

**Informal Statistical Study (Part II):
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston
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Greetings in Christ!

In February 2004 we released Part I of this three-part, informal statistical study. In Part I we focused on the state of parishes in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston *before* the 2004 closings. In this report (Part II) we focus statistically on the parish closings themselves. In Part III (Fall 2004) we will focus on the effects of the closures on the people of the Archdiocese and, indirectly, on Catholics in other dioceses preparing for the "Boston model" of parish reconfiguration.

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A. Executive Summary

The 2004 "Parish Reconfiguration" in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston (hereafter RCAB) is unprecedented in the American Church for four reasons:

- *Scope of closures:* No diocese has resorted to closing 22% of its parishes at one time.
- *Method of closures:* Choosing the method of suppression over merger is extreme. Dioceses have two options when closing a parish.

- Merger -- the assets, permanent records, staff, and debts of two or more parishes are combined into a single, larger parish.
- Suppression -- the assets and debts of a suppressed parish are transferred to the diocese. Because suppression is so disruptive to a community, it is not recommended in Canon Law. Suppression is a last resort for failing parishes, not the preferred method or default method for reconfiguring a mixture of failing and healthy parishes. Bishop Lennon, speaking for Archbishop O'Malley, emphasizes that the method of suppression was a conscious decision.

The Archbishop has deliberately chosen the canonical procedure of suppression rather than that of merger. There are many reasons for this choice. As you probably already know, when there is a merger of two or more parishes the assets and liabilities of the parishes belong to the new parish that is formed from the merger, whereas when there is a suppression, the assets and liabilities of the parish that is suppressed or closed belong to the Archdiocese of Boston. The archbishop has chosen this approach [suppression] so that many issues may be addressed. First, let me say again none of the assets from suppressed parishes will be used to fund clergy sexual abuse cases. . . . The proceeds from the assets of suppressed parishes will provide monies due employees of suppressed parishes for past work and separation assistance, for vendors who are owed monies from suppressed parishes, for amounts for past employee benefits and parish insurances due from suppressed parishes, for run out costs of health insurance for separated employees, for covering unfunded pension liability for employees of suppressed parishes, for repayment of revolving loans from suppressed parishes, for expenses involved in the closure of suppressed parishes, for assistance to parishes that are unable to fund needed church repairs, for expenses for providing current support services to parishes, for establishing an endowment fund for parish support for those parishes that cannot be self-supporting, for recapitalizing the Revolving Loan Fund, and I am sure there are other needs that I have not yet thought of which will benefit from the assets of suppressed parishes. ([RCAB](#))

- *Process:* RCAB publicly considered no alternatives to suppressing 22% of its parishes and scheduled only six months for the entire selection process. From the beginning, Archbishop O'Malley emphasized the importance of proceeding quickly. He notes, "Reconfiguration must be completed as swiftly as possible. . . . We cannot afford to drag the process on over too lengthy a period. We need you to make this process a priority now" ([RCAB](#)).
- *Rationale:* RCAB provided descriptions of the general problems facing the Archdiocese. It did not provide specifics on the scope of closures -- why 50 parishes? 60 parishes? 80 parishes? Nor did it provide parishioners in suppressed parishes with any detailed information in support of the closure decision. Nor did it provide and blueprint or roadmap for what the Archdiocese would look like *after* this round of closures.

What did they decide?

The Archdiocese has made all its decisions. Here's what they decided and when.

Date	Regions Affected	Scope of decisions
Dec 16, 2003		Parish Reconfiguration Initiative announced .

March 2003		Parish clusters submit recommendations for closure and the Archdiocese announces that decisions on parish closings will be announced in late May.
May 25	All but Lowell/Lawrence	68 suppressions and two mergers announced .
July	Lowell	4 suppressions communicated to pastors, no announcement from RCAB.
August	Lowell/Lawrence	5 suppressions and 2 mergers communicated to pastors and announced by the Archdiocese.

What motivated their decisions?

As you might imagine, there were many diocesan decision makers involved in the decision-making process. To the extent that deliberations were not public, we can only evaluate the results of their decisions statistically in order to reverse engineer their selection criteria and priorities. As best we can infer from the data, the Archdiocese had four priorities:

1. *Convert real estate equity (parish properties) into capital and centralize control of that capital.* Of the many options open to the Archdiocese, only near-universal suppression of parishes would generate significant cash in a relatively short period of time. Because it was their first and most important decision, we rank it as their highest priority. Recent estimates by the [Boston Globe](#) put the value of the first 68 suppressions at \$450,000,000 or more. Assuming that the other suppressions would net another \$30,000,000 (at least), RCAB stands to clear nearly a 1/2 billion dollars. Suppressed church properties in some of the more affluent Massachusetts towns have [real estate values](#) estimated at \$3-11,000,00. Archbishop O'Malley mentioned the need for capital in his announcements of the reconfiguration process and the first round of closings. He said, "Through recapitalizing and reallocating resources, more funds can be used for increasing social service programs and strengthening remaining parishes and schools and enhancing evangelization" (RCAB). Perhaps on a related note, The *Boston Pilot* recently reported that the Vatican was running in the red (deficit spending) for the third year in a row. It too needs money.
2. *Maintain a Catholic parish in every Massachusetts town.* 137 towns in the Archdiocese have one or more Catholic churches. 73 of these towns (53%) have only one Catholic church. Of these 73 towns, only 4 (5.5%) were suppressed . . . and the buildings of those 4 suppressed parishes have been designated as worship sites for weekends. 69 of the 73 one-parish towns, therefore, had their sole parish preserved. If strong attendance and high sacramental indexes were high-priority criteria, then many of these 69 parishes in one-parish towns should have been candidates for suppression. Because the Archdiocese prioritized location over pastoral statistics, we conclude that maintaining at least one parish in every town was a high priority.
3. *Reinforce clerical administration of parishes.* The Archdiocese of Boston has not, historically, embraced the notion of parishes administered by ordained permanent deacons or unordained laypeople. Rather than considering alternative forms of lay-administered parishes common in other parts of US, the Archdiocese has embarked on a shrink-to-fit policy, i.e. the number of parishes in the Archdiocese will be reduced (shrunk) to fit the dwindling number of available pastors. This commitment to a 1:1 ratio of ordained

priests (pastors) to parishes highlights the Archdiocese's commitment to maintaining a 100% clerical administration.

4. *Normalize parish infrastructure*: Because RCAB parishes before the 2004 suppressions were responsible for supporting only as many services and staff people as they could individually afford, there was variation between parishes in parish services and levels of staffing. Two parishes situated within a mile of one another could differ greatly in the programs, both local and Archdiocesan, that they could support. The 2004 suppressions create two opportunities for the Archdiocese. First, the suppression of 77 parishes creates a financial windfall for the Archdiocese. It will have the cash to create new programs and to staff new programs wherever it wants. If the Archdiocese wants to create vigorous seminary recruitment programs, it can fund as many youth ministers as it needs. Second, the suppression of 77 parishes creates a surplus of trained, competent lay staff people. If surviving parishes are interested in staffing up or in replacing people currently on their payrolls, they have a pool of talent to choose from. RCAB will be able to use its newfound monetary and staffing superfunds to equalize the number of services and staff people assigned to parishes. As the degree of consistency in parish infrastructure increases, the predictability and efficiency of parish programs should increase proportionately ... at least that's the theory. We will examine this statistically in Part III of our report this fall.

Let's set the stage and do the numbers.

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B. Background

Why do this study?

Two reasons:

1. *Administrative accountability*: Catholic dioceses are not for-profit corporations with executives and boards of directors bound by law to deliver detailed and understandable reports to shareholders. Catholic dioceses are not-for-profit corporations responsible for balancing the requirements of their apostolic mission with the administrative requirements of running multi-billion-dollar organizations. Having this dual mission --- spiritual and administrative -- does not exempt dioceses from being accountable. Spiritually, the Archdiocese needs to create public forums occasionally at which it asks the faithful, "How are we doing?" Administratively, the Archdiocese needs to be as transparent in its business dealings and decision-making as is required to maintain the trust and confidence of the faithful. If the Archdiocese of Boston considered itself accountable to the faithful of the Archdiocese for its dual spiritual-administrative decisions to suppress parishes, it would be making every effort to educate the faithful on how the diocese works and how all relevant financial and staffing information had been brought to the table before, during, and after the decisions. If the Archdiocese is unwilling to be more transparent and accountable, then it needs to understand that there are large numbers of the faithful who expect greater transparency and accountability in such minor matters as \$450,000,000 real estate transactions. If the Archdiocese lacks experience in producing credible financial plans, it needs to know that there are many experienced business people in the Archdiocese who would be willing to assist. We did this informal statistical study because we hold the leaders of the Archdiocese of Boston accountable for their decisions -- whether they choose to acknowledge that responsibility or not.

2. *Lay involvement*: One of many sobering truths that has come out of the clergy sex abuse scandal and hierarchical cover-up scandal is that we, the laity, must bear some indirect responsibility for what happened. Generations of Boston lay Catholics tolerated and subsidized Church institutions supportive of unChristian and criminal behaviors. If we, the laity, continue to tolerate these behaviors in the Church that we love, shame on us. The path toward demanding and obtaining greater involvement in the administrative workings of our Church begins with education --- understanding how the Archdiocese actually works and how its workings can be improved. We did this study in order to expand the amount of relevant information available to laypeople who wish to get educated in order to get involved. Information is power.

We hope that these studies contribute to these goals.

Why call this study informal?

We call these studies informal for two reasons:

1. We are liturgical musicians and lectors and eucharistic ministers, not professional social scientists or statisticians. When it appeared that no one else would be diving into this area, we thought it better to give it our best shot than to wait for a more formal study to happen.
2. We lack public data in key areas that would enable us to build as comprehensive a picture of Archdiocesan parishes as we all would like. We offer what we have.

What can we study statistically?

We are limited in our analysis to available public information.

Information we have ...	Information we do not have ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish locations and reporting structures • Parish staff people (at least those in public directories) • Parish sacramental indexes • Town populations, racial mix, and mean household income • Ordination dates and estimated ages for ordained priests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish financial data (debt, solvency, assets, contributions) • Sunday attendance data for all parishes • Parish real estate assessments • Ethnic data for parishes and vicariates • Open bids on parish properties • Estimated repair or maintenance costs for parish structures • Parish demographics (age, race, gender, historical trends) • Parish volunteers • Demographics for the percentage of Catholics in a town

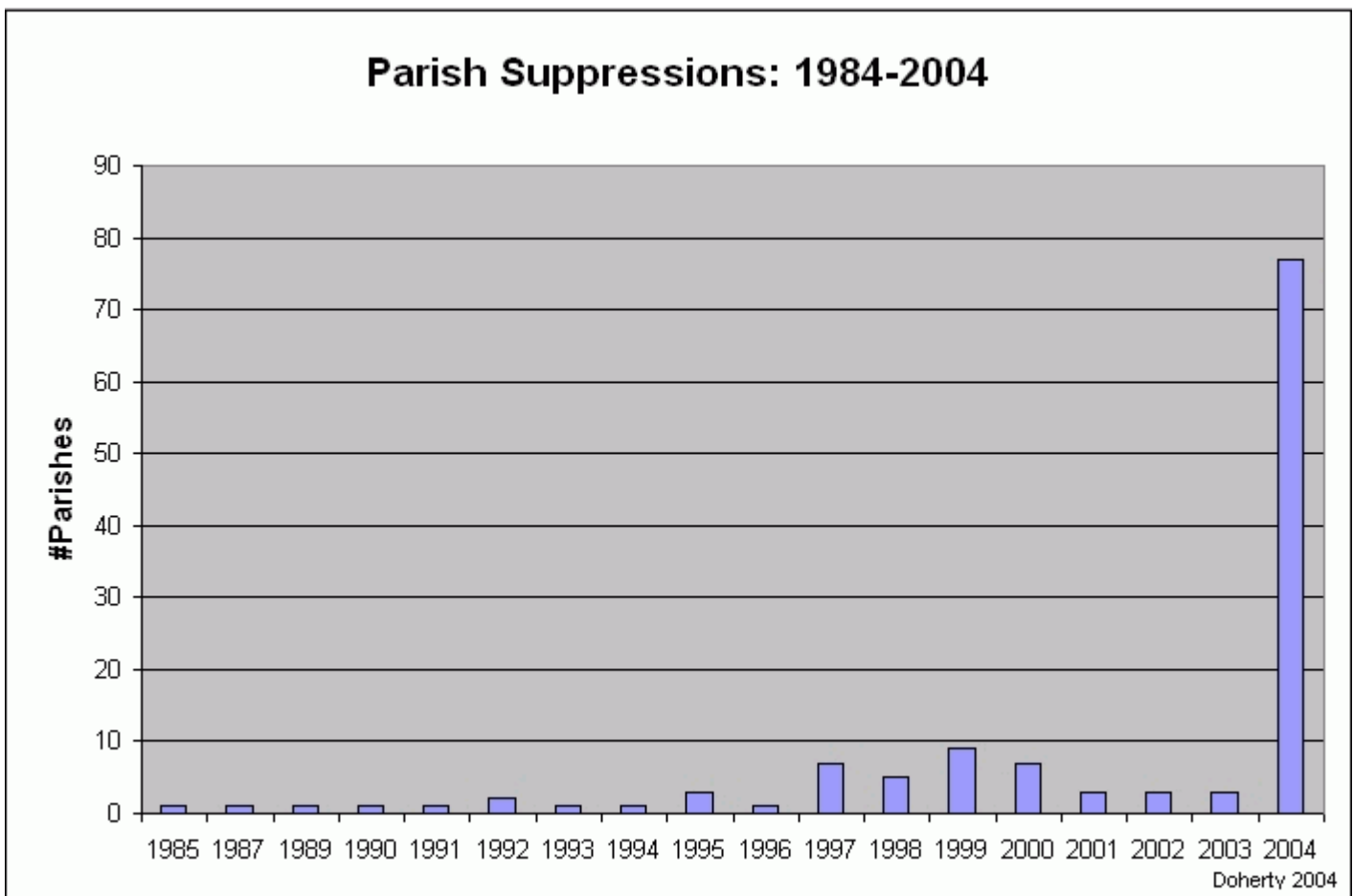
Although individual parishes have recently sent us a significant amount of data, we cannot use it without equivalent information from all other parishes in the Archdiocese.

C. Parish Suppressions and the RCAB Organization

In this section, we examine how the 2004 parish suppressions correlate to various levels of the RCAB organization, i.e. diocese, region, vicariate, and cluster.

Parish Suppressions Historically

The 2004 parish suppressions are not "normal" adjustments consistent with the way the Archdiocese has suppressed or merged parishes over the last 20 years ([RCAB](#)). As the following chart demonstrates, there were more parish suppressions in 2004 than in the previous 19 years.



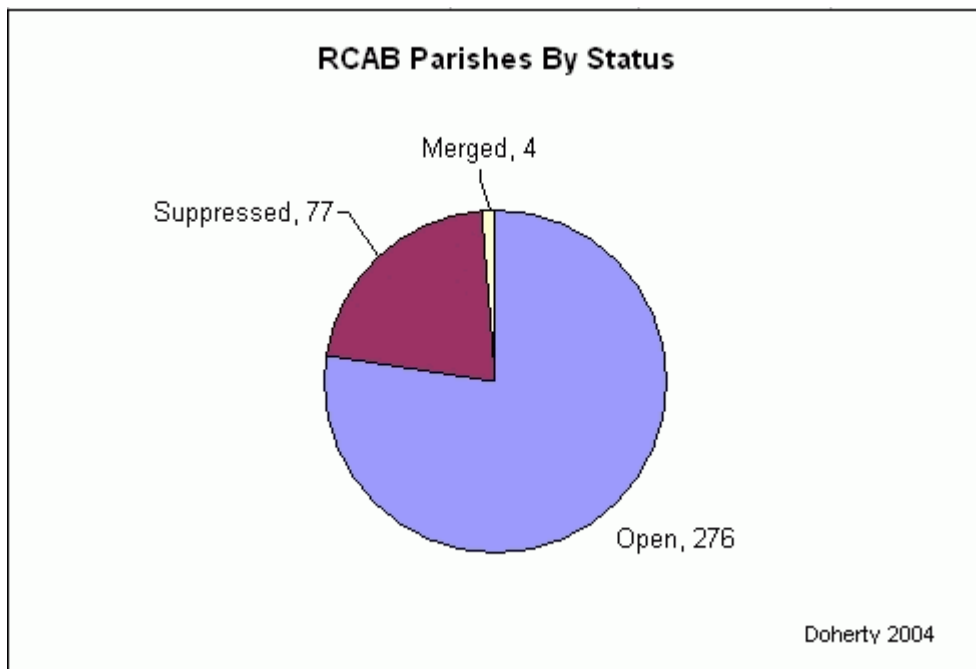
In his March 11, 2000 address to the Convocation of Parishes, Cardinal Law set expectations that parish reconfiguration was all but over.

