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Despite parish protests popular Rev. Finnegan will move on Archdiocese takes no stock in 500-signature petition

By Tom Nushbaum

For members of St. Michael's parish, sometimes the Catholic Church can work in mysterious ways.

St. Michael's Rev. Paul Finnegan, a popular priest at the Main St. church for 12 years, will soon leave North Andover for another parish despite his parishioners' wish that he remain and despite his own desire to continue in North Andover.

Finnegan will be replaced by the Rev. John Prusaitis, 36, who comes to North Andover from St. Brigid's Church in Lexington where he served for nearly seven years. Finnegan will not find out his new assignment until the end of May.

Some St. Michael's members link Finnegan's departure to reported behind-the-scenes clashes between Finnegan and the current pastor Rev. Joseph Svirskas who joined the church in the summer of 1985.

Svirskas, who parishioners characterize as a "by the book" priest in contrast to Finnegan's more people-oriented approach, was not officially responsible for the decision to relocate Finnegan. That order came from the Boston Archdiocese's personnel board in the form of a letter dated Saturday, April 11, stating that Finnegan will not receive an extension of his stay. The brief letter did not explain a reason for the move.

Finnegan was originally assigned to North Andover's understaffed 3,000-family parish for 10 years. He has since received two one-year extensions and he told the *Citizen* in March that he



The Rev. Paul Finnegan
Will leave St. Michael's

was "on borrowed time."

A petition signed by 500 parishioners will ask the Archdiocese to allow Finnegan to remain in North Andover. But one personnel board member told the *Citizen* that public protest would not effect the board's decision.

"It wasn't a political decision," said Personnel Board Member Vincent Malone from his Brighton office. "There are many parishes in the Archdiocese needing priests. In the case of Father Finnegan, he's an excellent priest and that's why he had been extended. But now he's needed elsewhere."

Malone added that staffing problems were apparent at many churches statewide in addition to North Andover. "There are 45 parishes on the urgent need list," he said.

Although Malone commented that the move would benefit Finnegan's "spiritual welfare," he insisted that Church officials did not consider mov-

ing Finnegan to abate tension at St. Michael's.
In regards to the public protest in North Andover, Malone said, "We hear that every time. There are many good priests who do good work. But sometimes we must make decisions even though it's very hurtful to people."

"I wouldn't want to speculate," he said. "I'd love it if the decision would be changed. I really love it here. I think I work well with the people."