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## Shakeup ahead for Twin Cities Catholics

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The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis soon will undergo the largest reorganization in its history as it deals with tight budgets, fewer priests and shifting demographics.

Catholic parishes metrowide await details of the plan, which aims to restructure the archdiocese's churches and schools.

Recommendations could include merging, clustering or closing parishes. Also affected will be the archdiocese's schools. In addition, the plan aims to create efficiencies, like consolidating office work among clusters of parishes and looking for other ways to improve business practices.

The report, completed late last month, will be unveiled this fall if Archbishop John Nienstedt approves it. The changes are expected to begin after January 2011.

"It's a monumental effort and occasion," said Dennis McGrath, archdiocese spokesman. The archbishop "wants to make sure that he gets it absolutely right."

Similar restructuring efforts have taken place across the nation. Catholic archdioceses in Detroit, Buffalo, N.Y., and Chicago have reorganized their churches and schools, or their central offices, or both.

The Archdiocese of Detroit tackled both, said spokesman Ned McGrath. The two McGraths are not related.

As part of a five-year plan, Detroit's Catholic parishes and schools evaluated themselves and decided whether closures, clustering or mergers were needed. The central-services division eliminated 77 positions, and five newspaper jobs, through

a separate reorganization plan.

"It has saved money," he said.

In 2006, the Archdiocese of Chicago eliminated 40 administrative positions.

Nationally, limited funding and the shrinking ranks of priests have prompted the church to restructure.

The predicament also is hitting the Twin Cities, where the archdiocese serves some 650,000 Catholics across 12 counties. There are 217 parishes and more than 100 schools.

"I think people have understood the need for change," Dennis McGrath said.

The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis is monitoring 25 percent of its parishes because of serious debt and budget issues, according to the archdiocese.

Today, 182 priests are eligible to be pastors. That number is projected to decrease by 19 in 10 years.

Twenty percent of parish schools receive subsidies from the archdiocese.

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Also, many Catholic schools — where nuns once taught without pay — must pay for teachers because of the decline of women entering sisterhood, McGrath said.

Thousands of parishioners and church leaders participated in 150 meetings to give input on the potential changes facing churches and schools in the archdiocese.

They asked leaders to consider maintaining their parish's culture, reaching out to young people and continuing to support priests, the archdiocese said. Nonclergy members also want to be involved in potential mergers and closures of parishes, they stated.

Like their peers across the archdiocese, members of the once-thriving St. Mary's Catholic Church in downtown St. Paul are awaiting the results.

Debby Heymans, business director at St. Mary's, said congregation leaders attended some of the archdiocese meetings. They also met with their own parishioners after the 13-member task force finalized the plan in June.

"I have not gotten any feedback" from our parishioners, she said.

The 145-year-old parish is made up of mostly older members whose families have ties to the church. Many had grandparents who married there, Heymans said.

At its prime, church membership grew to 6,000 people in 1916.

Membership began shrinking in the early 1970s

after Interstate 94 divided the church's neighborhood, now the eastern side of downtown St. Paul.

Today, membership numbers about 270.

Like all of the archdiocese's churches, St. Mary's will learn the specifics of the plan Oct. 16-17, McGrath said. The task force — priests, nuns and nonclergy members selected by Nienstedt — began working on the report in February 2009.

The archdiocese has taken steps in recent years to address some of problems, having closed six schools the past two years. There are 10 fewer parishes than just a decade ago, and already about 25 percent of parishes are in service-sharing cluster relationships.

But there are also thriving parishes and schools in the outer suburbs.

Although the plan will represent the archdiocese's largest-ever restructuring effort, McGrath said it has undergone at least three other major reorganizations, all wrought by membership growth, in the mid-1800s, early 1900s and late 1940s.

An influx of immigrants prompted those efforts, he said.

Today, the archdiocese's parishes serve Hispanic, Hmong, African and Vietnamese immigrants. Also, its churches face shifting populations. Parishioners who used to live in the city and inner-ring suburbs are now in outlying suburbs.

All Saints Catholic Church in Lakeville saw membership double 10 years ago after it built a new

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church, said Jackie Sauber, parish administrator.

Today, the 133-year-old parish has about 11,000 members.

"I have heard that the population isn't always where the churches are right now," Sauber said. She believes the restructuring plan will address that.

**Maricella Miranda can be reached at 651-228-5421.**

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