

Marion I. Ferreira  
President

Associates for the Preservation of Creole Cultural Heritage, Inc.

Dear Marion I. Ferreira,

I read your postings on Henriette Delille. I thought that you would be interested in the situation at hand, the closure of St. Augustine Parish where Mother Delille began her apostalate. We need action from all of our people around the country. Please read through this email. I have contacted Marc Morial for assistance. The email has responses from Marc Morial and Jacque Morial. Jacque has provided some invaluable insight. I have attached a letter that I am planning to send to Sen. Landrieu (La.) and the Congressional Black Caucus once it is approved by my cousin Fr. Jerome who is traveling at this time.

Please respond to allow me to know you received this email.

As Jacque has requested, we need to get this message out to everyone across the country to respond. As well, if all start to send even \$10 to the church, we can be successful.

Respectfully,  
Dawna Dukes  
Texas State Representative

Everyone,

This is an urgent request. See the article below. St. Augustine Parish and its rich New Orleans history become victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Write to Sen. Landrieu immediately to ask her to assist in no further destruction to our Creole heritage by closing this church. Our people are spread throughout the country having lost their family centers. If genocide were defined as death, this is a nail in the coffin. This church is the bedrock from which all Southern Louisiana slaves, free people of color and Creoles bore Catholicism. We must beseech her assistance and call upon the Diocese of New Orleans as well not to close this church.

Father Jerome (my cousin) nearly gave his life to stay in Treme at St. Augustine to pray and protect it from Katrina. God spared the church with minimal damage in the large scheme of things. How can man now make the decision to close this church? Arch Bishop Hughes (Baton Rouge) announced the closure in the newspaper February 10th.

I am sending a letter to Sen. Landrieu and all the Louisiana politicians I know for assistance. This effort can be successful. Request of everyone who cares about the Louisiana black and Creole history to do the same.

"Now for faith is substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen."

[Hebrews 11:1 KJV]

Respectfully,  
Dawnna Dukes  
State Representative

Click here: U.S. Senator Mary L. Landrieu (D-La.) | Contact Me  
<<http://landrieu.senate.gov/contact/index.cfm>>

please share widely. . .

The Archdiocese of New Orleans has announced that it will close the oldest and most historic African American parish in North America. The Archdiocese claims that, after Katrina, it can no longer afford to subsidize St. Augustine. The truth is that the operations of St. Augustine Parish are financially self sufficient. Apparently the Archdiocese did not examine the current financial statements of St. Augustine or perhaps the other parishes slated for closure; the Archdiocese had not revealed any objective criteria for its decision to close St. Augustine.

Many Catholics and even more African Americans and others in New Orleans and across the country are suspicious of the Archdiocese and its unsupported claims regarding the finances and viability of St. Augustine Parish and others slated for closure. Consistent with the plans and initiatives of Mayor Nagin's Bring New Orleans Back Commission (on which Archbishop Hughes serves as a member) the interests, opinions and rights of return and self determination have been overlooked and callously disrespected by the Archdiocese. It is clear that the Archdiocese has engaged in a process that is not transparent and is inconsiderate of the interests of the parishioners of St. Augustine and the large community whose needs the parish has served for more than a century and a half.

Not only is St. Augustine a uniquely historic congregation, the parish and its pastor have played a vital role in the recovery of New Orleans after Katrina.

The parish and its pastor, Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD, have partnered with human service institutions and government agencies to provide essential services to the Treme and surrounding communities, including a food pantry, healthcare services and technical assistance and training for the recovery and reconstruction of damaged homes. In addition, the pastor of St. Augustine remained at the church rectory during the storm, and after briefly evacuating several days after Katrina, he returned as soon as possible to begin to meet the spiritual and human needs of the parishioners and neighbors of St. Augustine.

St. Augustine has emerged over its century and a half of history as the African American cathedral of New Orleans, initially because the Catholic Churches of New Orleans remained segregated through the 1960s. Since the Catholic parishes of New Orleans were nominally integrated, St. Augustine has continued to serve the spiritual and human needs of primarily African Americans through its ministry and mission.

The neighborhoods served by St. Augustine suffered comparatively minimal damage, and most of the parishioners of St. Augustine have either returned or expressed their explicit intention to return. Furthermore, given the destruction in large parts of the city, it is likely that the undamaged housing in the neighborhoods surrounding St. Augustine will continue to experience growth in population and vitality and more New Orleanians return to New Orleans. This irrefutable fact is evidenced by the rising demand for housing and increased rents since Katrina in Treme and surrounding neighborhoods.

To close this parish, based on the factually erroneous and politically self serving claims of the Archbishop and his advisors, is not only an act of bad faith, but a transparent injustice consistent with so many actions and initiatives of the civic and business leadership of New Orleans which have the effect of discouraging the return of victims of Katrina and the failures of government that followed.

If you agree that the historical, spiritual and human service mission of St. Augustine is vital to the recovery and rebuilding of New Orleans with social justice, fairness and sincere respect for diversity, share this message and make your voice heard: contact Archbishop Hughes at 7887 Walmsley, New Orleans, LA 70125, or at (504) 861-6262, or by fax at (504)861-6312 or (504)866-2906, or email Monsignor Roger Morin, Vicar General and Deputy to Archbishop Hughes at [bishopmorin@archdiocese-no.org](mailto:bishopmorin@archdiocese-no.org)

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By Bruce Nolan

Staff writer

St. Augustine Parish and its rich New Orleans history become victims of Hurricane Katrina

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Called to manage a floodscape of devastated church parishes and hollowed-out neighborhoods, the Archdiocese of New Orleans Thursday said it could no longer afford to subsidize a treasure that counts as one of Hurricane Katrina's walking

wounded: St. Augustine Parish, the cradle of black Catholicism in New Orleans.

