Despite parish protests popular Rev. Finegan will move on

Archdiocese takes no stock in 500-signature petition

By Tom Nusbaum

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

St. Michael’s Rev. Paul Finegan, 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.

Finegan 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. Finegan will not find out his new assignment until the end of May.

Some St. Michael’s members link Finegan’s departure to reported behind-the-scenes clashes between Finegan 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 Finegan’s more people-oriented approach, was not officially responsible for the decision to relocate Finegan. That order came from the Boston Archdiocese’s personnel board in the form of a letter dated Saturday, April 11, stating that Finegan will not receive an extension of his stay. The brief letter did not explain a reason for the move.

Finegan 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 was “on borrowed time.”

A petition signed by 500 parishioners will ask the Archdiocese to allow Finegan 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 Finegan, 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 Finegan’s “spiritual welfare,” he insisted that Church officials did not consider mov-