

DETROIT CATHOLIC CHURCHES^{1/}

In 1989 thirty-five Catholic churches closed, all in Detroit. In 2006 more will close.

"I think the responsibility of the archdiocese has to the city of Detroit is to maintain a strong presence. You look at the news; Detroit is getting blasted from everywhere. There is focus with all the events coming. There is desolation. There is focus on it's a bad city; it's not a good place. Who is going to give us hope? Who is going to say that this city is alive and well. That's part of the Church's responsibility." (Angela Weldon-Thomas)

Passion for the city: We need leadership that has a passion for the city and for its people. We feel that many of the decisions being made are made by people who have no passion for the city. Now the city of Detroit is over 85% African-American; and we feel we are part of this city. And we have people who are not African-American making decisions for us in the city. We feel that's wrong!" (Fr. Norm Thomas)

Racism: You have to ask yourself with the church and school closings in Detroit why it is happening? From the archdiocese's standpoint it's an economic issue. From my standpoint me and my colleagues in the alliance (Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance) I believe it's racism. We have a population of 85-90% colored; it seems that the Church is abandoning Detroit with the church and school closings." (Cleophus Bradley)

"Institutional racism is part of the fabric and fiber of our society. It's part of the air we breathe. You may not be conscious of the air you're breathing, but you are breathing it. And institutional racism really undergirds many of the problems we are having." (Fr. Norm Thomas)

"That is not the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is open to everyone, regardless of race, ethnic background; and we cannot have that kind of institutional racism. But now we seem to be going back to it. We're reinforcing the white churches in the suburbs, staffing them adequately, and closing on the other hand churches in the city, partly we say, because they are too small. But what's too small? The smaller the community the more you can develop community life and have a real sense of people knowing one another, caring for one another, just like it was in the earliest days of the Church, where everybody in the community was taken care of, because everybody looked out for everybody else, and they shared their goods." (Bishop Tom Gumbleton)

Sustainable: "I am not naive about the fact that you have to have money to run these operations, and there's no question about that; but when you say that that money has to come from the pews, it really restricts what can happen. And also, if we're talking about being with the people in that particular neighborhood, they probably don't have a whole lot of money in their pockets; and that's not to say that everybody in the city is poor. But there are a lot of churches where there are a lot of folks who don't have resources. Churches are very creative on how they can raise money. So that's the first thing. Secondly, I think you have to talk about how is that church being in the neighborhood. Does it serve a kind of beacon where people can feel safe, can feel a community, can feel they belong to the people of God, they're included in this church, this parish, nobody is excluded, everybody has a place at the table. If that can be measured, and I think it can be measured, I think all you have to do is hang around a little while and you can tell; then, that to me is the number one criteria for keeping churches alive. (Sr. Cathey DeSantis)

"Our Churches are rehabbing old houses and building new houses for people of low income. Our churches are feeding the hungry and helping the homeless, because we know there are a lot of men, women and children that need our service. We are also visiting the sick, and we take communion to the homebound." (Janet Moss)

"We really represent the hand of God and the hand of Jesus here in the city. People come to the churches in Detroit for help. They come in a time of crisis and a time of need, a time of devastation. Without the Church here in Detroit, these people wouldn't have any place to go. Part of that is the archdiocese being the symbol of the Church; that's where their responsibility is to say, 'What can we do to change this image of Detroit.' Don't add to it by closing churches. Enhance it by saying, 'We are

keeping the people here. We are going to keep places of worship here,' because in their worship they are gaining strength, so that in the political realm, they can speak up. They can improve the city. So there is a major responsibility for the Archdiocese of Detroit." (Lovette Jackson)

"The central archdiocesan structure does not understand the Church in the city. Maybe because they lack understanding we can forgive them, but not for their misuse of power." (Fr. Norm Thomas)

"I've been in this parish (Nativity) for over 34 years. I've seen life; I've seen death; I've seen violence; I've seen coming together. I see everything in life and I'm a believer in everything I've experienced. So if I were in the suburbs for 34 years, I would see things differently, I am sure; but I haven't been in the suburbs for 34 years. And what I resent is that the archbishop consults about the future of the city with people who live in the suburbs, and not with people living in the city." (Fr. Jerry Singer)

Strategic, yet sacramental: "I believe there should be an Urban Parish Office that works with all of us to make the Church the Church of the People of God and helps the churches to give the message to minister to the people, to do everything a church should be in the city of Detroit. We need an office that specifically does that. We need leadership that not only acknowledges that, but shares the passion that's absent. And that's what we need. And that's why there seems to be this gap between what some of us believe and some of us hope, and the work we've been doing, and will continue to do, there's this gap between us and them. And the only way I can describe it is: yes, there is racism at the bottom of this whole thing; I believe it very firmly, a misuse of power and a benign neglect. But also there is a gap in degrees of passion. There's a whole different vision of what the Church should be, and again I'm talking just for the Church in the city. I think we've got different visions; so we're looking different ways. And because we're looking in different directions, we're not together. (Fr. Norm Thomas)

"I think that we have to get out of that mentality. Some things that the suburban folks do, for instance, one of the things they do is come to the soup kitchens, like St. Leo's or Manna Meal; and it reinforces every stereotype that they ever had. And, if we instead don't serve them, but sit down and talk to folks and see if you don't get a different idea then." (Sr. Cathey DeSantis)

"And let your life be touched. No one knows everything. And I believe that we can learn from each other, whether we're penniless, homeless, have a PhD and live in a mansion. Each one of us can give to someone else. And so, the biggest thing you can do is share your life." (Angela Thomas-Weldon)

"The Vatican Council made it so clear that what we have come to call now, 'preferential option for the poor,' that if you have to make a choice, your choice would be to stay where the poor are rather than move to where the more affluent area." (Bishop Tom Gumbleton)

"In the long run the people most in need will be the people the people that suffer from them closing the churches. I believe that the Church is supposed to represent the goodness of Jesus and the hope that Jesus provides. Without the churches being available, to those in need, there is no hope to provide for them." (Lovette Jackson)

"To place so much of your advice coming from that corporate model, we think leaves out the whole idea of what the Church, as we define the Church, as the People of God. The people have to be consulted; the people have to have a voice in the decision of what happens." (Rev. Norm Thomas)

"We're not a business; we're a Church. And we're called to serve. We have a moral responsibility to do just that." (Rev. Jerry Singer)

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