

Realigning, Closing, Amalgamating

Parishes, churches, and schools are as mortal as the humans who built them: they flourish, they decline, they die. To help us cope, the process described by Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross on the stages of confronting *Death and Dying* offers some wisdom.

Denial. “Oh, no, not mine! This may be happening with the 22 schools in Brooklyn or the 6 schools in the counties, but not here. They’re just trying to scare us. The warnings and admonitions are idle threats.” Sorry, but it **is** going to happen.

Anger. “How dare they do this to us! Don’t they know that my grandfather was one of the founding members, and that my family donated the stained glass window? Who are they to take away something that is so dear to us?” Sorry, but **they** are not some hostile forces, but rather we are the victims of shifting populations and declining membership.

Bargaining. “OK, OK, this is what we’ll do. We’ll run a couple of bake sales, stage a big bazaar, and organize a super dance. This will raise enough funds for another year, and then we’ll hope for the best.” Sorry, another year means greater decline in membership, consumption of valuable funds, and postponement of effective planning.

Grieving. This should have been our first reaction. It recognizes the goodness of what we had, faces the inevitability of its demise, and allows us to relive and cherish the fond memories that have become part of our lives. Mourning, not maligning, is the proper response. When a terminally ill patient dies, it does no good to blame the doctor or the hospital. Therefore, administrators do well to involve the people in the process of termination, thereby alleviating the shock and aiding the grieving dynamic.

Acceptance. We get on with our ecclesial lives. We do not let the past be emotional baggage we have to lug around, but a pedestal upon which to build the future. Therefore, to this list I add

Memorializing. We honor the memory of our ancestors by asserting our solidarity with the Archdiocese, and by cooperating with alacrity and generosity in establishing churches and schools where they are needed now and in strengthening and reinvigorating those that are still viable.

Finally, focus on the essentials.
*The when, where, and how
of education and worship will change,
but the who and the what remain the same:
Jesus the Lord and His Kingdom.*

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