It would be my hope now that we could put the issue of parish reconfiguration, with the exception of those few instances where planning is in progress, behind us. From the beginning, it has been my attempt to situate reconfiguration within the wider context of planning for mission. By and large, this has been well understood. From time to time, however, there have been situations in which nervousness about the possibility of reconfiguration has paralyzed efforts at planning for mission. Now that we have dealt with the question of reconfiguration for the foreseeable future, it is time for all of us to be focused on the far more significant task of planning for mission. [RCAB]

What changed between March 2000 and December 2003 to require the suppression of 22% of the parishes in the Archdiocese?

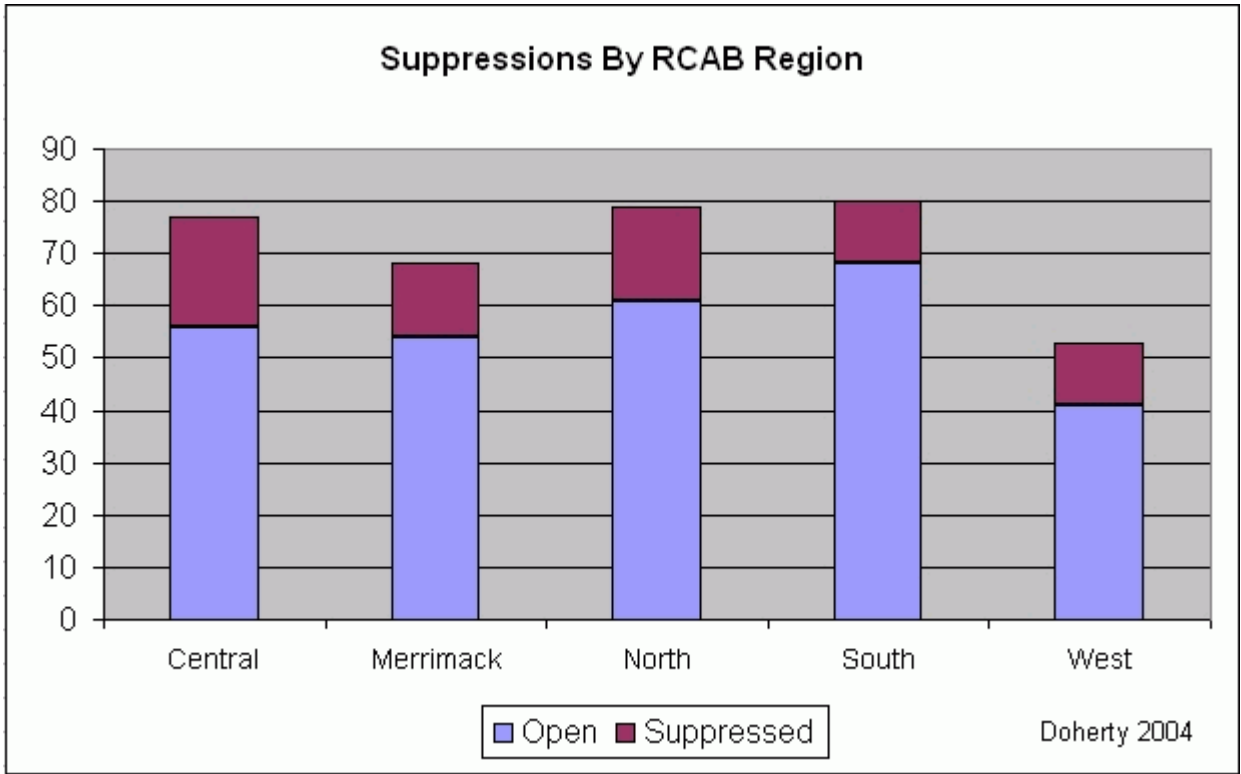
Parish Suppressions and the Archdiocese

77 (22%) of the 357 RCAB parishes were suppressed and 4 were merged. The Archdiocese promised to create several "new" parishes possibly on sites of suppressed parishes, but specific implementation plans for these "new" or "renamed" parishes are unclear as of this writing. In this study we choose to measure suppressed parishes because suppressions are a more accurate indicator of the impact that Parish Reconfiguration has had on the Catholic faith community in the Boston area.



Parish Suppressions and RCAB Regions

RCAB is organized into five geographical regions: Central, Merrimack, North, South, and West. Each RCAB region has its own auxiliary bishop. The 2004 parish suppressions are distributed as follows across these regions.



Although 22% of the parishes in RCAB have been suppressed, the Archdiocese has announced no plan to reduce the number of administrative regions or auxiliary bishops.

Parish Suppressions and RCAB Vicariates

Each RCAB region has 4 or 5 vicariates, each run by a vicar. Apart from the Merrimack Region vicariates of Chelmsford, and Haverhill, each RCAB vicariate had two or more parishes suppressed.

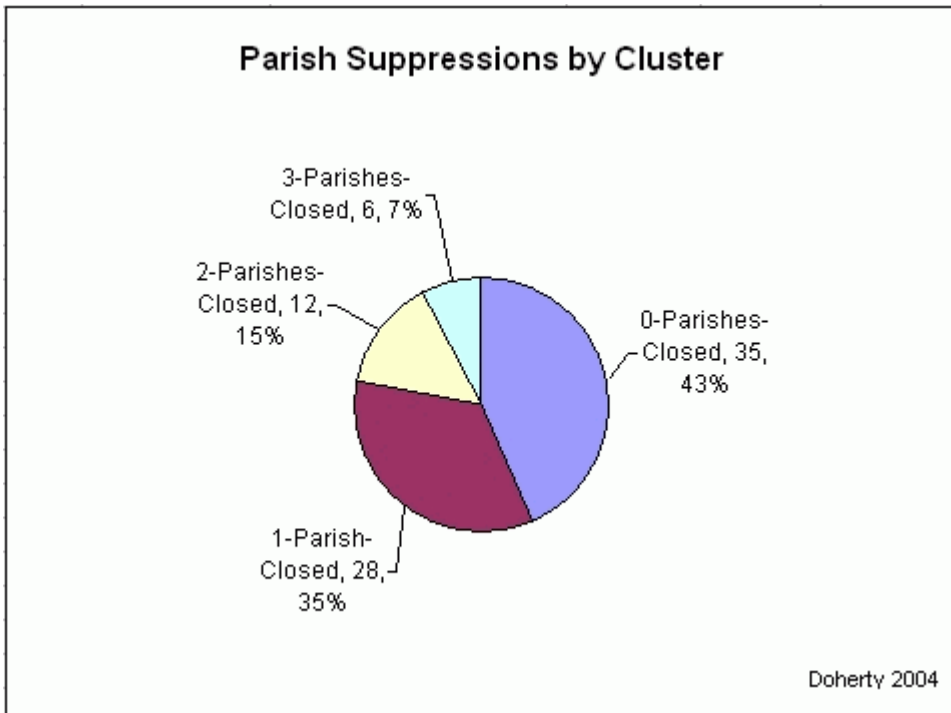
Parish Suppressions By Vicariate	Total	AvgSacrlIndex	#Suppressed	%Suppressed
Central: 1	20	138	7	35.0%
Central: 2	18	154	4	22.2%
Central: 3	19	133	6	31.6%
Central: 4	20	142	4	20.0%
Merrimack: Chelmsford	14	155	0	0.0%
Merrimack: Concord	12	112	5	41.7%
Merrimack: Haverhill	12	149	0	0.0%
Merrimack: Lawrence	12	189	3	25.0%
Merrimack: Lowell	18	173	6	33.3%
North: Gloucester	19	120	5	26.3%
North: Medford	19	168	6	31.6%
North: Salem	23	164	4	17.4%
North: Stoneham	18	210	3	16.7%
South: Brockton	17	160	2	11.8%
South: Norwood	16	181	2	12.5%
South: Plymouth	16	158	2	12.5%
South: Quincy	17	194	4	23.5%
South: Weymouth	14	206	2	14.3%
West: Framingham	14	158	2	14.3%
West: Marlboro	10	128	3	30.0%
West: Natick	11	116	2	18.2%
West: Newton	18	144	5	27.8%

Parish Suppressions by RCAB Cluster

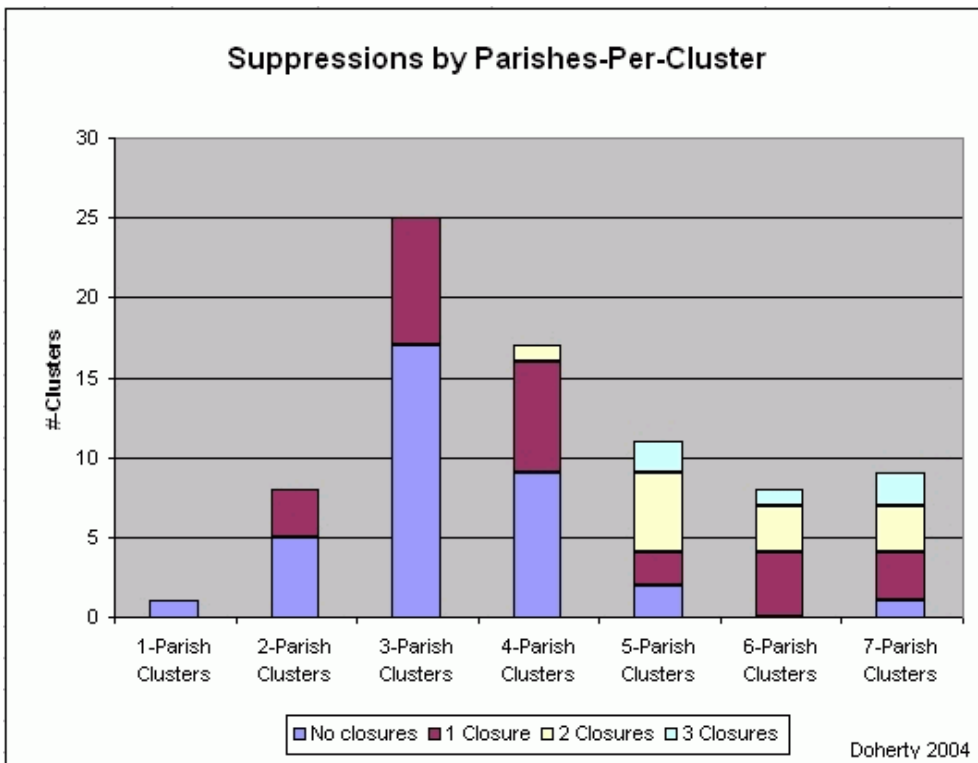
Each RCAB vicariate is comprised of 15 to 20 smaller groupings of parishes called clusters. Although the names of the 80 RCAB clusters and the names of their member parishes are common knowledge in those clusters, it is interesting to note that RCAB does not identify clusters on its web site or refer to them in any of its official organizational literature that we can find. We used a [survey](#) done by the *Boston Globe* as the foundation for our classification of parishes into their respective clusters. Clusters seem to be impermanent, *ad hoc* structures. The number of parishes in each cluster varies greatly, from one to thirteen. In the earliest stages of the reconfiguration process, each parish in each cluster was directed to send five people (a pastor and four other people) to Phase I Reconfiguration meetings. These groups of clergy and laypeople from the parishes in each cluster were then instructed to identify at least one parish in their cluster for closure. This set three expectations:

- Many, if not all, clusters would have one or more parishes suppressed.
- No parish in the Archdiocese was safe. There would be no cluster exempt from the requirement of designating at least one parish for possible closure.
- Clusters that refused to comply with RCAB guidelines for selecting parishes would have parishes selected for them by the next level in the hierarchy, the vicar in charge of their vicariate.

Contrary to the expectations set at the cluster level, 43% (35) of the 80 or so clusters in the Archdiocese experienced no suppression of parishes. 35% of the clusters experienced only one suppression.



In effect, 78% (63) of the 80 or so RCAB clusters were not affected or lost one parish. We question whether the Archdiocese was forthright in its early statements about minimizing pain and anxiety across the Archdiocese if more than 40% of the clusters participating in the life boating exercises experienced no closure. The process should have exempted clusters which were not probable contributors to the list of suppressions.



6 of the 16 2-parish clusters had one parish suppressed. Clusters with 3 or 4 parishes experienced a higher percentage of single-parish suppressions. Clusters with 5+ parishes experienced 1, 2, or 3 suppressions within their clusters.

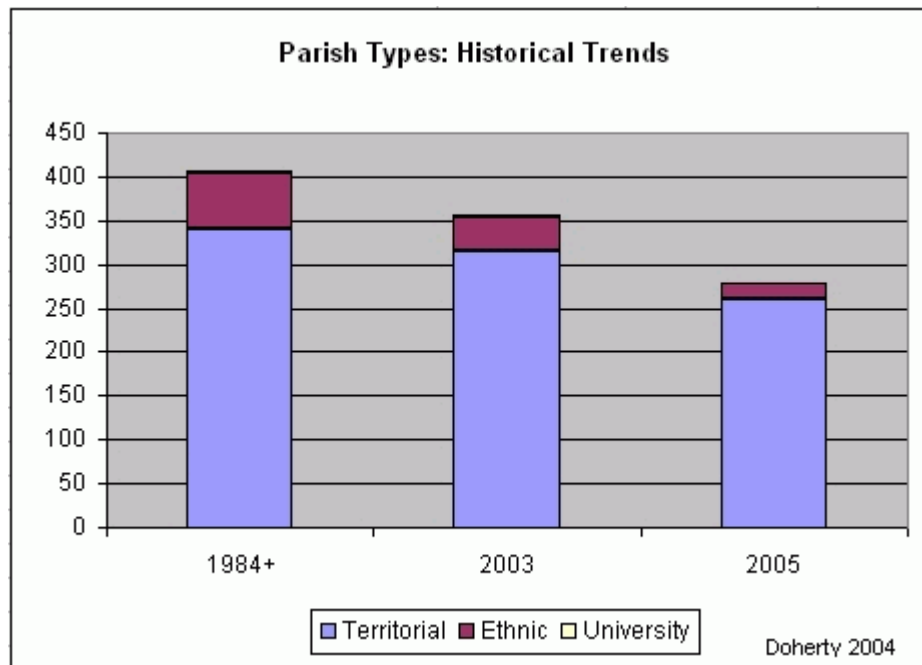
Parish Suppressions by Parish Type

There are three types of parishes in the Archdiocese:

- *Territorial parishes*: Serving Catholics in a specific geographical area
- *Ethnic parishes*: Serving ethnic groups regardless of geographical area
- *University parishes*: Serving college students

In 2004, RCAB continued the trend of suppressing ethnic and university parishes in favor of territorial parishes.

Territorial/Ethnic Parishes	Territorial	Ethnic	University
1984+	340	65	1
2003	316	39	1
2005	260	19	0



By suppressing ethnic or university parishes disproportionately, the Archdiocese has further reduced the overall diversity of culture and expression available to the faithful.

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D. Parish Suppressions and Massachusetts Communities

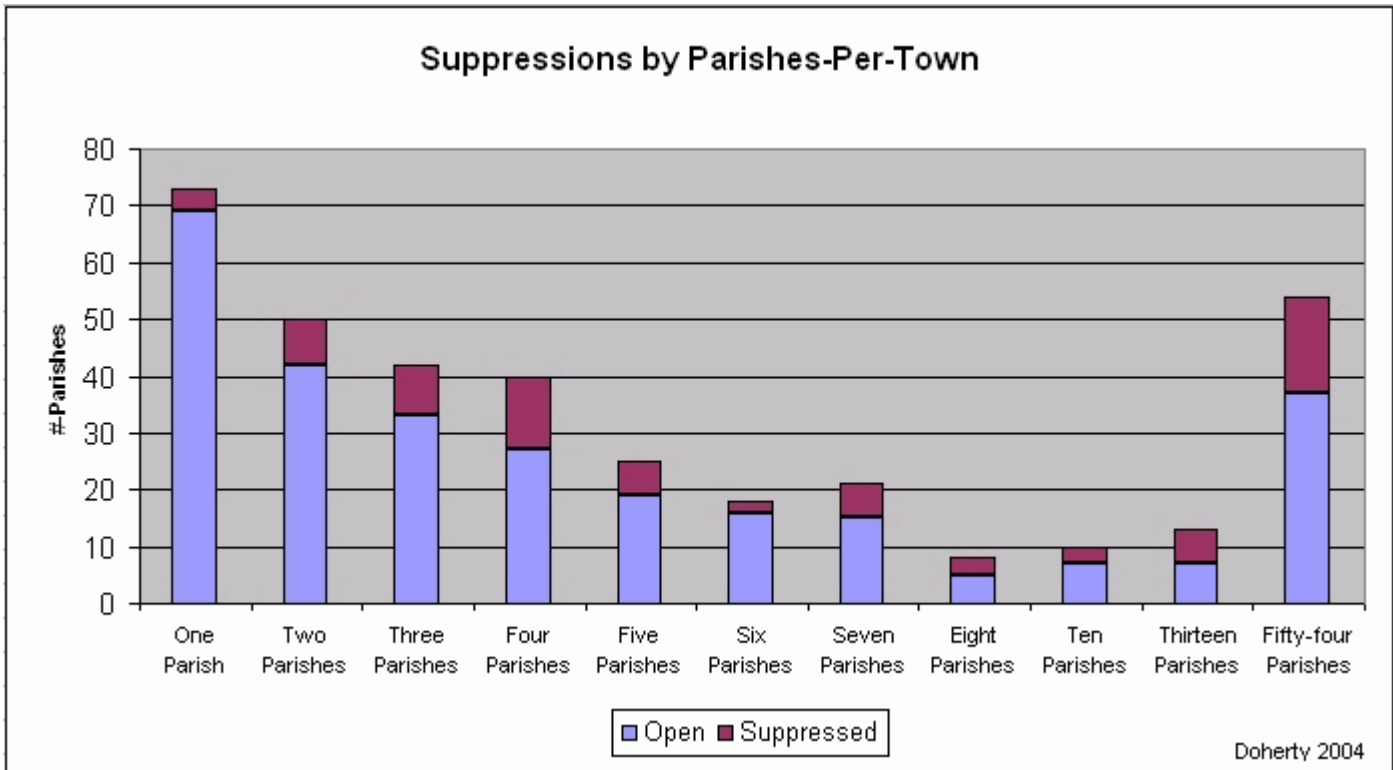
A parish is much more than its buildings and some dedicated staff people. It is a faith community living in a town and serving witness to that town. Parishes are the front lines in the apostolic mission of the Church; they bring Christ to immigrant towns and bedroom communities and fishing communities and inner cities. Diverse Catholic communities responding to the diverse needs of Massachusetts towns strengthen the Archdiocese. We analyze here the effects of the 2004 suppressions on that diversity of Catholic parish life.

