

# The Sacred and the Sustainable: Changing Regional Demographics Pull the Third Leg From the Stool, Disrupting Parish Communities

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# Context

The ADNY self reports that changes in regional demographics have upset the financial stability of many of their existing parishes.

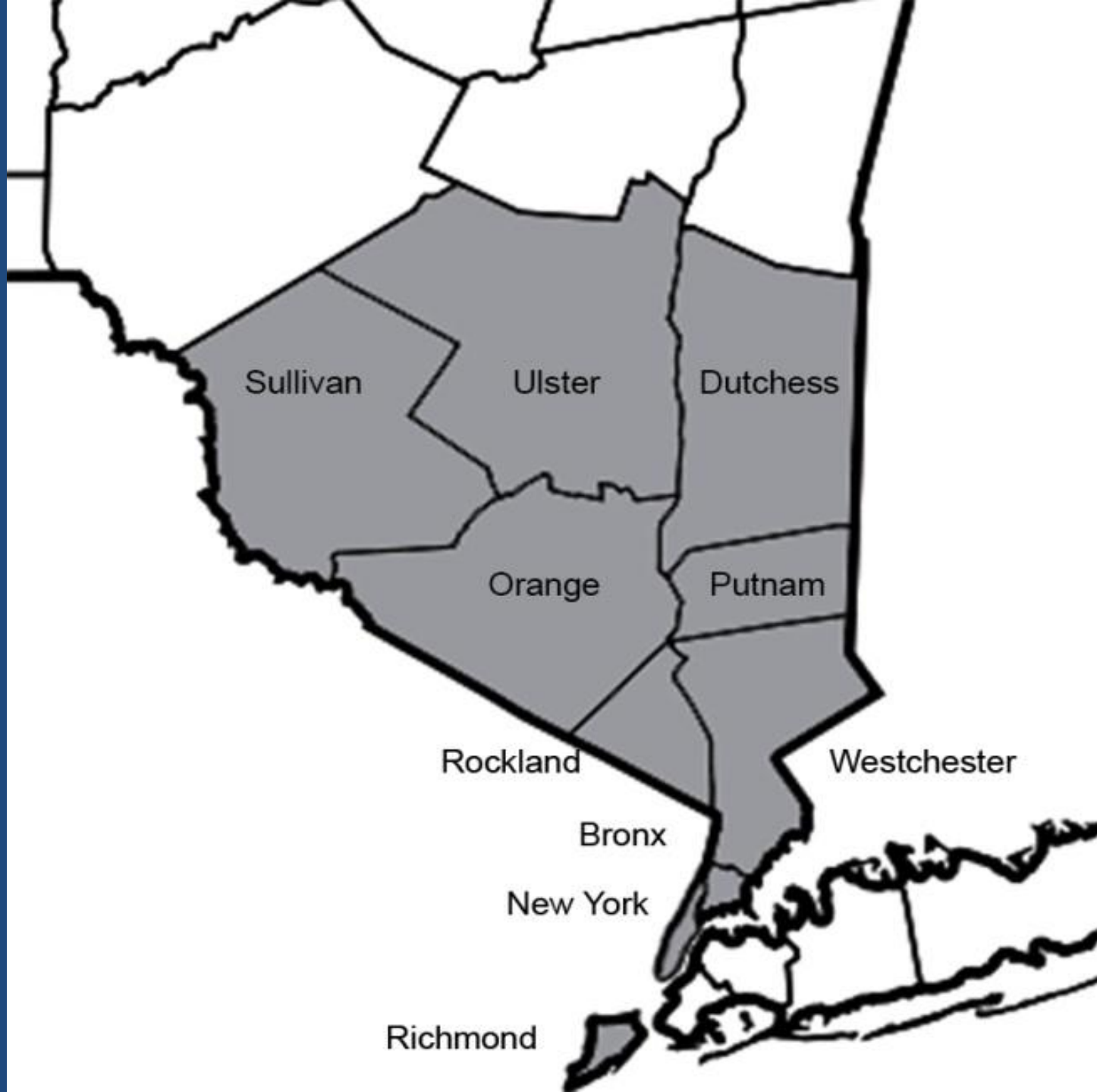
This investigation is an attempt to capture and visualize the resulting realignments in the context of the regional archdiocese. Few previous studies exist on this topic; the data is hindered by irregular collection, uneven reporting, and possibly, a willful lack of transparency.

# Context

Religious organizations have been discussed in language borrowed from the marketplace and the economic viability of religious organizations has been modeled as a product of the surplus resources required for growth, language that is repeated by the ADNY through their strategic parish planning initiative, “Making All Things New,” which suggests that in spite of their apparent “decreased financial stability,” the church will rebound and “continue to grow.” Although nationally Catholic parishes have trended towards greater financial stability since the 1990s, the financial instability explanation is typical of the ADNY’s strategy.

Throughout the ADNY statements and publications, improved financial stewardship is stressed as a key component of the viability and success of the organization.

