

7 Catholic churches will close in south city

BY TIM O'NEIL
Of the Post-Dispatch

The St. Louis Archdiocese has begun a major redrawing of parish lines in the southern half of St. Louis that will close seven churches outright and redefine 10 others for special or occasional use.

Archbishop Raymond Burke announced the changes in a detailed column he wrote for Friday's St. Louis Review, the archdiocesan weekly newspaper. Changes will begin this summer and are scheduled for completion next year.

The plan is a patchwork of mergers, closings and other changes that will affect all but six parishes on the south side, even though there is no liturgical future for only seven of the 35 Catholic churches in the South St. Louis Deanery, which includes downtown.

An example is St. Francis de Sales, southwest of downtown and known as the "cathedral of the south side" because of its 300-foot spire. It will lose its status as a geographical parish but become permanent home to Latin Masses.

Burke's final plan makes some changes in proposals that have been hot topics among parishioners since the fall. Friday's big news is his assignment of St. Agatha's, next to Anheuser-Busch Cos. Inc., as the parish for Polish Catholics — a move that will be permanent without a resolution in the lengthy fight over the control of the St. Stanislaus church northwest of downtown, said archdiocesan spokesman Jamie Allman.

Special roles, chapels

The plan preserves five other churches by giving them similar specialty roles and will keep three alive as "chapels" without assigned pastors or regular Masses. One future chapel is St. John Nepomuk just south of downtown, which was founded in 1854 as the first Czech parish in the United States.

"The archbishop is convinced of the hopes for a revival of the city that will some day restore these churches as full replenished parishes," Allman said Friday. "Take St. Francis de Sales. There was no way he was going to close such a beautiful and historic church."

Allman said Burke hoped that a permanent Latin-Mass congregation there can begin making the \$2 million in repairs that the landmark church needs.



PHOTOS BY J.B. FORBES / POST-DISPATCH

Volunteers work Friday at Holy Family Church in St. Louis for the weekly fish fry during Lent. They cook over 200 pounds of fish on an average night. From left are Traci Butler, Bob Woods, Dave Stevens (in cap looking up), Gus Mantia (in white apron) and Jerry Crowe.

At Holy Family: "I cried all night"

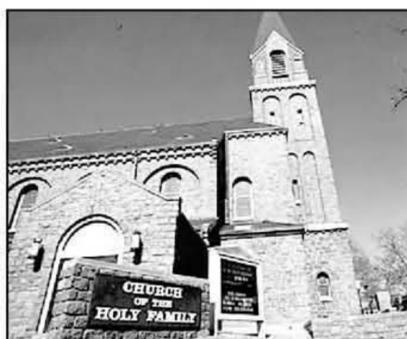
BY GREG JONSSON
Of the Post-Dispatch

Yard signs dotting the neighborhood surrounding Church of the Holy Family point the hungry to the Friday fish fry, where a packed gym of parishioners ate a Lenten meal and tried to digest the news that their parish will soon close.

Most were hesitant to point fingers or place blame, though some grumbled about Archbishop Raymond Burke. Others said this was all set in motion long before he came to St. Louis.

They said they don't understand why their parish was targeted for closing and others were spared. Holy Family, at 4125 Humphrey Street in the Tower Grove South neighborhood, is debt-free, they say, and is the heart of the community.

"I can't believe that they're pick-



Holy Family Catholic Church is at 4125 Humphrey Street, south of Tower Grove Park.

ing this parish to close," said Mike Lunsford, 49, whose been a member of the parish for just three years, a short time at this church. "It's such a close-knit community."

Fifth-grader Timmy Johns, 11, sat at a table eating pizza with friends Friday night. He may not be attending the same school with these friends next year.

The plan also will close four parish grade schools at the end of this school year. The archdiocese hopes that most of the 600 students at those schools will move to the remaining 13 grade schools, which now serve 3,500 children.

The plan puts into motion the second of three archdiocesan studies of regions in the Missouri por-

"I think it's hard for them," said Kathy Johns, his mother. "They don't know where their friends are going. It was a big shock."

The announcement was hard on the large number of older members of the parish, too.

