

This weekend ten pastors in our diocese are standing in front of their parishioners to tell them that on February 3, 1991 their parish church will close. One of those pastors is Fr. Turner, but it's my brother. I will not give you the names of the parishes; they'll^{all} be in the news tomorrow. ~~I want those parishes to hear it from their pastor, not from someone else.~~

Four years ago our diocese began a process of planning for the future. Planning became necessary because of five factors: 1) Geography: Some parishes are quite close to one another; others are far away. 2) Demographics: Catholics have been moving away from the central city and toward the suburbs. 3) The availability of priests: In the past 10 years we have lost 70 priests and ordained 20. 4) Buildings: We own many facilities that are underused. And 5) Programs: Parishes vary in the number and kind of programs they are able to offer their people.

All parishes were invited to plan. We each planned for our^{selve}s ~~individual parishes and for the cluster of parishes that sur-~~rounds us. At St. Regis our Planning Board submitted its report about a year and a half ago. Our cluster includes Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Bernadette's in Raytown.

The Diocesan Planning Commission was pleased with our report. In the past eight years attendance at St. Regis has increased 34%. This is higher than any other parish in our cluster. All three parishes in our cluster will remain open.

Bishop Sullivan has confidence in our parish. If I may borrow an image from today's Gospel, he has invited St. Regis to the wedding banquet. Admist the closings and consolidations, few will remember that we have created about 15 new parishes in that many years. Our diocese is alive and well; our communities are thriving; there's a wedding banquet, and Regis is invited.

What do we do with this invitation? There are two specific tasks I hope our parish will fulfill in response to the diocesan plan.

The first is evangelization. It's a new word for Catholics. I am using it in this sense: Evangelization is proclaiming the Gospel in our neighborhood. Ours is a community in which a substantial number of people move in and out, while St. Regis remains stable. When people move into our neighborhood it is our task to invite them here and to welcome them when they arrive. Although this task applies to newcomers of all races, I call to your attention how important this is to the Black community. It is no secret that we have more Black faces on our streets than we see in our church. In subtle and not so subtle ways we have made it difficult for Black families to feel welcome here. With the closings of two parishes in the Central City, I anticipate that more Black Catholics will be giving us a try. When we see strangers in our church, our task is to say hello to them, and to welcome them here. That is the bare minimum of evangelization.

The second task I call us to is vocations to the priesthood. St. Regis is now 26 years old. Many priests have served here. In 26 years no one--no one from St. Regis Parish has been ordained a priest. O'Hara High School in 25 years has had no graduate ordained to the priesthood for our diocese. Several men have tried the seminary. I commend them and their families for their interest; our parish is richer for it. But for 26 years we

have used the priests of the diocese and have offered none in return. In 1961 President John Kennedy asked his country to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade and we did it. I would like to ask this parish if by the year 2000 we could put a man in the priesthood. To do it, we'll need twelve men to try the seminary for at least one year. Right now we have none. Our parents and grandparents saw to it that we would have priests. Now it's our turn.

Our two tasks then are to reach out to our community and to prepare for the future. We received invitations to the wedding banquet. Now is the time to respond.