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40% of Brooklyn parishes can't meet expenses

by Ed Wilkinson by Catholic News Service

BROOKLYN, N.Y. -- Brooklyn Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio March 1 called for the renewal of church life in the diocese by addressing changes he said are needed in parishes, schools and diocesan structures.

In a pastoral letter titled "Renewing the Mission: Christ Jesus, Our Hope," he said changes have become necessary because "meeting the ordinary expenses of parish life and maintaining the buildings that form our parishes and schools should never detract us from the mission of evangelization."

"No parish or school should have to face the dilemma of choosing between meeting its ordinary financial obligations, including the maintenance of its buildings, beautiful as they are, over serving the pastoral needs of all of its members, 'living stones' of the church," wrote Bishop DiMarzio.

Many parishes have had a tough time maintaining the church's mission of evangelization while trying to pay for the upkeep of its plants, "many of which require extensive repairs that few parishes can afford," the pastoral said.

Forty percent of the parishes in Brooklyn and Queens -- the two boroughs of New York City that comprise the diocese -- cannot meet their ordinary expenses, forcing them to request assistance from the diocese.

"Last year, our diocese provided nearly \$5 million in aid to parishes in financial need, a sum that can no longer be sustained," said Bishop DiMarzio.

He pointed out that since debts owed the diocese by parishes were forgiven as part of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the number of parishes seeking aid has risen. More than \$21 million has been requested in the past 10 years. Because of the significant decrease in revenue from investments and the general economic downturn in the nation's economy, those types of requests can no longer be met.

Bishop DiMarzio asked for a time of prayer and planning during this "decisive moment in the life of the church in Brooklyn and Queens."

All parishes have been asked to participate in a self-study report to identify their challenges and strengths. They will be given statistics about their individual parishes to aid their reports. A task force of diocesan leaders, both religious and lay, will assess their studies.

"Based on our findings, decisions will be made beginning in September of 2010, identifying specific measures that must be taken to ensure the vitality of our parish faith communities while maintaining sufficient facilities to support the broader mission of evangelization," wrote Bishop DiMarzio.

The bishop called for all members of the laity to dedicate their talents and efforts to preaching the Gospel and furthering the work of the new evangelization. He also made a special outreach to young people to become even more involved.

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