



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Protesters march outside Rochester's St. Francis of Assisi Parish on April 2 in attempts to keep the parish open.

St. Francis of Assisi will close July 1

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has formally announced that St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Rochester will close July 1, ending more than two months of speculation following a March 15 parish council vote to close.

The bishop issued a May 22 "decree of suppression of the parish" — a canonical term — copies of which were included in the parish's bulletin on May 28.

St. Francis' parish council had voted 5-4 to close the church, which suffers from a low level of attendance at Masses, small membership and financial challenges, according to Father Paul Tomasso, pastor.

However, a group of parishioners plans to appeal the suppression, according to one member of the church who asked to remain anonymous. The decree indicates that an appeal to the bishop must be filed within 10 business days of the decree's issuance. An appeal must give "more compelling" rea-

sons for the revocation or changing of a decree than the reasons for which it was issued.

Additionally, the parishioners fighting the church's closing plan to hold a public rosary/protest at St. Francis, 77 Whitney St., on Wednesday, June 7, at 7 p.m. Parishioners have protested previously outside the church, and have also sent several letters to diocesan officials. Officials also have received correspondence from area civic leaders who are concerned about the absence of the church from its neighborhood and who oppose its closing.

In a letter to parishioners dated May 24, Bishop Clark indicated that he had read the letters opposed to the closing and consulted with priests and lay people about his decision.

"I know of your deep love for this parish, and I know that this announcement will bring you great sadness," he wrote. "It is difficult for any family to let go of the home they have loved."

For more information on the St. Francis closing, turn to Page 3.



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In God we trust

Courts delve into public religious symbols

Story By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

It's been a busy few weeks for the federal courts when it comes to religious symbolism.

Ohio may have to change its state motto, "With God All Things are Possible." Kentucky has been ordered to remove the Ten Commandments from courthouses and public schools. And a Wisconsin city won't have to build a wall to block a view of a statue of Jesus.

Can an attempt to delete the phrase "In God We Trust" from U.S. money be far behind?

Federal judges in Wisconsin, Ohio and Kentucky all recently ruled on cases challenging governmental connections to some kind of religious symbol.

A three-judge panel of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in April that the Ohio state motto — "With God, All Things Are Possible" — unconstitutionally amounts to government endorsement of Christianity.

The motto was adopted in 1959 after a 12-year-old boy learned Ohio had no motto and suggested one of his mother's favorite sayings. Although few Ohio residents apparently could identify its origins, the phrase is a quote from Jesus in answer to a question about how to achieve salvation. The court said even if few people recognize it as such, the motto is too identifiable with Christianity.

A couple of weeks later, U.S. District Judge Jennifer B. Coffman ordered Kentucky authorities to remove the Ten Com-

mandments from courthouses and public schools.

The U.S. Supreme Court already ruled in 1980 that Kentucky could not require public schools to post the Ten Commandments. But the state General Assembly passed a new law this year permitting schools and government property to include the Ten Commandments in "historical displays."

Displays in Pulaski and McCreary county courthouses included religious references from the Declaration of Independence, the state Constitution and the Mayflower Compact. They also displayed a 1983 declaration of the "Year of the Bible" by President Ronald Reagan and a quotation from President Abraham Lincoln calling the Bible "the greatest gift God has ever given to man."

Coffman ruled that even though copies of the Ten Commandments in the courthouses and a third of the county's schools are displayed with other historical documents, they are still religious in nature and serve no secular purpose.

"No reasonable observer of the displays could conclude otherwise," her ruling said.

In the third case, U.S. District Judge John Shabaz ruled May 9 that the city of Marshfield, Wis., has no obligation to build a 10-foot wall blocking the view from city property of a 15-foot-tall statue of Jesus.

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