Archbishop Alfred Hughes announced Thursday that he will close the parish, the third- or fourth-oldest in the archdiocese.

St. Augustine's historic church will remain open for weekly worship, now as one of two places of worship in the newly enlarged St. Peter Claver Parish next door.

But historic St. Augustine Parish will cease to exist in mid-March. Whatever future the community builds for itself, it will do so under another name and under a new pastor.

Founded in 1841 on a former plantation at the edge of the French Quarter, St. Augustine's roots are African, French, Haitian and Spanish.

Its story provides a window into the rich cultural ancestry of old New Orleans.

The city's Creole families worshipped there, along with Haitians and free black people. Short pews arranged along the walls of the church welcomed slaves, an unusual piece of hospitality, according to parish histories.

The gold-leaf French inscription over the antique marble altar reads: "Si tu savais le don de Dieu" -- ("If you knew the gift of God") -- and the stained glass windows are French.

The French saints today look down on the original pews where both free and enslaved Africans sat. And pictures of their descendants, black Mardi Gras Indians, line the walls between the stations of the cross depicting the Passion of Christ.

"They would sit here and sing. Pray in his name. After church they'd walk over to Congo Square, and they'd do their thing," said the Rev. Jerome LeDoux, 75, now fated to be St. Augustine's last pastor.

A unique culture

Doing their thing, he explained, meant drumming, bartering, making music,

exchanging memories and recipes -- fashioning a culture, a cuisine and a sound that would uniquely characterize New Orleans .

"I feel their presence here all the time," he said.

So it is that sometime after arriving at St. Augustine 15 years ago, LeDoux set about exposing St. Augustine's African roots.

He imported a polished cypress stump for an altar. Another chest-high stump serves as a pulpit. His vestments were African.

LeDoux's Masses -- just one on Sunday -- were long, luxuriant, sacramental and social.

At the moment in the middle of the ritual when the priest calls on parishioners to turn and briefly wish each other well, LeDoux's congregants stopped the Mass for 10 or 15 minutes, wandering the church greeting and socializing until everyone, it seemed, had learned something about everyone else.

The city's jazz musicians or singers sometimes provided music. And LeDoux's sermons were as likely to be sung as spoken.

European tourists, especially Germans, often sat in back, soaking up the exotic mix of the sensual and sacred.

Yet St. Augustine's Treme neighborhood for years has been mostly populated by black Baptists, and many who lived there struggled against poverty.

In recent years, the Sunday congregation usually ran about 200 souls, counting the tourists, LeDoux said. He constantly sought outside donors and launched new festivals, as well as new jazz Masses, to supplement St. Augustine's \$3,000 weekly income, he said.

Celebrating the city

The church sponsored a Jazzfest brunch every year and a Satchmo festival every August, around Louis Armstrong's birthday.

But St. Augustine's parish life was far from robust.

Then Katrina ripped the metal sheathing off its steeple and opened its roof sufficiently to create at least \$400,000 in rainwater damage, said Drex

Brumfield, a church volunteer who has spent years lavishing care on the historic old church.

At a press conference Thursday, Archbishop Alfred Hughes said the storm-ravaged archdiocese no longer can afford to subsidize St. Augustine's existence. It was one of seven marginal parishes that were barely providing the additional elements of community life that parishioners need, Hughes said.

In an interview Thursday, LeDoux seemed neither angry nor bitter, even as the news caught him in the middle of an ambitious new fund-raising effort.

Saxophonist Donald Harrison composed a Mardi Gras Mass combining jazz, gospel and Indian chants that raised \$15,000 in a performance at St. Augustine in January, LeDoux said.

They conceived the idea to take the Mass to other St. Augustine parishes around the country in a series of benefits. Philadelphia is Sunday. New York City and Washington, D.C., follow a little later, he said.

LeDoux said he sat up most of one night this week writing Hughes about the decision. He declined to describe it, but it was clear he disagreed. "I'm not in his corner, but I will not disobey him," he said.

LeDoux is a vigorous 75. As a member of a religious order, the Society of the Divine Word, his future is in the hands of his superior in that community.

"The thought of retirement hasn't even crossed my mind," he said.

### **Neighborhood jewel**

The changes take effect in mid-March. Thereafter the new community will be under the leadership of the Rev. Michael Jacques, who has built nearby St. Peter Claver into a vibrant center of modern African-American Catholicism.

Even so, the news of St. Augustine's future and LeDoux's imminent departure evoked dismay throughout the community as it circulated Thursday.

Even among non-Catholics, St. Augustine is regarded as a treasure to the neighborhood, because LeDoux had made it so, said a local artist named Dr. Foots.

In 1999, South African jazz musician Hugh Masekela performed at a Treme festival in the church parking lot, he said. And another time a brass band and second-line parade strutted into the neighborhood and headed into the church fellowship hall at 1 a.m. -- a birthday party for the father of rapper Master P.

(Master P "could have had any hotel around here he wanted," said Ken Williams, who has known Treme all his life. "But he wanted the church."

At the very moment the news reached them, Williams and a small group of men were standing at the edge of the property discussing plans for a New Orleans cultural event the Saturday before Mardi Gras: a drum circle, appearances by Mardi Gras Indians, maybe a brass band.

It would be an attempt to recover the culture of the storm-battered city, he said. And the place would have to be at St. Augustine.

Williams and the others absorbed the news of LeDoux's departure, and its implications, silently.

"We got to tell them how deep this is," said Ron Chisom, a community activist. "This cultural piece, it's really big."

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