

Reorganize church

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To the editor:

As Pope Benedict XVI's inaugural visit to the U.S. nears, diocese after diocese is convulsing in upon itself with massive closings and downsizing. For example, the Diocese of Camden, N.J., is cutting the number of parishes to 66 from 124. Bishop Galante observed: Mass attendance below 24 percent is "appalling," and that the assets and liabilities of the closed parishes belong to the parishes and will stay at the local level; they do not belong to the diocese.

The practice of chasing people within the U.S. from urban to suburban neighborhoods and building churches along the way may have had merit in ancient times, but it has proved too simplistic and ineffective. It is a stubborn fact that the current governance structure of Catholic parishes is not working.

Lay people as volunteer "payers and advisers" is unjust. It's time for change. To place all civil law authority in the hands of the pastor-priest is unjust and unfair to pastor-priests. It's time for change.

For those of us who have proposed appropriate and authentic governance change, personal attacks are the response. Those attacks reflect fear and status quo-ism of the worst kind. It's time for change.

The saintly Connecticut priest, Father Michael J. McGivney, founder of the Knights of Columbus, knew 125 years ago that it is the proper role of the laity to be responsible for the temporal affairs of the work of the church. Today, the K of C fraternity has 1.7 million members, \$14 billion in assets, and is an AAA-rated life insurance company.

We need courageous priests and lay people like the Father McGivney. Can you imagine if each parish was governed like the K of C (except that it would include women in governance)? Until that day comes, convulsion and personal attacks will continue.

Tom Gallagher