

New Orleans plans for fewer Catholic churches: A massive restructuring plan

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Archbishop Alfred Hughes of New Orleans is asking his Catholic flock, including those far from the flood zone, to prepare for a reorganization of Catholic life befitting a church deeply damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

In a letter read from nearly 140 pulpits in early April, Hughes said “all sectors will share in some of the sacrifices involved” in a massive restructuring plan. One new parish will be created, some will be merged, some closed and others reduced to mission status, he said.

The number of parishes to be closed, the archdiocese has announced, is 33, while 108 will remain.

The archdiocese must chart a course through a post-Katrina landscape, with 20 percent of the region’s 491,000 Catholics still absent, some neighborhoods thinly populated and \$120 million in uninsured flood losses to churches, schools and other buildings.

A number of churches are open in name only, their damaged church and school buildings shuttered and their parishioners attending neighboring parishes.

Officials said the church now must deal with a steadily dwindling corps of priests. “We will move forward together with fewer priests, fewer churches, fewer schools, but, hopefully, with a greater evangelizing spirit,” Hughes said. *-Religion News Service*