican decrees on March 14 and had 60 days to decide whether to appeal to the Apostolic Signatura, the Vatican's supreme court.

He said he decided not to appeal after consulting with clergy, laity and experts in church law.

The bishop's latest decision was welcomed by FutureChurch, a Cleveland-based national church reform group that criticized Lennon's decision to close parishes and mounted a nationwide "Save Our Parish Community" initiative to help lay Catholics resist church closures.

"This prudent decision is a final ratification of the courage of Cleveland Catholics whose love for their parish communities led them to appeal," FutureChurch said in a statement. "They are now richly rewarded for their faith in the judicial systems of the Catholic Church."

Michael O'Malley writes for The Plain Dealer *in Cleveland.*

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