

St. Emeric Catholic Church will reopen in Cleveland, led by its former priest



(<http://connect.cleveland.com/user/momalle/index.html>) By Michael O'Malley, The Plain Dealer

(<http://connect.cleveland.com/user/momalle/posts.html>)

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CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The former pastor of St. Emeric Catholic Church, on the city's near West Side, will return to lead its reopening.

The Catholic Diocese of Cleveland



The Rev. Sandor Siklodi serves Communion during the final Hungarian Mass at St. Emeric Catholic Church in June of 2010.

Gus Chan, Plain Dealer file

(<http://www.dioceseofcleveland.org/>) announced Tuesday that Bishop Richard Lennon has assigned the Rev. Sandor Siklodi -- who was moved to Chicago after St. Emeric closed in June 2010 (http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2010/06/closing_of_st_emic_marks_end.htm) -- to head the reconstituted parish.

Parishioners of the Hungarian church had appealed for Siklodi's return because he speaks Hungarian and says Mass in their native language. The reopening Mass is scheduled for noon on Nov. 4.

"Our parish is rejoicing in the news," parishioner and church organist Miklos Peller of Westlake said Tuesday. "There are tears of joy."

St. Emeric will become the last of 11 churches in the diocese to reopen after the Vatican in Rome decreed in March

(http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2012/03/vatican_reverses_cleveland_cat.html) Lennon did not follow proper procedures or present sound reasons for closing them.

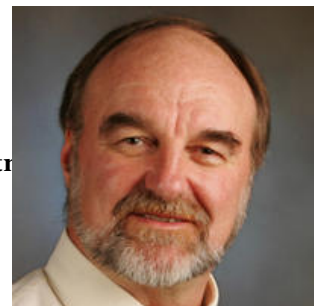
The bishop, beginning in 2009, closed 50 churches over a 15-month period, citing dwindling attendance and a shortage of priests. Eleven of the churches appealed to Rome, which upheld the appeals.

The bishop could have appealed Rome's decrees, but instead he announced in April (http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2012/04/bishop_richard_lennon_says_he.html) that he would reopen the 11 parishes. Ten of them already have reopened with new pastors. Siklodi is the only one of the original pastors to return to his church.

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The closed churches that did not appeal have either been sold or are up for sale.

St. Emeric, a 108-year-old parish near the West Side Market, had about 650 parishioners when it was closed on June 30, 2010.

Siklodi, who had been sent here by a Hungarian bishop in Romania, had served as pastor for 24 years. After the closing, he was transferred to St. Stephen King of Hungary in Chicago.

Peller said Siklodi will return to Cleveland next week. The priest could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

During the appeal, Peller continued to push the Vatican and Lennon for Siklodi's return.

"We're most grateful to the Vatican for standing by the side of our parishioners," said Peller, noting that St. Emeric was the last of the 50 to close and the last of the 11 to reopen. "And we're grateful that Bishop Lennon listened to the Vatican."

In a statement, Lennon said, "Please join me in rejoicing with our brothers and sisters in faith during this blessed moment and pray for the success of this parish in its mission to bring glory to God."

When Lennon formally closed the church with a prayer service more than two years ago, some parishioners boycotted the bishop's appearance.

Following the evening service, six parishioners barricaded themselves in the church in protest of the closing. They stayed all night.

After nearly a day-long standoff with police the next day, the protestors surrendered.

"The past two and a half years of our struggle to keep our parish alive and to reopen our place of worship has been trying and stressful," said Peller. "But we have never given up our hope that this day would arrive."

Peller noted that the Nov. 4 reopening marks the feast day of St. Emeric, the parish's patron saint and namesake.

"We're expecting a big crowd," he said. "And we're looking forward to being an integral part of the Diocese of Cleveland once again."

Before the church closings, the eight-county diocese had 224 parishes. The largest number of closings were in the hearts of Cleveland, Akron and Lorain, followed by inner-ring suburbs like Lakewood and Euclid.

About 70 percent of the 50 parishes closed were in inner-city neighborhoods.

Before the closings, the diocese ranked the 17th largest in the nation. Today it ranks 23rd.

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