

Little faith -- in the diocese  
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One can understand the need for the Diocese of Springfield to consolidate, close churches and merge parishes in order to absolve debt brought about by dwindling membership in the wake of horribly mishandled sex-abuse cases involving Catholic priests.

One can also understand the anger and sadness of the many faithful parishioners, here in North Berkshire and well beyond, as they lose the churches they grew up in, got married in and baptized their children in.

What one cannot understand is the way the diocese went about this entire procedure, in many cases acting like a fatherly figure who pats his followers on the head, saying "There, there, everything will be all right," all the while knowing that everything will soon go to hell.

Over the past year, the diocese has done everything possible to make itself look good, paying lip service to "listening" to the concerns of its parishioners, knowing full well that the hammer would fall on many of them, crushing their hopes and dreams of saving their precious churches. This was disingenuous at best, leading to false hope among the faithful who now have little reason for faith -- at least in their regional leaders.

St. Francis and St. Stanislaus and St. Thomas, among many other Catholic churches, will soon be gone, sold off to the highest bidders -- if there are any bidders (how many condominiums are needed in communities like North Adams, Adams and Lanesborough?).

Soon after Jan. 1, 2009, no doubt, the diocese will swoop in and gut these remarkable buildings of everything valuable, leaving empty hulks where once the joyous sang and worshipped.

We admire the spirit of young Catholics like Matthew Alcombright, a third-year seminarian with the diocese and a member of St. Stan's, who wants parishioners here and everywhere to "pull together and embrace our universal Catholicism." (Transcript story, Aug. 12) For many, that will be difficult, having lost their trust in the very spiritual leaders who are supposed to guide them.

If Catholicism is to move forward and to be embraced, its leaders need to change to meet the needs of the modern world. The first important change would be to use honesty, not subterfuge and spin control, in its dealing with its parishioners.