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Houses of God serve according to needs

During 1997 and 1998, Doris Prechtl has performed one of her most painful tasks as a realtor: showing her longtime church building, Elmira's St. John the Baptist.

"I would tell people, this is where my four children were married from and where they received other sacraments," Prechtl said. "They'd look at me and say, 'Are you ready to do this?' And I'd say, 'No, I'm not ready.'"

Working pro bono, Prechtl was unable to secure a buyer for either St. John the Baptist or another Elmira church, St. Cecilia's. As the buildings remain for sale, their final Masses will take place next month: St. Cecilia's on Sept. 13 at 2 p.m., and St. John the Baptist on Sept. 20 at 2 p.m.

The decision to close St. John's and St. Cecilia's had been announced in 1994 by Father Patrick Connor, pastor of both churches. St. John the Baptist and St. Cecilia's will now be absorbed into Ss. Peter and Paul Church. The three churches had originally merged in 1990 when the East-side Catholic Parish was formed.

St. John the Baptist and St. Cecilia's will mark the first two parishes from the city of Elmira to undergo "suppression," the term used when a Catholic parish is discontinued.

This action follows the recent closings of St. Aloysius in Auburn (1995) and St. Theresa in Rochester (1997).

But while such church closings are often painful, they are a natural part of the history of any diocese, according to Father Robert F. McNamara, diocesan archivist.

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STORY BY
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