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Collection plate boycott called to protest closings

by Michael O'Malley by Religion News Service

CLEVELAND -- A grassroots group that's fighting the ongoing closing of churches in the Cleveland Catholic Diocese is urging parishioners to boycott Sunday collections.

The group, Endangered Catholics, has begun circulating forms that parishioners can fill out, saying they are withholding their money until Bishop Richard Lennon reconsiders some of the closings.

The form, to be signed by a parishioner and placed in a Sunday collection basket, reads in part:

"I will withhold any further financial contributions to any Roman Catholic Church until Bishop Richard Lennon agrees to mediation with each parish protesting its closing."

Endangered Catholics, organized in the wake of Lennon's orders last March to close 50 churches in the eight-county diocese by the end of June, is made up of parishioners from 14 parishes, four of which are already closed.

"We feel an injustice is being done because these churches are being closed without our consent," said Dave Hoehnen of Mayfield Village, a key organizer of the boycott. "The bishop has abused his power. But we have power too -- the power of the purse -- and we don't want to abuse our power by failing to exercise it."

The diocese, which has painted Endangered Catholics as a small fringe group, responded with a prepared statement by spokesman Robert Tayek:

"The diocese and its parishes have been blessed with the generosity of Catholics throughout these especially difficult economic times in northeast Ohio and during the diocesan reconfiguration process. ... The diocese and its parishes are most grateful for the continued support of all the faithful."

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