

BOSTON PUTS HOLD ON SEX-ABUSE CASES

BOSTON (CNS) — The Boston Archdiocese and lawyers representing about 400 alleged clergy sex-abuse victims jointly asked a judge Feb. 20 to put a 90-day hold on all those cases to see if they can reach a mediated settlement.

Our hope has been that these cases can be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties through some form of mediation process, said an archdiocesan statement released late Feb. 20.

Attorney Mitchell Garabedian, who is handling 108 lawsuits against the archdiocese, declined to join the moratorium.

MORE PEOPLE USING ASSISTED-SUICIDE LAW

PORTLAND, Ore. (CNS) — More people used Oregon's assisted-suicide law last year than ever before.

An Oregon Health Department report due in March is expected to show that between 35 and 38 terminally ill patients died by lethal prescription last year. The previous high of 27 deaths annually from legal overdoses came in 1999 and 2000.

Church leaders continue to criticize the law as a manifestation of a "culture of death." Legalized assisted suicide leads to a perceived "duty to die" causing guilt and shame as death nears, church leaders say.

POPE FAVORS LIMITS ON BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — If the church fails to speak out forcefully about the ethical limits of biomedical research, history — and maybe even scientists — could one day accuse it of culpable silence, Pope John Paul II said.

He made his remarks Feb. 24 to about 160 medical researchers and church officials participating in a three-day plenary meeting of the Pontifical Academy for Life. "Today, perhaps more than in other times, given the enormous development of biotechnologies — even human experimentation — it is necessary that scientists are aware of the impassable limits that the defense of life and of the integrity and dignity of every human being imposes on their research activities," the pope said.

Parish pursues expansion

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

PENFIELD — Scores of people turned out for public meetings at St. Joseph Parish Feb. 11, 13 and 16 to learn about — and in some cases criticize — proposed expansion and renovation of the church and other parish facilities.

Meanwhile, the parish recruited 210 volunteers over the weekend of Feb. 22-23 to make home visits to parishioners and ask them to pledge to a \$3.216 million capital campaign to fund construction of new facilities. Parish families will be asked to make pledges that would be paid to the campaign over a three-year period, according to Bill Grant, campaign director.

The new facilities include a ministry center and school lunchroom, which constitute Phase I of the overall project. Phase II calls for construction of a new church once a second capital campaign is launched in 2006, and would convert the existing church into a daily Mass chapel with rooms for various other purposes.

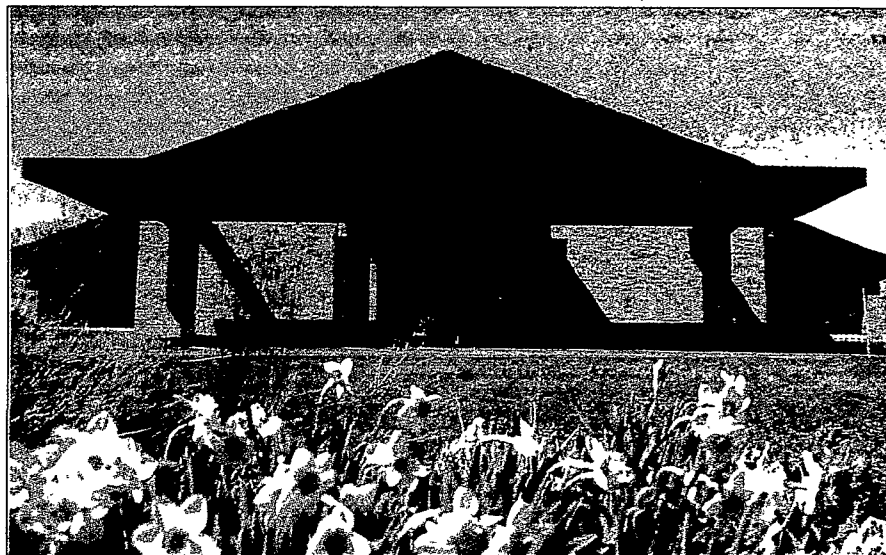
The cost of the new church, which would offer 400 more seats than the current 800-seat edifice, would run somewhat less than \$4 million, according to Barbara Babiarz, a member of the parish council and "Today & Tomorrow Implementation Team."

While some of those in attendance at the Feb. 13 church session seemed interested in learning about the plan from the parish's implementation team, members of which were on hand to answer questions, several participants voiced strong opposition.

Among the strongest opponents were parishioners Joseph and Jessica Ellison who are leading a group called "Concerned Citizens of St. Joseph's Church and Community." Joseph Ellison said his group maintains a Web site, and has about 400 people on its e-mail list. Ellison said that he and his wife believe building new facilities in a time of economic downturn and increasing joblessness is "morally wrong."

"It just seems that we should be able to do with what we have," he said. Ellison's group has run advertisements opposing the parish plan in an area newspaper.

Prior to the meeting, implementation team members distributed statements that indicated expansion is needed partly to accommodate projected growth in the number of parish families from the current 3,000 to more than 3,500 families by 2010. And although the parish is currently served by a full-time pastor and two part-time priests, the con-



File photo

St. Joseph's Church in Penfield plans facilities expansion and renovation.

tinuing priest shortage eventually may lead to the parish having only one full-time priest. This would mean only three Masses could be celebrated at the church per week-end, the statements read.

"Soon we will have to accommodate close to 3,000 people who attend five weekend Masses now in only three Masses," the documents stated. "Our present church has a capacity for 800, meaning we will only be able to accommodate a total of 2,400 in three weekend Masses."

Initial plans for the expansion project first called for construction of a new church, followed by renovation and construction of other facilities. Construction of a new church has been postponed because negotiations to use a driveway adjacent to the current church were unsuccessful. The driveway would have provided a second exit from the parking lot, which would be expanded when a new church was built, according to Babiarz, who facilitated the Feb. 13 meeting.

The master plan calls for construction of the following:

- A new ministry center that would include a meeting space for family and adult learning, and would accommodate up to 400 people. The meeting space could also be divided into rooms for meetings of smaller groups. The center will also include various other rooms. The statement noted that the Parish Resource Center's spaces are in constant use with daily schedule conflicts, and that the lack of adequate meeting space hinders the development of new programs.

- A new lunchroom at St. Joseph's School. The lunchroom would be used by the school's students — who currently eat in their classrooms —

and also would be used for other gatherings and ministry purposes.

- A new school entry.
- Extension of the existing parish driveway to encircle the entire parish campus.
- A new maintenance garage and work area.

Tim Bruner, a parishioner whose son, Nicholas, attends second grade at St. Joseph's School, said he supports construction of a new lunchroom to help the school "stay on par with the public school system." He added that he believes it is up to the parishioners to improve their children's school environment.

"I think it's something that has to be done, and the kids, in the end, will benefit," Bruner said.

Ellison, however, said the parish should spend more time exploring more efficient use of all its spaces.

"Building the building isn't for the glory of God, helping others is," he said. However, he added that he is willing to hear out supporters of the plan. "My intention here is not to be confrontational," Ellison said.

Babiarz said that "the naysayers are going to be there, but that's going to happen with anything." She added that the parishioners who attended the Feb. 11 and 16 meetings were more positive about the plan than the Feb. 13 attendees. She said she believes the majority of the parishioners would give to the capital campaign.

Babiarz noted that only time will tell how much the parish will support the planned expansions.

"If the people of the parish say with their wallets that this is too much, then I say I agree with (them)," she said. "We'll cross that bridge when we get there. If it's meant to be, it's meant to be."