

# DIOCESE

FROM A1

## Church closings illogical for some

But in a few scenarios, he rewrote the script — often with little explanation. To some, a process expected to be painful has also become a mystery. Incredulity swirls with panic as many Catholics realize, quite suddenly, what stands to be lost.

"As St. Ignatius goes, the neighborhood goes, everyone says that," said Anne Serina, a longtime member of the church that stands cathedral-like at the busy intersection of West Boulevard and Lorain Avenue. "St. Ignatius has such an important mission and such an important location. It's visible. Everyone looks up to this church."

Members of St. Ignatius are not the only Catholics in dismay upon learning that their churches are closing. The faithful at St. Colman Church had been told they handily survived a review process that deemed them an essential neighbor on the near West Side.

Many in Lakewood thought that St. James Church, a handsome and historic landmark on the suburb's west side, would survive in a cluster with smaller Catholic parishes.

At St. Adalbert, the last Catholic church in a largely black neighborhood of Cleveland's East Side, parishioners expected to learn they would merge with another parish, as their cluster committee recommended. Instead, the bishop decreed their multigenerational church must close.

"It was gut-wrenching news," said George Gamble, a parishioner and a graduate of St. Adalbert School, where he now teaches. "We are the only Catholic church left in Fairfax."

Lennon will speak only in general about his decisions and has declined to go into detail about specific churches.

He did say that some cluster committee reports came to him with outdated information, or that some committees did not follow his directives. And sometimes the bishop has to make the tough decisions, Lennon has said more than once.



GUSCHAN | THE PLAIN DEALER

## St. Adalbert

2347 East 83rd St.  
Cleveland

- Established as a Bohemian parish in 1883
- Present church built between 1911-1912
- Congregation: 220 parishioners

But bishops are not infallible. Lennon's tenure here has been relatively brief: less than three years. Some civic leaders say some of his decisions seem to overlook the key role a particular church plays in a neighborhood or in the region.

St. Ignatius, a church that has an illuminated steeple that can be seen for miles, is cited as one of the most diverse congregations in the eight-county diocese and strong enough, supporters say, to be a model multicultural parish.

While achieving a modest budget surplus, St. Ignatius supports a popular school and fields an array of social services and youth athletic leagues.

Its cluster committee recommended the diocese close nearby SS. Philip and James Church and merge that parish with St. Ignatius.

But the committee's report also indicated challenges that would unnerve a diocese concerned with the bottom line. St. Ignatius parish, like the central West Side neighborhood it anchors, is noticeably poorer and less populated than a few years ago.

Meanwhile, the stone church needs major repairs, including a new roof, expected to cost more than \$1 million.

And the parish is \$1.8 million behind on its tax to the diocese,

called an assessment, according to the church's financial statements.

In his letter to the parish explaining his decision, Lennon indicates he believes the debt burden is too great to overcome.

St. Ignatius supporters prayerfully disagreed at a candlelight vigil Thursday night. They said they could raise the money for a new roof and more.

"Our ancestors found a way to build this beautiful edifice during the Depression," parishioner Michael Hoag told the faithful. "We must find in our hearts a way to save it."

In a recent letter to the bishop, Cleveland City Council members Jay Westbrook and Dona Brady argued that the closing of St. Ignatius would leave a Catholic void in the central West Side, a 10-square mile swath of city devoid of a Catholic church.

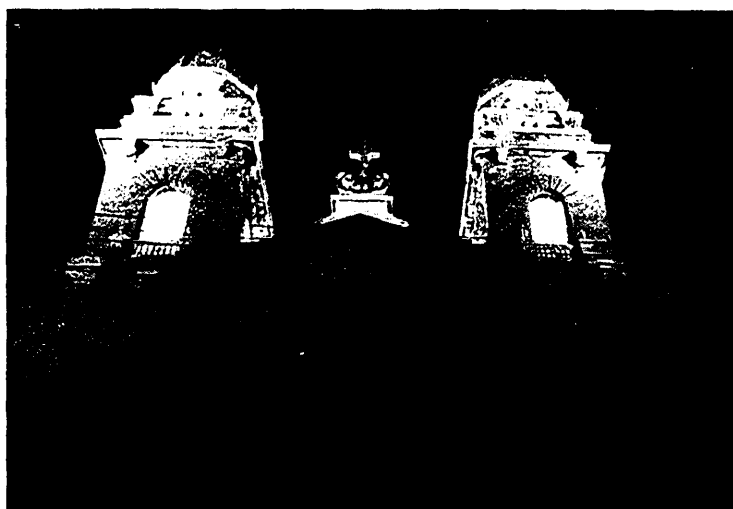
They urged the bishop to reconsider.