"I cried all night last night," said Terri Huber, 79. "I did. I can come out my front door and fall down and be at church. Now I have to find somewhere to drive to."

Many of the older parishioners say they can't or won't drive. Now, they can walk to church. But some aren't sure how or if they'll make it to St. John the Baptist, 4200 Delor Street, where Holy Family parishioners are supposed to go under the Archdiocese plan.

"We all just walk to church," said Ruth Bangert, 81. "We really are like a family up here. My whole life is here. We don't know how we'll get together when it's gone. It just breaks our hearts."

tion of the metropolitan area that have lost many of their Catholic residents to progressively newer suburbs since World War II. On Feb. 11, Burke announced mergers

in north St. Louis County north of Interstate 270 that will reduce the number of operating churches to 11 from 25. Still under way is a review of parishes in north St. Louis, the number of which has fallen greatly in the postwar years.

On Friday, Burke said the archdiocese will close permanently the churches and parishes of Holy Family, Holy Innocents, Immaculate Conception/St. Henry, Resurrection of Our Lord, St. Hedwig, St. Aloysius Gonzaga and St. Boniface. They will merge into neighboring parishes.

Upset parishioners

Even though most parishioners suspected what was coming, Friday's news hit hard. "It's as though your mother is dying and a loving aunt is willing to take you in," said Phyllis Bilger, Resurrection's parish council president. "We still don't want it to happen. Of course we can go to the next parish over, but this is a loss of city living — the ability to walk to church, to have everything close by."

At Holy Family, which survived the first cut last fall only to get the first hint of bad news before Christmas, the mood is harsher. The parish is south of Tower Grove Park.

"Everybody here feels like we got the shaft," said Cecilia Dooley, who organized protests after tentative plans changed. "It's unfair to pit one parish against another. We don't have a debt, we love this parish. It makes no sense."

Allman said Burke reviewed Holy Family's fate one more time this week after he met with Mayor Francis Slay, who pleaded to spare more parishes. "But the people who crunched the numbers said (Holy Family) just can't sustain itself," Allman said.

Holy Family and Resurrection will be merged into St. John the Baptist, near the Bevo Mill.

Mayor Francis Slay, who is Catholic, expressed "mixed feelings" about the overall plan and said he was particularly disappointed by the fate of Holy Family.

"It could have been worse," said Slay. "The archbishop obviously listened. I know this isn't unique to St. Louis. But these parishes have been anchors for their neighborhoods."