Parish Suppressions and Massachusetts Towns

The most significant factor in determining whether a parish was a candidate for suppression was its status in its town. 69 of the 73 Massachusetts towns having only one Catholic parish were not affected by the 2004 suppressions. The 4 parishes suppressed in these one-parish communities will have their churches opened on weekends for worship. Maintaining at least one parish in every Massachusetts town seemed to be the highest-priority selection criteria.

Parishes Per Massachusetts Town	#Towns	#Parishes	#Suppressed	%Suppressed
One	73	73	4	5.5%
Two	25	50	8	16.0%
Three	14	42	9	21.4%
Four	10	40	13	32.5%
Five	5	25	6	24.0%
Six	3	18	2	11.1%
Seven	3	21	6	28.6%
Eight	1	8	3	37.5%
Ten	1	10	3	30.0%
Thirteen	1	13	6	46.2%
Fifty-four	1	54	17	31.5%

The Archdiocese suppressed parishes in towns where there was some perceived redundancy of services or access. The towns with the largest number of parishes -- Boston (54), Lowell (13), Cambridge (10), and Quincy (8) -- got hammered. The distance between parishes in these towns is not great, making access to an alternative parish feasible. Towns with 6 or 7 parishes were affected less while towns with four parishes, for some reason, were affected dramatically (32%).

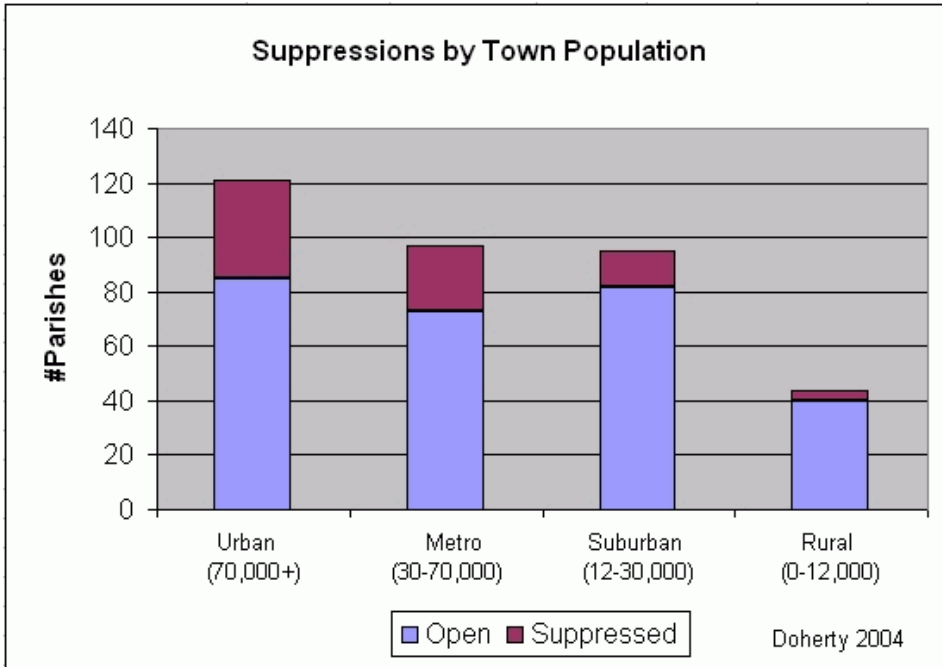


Parish Suppressions and Catholic Demographics

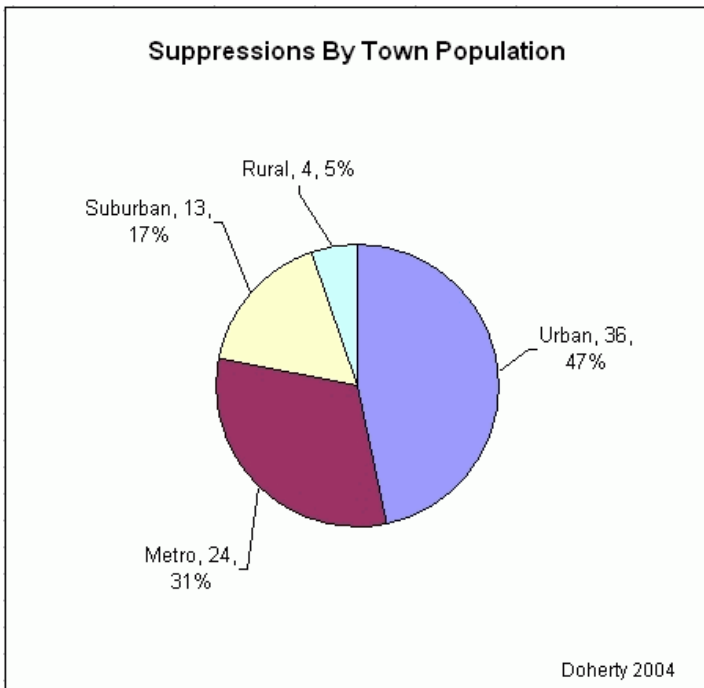
We can find no public information about the percentage of Catholics in particular Massachusetts towns. Although the Archdiocese cited changing Catholic demographics as one of the major reasons prompting its "reconfiguration" initiative, it has not released any demographic information either. We're all blocked without data.

Parish Suppressions and Town Populations

We examined whether the suppressions affected towns disproportionately on the basis of population density within that town. The more dense the population in a town, the less distance there is between parishes. The more urban the population, the more public transportation is available.



Based on 2000 US Census data on Massachusetts towns, it is clear that urban and metropolitan towns experienced a higher percentage of parish suppressions than suburban or rural towns. Given the low number of suppressions in rural Massachusetts communities (6%), we again question whether parishes in those towns should have been required to participate in the life boating exercises early in the reconfiguration process. Either the Archdiocese was not certain whether it would exempt rural towns or it was determined to have every parish participate in the game of Parish Survivors regardless of known exemptions.



Parishes and Mean Household Income Per Town

Without financial data on individual parishes, we cannot evaluate whether more affluent or less affluent parishes within a town or region were more likely to be suppressed. We do have 2000 US Census data on the mean household incomes for Massachusetts towns and we used that data to assess whether parishes in more affluent or less affluent towns were affected disproportionately.

Mean Household Income by Town	#Suppressed
Affluent (\$60K+)	7
Comfortable (\$40K-\$60K)	24
Moderate (\$30K-\$40K)	20
Low (< \$30K)	26

We observe no significant variance based on mean household income. Low-income towns were hit a bit more while towns with a comfortable income were hit a bit less. Income was not a major criteria for closure.

Parish Suppressions and Racial Diversity

Without detailed information about the racial makeup of individual parishes, we cannot assess whether race played a role in determining whether Parish A or Parish B closed in a particular vicariate. Parishioners from several suppressed parishes believe that race did play a role at the town or vicariate level, but this cannot be substantiated statistically with the data that we have.

Using 2000 US Census data about the racial makeup of Massachusetts towns, we see mixed results for those towns having more than 20% minority populations. The following table of towns is sorted by the percentage of white residents.

Town	Pop	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	%White	#Par	#Suppr	%Suppr
Lawrence	67542	24569	3516	1910	43019	36.4%	7	3	42.9%
Chelsea	32770	13424	2544	1647	16984	41.0%	3	0	0.0%
Boston	589141	291561	149202	44284	85089	49.5%	54	17	31.5%
Brockton	86966	54902	16811	2066	7552	63.1%	7	1	14.3%
Lynn	84731	55630	9394	5730	16383	65.7%	6	1	16.7%
Lowell	101046	66760	4423	17371	14734	66.1%	13	6	46.2%
Cambridge	96734	65425	12079	12036	7455	67.6%	10	3	30.0%
Malden	54389	39230	4592	7882	2696	72.1%	4	1	25.0%
Somerville	73721	56320	5035	4990	6786	76.4%	6	0	0.0%
Framingham	64647	50293	3409	3527	7265	77.8%	5	1	20.0%
Quincy	86472	68980	1947	13546	1835	79.8%	8	3	37.5%

Towns such as Boston, Lowell, Cambridge, and Quincy experienced a significantly higher percentage of suppressions whereas Brockton and Lynn had a lower percentage than the norm of 22%. Without demographic data on the percentage of Catholics in these communities with more than 20% minority populations, we cannot determine whether parish suppressions disproportionately affected minority Catholics. We may do some follow-up work in these towns if we can get reliable ethnic demographic data on particular voting districts.

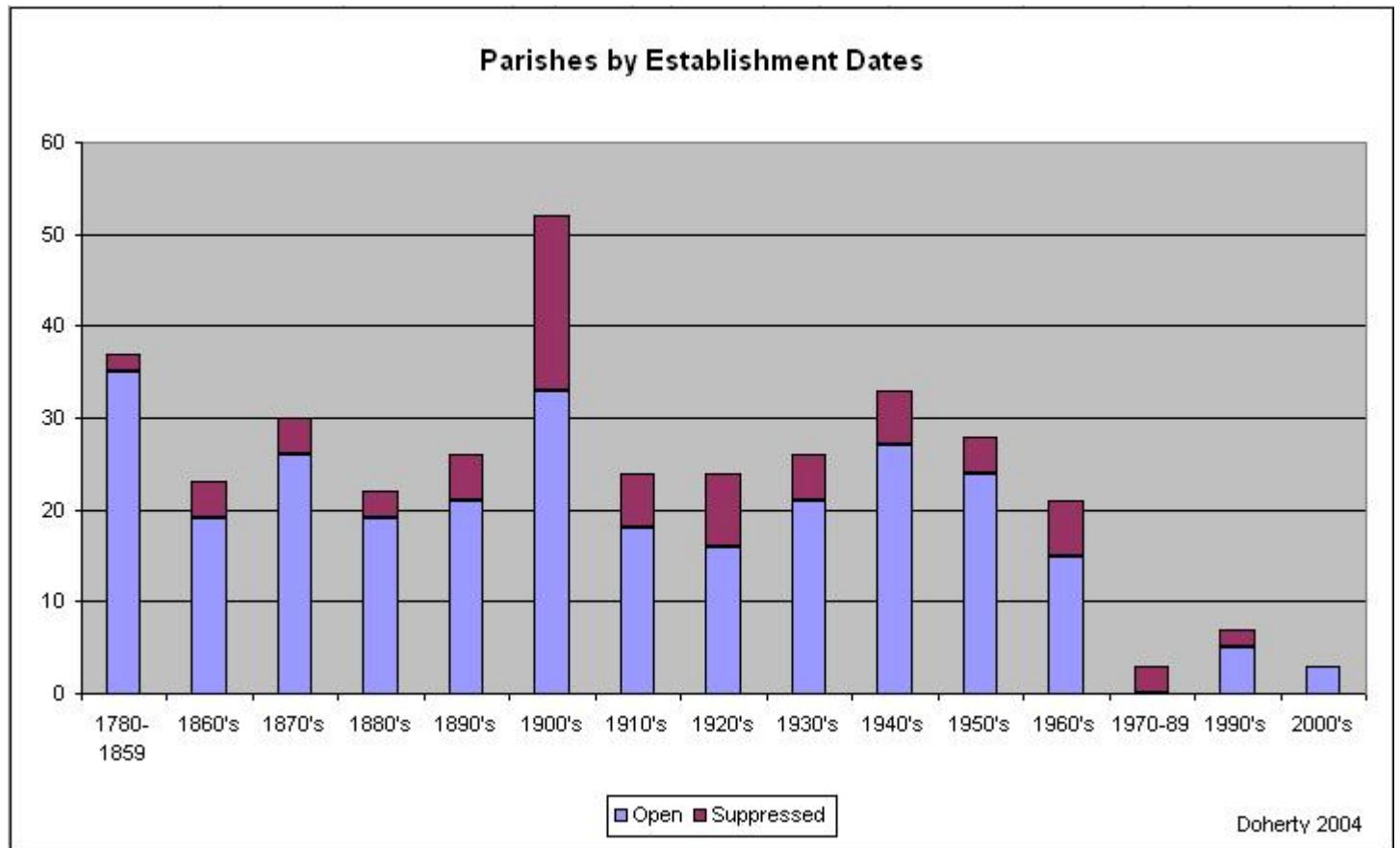
Parish Structures as Historical Assets

In addition to serving the needs of Catholic faith communities, many Catholic churches are also historically significant assets to their towns and to the state. Generations of immigrant Catholics made contributions from their low wages to build architecturally significant churches, testimonials to their commitment to an enduring faith and enduring church community. Any church structure more than 50 years old is considered a possible historical asset by the Massachusetts Historical Commission and cannot be demolished without being reviewed by one or more local historical commissions.

Archbishop O'Malley cited the widespread state of disrepair of many of the older churches in Boston as one of the reasons for closing churches in Boston and across the Archdiocese. This statement created expectations that older parishes facing potentially large repair and maintenance expenses might be more likely candidates for suppression than those more modern churches with modest maintenance expenses. Quite the opposite seems to have happened.

RCAB Parishes By Establishment	Total	Suppressed	%Suppressed
18th Century	1	0	0.0%
19th Century	135	18	13.3%
20th Century	218	59	27.1%
21st Century	3	0	0.0%

59 (76%) of the 77 suppressed parishes were established in the 20th Century. The oldest parish structures, those established in the 19th Century, were not suppressed proportionately.



As a consequence of *not* closing our 19th-Century churches (only 13.3% suppressed), nearly three times as many church structures built in the first half of the 20th Century were suppressed. We have to generalize a bit here. Given the option to close an older, larger church structure or a less large, 20th-Century structure, they those the latter three times more often. Curiously, we also found that the samll number of churches constructed in the 1970s and 1980s were all suppressed. This would also suggest that churches designed according to Vatican II guidelines for modern worship spaces were more likely to be suppressed than those constructed according to pre-Vatican II guidelines. Don't dispose of those altar rails stored in the church basement!

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E. Parish Suppressions and the Ordained Community

How has this round of closings affected the ordained priests and deacons in the Archdiocese?

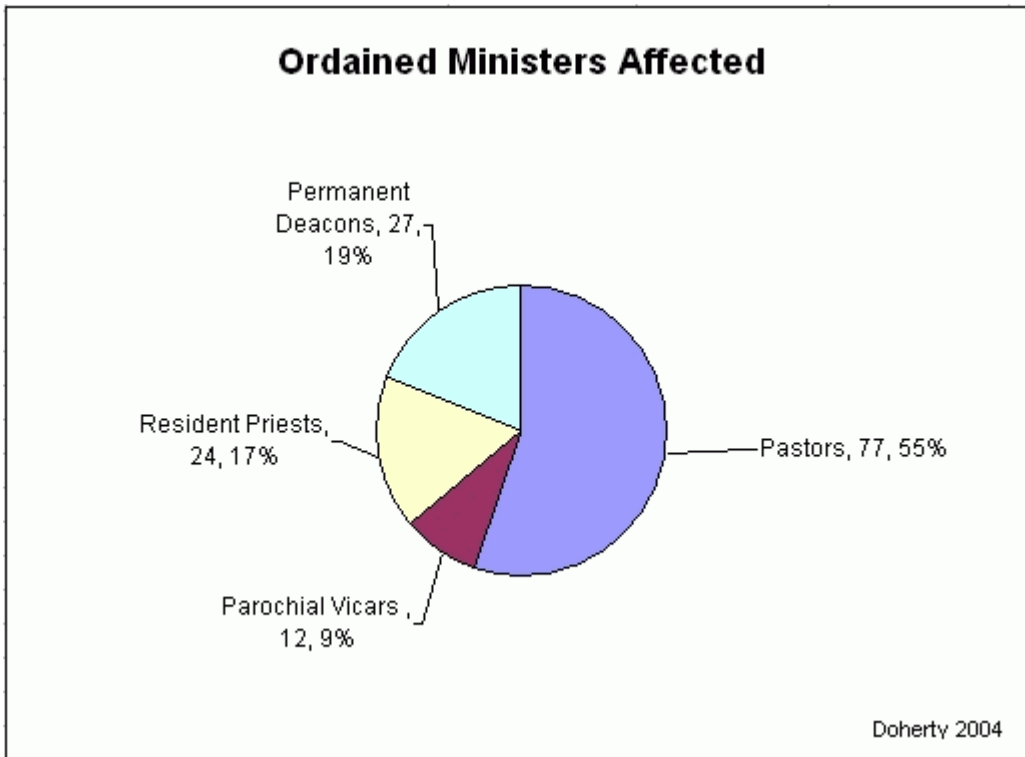
Parish Suppressions and Pastors

This round of parish suppressions disproportionately affected diocesan pastors. As you might expect, the number of parishes suppressed equals the number of pastors and priest-administrators. Suppress a parish -- displace a pastor for other duties or retirement.

