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Trials and tribulation

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The experience of Catholics as they restructure the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis should prove useful beyond the boundaries of faith and parish.

As Maricella Miranda reported on our front page Friday, the archdiocese "soon will undergo the largest reorganization in its history as it deals with tight budgets, fewer priests and shifting demographics."

Recommendations from a new report "could include merging, clustering or closing parishes," Miranda wrote. "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."

Church is not state, nor Catholicism democracy, but the wrenching choices involved in adapting to reality in one large organization can be instructive for others. In the years to come, there's going to be a lot of adapting to reality among all our institutions, private and public and in-between.

It's happening at different paces in different places. The pace of change in St. Paul schools, for example, is accelerating. Some nonprofits are capitulating to leaner times by consolidating — and perhaps concluding they might have done so long ago. A multi-billion-dollar state budget deficit will keep the pressure on government at every level in Minnesota, regardless of who wins this fall's elections. At the federal level, deep deficits, huge debt and

tremendous increases in the entitlement

spending (a result of the retirement of baby boomers as well as new entitlements) will require more adjustment than we've so far been willing to admit.

This is all challenging. But a common lesson in restructurings is this: What looked like the end of the world from a distance, wasn't.

We wish the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis well in its planning for reorganization, which spokesman Dennis McGrath described as "a monumental effort and occasion." Some of what happens is bound to hurt. In these days of monumental restructurings, public and private alike, there's plenty of tribulation to share. Might as well share the lessons, too.

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