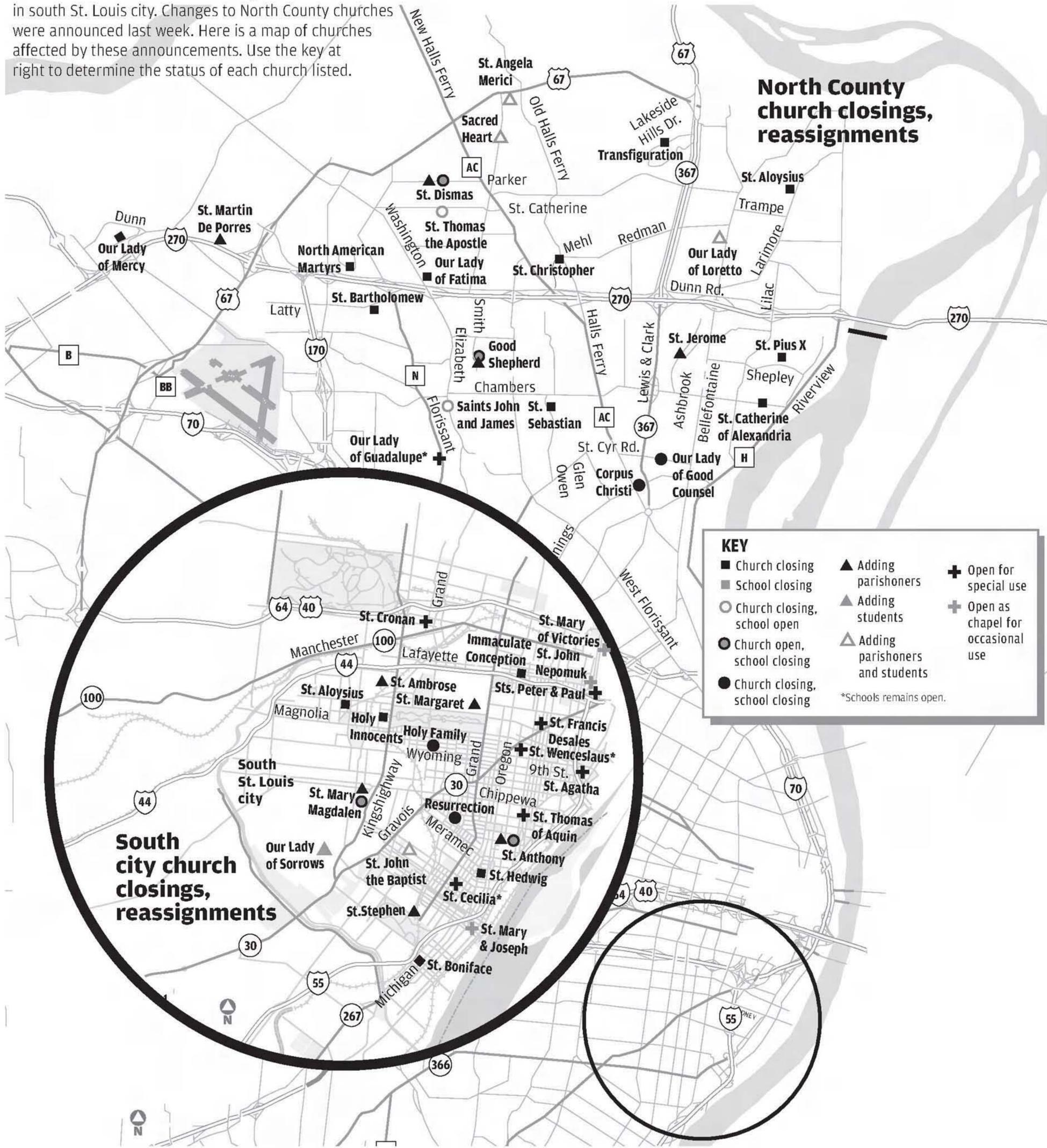
Seven churches, including St. Agatha and St. Francis de Sales, no longer will have traditional geographical boundaries but will serve special purposes.

The plan formalizes what several of them had already become.

St. Cronan, for example, will be

Changes in the archdiocese

On Friday, the St. Louis Catholic Archdiocese announced a series of church and school closings and consolidations in south St. Louis city. Changes to North County churches were announced last week. Here is a map of churches affected by these announcements. Use the key at right to determine the status of each church listed.



SOURCE: Archdiocese of St. Louis; Post-Dispatch research by Tim O'Neill | Post-Dispatch

defined by its social-justice ministry. St. Cecilia will become the Spanish-Mass church, St. Thomas of Aquin will keep its role as the Vietnamese church, Sts. Peter and Paul in Soulard will retain its homeless center and youth-music programs, and St. Wenceslaus becomes home to the order of the Missionaries of the Holy Family.

St. Mary of Victories, just south of the Arch grounds, and Sts. Mary and Joseph in the Carondelet area,

will become the other two part-time chapels.

Parishes that will be preserved as they are, or become enlarged to include closed parishes nearby, are St. John the Apostle and Evangelist downtown; St. Vincent de Paul south of downtown; St. Joseph (Croatian) in Soulard; St. Margaret of Scotland in the Shaw neighborhood; St. Pius V; St. Anthony of Padua; St. John the Baptist; St. Ambrose on the Hill; St.

James the Greater in Dogtown; and St. Stephen Protomartyr, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Joan of Arc, St. Raphael, St. Gabriel and Epiphany in far south and southwest St. Louis.

The Old Cathedral downtown also will be preserved.

Schools to be closed

Schools to be closed are at Holy Family, St. Mary Magdalen, Res-

urrection and St. Anthony.

Terry Edelman, a Catholic schools' spokeswoman, said the school office is holding job fairs for the 100 teachers who will lose their jobs because of closings in North County and south St. Louis.

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