Ordained Ministers	Unaffected	Affected	Total	%Suppr
Pastors	278	77	355	21.7%
Parochial Vicars	145	12	157	7.6%
Resident Priests	108	24	132	18.2%
Permanent Deacons	151	27	178	15.2%

Parish Suppressions and Parochial Vicars

Parochial vicars (a.k.a. parish curates) are a different matter. Of the 77 parishes suppressed in this round, only 10 parishes had parochial vicars assigned. Holy Rosary (Lawrence) and Sacred Heart (Lowell) each had two parochial vicars according to the 2004 directory.



What does this tell us? If 22% of the 355 pastor/administrators were affected, one might expect to see 22% of the 157 parochial vicars affected as well. We see three, non-exclusive, possible explanations for the disproportionately low number of parochial vicars affected:

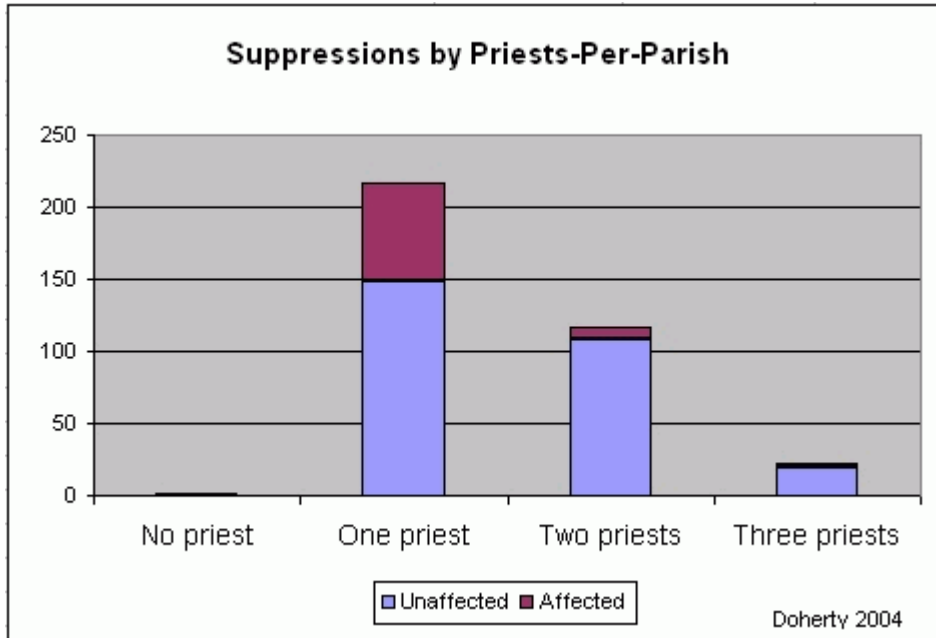
1. Suppressing a parish with a pastor and a parochial vicar would not necessarily free up two priests to replace all the retiring pastors in the next few years. Not all parochial vicars are ready or qualified or willing to become pastors.
2. The parishes large enough to warrant the assignment of a second priest (the parochial vicar) were not candidates for suppression. Size, or at least clerical staffing, mattered.
3. A certain amount of gerrymandering may have been happening for years leading up to the 2004 suppressions. Parishes perceived by the Archdiocese, for whatever reason, to be candidates for closure did not receive parochial vicars or had them reassigned to other parishes.

All three of these possibilities may have been relevant.

Parish Suppressions and Priests-per-Parish

Clerical staffing (numbers of pastors and parochial vicars assigned to parishes) did play a significant role in decision-making. This is only logical, because maintaining a 1:1 pastor:parish ratio was the second-biggest problem that the Archdiocese needed to address (money being biggest). When we look at the number of parochial priests assigned to parishes and how they fared in this round of suppressions, it becomes clear that the Archdiocese was six times more likely to suppress a parish with less clerical infrastructure (one priest/pastor) over a parish with more clerical infrastructure (two or more parish priests).

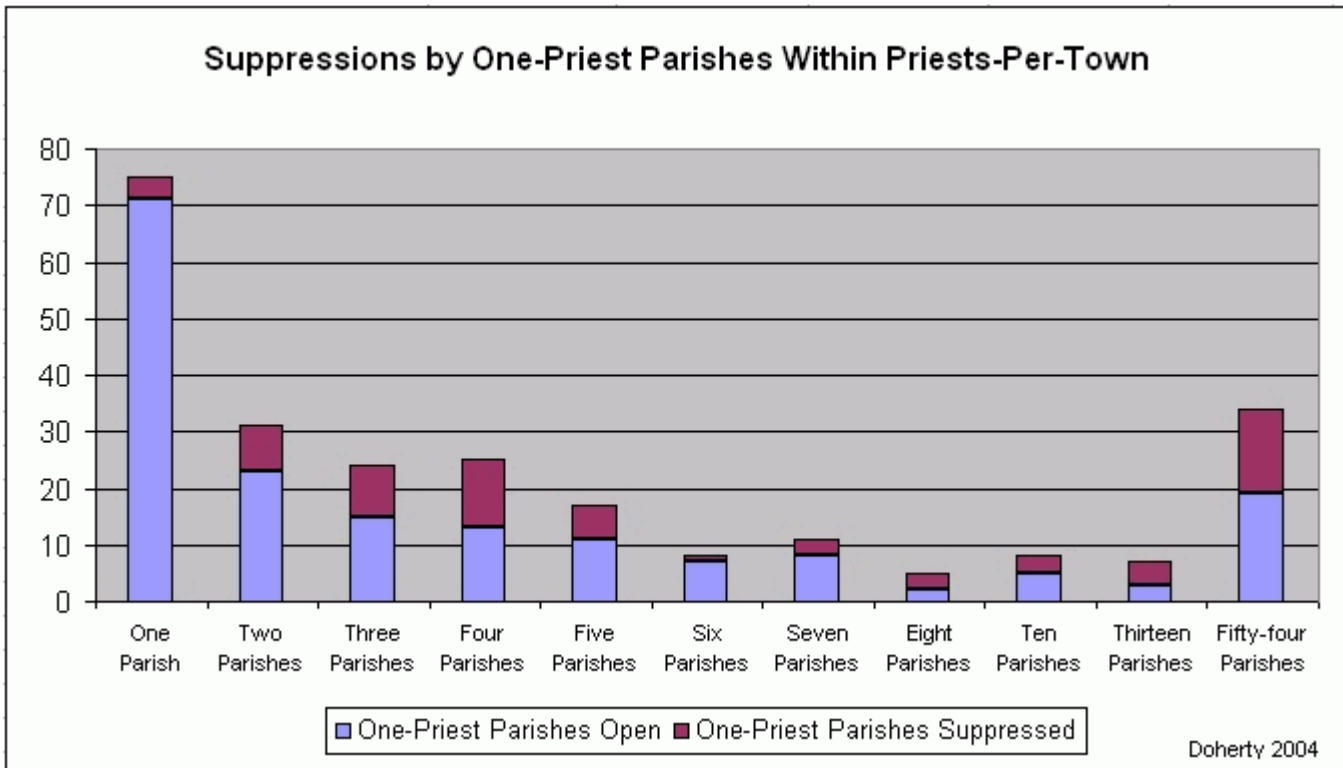
Parish-Priests-per-parish	Unaffected	Affected	%Affected
No priest	2	0	0.0%
One priest	149	67	45.0%
Two priests	109	8	7.3%
Three priests	20	2	10.0%



67 of the 77 suppressed parishes had only one parochial priest assigned (the pastor/administrator). The 117 parishes with 2 parish priests were not affected significantly (7%). Only 2 (10%) of the 22 parishes with three parochial priests were suppressed. We suspect that Archdiocese needed to close all these one-priest parishes in order to replace (in the next few years) all the aging pastors in multi-priest parishes untouched by the 2004 suppressions. The larger, older parishes with (generally) older pastors were preserved; the smaller parishes with one priest (the pastor) got hammered.

Parish Suppressions and Parishes-per-Town

When we correlate the selection criteria of closing one-priest parishes with the criteria of preserving a Catholic parish in each town, we see a significant trend.



Massachusetts towns with one Catholic parish and, therefore, one pastor were virtually untouched by this round of parish suppressions. One-priest parishes in towns with multiple parishes bore the brunt of the closings. This makes sense. As we'll see in the next section, the Archdiocese desperately needs experienced pastors. Given a choice between closing one-priest parishes in one-parish towns and closing one-priest parishes in multi-parish towns, the Archdiocese chose the latter.

Parish Suppressions and the Aging Presbyterate

This round of parish suppressions in the Boston Archdiocese needs to be viewed in the larger context of an aging presbyterate. Statistics on the state of our ordained priests in the United States and in RCAB are not encouraging:

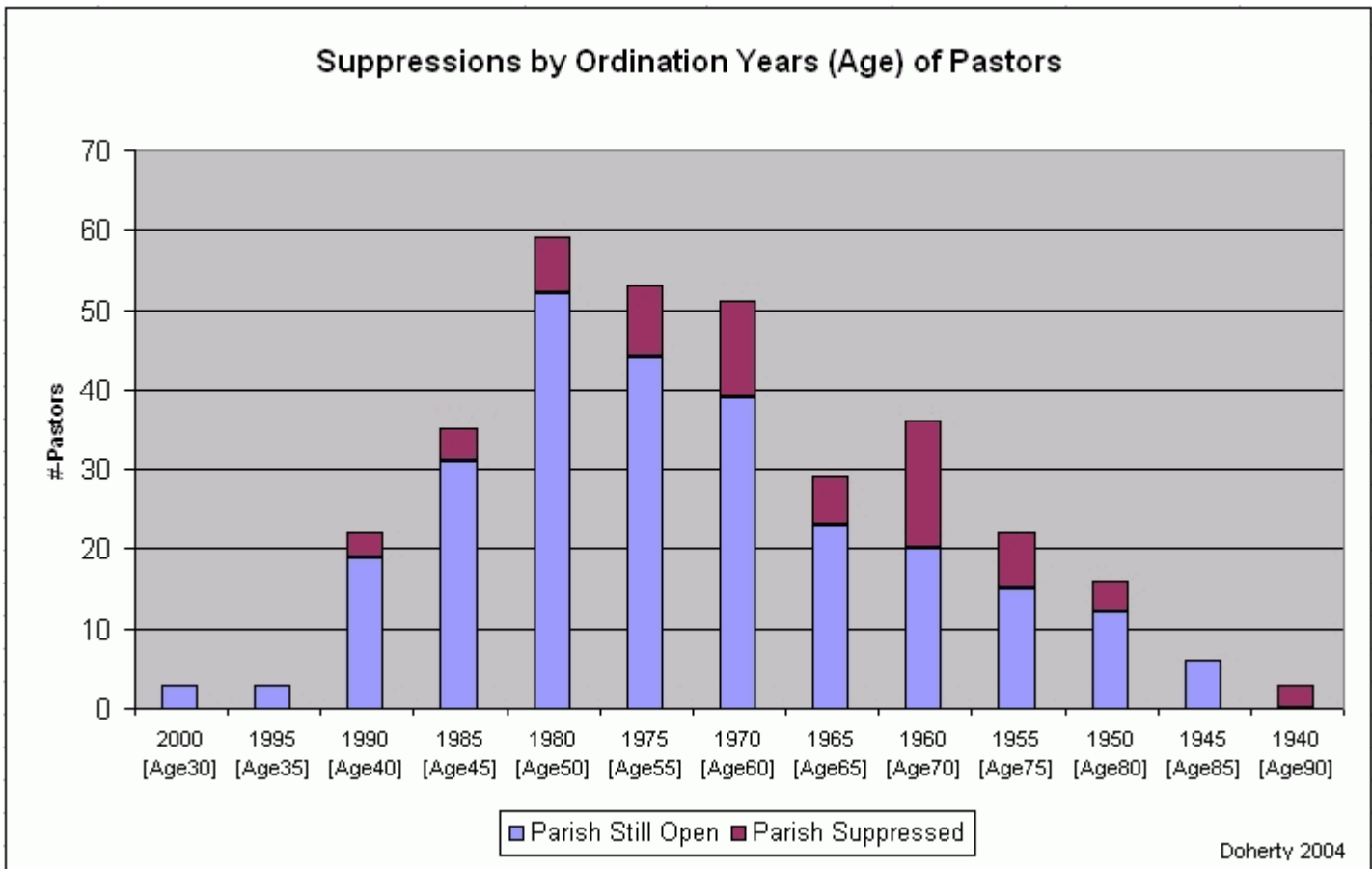
- *Average age of newly ordained priests:* Preliminary data from [The Life Cycle Institute at Catholic University](#) reports that the average age of the 2004 class of newly ordained US priests has crept up to 37. In the 1950s and 1960s, the average age of newly ordained priests was between 25 and 28. Men are entering the seminary at a later age and are, therefore, able to serve the Archdiocese as priests for a fewer number of years.
- *Percentage of foreign-born newly ordained priests:* The same study reports that the percentage of newly ordained US priests who were born in foreign countries has risen to 31%. There's nothing wrong with immigrants joining the priesthood ... but this trend further highlights the erosion of traditional vocations to the priesthood from the US-born community of young men.
- *Average age of ordained priests in the US:* CARA recently reported that the average age of a parish priest in the US was 60 years of age.
- *Total number of ordained priests in the US:* The Official Catholic Directory (US) reports that the total number of ordained priests in the US in 2004 is declining back to number of priests in ministry in 1950.

While the number of US Catholics has risen from 28,000,000 (1950) to 67,000,000 (2004), the number of ordained priests has expanded and contracted -- 43,000 (1950) to 59,000 (1980) to 44,000 (2004).

- *Boston pastors over the age of 70*: Archbishop O'Malley mentioned in his May 25 [remarks](#) on the first parish suppressions that 130 pastors are at least 70 years old.

How does this information relate to the parish closings in Boston?

Using public data about the ordination dates of current pastors in the Archdiocese, we can make educated guesses about the chronological ages of our pastors. Grouping pastors into 5-year segments by ordination date and estimated age, it is evident that a significant number of pastors are in their 70s and will be retiring or leaving active ministry for medical reasons in the next ten years or so.



Of the 83 pastors who we can identify in the 2004 directory and safely estimate to be over 70 years old, 30 (36%) served in suppressed parishes. Although some of these displaced pastors may be transferred to other parishes, many will probably retire. This leaves at least 53 pastors aged 70+ working in open parishes. To replace all these senior pastors retiring in the next 5-10 years with experienced, younger pastors, the Archdiocese needed to close many otherwise-healthy parishes that happened to have a younger pastor. The Archdiocese needed a "reserve" of younger pastors to respond to the emergencies associated with supporting an aging presbyterate.

What does this tell us about future parish suppressions? Unless the Archdiocese fills its two seminaries with 150 men and eventually ordains 100 of those candidates, it will need to suppress another 50 parishes in 4-5 years to

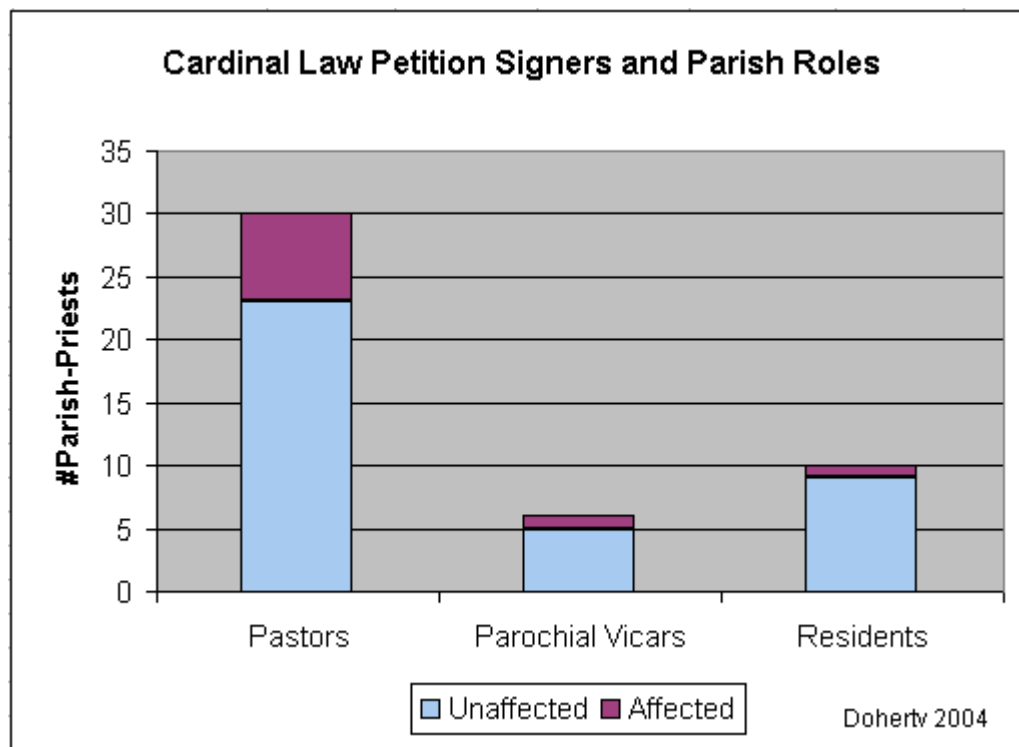
keep pace with the diminishing number of available pastors. Future parish suppressions seem inevitable as long as RCAB seeks to maintain its 1:1 pastor:parish staffing model.

