

Judge orders parishioners to end 11-year vigil in church

by [Michelle Toh](#)

October 15, 2015

([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) A group of parishioners who have staged an 11-year, 24-hour vigil inside a closed Roman Catholic church in Massachusetts have once again lost their appeal to keep it open.

They have said that they helped build and maintain the church since the 1960s.

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court on Wednesday upheld the ruling of a lower court that the parishioners of St. Frances X. Cabrini Church are trespassing on property owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston.

“While we acknowledge the defendants’ heartfelt beliefs that they are entitled to remain on the premises as an exercise of their freedom of religion, the judge’s conclusion that the defendants are trespassers is supported by the evidence,” the ruling said.

It began in 2004, when the church was closed in an attempt to reorganize after the clergy sex abuse scandal led to a decline in attendees and donations, as well as too few priests.

Congregants occupied six parishes in protest. This one, in Scituate, Massachusetts, was the last where they remained.

In March, the archdiocese sued to evict the St. Frances members, who later argued in court that since their donations had helped construct the church in the 1960s, they were entitled to a stake of the property as well. The court rejected that argument.

After the ruling on Wednesday, both sides in the case were uncertain of their next steps, the *Boston Globe* reported.

The parishioners said they were still reviewing their legal options with an attorney. They have scheduled a news conference to discuss these plans on Thursday.

“We appreciate the court having taken the time to review this matter and issue its ruling. We ask the Friends of St. Frances to respect that decision and conclude the vigil,” archdiocese spokesman Terrence C. Donilon in a statement to the *Globe* on Wednesday. “The parishes of the Archdiocese welcome and invite those involved with the vigil to participate and join in the fullness of parish life.”

*This report contains material from the Associated Press and Reuters.*