

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Today marks the end of the Easter Octave and the continuation on Monday of the Easter season. It is very important that we Christians have sufficient time to meditate on and pray about the Lord's resurrection.

This week will be an important one for the Archdiocese of New Orleans. On Wednesday Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes is scheduled to meet with the diocesan and religious priests serving here to give information about Phase II for the plans concerning the future of the local Church. The archbishop will then conduct a press conference to inform the public.

From reading the newspaper and, no doubt, talking with friends, we have all heard of demonstrations here in our Uptown Deanery protesting what people think will happen to their churches. Will parishes close or consolidate? So it seems. Will some parishioners experience hurt and rejection when they hear the archbishop's decision? No doubt.

Some families have been represented in various parishes for three or four or even more generations. Some families have donated windows or other memorials in honor of their families. They will understandably find it hard to accept the closure of or drastic change to an institution that has meant so much to them and their ancestors. There will definitely be tears of sadness and even anger.

I can understand something of their feelings. Celebrating Mass at tiny St. John the Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, is a special thrill for me. A window remembers my great-great-grandfather, who first came to Mass there in 1849. In fact, were it not for this specific church, I would not be a priest today.

These next remarks may seem hypocritical to some when I myself am engaged in trying to raise funds for the completion of our Capital Campaign Drive, an effort to be employed in the physical enhancement of our church building through the installation of a new HVAC system. I believe, nevertheless, that it is necessary for all of us—priests and people—to recognize that a parish community is more about people than it is about a church. On Wednesday, April 16, we will once again have a parish dinner in Holy Name of Jesus School in order to encourage our parish's community life.

The Church is where the people are. It appears that congregations of three thousand families are very much alive on the North Shore with an insufficient number of priests to serve them. Considering the number of priests, diocesan and religious, available in the archdiocese, closure or consolidation of smaller parishes is the only way that large numbers of the faithful can receive the priestly care that they deserve by their baptism.

The destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina is certainly not the only reason for these changes. If we had larger numbers of priestly vocations, then we would not be in the situation in which we find ourselves. Given the number of priests and candidates for the priesthood, the archdiocese must make adjustments. In recent years we have seen religious communities withdraw their members from their traditional ministries—St. Stephen’s is a nearby example—meaning that diocesan clergy must fill in the gaps.

My hope is that we will all prayerfully support Archbishop Hughes as he makes these difficult decisions. Then we must pull together as God’s People, with fewer churches but, I hope, with even greater love, generosity, and zeal.

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I have to confess that I made a grave error in last week’s bulletin when I thanked people for their work during the Easter Triduum. I neglected to mention four people who were so instrumental in the beautiful decorations that we all enjoyed: Cathy Anderson, Robin Sakla, Teri Marchese, and Cookie Baxter. Cookie was also responsible for the wire cross that we turned into a floral cross, a fitting comment on the resurrection itself.

In our Lord,
Donald A. Hawkins, S.J.
Pastor