Archbishop O'Malley hopes otherwise. He noted, "We hope this is it for a long while ... that is why we decided to carry on with a process that is this radical, hoping that from here on we'll be able to plan, knowing what sites we have, and to make sure the entire archdiocese is covered with the pastoral care that it needs" ([RCAB](#)).

Parish Suppressions and the Priest Signers of the Cardinal Law Petition

Of the 58 priests who signed the petition asking Cardinal Law to resign in December 2002, 46 of them work or reside in Boston-area parishes. Statistically it cannot be proven that the Archdiocese disproportionately suppressed more parishes with petition signers than parishes without signers.

Signers	Total	Unaffected	Affected	%Affected
Pastors	30	23	7	23.3%
Parochial Vicars	6	5	1	16.7%
Residents	10	9	1	10.0%



Parish Suppressions and Clerical Reassignments

What will happen to all the ordained clergy serving in suppressed parishes? The *Parish Closing Manual* Version 1.0 published by the Archdiocese of Boston in May 2004 provides guidance to pastors on what ordained clergy should expect.

Role	Deployment Notes from the <i>Parish Closing Manual</i>
Pastors	When your pastorate ends due the suppression of the parish, there are a variety of scenarios that might take place. . . . We will call you and schedule an individual meeting to discuss your future status, ministry and assignment and answer your personal questions.
Parochial Vicars	If you are ending your assignment as a parochial vicar, you will receive a new assignment from the Archbishop through the Clergy Personnel Office. . . . You will be called as well to set up an appointment to discuss your future ministry and every effort will be made to address your personal concerns and issues.
Permanent Deacons	If the Closing Parish has a Permanent Deacon, the Office of the Permanent Diaconate will work with him and the Clergy Personnel Office to receive a new assignment from the Archbishop.

The *Parish Closing Manual* offers no explicit guarantee that every parochial pastor, parochial vicar, and permanent deacon in a suppressed parish will receive a reassignment if he wishes to remain active in ministry. That said, everything in the *Parish Closing Manual* supports the assumption that all healthy parochial priests and deacons in the good graces of the Archdiocese can expect to be assigned to some other parish or institution in the Archdiocese.

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F. Parish Suppressions and the Lay Community

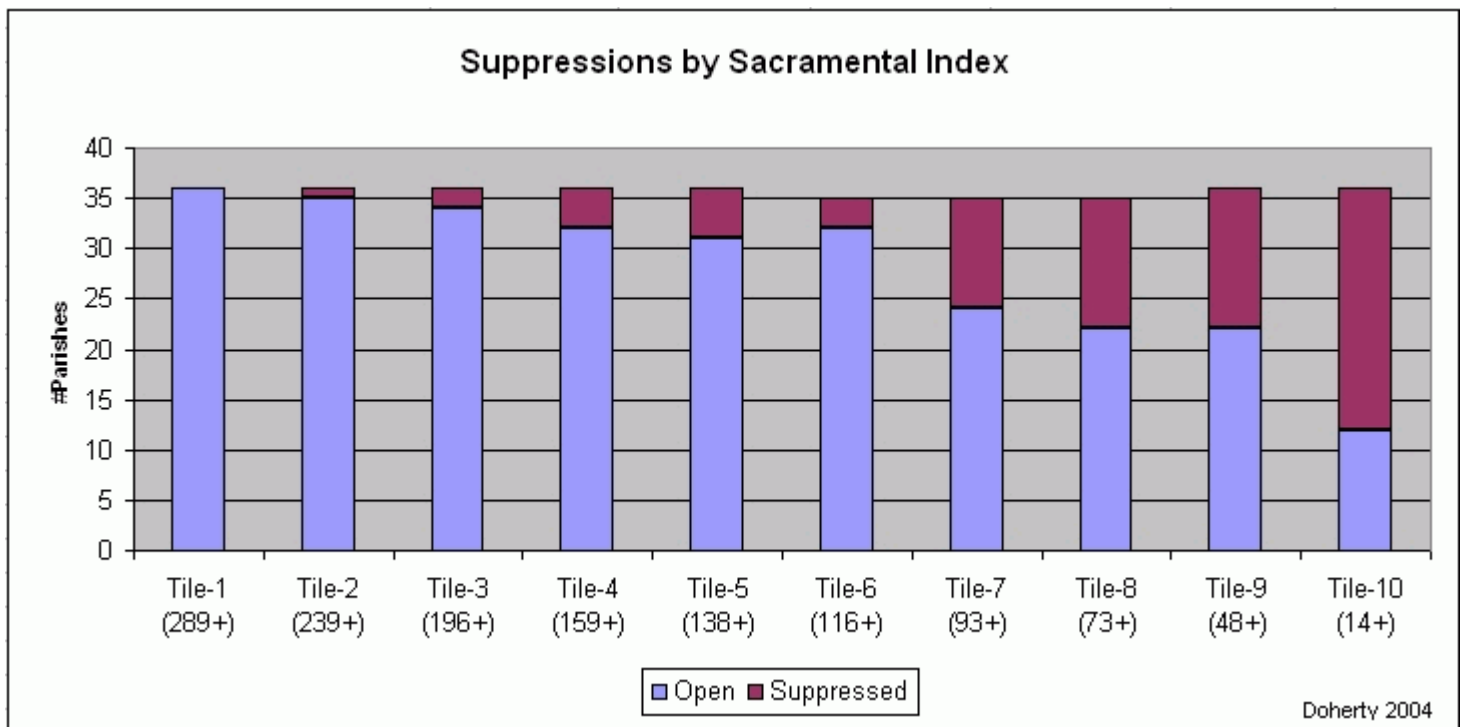
Part III of our study will examine the far-reaching impact of these parish suppressions on the laity. We offer here some preliminary observations.

Parish Suppressions and the RCAB Sacramental Index

A diocese collects statistics on the number of sacraments performed in each parish and, using a formula, calculates a score for each parish. The formula is simple: a parish sacramental index = baptisms+(2 x weddings)+funerals. In the past, these sacramental scores were used by diocesan personnel committees to determine how many curates (parochial vicars) should be assigned to each parish. Although there are many problems associated with evaluating parishes by their sacramental score (index), it remains the only public, quantitative measure that we have for assessing the relative size and vitality of a parish.

In January 2004, the Archdiocese published the [sacramental indexes](#) for year 2003. Boston-area laypeople digested these with the same relish that they did Red Sox batting averages. In a March 19 *Boston Pilot* [article](#), the Central Committee noted that "parish Mass counts and their sacramental indexes will be among the criteria the Central Committee will use when making their recommendations to the Archbishop." Releasing the 2003 sacramental index for parishes created the expectation that the Archdiocese might be applying objective, numerical criteria in its process of selecting parishes to be suppressed. To test whether the sacramental index did play a significant role, we sorted from highest to lowest the sacramental index scores for all 357 RCAB parishes - from St. Michael's in North Andover (655) to Holy Trinity in Boston (14). We then divided the 357 scores into

10 equal tiles (groups) of 36 parishes each. We then tallied up the number of open and suppressed parishes in each of these tiles. This gives us a reasonably accurate picture of how suppressions were distributed across parishes with higher or lower sacramental index scores.



We conclude that the parish sacramental indexes published by the Archdiocese in January 2004 did not play a significant role in determining which parishes were selected for suppression. Although parishes in the lowest tiles were more likely to be suppressed than parishes in the higher tiles, there are still many parishes with low sacramental indexes in Tiles 8-10 still open and many other parishes with normal-to-high sacramental indexes in Tiles 2-7 suppressed. To examine how parish suppressions in four vicariates correlated to sacramental index scores in their respective vicariates, see [Appendix 2](#). If sacramental indexes were primary criteria in choosing parishes for suppressions, several of the following parishes with high sacramental index scores should never have been considered for suppression, let alone suppressed.

Suppressed Parish	Location	Index
Saint Augustine	Boston	266
Saint William	Boston	202
Saint Albert The Great	Weymouth	169
Saint Florence	Wakefield	162
Saint Margaret	Brockton	159
Saint Margaret	Boston	155
Saint Thomas The Apostle	Peabody	151
Saint Bernard	Newton	148
Saint Ann (Italian)	Marlborough	143
Saint Joseph(French/Spanish)	Salem	138

Similarly, a more credible case for suppression could be made for the following open parishes with low scores.

Suppressed Parish	Location	Index
Saint John The Baptist	Essex	41
Saint Stanislaus(Polish)	Chelsea	42
Holy Family	Boston	46
Saint Marie (French)	Lowell	46
Saint Mary	Ayer	47

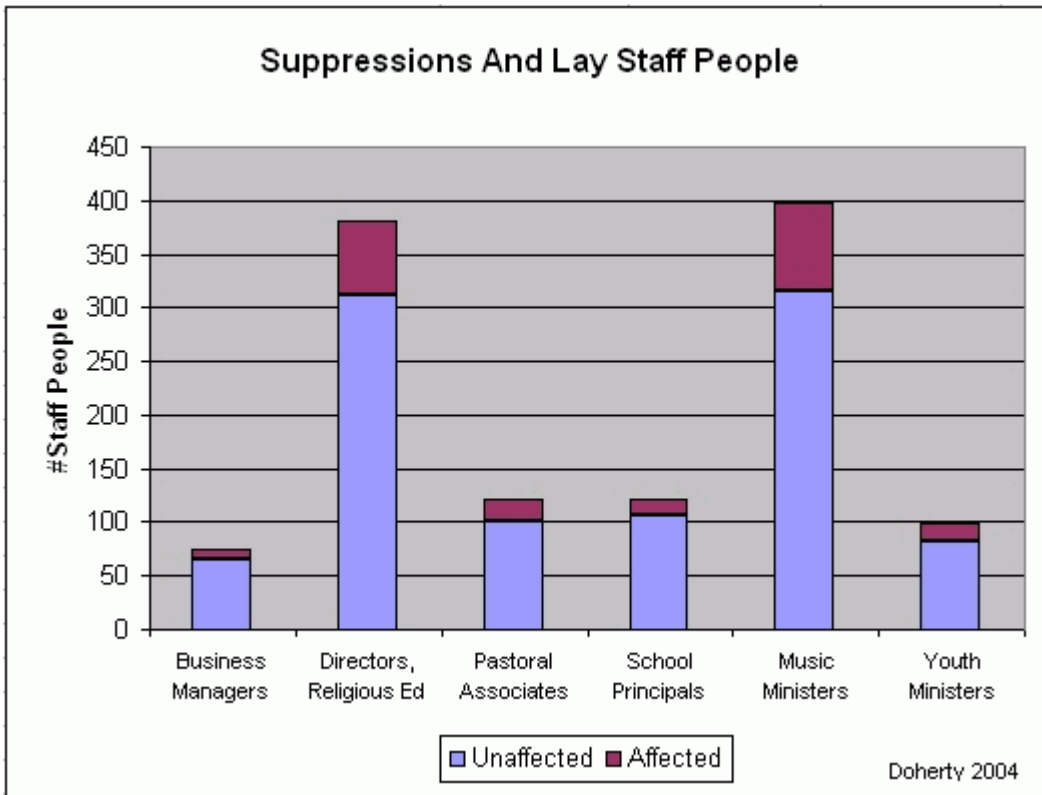
More than six times as many indexed sacraments were performed at Saint Augustine's in South Boston (suppressed) as performed at Saint John the Baptist in Essex (open). This inconsistency has caused significant resentment amongst Catholics in suppressed parishes. If sacramental index is a reasonably fair measure of the pastoral vitality of a parish, then we should expect to see a higher correlation between low sacramental index scores and suppression.

Parish Suppressions and Parish Staff Laypeople

We do have some insight into the effects of the parish suppressions on non-ordained, parish staff people whose names and roles are published in the 2004 diocesan directory. It is critical to note that these annual publications are not intended by the Archdiocese to be a complete directory of all people involved in parish life -- the names of volunteers and other staff people (including teachers) were not listed. For each person listed in the directory, there may be several other part-time or full-time people working as paid employees or as volunteers. The following numbers, therefore, illustrate trends but do not represent the full impact of the parish suppressions on the livelihoods and ministries of laypeople working in suppressed parishes.

Based on the information that we do have, here's how the laypeople listed in the 2004 directory were affected by this round of suppressions.

Parish Roles	Unaffected	Affected	Total	%Role
Business Managers	66	9	75	12.0%
Directors, Religious Ed	311	69	380	18.2%
Pastoral Associates	100	21	121	17.4%
School Principals	107	14	121	11.6%
Music Ministers	316	81	397	20.4%
Youth Ministers	83	16	99	16.2%



Because so many of the suppressed one-priest parishes managed to fund at least a Director of Religious Education (DRE) and a music minister, these two roles seem to be affected disproportionately. It would be more accurate to conclude that larger, older parishes with more money to support laypeople in the roles of business manager, pastoral associate, or youth minister were not targeted by the Archdiocese so those roles were affected disproportionately lower. Parishes with a deeper staff infrastructure were preserved.

Parish Suppressions and Lay Reassignments

What will happen to all these unordained staff people serving in suppressed parishes? The *Parish Closing Manual* makes a distinction between a canonical assignment to a parish (for the ordained) and other forms of assignment to a parish (for the laity). Rev. Robert Connors addresses the ordained clergy in Tab 12 of the *Parish Closing Manual*.

The difference in the process of transition for the clergy of a parish that will close from other staff members is your ordination and relationship to the Archbishop. When a parish is suppressed, the canonical assignment of the pastor, parochial vicar or deacon ends. The Clergy Personnel Office addresses the transition of all clergy and makes a recommendation to the Archbishop.

Reassignments for ordained clergy serving as staff at a suppressed parish are handled by canonical law, apparently, whereas reassignments for unordained laypeople serving as staff at a suppressed parish are handled as a RIF (reduction in force). Qualifying lay staff people receive the package -- 1-20 weeks of severance pay, unused vacation payout, and further financial assistance through a Transition Assistance Program. Lay staff people in good standing with the Personnel Office are placed on a preferential hiring list.

Role	Deployment Notes from the <i>Parish Closing Manual</i>
Qualifying staff people	During times of multiple reductions in force, such as parish reconfiguration, Human Resources will conduct a series of regional workshops to assist those searching for employment. These workshops will provide group and individual resume assistance, networking skills and interview training. . . . Pastors are expected to consider the preferential hiring list as vacancies occur.
Teachers	Teachers whose positions have been eliminated . . . shall be placed on the preferential hiring list of the Catholic School Office for a period of twelve (12) months. . . . Principals are expected to consider the preferential hiring list as vacancies occur.
Members of religious orders	Whenever a member of a Religious Order has an assignment terminated as a result of a reduction in force and is not immediately placed in another assignment in support of the Archdiocese, that member's Order will receive ... a lump sum equal to four times the monthly stipend in effect at the time. Members of Religious Orders are not eligible for participation in the Transition Assistance Program.
Pastoral Associates	During this time of parish closings it is inevitable that some Pastoral Associates will lose their positions. The Office for Pastoral Ministries is ready and eager to assist a Pastoral Associate in applying for a position in another parish.

Bishop Lennon noted that the Archdiocese was committed to assisting displaced staff people in finding new jobs, but did not get into specifics about what percentage of displaced staff people might expect to find jobs in the Archdiocese. He notes, "With regard to employees who will lose their positions due to reconfiguration, please know we are committed to helping them secure positions at parishes if at all possible or to assist them with finding other employment" ([RCAB](#)).

Parish Suppressions and Gender Discrimination

Based on our reading of the *Parish Closing Manual*, it would seem that the reassignment of all-male clergy is handled very differently than the reassignment of male and female lay staff people. Is this a form of gender discrimination?

