World & Nation

Detroit Catholics left reeling by plans for closing parishes

Detroit (NC) — The massive parish closing plan announced by the Detroit Archdiocese September 28 has left many Detroit Catholics

Many agreed that changes were needed, but few expected Cardinal Edmund C. Szoka to announce plans to close 46 of the city's 112 parishes and turn two more into shrines and four into missions.

The parishioners affected would be moved to or merged with neighboring parishes, and in five areas new parishes would be created, if the full plan were put into effect.

In the days following the announcement, pastors of many affected parishes began making plans to appeal the decisions. Some 1,000 pastors, parish ministers and parishioners met October 3 and agreed unanimously to appeal jointly against the recommendations affecting their parishes.

Even if some parishes succeed in reversing initial closing decisions, however, interviews conducted around the city by reporters of The Michigan Catholic, archdiocesan newspaper, left little doubt that the overall plan will significantly change the face of the Catholic Church in Detroit.

A number of those interviewed expressed surprise and disappointment that the archdiocesan task force that studied the parishes and the two archdiocesan bodies that made the recommendations worked solely from an analysis of written questionnaire responses, without on-site visits to the affected parishes.

Some wondered why the appeals process in which pastors and parish representatives will be given half an hour to tell archdiocesan representatives why their parish should not be closed - could not have been part of a consultation process conducted before the recommendations were made.

"We all need to face the fact that there are darn few Catholics in Detroit," said Betty Ho-



UPI/NC News

Auxiliary Bishop Patrick R. Cooney (left) and Cardinal Edmund C. Szoka answer questions about the Archdiocese of Detroit's proposal to close 46 city parishes

gan, who sees the plan from two distinct vantage points. She is a member both of the archdiocesan Urban Advisory Board, one of the bodies that helped formulate the parish closing plan, and of St. Dominic Parish, one of the parishes slated for closing. She does volunteer social work 25 hours a week at the

Many of the parishes to be closed were formed decades ago in Catholic ethnic neighborhoods. The ethnic populations have largely disappeared through decades of migration to the suburbs, and the predominantly black population in the city is mostly non-Catholic.

At a press conference October 3, seven black

Catholic leaders issued a joint statement rejecting suggestions that the closing plan was racially motivated. They supported the recommendations in general, but urged more fine tuning before they are put into effect.

In an interview, Auxiliary Bishop Moses Anderson, a black and a member of the task force that conducted the study of parishes, also denied that racism was behind the proposals.

If St. Dominic Parish closes as proposed, its pastor, Dominican Father Dennis Wiseman, fears it will mean the end of the six-day-a-week soup kitchen, social services, clothes closet for the poor, neighborhood recreation programs, and free arts and crafts classes the church offers. The soup kitchen is run by four mem-

bers of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity.

Father Wiseman expressed surprise that the parish, which is debt-free and staffed by his order not by archdiocesan priests, was among those picked for closing.

Even parishes not slated to close had questions about the plan. Father Valentine Gattari of Annunciation Parish wondered why Annunciation was picked as the site of the parish church in a plan to merge Annunciation, St. Charles Borromeo and St. Rose of Lima

Lack of facilities is the problem, he said. 'Black teenagers can't come here at 10 o'clock at night and play basketball at Stapleton, with old people sleeping," he said. Stapleton Center, across the street from the church, is a senior citizen complex.

The pastor of St. Casimir Parish in southwest Detroit, Father Eugene Wojtewicz, questioned several of the criteria used in the recommendation to close his parish.

He noted that budget of his parish's school exceeded the task force's limit of 18 percent of the total parish budget, but said, "The school is the only outreach we have to the black com-

Several people, noting during interviews that the growing priest shortage is one of the key factors behind the closing plan, asked why the task force had not considered alternative approaches, already in use in a number of dioceses, of keeping parishes open under lay

Auxiliary Bishop Patrick Cooney, head of the Urban Advisory Board and the Implementation Committee, which jointly developed the plan, said the two bodies were asked only to look at clergy distribution, not lay-leadership alternatives. "So that's what we looked at," he said. "There was no action outside of the for-

Commission finds no evidence of miracles at Lubbock parish

By Cindy Wooden

Washington (NC) — A committee appointed to study "rosary messages" allegedly given by the Virgin Mary to members of a Texas parish found them to be "pious meditations" of sincere people, but found no "evidence of miracles."

