

Two-Page FAX

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St. John Berchmans/St. Juliana Parish in Detroit to Close

Cardinal Adam Maida, archbishop of Detroit, has announced that St. John Berchmans/St. Juliana Parish in Detroit will close. The exact date for canonical suppression (closure) of the parish, located at the corner of Chalmers and Longview, a few blocks north of I-94, has not yet been determined, but it will be no later than June 30, 2004.

Churchgoers were informed of the decision to close the parish at the 10 a.m. Mass on Sunday, May 23. In a letter to parishioners, Cardinal Maida recalled that Bishop John Quinn, auxiliary bishop for the Central Region, and Father David Preuss, OFM, the parish administrator, held a “town meeting” on March 30 seeking parishioner input regarding the possibility of closing the parish.

In addition, the cardinal indicated he had “sought the wisdom” of his priest consultors (a group which advises him on administrative and financial issues) and the Presbyteral Council (a group which represents the priests of the archdiocese and assists him). Both of these groups recommended the closure of the parish.

The pastors of the Detroit/Grosse Pointe Vicariate also discussed the parish status last month and concluded the only alternative at this point was to close the parish. The matter was also presented to the Detroit/Grosse Pointe Vicariate Pastoral Council. They agreed that if such a closure were to occur, they would stand ready to welcome and serve the community of St. John Berchmans/St. Juliana.

In the letter, Cardinal Maida referenced a proposal drafted by some parish leaders and forwarded by Fr. Preuss in April. The cardinal noted the proposal had been reviewed in detail with various representatives from archdiocesan offices and members of the parish. It was also evaluated by the Parish Support Services Review Committee.

“The unanimous consensus of the committee was that the proposal, even with subsequent modifications, did not adequately address the serious and chronic problems facing the parish,” said Cardinal Maida.

St. John Berchmans (4863 Lakeview) was founded in 1923 and St. Juliana was founded in 1932. The parishes merged in 1989 and the combined parish has been operating out of the St. Juliana site. Cardinal Maida cited a number of factors that were considered in the process that resulted in the recommendation for closure:

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The recent consultative process was part of ongoing discussions about the future of the parish in recent years. The two parishes merged in the hopes that a combined parish would stabilize and enhance the parish community in the midst of a declining neighborhood population. The parish leadership proposal acknowledged that despite these hopes, the parish has been in “survival mode” and “on the threshold of uncertainty since the early 1990’s.”

The most recent analysis of parish membership shows that of the 63 registered households, only 17 are within the parish boundaries, while 22 families live elsewhere in the vicariate and another 24 household do not even live in the vicariate. There have been only a few baptisms and funerals in recent years, and no weddings since the year 2000.

Financially, the parish is \$765,000 in debt to the archdiocese. Despite this shortfall, the archdiocese has made substantial efforts to support the parish. Over the past six years, the total subsidy from the archdiocese to the parish, factoring in various grants, accumulated debt, and uncharged interest comes to almost \$2 million.

The buildings and parish plant at the St. John Berchmans/St. Julian site need extensive attention and repair, yet a further financial liability. “An analysis of various proposed budgets for the next fiscal year leads to the inescapable conclusion that there are simply not enough resources to operate and maintain the parish,” the cardinal states in the letter.

The pastoral needs of the parishioners can be easily met at one or another of the nearby parishes. The neighboring pastors and entire Detroit/Grosse Pointe Vicariate have indicated they are prepared to work with the parish community and embrace its members, while at the same time maintaining a commitment of outreach to the entire community located within the parish boundaries. In the letter, the cardinal indicates that the various ministry potentials outlined in the parish leadership proposal could proceed, even upon the closure of the church building.

“...Assessing the prospect of closing a parish is not an easy task. Each parish has its own unique history and community,” Cardinal Maida writes in the letter. “I know your parish means a great deal to you. At the same time, with prayer and discernment, we are called to be responsible stewards of our resources, both human and financial.

“...Be assured there will still be a strong Catholic presence on the eastside of Detroit. It is my hope and prayer that your efforts in the past few months to promote the vitality of St. John Berchmans/St. Juliana Parish will not be diminished, but channeled into a new parish configuration.

“St. John Berchmans and St. Juliana Parish have each made an extraordinary contribution to the Church of Detroit throughout their histories,” Cardinal Maida adds. “In a particular way, I want to acknowledge with gratitude the commitment of the Servite community to these parishes.

“While there is always difficulty during times of transition, this should be a time for us to rejoice in all that God has accomplished at St. John Berchmans/St. Juliana Parish over the years. With hope and trust in God’s providence, let us now move forward with renewed enthusiasm in service to the People of God in the Archdiocese of Detroit,” the cardinal concludes.