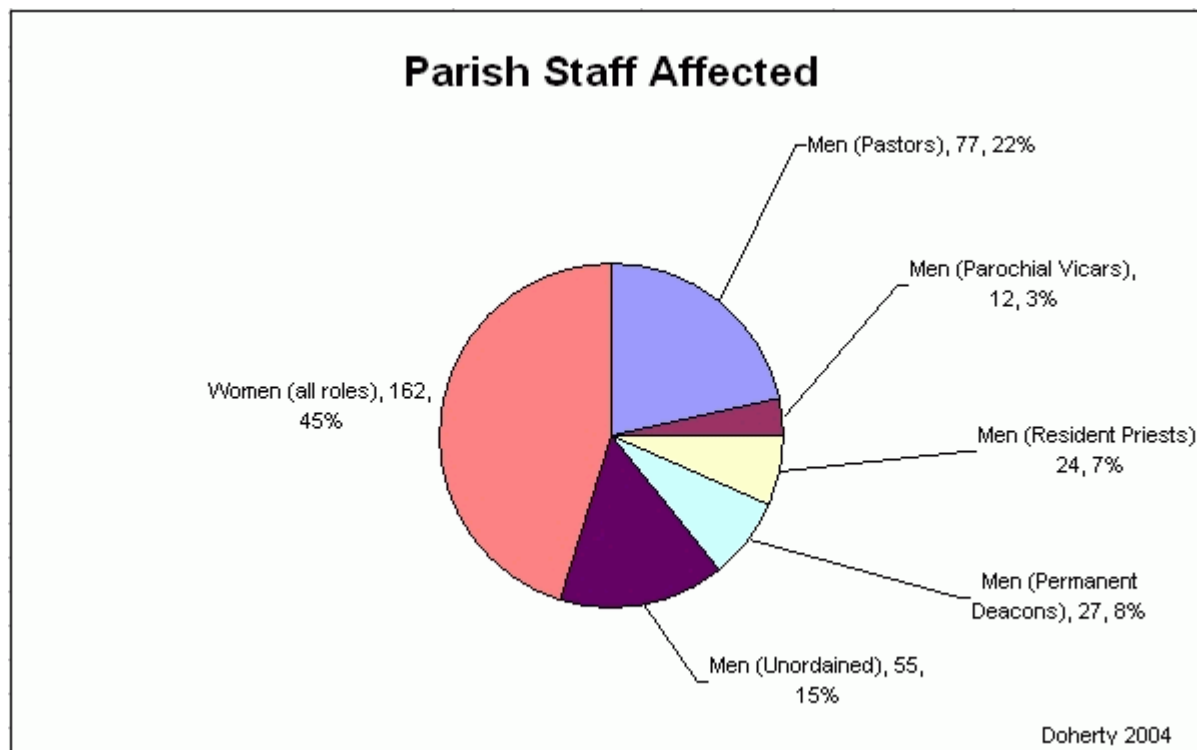
We start by looking at the total number of men and women (listed in the 2004 directory) whose positions have been directly affected by a decision to suppress the parish in which they work.

Gender and Displacement	Unaffected	Affected	Total	%Affected
Men (all roles)	948	195	1143	17.1%
Women (all roles)	693	162	855	18.9%

Let's unpack the numbers and roles of men serving in parishes.

Gender and Displacement	Unaffected	Affected	Total	%Affected
Men (Pastors)	278	77	355	21.7%
Men (Parochial Vicars)	145	12	157	7.6%
Men (Resident Priests)	108	24	132	18.2%
Men (Permanent Deacons)	151	27	178	15.2%
Men (Unordained)	273	55	328	16.8%
Women (all roles)	693	162	855	18.9%

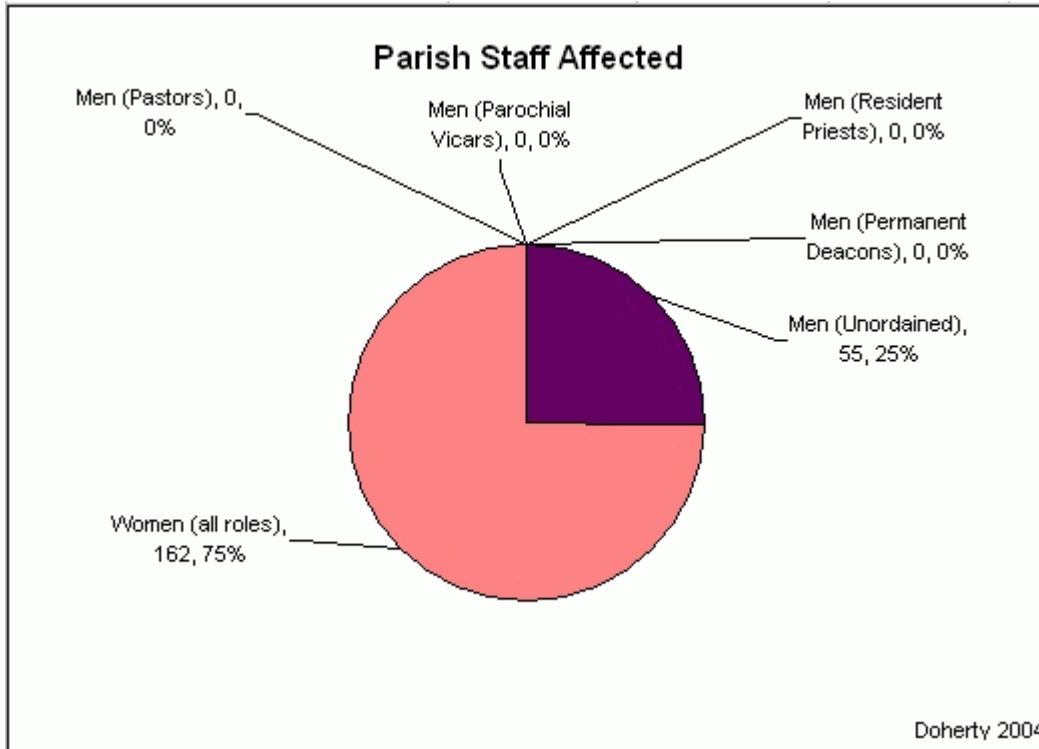
Of the staff people identified in the 2004 directory and immediately affected by this round of parish suppressions, 55% are men.



We need to go a bit beyond the term "affected." The ministry of all ordained parochial priests and deacons is interrupted pending some form of assured reassignment; the ministry of unordained male and female staff people is terminated pending possible rehiring. The livelihoods of all-male ordained clergy are not "displaced" by the 2004 parish suppressions. Based on this distinction, we zero out the numbers of ordained men in this table of "displaced" men and women.

Gender and Displacement	Displaced
Men (Pastors)	0
Men (Parochial Vicars)	0
Men (Resident Priests)	0
Men (Permanent Deacons)	0
Men (Unordained)	55
Women (all roles)	162

Yes, some of the displaced unordained men and displaced unordained women may eventually find work elsewhere in this diocese, but it is unlikely that they will be reassigned **systematically** or **automatically**. Once we remove the ordained men working in suppressed parishes, it appears that a truly disproportionate number of women will be displaced by the parish suppressions.



This double standard in treating parish staff people may be perfectly legal for all we know, but it certainly is not fair. Gender exclusion in Roman Catholic ordained ministry seems to foster a certain amount of gender discrimination in these circumstances.

Parish Suppressions and Voice of the Faithful (VOTF)

Did the Archdiocese target VOTF parishes? Statistically there was a higher probability that a VOTF parish affiliate or VOTF area affiliate would be suppressed than any parish that had no VOTF affiliation.

VOTF Parish Affiliates	Total	Suppressed	% Suppressed
Parishes with own affiliate	25	8	32.0%
Parishes sharing an affiliate	29	10	34.5%
All parishes (regardless of VOTF)	357	77	21.6%

Although it is unlikely that VOTF affiliation played any role in making first cuts through the lists of parishes, there is evidence to suggest that being the sort of parish that supported VOTF Catholics hurt in the final deliberations. The Archdiocese used a profile to exempt certain parishes and to move the remaining parishes onto the short list for Final Jeopardy. It exempted (for all practical purposes) any parish that was the only parish in a town *and* any parish that had more than one parochial priest.

Of the 14 VOTF parish affiliates that were in multi-parish towns *and* had only one parish priest, seven (50%) were suppressed.

VOTF Parish Suppressed	Location
Saint Anselm	Sudbury
Our Lady Help Of Christians	Concord
Saint Susanna	Dedham
Saint Albert The Great	Weymouth
Saint Mary of the Angels	Boston
Saint Catherine of Siena	Boston
Saint William	Boston

The eighth VOTF parish affiliate to be suppressed missed the profile only because it had two parish priests.

VOTF Parish Suppressed	Location
Saint Bernard	Newton

Of these eight suppressed VOTF parish affiliates, five also had pastors who signed the petition encouraging Cardinal Law to seek an alternative ministry. VOTF parish affiliates in one-parish towns or with one parish priest were not targeted. VOTF parish affiliates in multi-parish towns with one parish priest got hammered (50%).

Parish Suppressions and Parochial Schools

Parochial schools are perceived to be critical to Catholic infrastructure. If your parish had a parochial school, it was far less likely to be suppressed than any parishes without a parochial school.

RCAB Parishes With Schools	Total	Suppressed	% Suppressed
Parishes with Schools	118	16	14%

Parish staffing, parish facilities (big traditional churches), and parochial schools constituted the main components of what we call "Catholic parish infrastructure" in the Archdiocese.

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G. RCAB Parish Futures

As painful as the 2004 parish suppressions are to all Catholics in the Archdiocese of Boston, they do offer a rare opportunity for analysis. When a diocese suppresses or merges one or two parishes every couple of years, it is difficult to infer its motivations. The sampling of data is too small. When RCAB suppresses 77 parishes, we have more than enough data to extrapolate some general principles and patterns from their decisions. We have the rare opportunity to examine *what they do* in addition to *what they say*. From their decisions we can reconstruct their functional priorities and, indirectly, their vision of the diocese in the 21st Century.

Here's where the Archdiocese is *not* going ...

Based on the decisions made by the Archdiocese in this round of parish suppressions, it is unlikely that the following will be future priorities:

- *Lay leadership*: If the Archdiocese valued lay leadership, it would have pursued lay-administered parishes instead of suppressing parishes to maintain a 1:1 priest:parish ratio.
- *Cultural diversity*: If the Archdiocese valued ethnic and cultural diversity, it would have opted to preserve the identities of such parishes as St. Catherine of Siena (Charlestown) or St. Mary of the Angels (Roxbury) through a gradual merger with other parishes. The city of Boston is no stranger historically to racial segregation and conflict. Catholic churches in Boston that managed to build multi-ethnic faith communities were instrumental in healing racial divisions and dispelling perceptions that the Archdiocese could be indifferent to minority communities. Asking Catholics from suppressed multi-ethnic parishes to attend nearby predominantly white parishes re-opens a host of questions about Archdiocesan commitment to minority faith communities and to minority neighborhoods.
- *Open dialogue*: If the Archdiocese valued open dialogue on the issues troubling the institutional Church, it would not have closed such parishes as St. Albert the Great (Weymouth), St. Susanna's (Dedham), or Our Lady Help of Christians (Concord). In the wake of the clergy abuse scandal and hierarchical cover-up scandal, Catholics who were shocked by the conduct of Archdiocesan priests and prelates but did not want to leave the Church sought to worship in parish communities where there could be an open dialogue about the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of our Church. These parishes seemed to have been targeted in Final Jeopardy.

Here's where the Archdiocese is going ...

Implementation proceeds from vision. Vision proceeds from values and priorities. Here's what this statistical study of Archdiocesan decisions about parish suppressions has suggested about Archdiocesan values and priorities.

- Each town in the Archdiocese should have a parish, or at least a building to be used for worship on weekends.
- Each parish should have a pastor.
- Each parish should, ideally, have a parochial vicar (when and if one is available).
- Each parish should have sufficient infrastructure (seating, staffing, parking) to support larger numbers of Catholics and larger programs.
- Each parish should promote its "Catholic identity" and "Catholic culture" over ethnic or multicultural identities. In the August 13, 2004 edition of the *Boston Pilot*, we read an excerpt from Pope John Paul II's June 24 *Ad limina* message entitled "Church Institutions." The Pope writes, "It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that the Church's institutions be genuinely Catholic: Catholic in their self-understanding and Catholic in their identity."
- Each parish must contribute to the recruitment of seminarians and priests in order to address the aging population of ordained ministers.
- Current parishioners are welcome to stay in the Church if they comply with its teachings and attend "orthodox" parishes regularly. Parishioners outside this profile will find fewer and fewer parishes open to dialogue. With millions in the bank and lower overhead (fewer salaries, fewer heating bills), the Archdiocesan budget is less dependent on the size of Sunday collections. It can afford, theologically and financially, to be less inclusive.

No surprises here. Read the *Boston Pilot* or watch EWTN TV or watch Boston Catholic Television. Try to understand where the decision makers are really coming from -- that uniquely Catholic siege mentality -- the forces of darkness and anti-Catholicism are attacking the Catholic order in America so the caretakers of that order need to shrink the defensive perimeter and muster the troops for a final stand. Future generations of orthodox Catholics are counting on the current leadership to do whatever needs to be done -- however painful -- to safeguard the current order and to extract sufficient assets from real estate sales to fund a comeback when the time is right. Suppressing 22% of our parishes is painful, but it is also logical and necessary given a siege mentality.

Moving forward: The new model for parishes ...

Let's indulge in some speculation about the near future. In the aftermath of this round of suppressions, we should expect to see further consolidation of this new Archdiocesan vision at the parish level.

- Archdiocesan programs designed to recruit seminarians will be the top priority. Expect to see dramatic investments in youth ministry with a recruiting spin. Expect to see scorecards.

If every parish sent one young man to the seminary every 10 years, we'd have more than enough vocations. [Archbishop O.Malley, 5/25/04 as quoted in [Boston Pilot](#) 05/28/04

- Smaller parishes within clusters or vicariates will not receive significant increases in funding or subsidized staffing from the Archdiocese. Unless the seminaries begin to fill with candidates for priesthood, making investments in parishes that will have to be suppressed in five years makes no sense.
- Larger parishes within clusters or vicariates will receive surplus clergy and increased funding to consolidate their long-term infrastructure. A smaller number of larger, more homogeneously staffed parishes will be positioned to absorb Catholics displaced from the next few rounds of suppressions.
- Clergy and lay staff people displaced by this round of suppressions and subsequent rounds of suppressions will be evaluated by the Archdiocese for their orthodoxy prior to reassignment within the Archdiocese.

In this new paradigm, the division of responsibilities will be clear.

- *The Archdiocese* is responsible for developing educational and vocational programs to be disseminated to the parish level. It will subsidize strategic programs such as seminary recruitment.
- *The parish* is responsible for maintaining an infrastructure that is sufficiently homogeneous and orthodox to guarantee a high degree of efficiency in the reception and re-transmission of these diocesan programs to the laity. It's a military model really. It would make no sense for a battalion commander to send mortar rounds to a company commander if that company has no mortars. Efficient reception and re-transmission of doctrine depends on homogeneous and orthodox infrastructure. Diverse infrastructure at the parish level compromises or distorts transmission.
- *The laity* is responsible for three things:
 - Accepting the transmission of doctrine
 - Supporting the parish and diocese financially
 - Nurturing seminarians

It is a simple model and a clean model ... at least for some Catholics.

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H. Trends Under Investigation

Our analysis to date suggests that there are some clear trends. Read into these what you will.

Your parish was less likely to be suppressed if it ...

- Has a resident vicar or bishop (26/27 open - 96.3%)
- Has 2 permanent deacons (17/18 open - 94.5%)
- Is the only Catholic parish in town (69/73, 94.5% open)
- Has two parochial vicars (20/22 open, 90%)

- Has a parish business manager (66/75, 88%)

- Has a parochial school (112/118, 86% open)
- Was established in 1800's (117/135, 86% open)
- Is a territorial parish (260/316, 83% open)

Your parish was more likely to be suppressed if it ...

- Has one parish priest in a multi-parish town (64/170 suppressed, 37.6%; 83.7% of total suppressed)
- Was established (designed) to Vatican II guidelines for worship space (1967-1992) - 4/5, 80% suppressed

- Is an ethnic or university parish (21/40, 51% suppressed)

- Supports a VOTF parish affiliate (8/25, 32% suppressed)

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I. What have we learned?

Although we have focused primarily on the dynamics of Archdiocesan decision-making in this part of our study, we recognize that in the end we have learned more about the laity and the media than we have about the hierarchy.

The Boston Laity

To the extent that the US Church had never experienced a round of parish suppressions of this scope and celerity, the laity was not prepared to respond to it -- emotionally, legally, or organizationally. In Part III of our study, we will have more comprehensive data about the effects of the suppressions of parish laypeople and staff.