Other events at St. John Neumann Parish in Lubbock — such as the sun pulsating, rosaries changing colors and physical healings - also were not miraculous, said the five-member commission.

The commission appointed by Lubbock Bishop Michael J. Sheehan to study events at the parish met there October 2-5. A fourpage summary of the commission's 16-page report to the bishop was released October 7.

The commission gave conditional approval to the continued dissemination of the messages two parish members believed were inspired by Mary, as long as the contents are approved in advance by the bishop.

"If the 'rosary messages' are conveyed as the pious meditations of good people and not private revelations miraculously produced, the content of Mary Constancio's and Mike Slate's messages may be shared with others,' the report said.

The report did not mention Theresa Werner, the third "messenger," who had claimed that her messages were from God. She has said that the messages to her stopped in early August.

The only apparent reference to Werner's messages in the report said, they "portray an angry God in language that is strident, affected and makes one 'question the claim to divine inspiration."

A member of the parish, who asked not to be identified, said the mood there after the report was issued was "very upbeat."

"If the commission said there was no fraud, no hoax, no deception, no search for financial gain - which they did say - then hallelujah!" the parishioner said.

In analyzing the events and information gathered from interviews with the three messengers," the pastor, Monsignor Joseph W. James, and testimonies from participants at an August 15 Mass and day of

prayer at the parish, the commission distinguished between the "miraculous" and the 'supernatural.'

"The precise distinction," Father Jelly said, "is that a miracle is a phenomenon perceptible to the senses which cannot be explained through natural explanations.'

None of the phenomena which the committee investigated "were of miraculous character," the report said. "In other words, God did not suspend the laws of nature, but rather natural explanations were seen to have been able to explain them sufficiently.

While the phenomena were not seen to be miracles, Father Jelly said, they were obviously occasions of grace for many participants, and therefore, supernatural.

"The supernatural working of God's graces in our Christian lives does not require miraculous events and, indeed; is mostly present to us and enacted within us in the midst of ordinary occurrences of divine providence which does not circumvent the laws of nature," the report said.

The commission members suggested to the bishop that the Monday evening rosary prayer services at the parish, where the messages were first reported by Constancio last March, be allowed to continue.

They also recommended that an advisory committee be set up to assist Monsignor James in making decisions about any future events or activities relating to the events.

The pastoral leaders also should help parishioners develop a piety that is not 'individualistic," but leads to "the creation of real community and social concerns," the report said.



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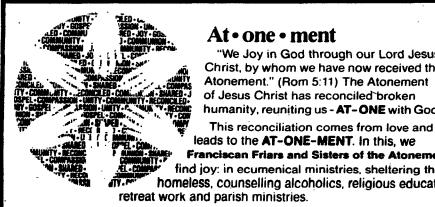
St. Jude's Church 4100 Lyell Road Rochester, New York 14606

Mass and Novena Prayers each morning at 9:00 a.m. and each evening at 7:30 p.m. All are invited by Father John J. Steger, Pastor, to attend and pray to the Patron of Hopeless Cases and Impossible Causes.

CONDUCTING THE NOVENA

Rev. Bonaventure Stefun, OFMCap. Anointing of the Sick, Wednesday, October 26th during both services. Main Celebrant of the Mass of Solemn Closing on the Feast of St. Jude, October 28th will be Bishop Dennis W. Hickey. Followed by a Coffee Hour in the Parish Hall.

Shut-ins may write for a Novena Booklet. St. Jude Church and Hall are easily accessible to the handicapped. Ample parking.



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