"We're really fighting for the life of a church and for the future of a community," said Westbrook, a non-Catholic.

"And you look to the church to be a beacon of hope, not a punch in the nose."

Much of the surprise results from the thoroughness of the decision-making process, which participants describe as intense, humbling and brutal.

Before deciding to close his-



C.H. PETECOPELAND | THE PLAIN DEALER

## St. Colman

2027 West 65th St.  
Cleveland

- Established as an Irish parish in 1880
- Present church built between 1914-1918
- Congregation: 1,300 parishioners

toric St. Stephen Church and keep open St. Colman, a cluster committee representing five neighboring parishes on the near West Side met for 16 months.

The members examined budgets and goals and demographic trends. They studied ministries and facilities and capital expenses. They even counted parking spaces. Their directive from the bishop was to close two of the cluster's five churches.

The committee agreed unanimously that La Sagrada Familia stay open, as it served a growing Hispanic congregation, and that Our Lady of Mount Carmel, renowned for its school, also survive. That left three parishes and room for one.

In a secret ballot, St. Colman garnered 14 votes of support from the committee of 25. St. Procop won nine votes and St. Stephen only four.

Somberly, and nearly unanimously, the cluster committee recommended to the bishop that St. Procop and St. Stephen should close.

So the atmosphere was ripe for shock when, at Saturday Mass on March 14, St. Colman parishioners learned there had been a reversal.

The bishop decreed that St. Colman would close and its congregation merge with St. Stephen, which would remain open.

"He ignored the cluster committee," said an astonished Rita Gaertner, president of the St. Colman parish council.

"Sixteen months of meetings. All that work. We don't want to be bitter. But we can't understand. Where is the logic?"

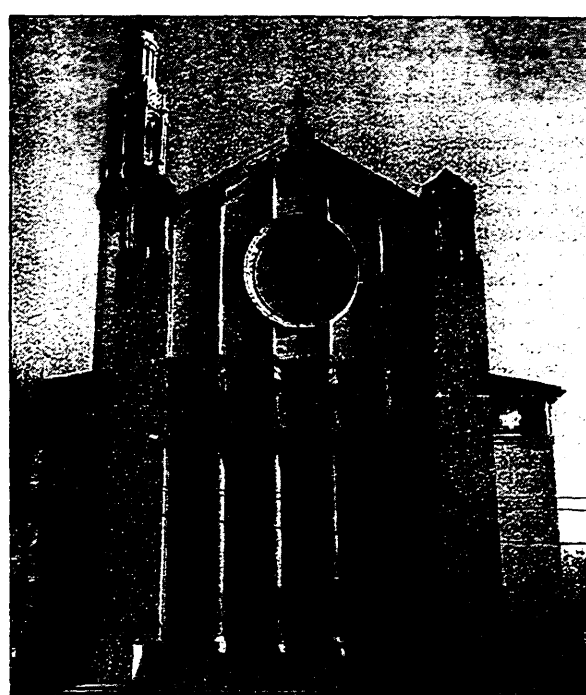
Finances might have played a role. St. Stephen, a German nationality parish, is solidly in the black, according to the report of the cluster committee. St. Colman, renowned for its social service programs, has run a small deficit the last four fiscal years, including a \$28,000 deficit in 2008.

The Rev. Bob Begin said much of those shortfalls were based on anticipated capital improvement costs, which, he said, were dramatically reduced by volunteer work from labor unions and contractors.

"Last year, we cut our deficit in half," Begin said. "And we're actually going to finish this year in the black."

But he also said that showing the diocese a budget surplus is not a priority at St. Colman.

"We spend as much as we can on the poor," Begin said. "We don't want to just save money."



JOHN KUNTZ | THE PLAIN DEALER

## St. Ignatius of Antioch

10205 Lorain Ave., Cleveland

- Established as a multinationality parish in 1902
- Present church built between 1929-1930
- Congregation: 1,000 households



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## St. James

17514 Detroit Ave., Lakewood

- Parish established in 1908
- Present church built in 1925
- Congregation: 1,500 parishioners

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