We have no statistical data to quantify the reactions of the 2,000,000 Boston-area Catholics, so we offer these general observations based on our attending dozens of meetings at parishes during the last six months. Laypeople achieved no consensus on the suppressions and reacted to the "reconfiguration" in a variety of ways:

- *Parochial defensiveness*: Many active Catholics in the Boston area are attached to their local parishes. Pastors may come and go, but these parishes, built by our grandparents, supported them spiritually and socially through several generations. When an Archbishop tells the faithful that many parishes would be closed, parishioners loyal to their local parishes circled the wagons and wrote letters in support of their parish to the Archdiocese. In a peculiarly old-school Catholic way, parishioners realized that they and their parish were being judged and they reacted defensively -- almost tribally -- to that judgement. Once parishioners got into a defensive mindset, there was little room for questioning the process or organizing collective responses across parish boundaries. It was every parish for itself.
- *Resignation*: Many other Catholics resigned themselves to the process. They seemed to accept the Archdiocesan rationale for the closings and accepted the possibility that they would need to take their business to a different branch office (parish) if the closest one was closed. If the Archdiocese cuts back on services, it is fundamentally no different than the State of Massachusetts or the US Government or local municipalities trimming services. Cutbacks are cutbacks ... move on.
- *Denial*: Other parishioners did not -- could not -- believe that the Archdiocese would close their parish, their community. Some other parish may need to be closed, but not mine. This sentiment was expressed most frequently by our elderly parishioners. One elderly lady noted that she had sung in the parish choir for forty years and had every expectation that the choir would turn out in full force to sing at her funeral. She had chosen the music -- no Archbishop was going to close her parish and dismantle the choir.
- *Fear*: Parishioners with more experience dealing with the Archdiocese recognized that politics could play an important role in the final decision to close one parish and not another. Parishioners feared that any display of resistance would result in closure. The dynamics of fear and of "divide and conquer" were widespread. The Archdiocese encouraged parishioners not to dwell on all the rumors that they claimed were circulating about closures. Even when parishioners learned that their parish was selected for suppression and that the Archdiocese was not receptive to appeals, some parishioners still feared that any display of anger at this news would diminish their chances for a successful appeal. Duh.
- *Resistance*: Organized resistance to the reconfiguration process happened in three phases:
 - Phase I (December 2003 - May 2004): Before the first suppressions were announced on May 25, there was little or no organized resistance. Call to Action New England a petition challenging the rationale for the closures. A few Voice of the Faithful affiliates organized informal working groups to gather and share information. The first organized protest happened on Sunday, May 23 - two days before the official announcements of the first round of suppressions.
 - Phase II (May 2004 - present): Of the 65 parishes initially slated for suppression, a dozen or so decided to pursue an appeal and to resist the Archdiocese. A strong and productive partnership eventually formed between several parish councils and the Boston Council of Voice of the Faithful. Focused working groups were organized to look at legal resistance, communications with

the media, Massachusetts political action, and prayerful acts of solidarity (notably the 08/15 Mass on Boston Common). Representation from parishes *not* scheduled for suppression remains low.

- Phase III (August 2004 on): Civil proceedings against the Archdiocese are in progress.
- *Support:* A small, but very visible, number of laypeople volunteered to support the reconfiguration process or were appointed by Archbishop O'Malley to put a "layperson's face" on the process. One of the more visible is Kathleen Heck, Special Assistant to the Moderator of the Curia. Frequently she speaks for the Archdiocese regarding concerns expressed by other laypeople. On financial accountability, for example, she announced, "The money will be used only for parishes. [Any transfers of money] in or out of the fund will be trackable on the archdiocese's website, as well as in *The Pilot*. . . . Anyone on the planet who wants to know what is going on with the money will have access to that information" ([RCAB](#)).

If the Archdiocese was betting that effective resistance to the reconfiguration process would be too little and too late to stop it, they were correct. In retrospect, it is clear that the laity in a diocese need to be educated and organized and empowered *before* a bishop announces one of these "reconfiguration" or "evangelization" initiatives. Documenting what laypeople can do in their diocese to prepare for these suppressions will be one of the topics in Part III of our study.

Boston Media

The Boston-area media (print, TV, radio) did a good job in covering the story of the 2004 parish suppressions. The editors and producers who were veterans of covering two years of the clergy sex abuse scandal saw the "reconfiguration" process for what it was. Many of them were practicing Catholics in parishes fearful about closure or ex-Catholics skeptical about the motives of the Archdiocese. Their coverage followed the high points of the story:

- December 2003: They covered Archbishop O'Malley's announcement of the reconfiguration process and the reactions to it from a variety of Catholics.
- March 2004: When the first round of recommendations for closure from vicariate committees happened, several media outlets (notably *The Boston Globe* and *NECN*) assigned researchers and reporters to the story and produced [excellent series](#) after excellent series on what was happening. Since there was no data being released officially by the Archdiocese, these media outlets provided the only substantive coverage.
- Late-May and June 2004: When the Archdiocese announced the first round suppressions on the Tuesday before the Memorial Day long weekend, the media did follow-up stories and analyses. The *Boston Globe*, for example, did an investigative report on questionable real estate deals made between the Archdiocese and businesses close to the Archdiocese. All media outlets covered the outrage, surprise, and sadness of average parishioners in suppressed parishes.

Although the Boston media was sympathetic and supportive, it could not keep the issue on the front page or at the top of the news hour without sustained and substantive response from the laity being affected by the parish suppressions. The laity was not sufficiently organized until late in the process to take advantage of supportive media.

No discussion of the media coverage of the parish closings would be complete without looking at the official Archdiocesan weekly newspaper, the *Boston Pilot*. Given that Archbishop O'Malley is the publisher of the *Pilot*, it would be unrealistic to expect that its editors would seek to evaluate the reconfiguration process from any perspective outside the party line. Although the *Pilot* did not provide unbiased coverage, we commend it nevertheless for three things:

- *Dedication*: The *Pilot* devoted an extraordinary amount of copy to the reconfiguration process. The editors could have published a vague article or two each month and let it go at that. To their credit, they kept news about the reconfiguration process in front of its readers and genuinely sought to educate readers about selective aspects of the process, notably [canon law](#).
- *Candor*: The editors of the *Pilot* periodically addressed concerns on the minds of many Boston laypeople. In the March 19 issue, for example, an editorial piece titled "The Whole Picture" notes, "As we move forward, we need to address the problems of the lack of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, the drop in Mass attendance and the scarce number of Christian witnesses in society at large. ... Unless we pay attention to those questions and act sooner rather than later, the contraction will continue" ([RCAB](#)).
- *Other voices*: The *Pilot* published no article that looked at the reconfiguration process critically. That said, we commend the editors of the *Pilot* for publishing direct quotations from parishioners who were quite critical of the Archdiocese and letters to the editor that were critical. The *Pilot* did not pretend that all was well with its readership. Other diocesan newspapers would not have permitted these other voices to intrude into the public conversation. We commend the editors for publishing alternative opinions where they could.

The Boston Hierarchy

Again, we did not learn much that was surprising about the clerical hierarchy. This branch diocese of the Roman Church has been remarkably consistent in its execution of the values, perceptions, judgments, and behaviors articulated in Rome. This model for clamping down on the American Church may have been implemented first in Boston, but it is probably coming soon to other US dioceses. Bishop Richard Malone of the diocese of Portland Maine, until recently an Auxiliary Bishop for Archbishop O'Malley in the South Region of RCAB, announced a ["New Evangelization" initiative](#) that will result in reconfiguring (suppressing?) as many as 35 of its 138 parishes. Many smaller parishes will be reconfigured (suppressed?) in order to build a new class of super-parishes called "Canonical Parishes." The guidelines for developing these super-parishes in Portland conform to the trends that we have identified here in Boston.

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J. Conclusion

Statistics can go only so far. The final (and perhaps ultimate) motivation for suppressing so many Boston parishes in so short a time is really political and emotional -- punishing Boston Catholics for their lack of obedience. Thousands of uppity laypeople, dozens of uppity priests, scores of Catholic reporters, and dozens of Catholic civil servants (notably a female Catholic judge) failed to turn their hearts to the Archdiocesan story about a few bad priests and some misplaced paperwork. To compound this lack of faithful obedience, other

Catholics working in the Massachusetts State Courts and Legislature failed to yield to Archdiocesan campaigns to block gay marriage in the state. For Archdiocesan and Vatican leaders, this widespread and chronic lack of obedience was probably perceived as a lack of faith; something had to be done.

An old Irish "blessing" captures it best.

*May those who love us love us,
and those who do not love us,
may God turn their hearts,
and if He cannot turn their hearts
may He turn their ankles
that we may know them by their limping.*

So the Vatican and the rest of Catholic America might know Boston Catholics by their limping, the Archdiocese of Boston piloted this extraordinary process of suppressing 22% of its parishes in one year. Just in case Boston Catholics had any doubts whether the parish closings were at all related to the clergy abuse scandal, the Vatican chose to announce the promotion of Bernard Cardinal Law to a Vatican post two days after Archbishop O'Malley announced the suppression of the first 68 parishes. Coincidence?

The last time provincial Bostonians were punished for their disobedience by their imperial, aristocratic betters in Europe, it did not go so well for the aristocrats in the long run. Time will tell. Our Church is on a long, long journey of discovery and evangelization. The road is neither straight nor level, so it should be no surprise that we get lost periodically or that our leaders/scouts take the wrong ramp periodically. We'll get there. God is great. God is among us. The Holy Spirit is alive and moving in Her Church.

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Call To Action New England

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Appendix 1 -- List of RCAB Parishes Suppressed in 2004

Parish	Region	Vicariate	Cluster	Town	ParishType	SacrIndx
Saint John - Saint Hugh	Central	1	C-1-BDR	Boston	Territorial	39
Saint Francis deSales/Saint Philip	Central	1	C-1-BDR	Boston	Territorial	38
Saint Mary of the Angels	Central	1	C-1-BDR	Boston	Territorial	41
Saint Joseph	Central	1	C-1-HDM	Boston	Territorial	20
Saint Adalbert	Central	1	C-1-HP	Boston	Polish	23

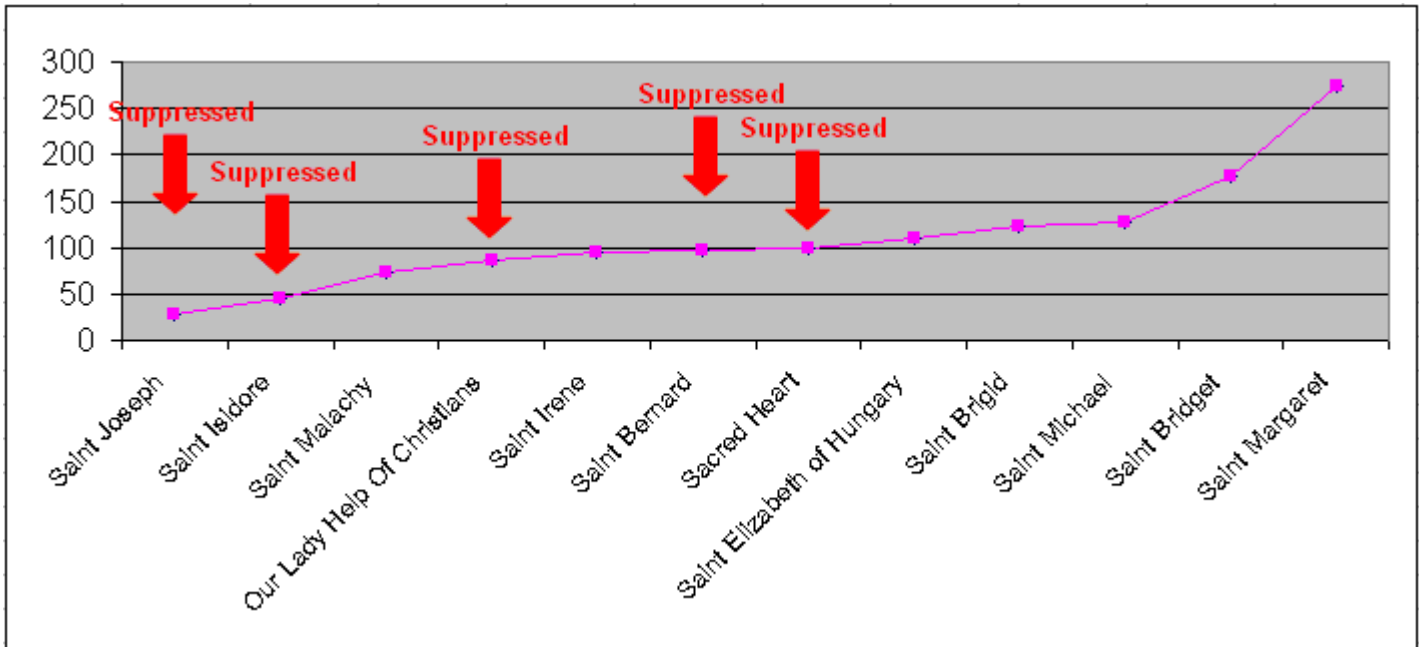
Blessed Sacrament	Central	1	C-1-JPB	Boston	Territorial	103
Infant Jesus-Saint Lawrence	Central	1	C-1-JPB	Brookline	Territorial	30
Saint William	Central	2	C-2-Dor2	Boston	Territorial	202
Saint Margaret	Central	2	C-2-Dor2	Boston	Territorial	155
Saint Augustine	Central	2	C-2-SB	Boston	Territorial	266
Saint Peter (S.Boston)	Central	2	C-2-SB	Boston	Lithuanian	62
Sacred Heart (NorthEnd)	Central	3	C-3-B	Boston	Italian	83
Holy Trinity	Central	3	C-3-B	Boston	German	14
Saint Ann	Central	3	C-3-B	Boston	University	53
Saint Catherine of Siena	Central	3	C-3-Ch	Boston	Territorial	90
Our Lady Of Mount Carmel	Central	3	C-3-EB	Boston	Italian	77
Saint Mary Star of the Sea	Central	3	C-3-EB	Boston	Territorial	100
Our Lady Of the Presentation	Central	4	C-4-AlBr	Boston	Territorial	67
Immaculate Conception	Central	4	C-4-Cam2	Cambridge	Lithuanian	77
Blessed Sacrament	Central	4	C-4-Cam2	Cambridge	Territorial	46
Immaculate Conception	Central	4	C-4-CS	Cambridge	Territorial	23
Saint Isidore	Merrimack	Concord	M-Co-ALMS	Stow	Territorial	45
Saint Bernard	Merrimack	Concord	M-Co-BCCL	Concord	Territorial	98
Our Lady Help Of Christians	Merrimack	Concord	M-Co-BCCL	Concord	Territorial	87
Saint Joseph	Merrimack	Concord	M-Co-BCCL	Lincoln	Territorial	29
Sacred Heart	Merrimack	Concord	M-Co-LEX	Lexington	Territorial	100
Saints Peter and Paul	Merrimack	Lawrence	M-La-LAW	Lawrence	Portuguese	28
Holy Rosary	Merrimack	Lawrence	M-La-LAW	Lawrence	Italian	214
Holy Trinity	Merrimack	Lawrence	M-La-LAW	Lawrence	Polish	73
Notre Dame De Lourdes	Merrimack	Lowell	M-Lo-LOW	Lowell	French	40
Holy Trinity	Merrimack	Lowell	M-Lo-LOW	Lowell	Polish	55
Neustra Señora Del Carmen	Merrimack	Lowell	M-Lo-LOW	Lowell	Hispanic	119
Saint Louis De France	Merrimack	Lowell	M-Lo-LOW	Lowell	French	43
Saint Jeanne D'Arc	Merrimack	Lowell	M-Lo-LOW	Lowell	French	102
Sacred Heart	Merrimack	Lowell	M-Lo-LOW	Lowell	Territorial	181
Saint Margaret	North	Gloucester	N-G-BEM	Beverly	Territorial	39
Saint Alphonsus	North	Gloucester	N-G-BEV	Beverly	Territorial	50
Saint Joachim	North	Gloucester	N-G-GLOUS	Rockport	Territorial	70
Saint Peter	North	Gloucester	N-G-GLOUS	Gloucester	Territorial	135
Sacred Heart	North	Gloucester	N-G-GLOUS	Gloucester	Territorial	89
Saint James The Apostle	North	Medford	N-Med-ARL	Arlington	Territorial	84
Saint Jerome	North	Medford	N-Med-ARL	Arlington	Territorial	47
Saint Therese	North	Medford	N-Med-EV	Everett	Territorial	93

Saint Peter	North	Medford	N-Med-MALD	Malden	Italian	54
Saint James	North	Medford	N-Med-MED	Medford	Territorial	58
Sacred Heart	North	Medford	N-Med-MED	Medford	Territorial	85
Saint Michael	North	Salem	N-Sa-LYNN	Lynn	Polish	43
Saint Joseph	North	Salem	N-Sa-PS	Salem	French	138
Saint Thomas The Apostle	North	Salem	N-Sa-PS	Peabody	Territorial	151
Our Lady Of Lourdes	North	Salem	N-Sa-REV	Revere	Territorial	95
Saint Florence	North	Stoneham	N-St-MSW	Wakefield	Territorial	162
Immaculate Conception	North	Stoneham	N-St-WIN	Winchester	Territorial	99
Saint Joseph	North	Stoneham	N-St-WOB	Woburn	Territorial	75
Saint Margaret	South	Brockton	S-Br-BROCK	Brockton	Territorial	159
Saint James	South	Brockton	S-N-CSS	Stoughton	Territorial	45
Saint Susanna	South	Norwood	S-N-DED	Dedham	Territorial	84
Saint George	South	Norwood	S-N-NWW	Norwood	Territorial	85
Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha	South	Plymouth	S-Pl-CKP	Plymouth	Territorial	59
Saint Rose Of Lima	South	Plymouth	S-Pl-LMR	Rochester	Territorial	28
Saint Pius Tenth	South	Quincy	S-Q-MILT	Milton	Territorial	108
Most Blessed Sacrament	South	Quincy	S-Q-QUIN	Quincy	Territorial	110
Star Of The Sea	South	Quincy	S-Q-QUIN	Quincy	Territorial	47
Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton	South	Quincy	S-Q-QUIN	Quincy	Territorial	113
Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini	South	Weymouth	S-W-CHHNS	Scituate	Territorial	64
Saint Albert The Great	South	Weymouth	S-W-WEY	Weymouth	Territorial	169
Assumption	West	Framingham	W-F-BEL	Bellingham	Territorial	66
Saint Jeremiah	West	Framingham	W-F-FNS	Framingham	Territorial	67
Saint Anselm	West	Marlboro	W-F-FNS	Sudbury	Territorial	42
Saint Ann	West	Marlboro	W-M-HM	Marlborough	Italian	143
Saint Mary	West	Marlboro	W-M-HM	Marlborough	French	88
Sacred Heart	West	Natick	W-Na-NAT	Natick	Territorial	27
Saint James The Great	West	Natick	W-Na-WW	Wellesley	Territorial	43
Our Lady Of Mercy	West	Newton	W-Ne-BLWAT	Belmont	Territorial	88
Sacred Heart	West	Newton	W-Ne-BLWAT	Watertown	Territorial	119
Mary Immaculate Of Lourdes	West	Newton	W-Ne-NEWT	Newton	Territorial	49
Saint Bernard	West	Newton	W-Ne-NEWT	Newton	Territorial	148
Saint Joseph	West	Newton	W-Ne-WALT	Waltham	French	45

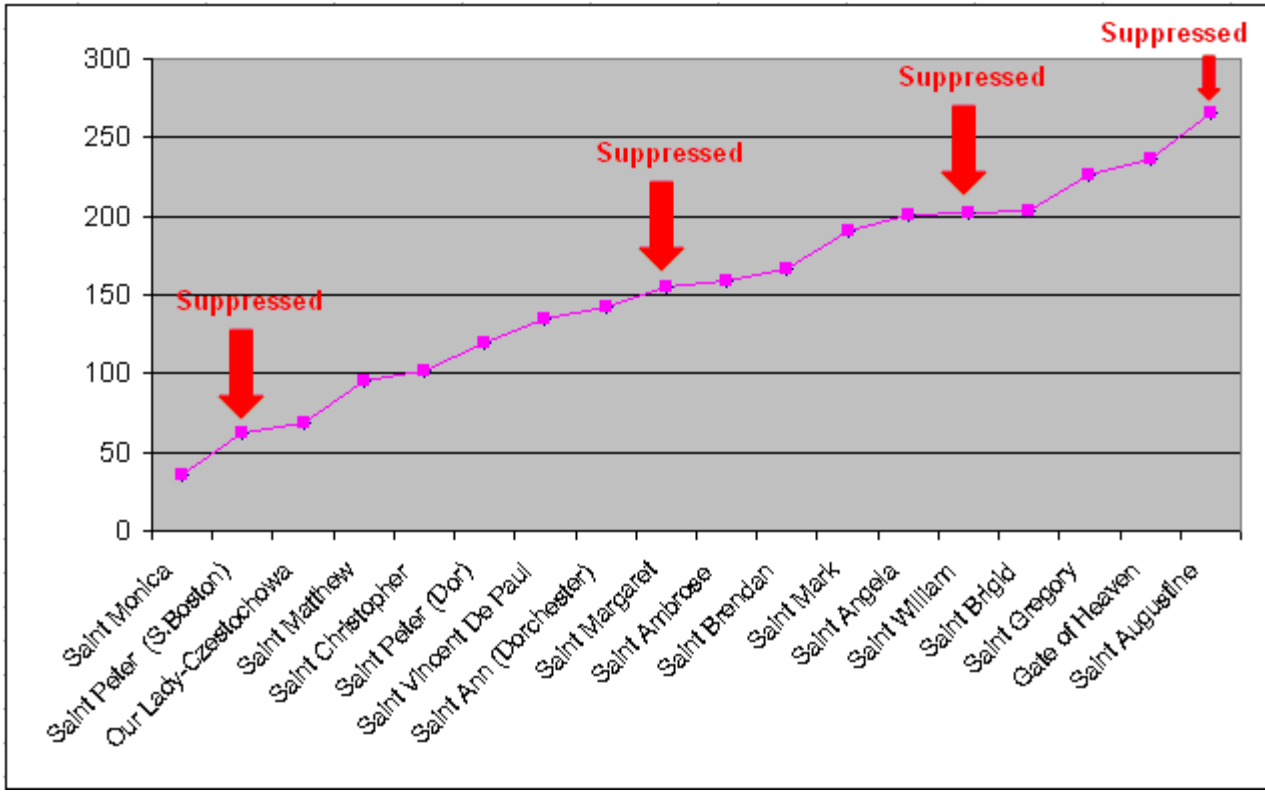
Appendix 2 -- Sample Line Charts for Sacramental Indexes Within Vicariates

In working with various parishes and VOTF groups, we discovered that many parishioners at suppressed parishes were far less interested in general statistical information about the Archdiocese than in statistical information about their local parishes. We generated a set of line charts for each vicariate in the Archdiocese that illustrated how the sacramental indexes for open and closed parishes stacked up against one another. The y-axis (vertical) measures sacramental index scores. In one case (Dorchester), the parish with the highest sacramental index in the vicariate was suppressed. Here are four of the more powerful line charts for sacramental indexes within vicariates.

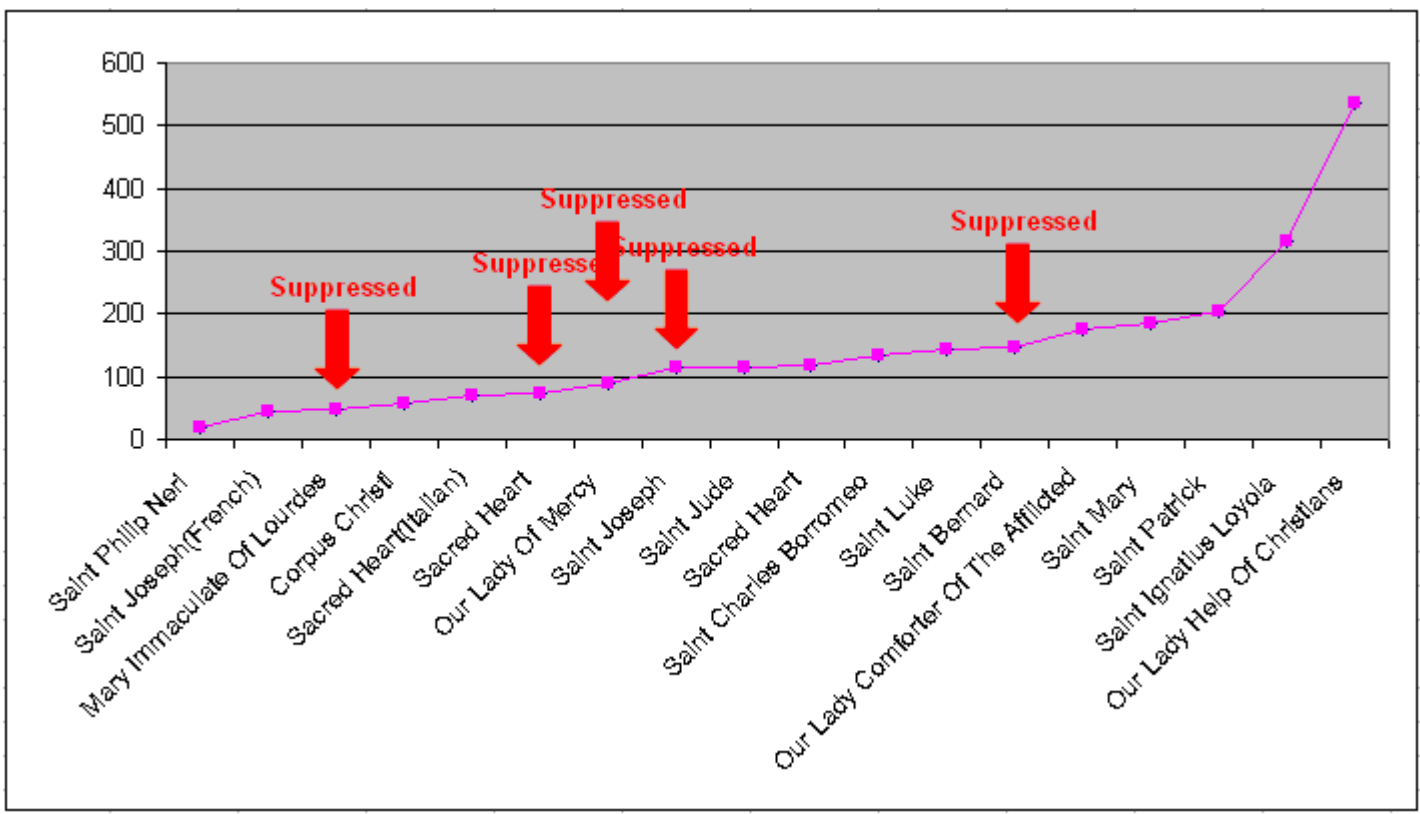
The Concord Vicariate



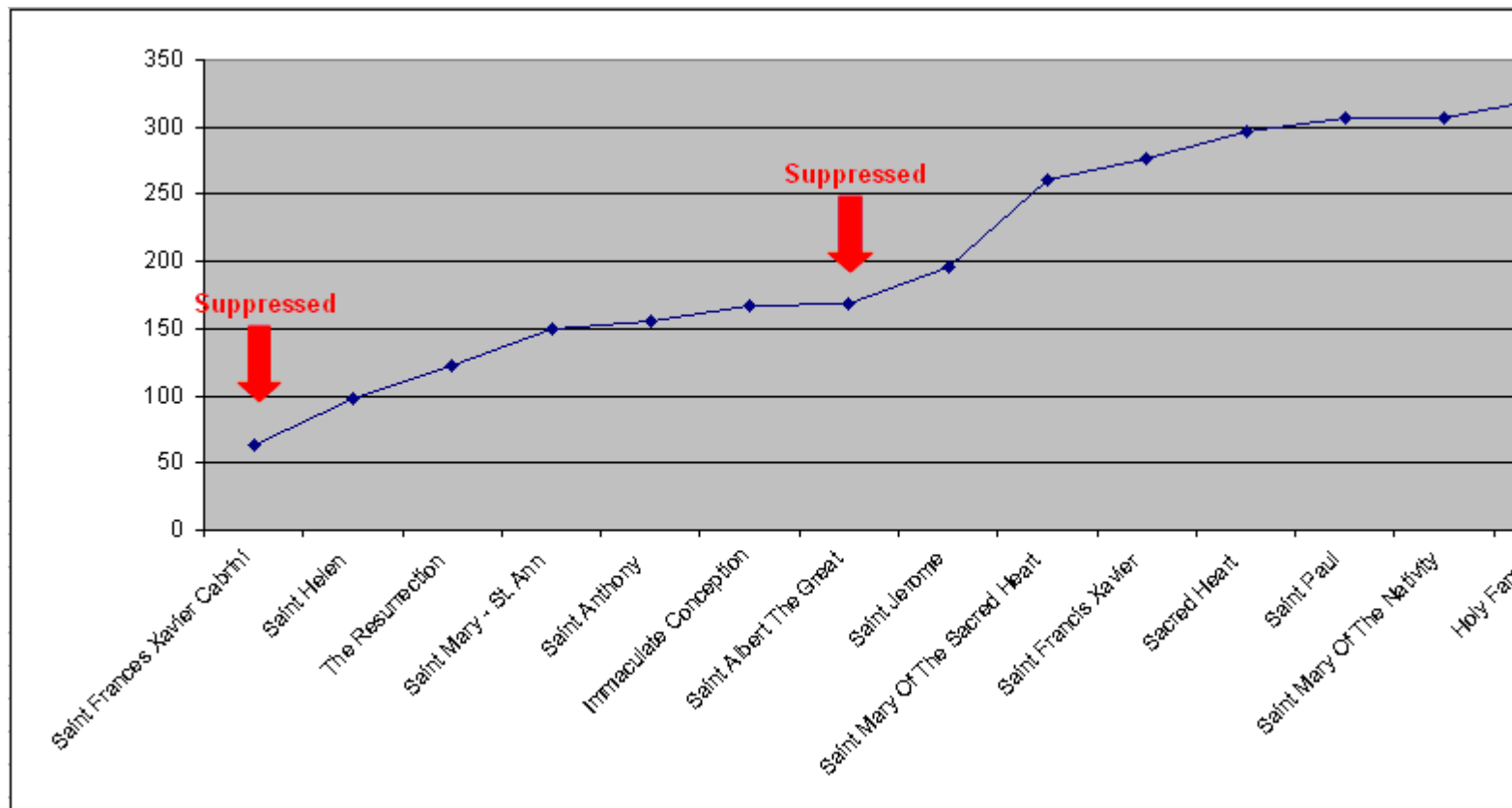
The Dorchester Vicariate



The Newton Vicariate



The Weymouth Vicariate



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Appendix 3 -- Messages on Parish Closing Protest Signs

When all the appeals and editorials and statistical reports are exhausted, we should never lose sight of the real impact that these parish suppressions have had on the people who *really* matter -- our Catholic parishioners. Here is our transcription of the messages that one group of parishioners put on their signs at a parish rally in July. We have changed the name of the actual parish to the generic *OurParish*.

- Archbishops' motto: "Do as I say, period!"
- Archbishop Sean -- We deserve honest answers now!
- Our Father who art is heaven, help us keep *OurParish* open.
- Archbishop O'Malley -- Please come to *OurParish* to see the error of your ways.
- Closing for the wrong reason.
- It is not too late to save *OurParish* Church.
- Wanted: An exterminator to clean out all the rats in Brighton.
- Here's the church - here's the steeple - close the doors and keep out the people.
- Our Church is alive -- don't close it!
- Jesus said, "Thou shalt not steal" -- \$Lennon, \$O'Malley -- you must have missed that class. Shame on you!

- Property = \$\$ Souls = 0
- *OurParish* -- Love lives here.
- Jesus, save us from the Archdiocese of Boston.
- Closing *OurParish* doors is like closing a door on Jesus.
- I may be homeless in September -- keep *OurParish* open.
- Keep *OurParish* open -- over 1200 at weekend masses.
- Your words from 2/4/04: "We are going to continue to support strong, parishes with a vibrant life and liturgy" -- keep your word!
- Bishop O'Malley -- God is watching!
- Ciaphas and Annas are back in charge.
- "Support strong parishes" is not the same as "close strong parishes."
- Archdiocese in the RED -- *OurParish* is in the BLACK.
- The Archdiocese cares more about our money than our souls.
- *OurParish* is not a declining parish --- closing it makes no sense.
- Up with God's laws! -- Down with Canon Law!
- *OurParish* is not for sale!
- I was ashamed and embarrassed by the actions of Cardinal Law -- now I'm disgusted and bewildered by the actions of his successor.
- No contributions without representation -- give the parishes back to the people -- we are the Church.
- God loves *OurParish* -- why doesn't the Archbishop?
- Some people will do anything to get a red hat.
- *OurParish* -- united we stand.
- Jesus loves *OurParish* -- this I know -- Sean O'Malley just wants the dough.
- Cardinal Rule: Obey the Cardinal (or bishop). Cardinal Sin: Call for the resignation of Cardinal Law. And he's basking in sunny Italy on our dime.
- Bishop Lennon is driving the bulldozer for the Archdiocese -- Look out!
- *OurParish* -- my church is a temple of God, not real estate.
- Please listen to us ordinary Catholics.
- The hierarchy can close our church, but never our hearts and minds.
- Bishop Sean -- leave my church alone! I'm not willing to pay for the coverup and Cardinal Law.
- The real reason for the closing is [our pastor's] integrity and openness.
- Cardinal Cushing is rolling over in his grave.
- This is our church and this is our money.
- What would Jesus do?
- Suppress clericalism, not parishes.
- Religious education -- this is one hell of a lesson.
- What does it profit a diocese to gain \$billions\$ yet suffer the loss of its immortal soul?
- Shame on Sean!
- *OurParish* = superb attendance, = no debt, = great Christian community, Why close?
- Mother Church has abandoned her family.
- How do we explain this pathetic silliness to our children?
- Fry the friar!
- The sign of a great leader is the ability to admit his mistakes and to apologize and to rectify the situation.
- Admit where the money is going!

- The Bible says, "The Lord will not abandon his people." Why then are the people of *OurParish* being abandoned by the Archdiocese?
- Thou shalt not kill -- a parish!
- Bishop Sean -- listen to us!
- Jesus, save us from your Church!