Responding to financial pressures, in 2007 the ADNY created a plan for realignment of parishes that included over 20 closures or mergers. A similar realignment is currently under consideration as more Catholics move upstate.



Sullivan

Ulster

Dutchess

Orange

Putnam

Rockland

Westchester

Bronx

New York

Richmond

# Parish Closings: Mary Help of Christians (New York)



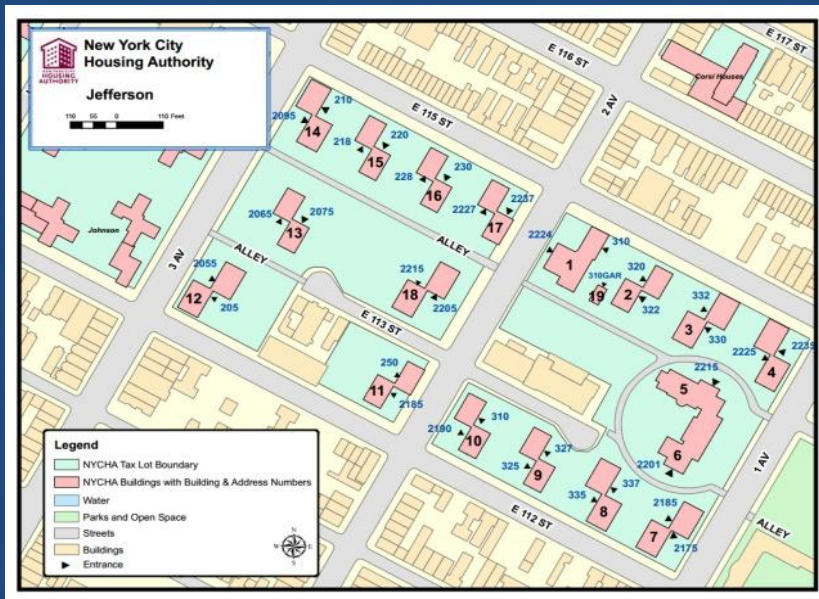
“Our church always ministered to the immigrants and to the poor, and they engaged the neighborhood youths in various activities. The church was there to guide the people as they arrived in this foreign land. They continued this tradition as the demographic shifted from an Italian population to an Hispanic population.”

After preservationists lost a years long battle, the church was demolished in 2013 to make way for 158 apartment units.

# Parish Closings: Our Lady Queen of Angels (New York)



“There are 400 dedicated parishioners, some in their nineties who love Our Lady Queen of Angels and wish to save it. Most have spent their lives there, seen their children baptized and married there and have joined together to protect an important part of their lives and an important part of the Church they love.”



# Parish Closings: Saint Mary (New York)



“In 1886, the Rev. Patrick O'Sullivan established St. Mary as a parish serving Irish, Italian and Polish immigrants. In 1914, it was reported that the parishioners number 1,100. By the time Father John Sullivan became pastor in 1987, however, there were 600 congregants left. The dwindling congregation was due primarily through the exodus of congregants to the surrounding suburbs and the death of the older ones.”

The church is now home to a Korean congregation.

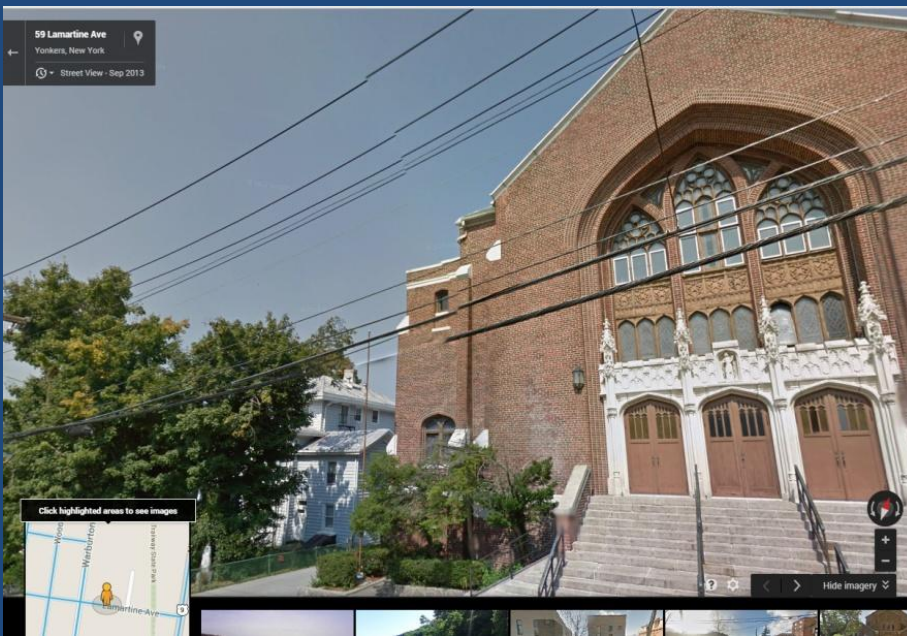
# Parish Closings: Saint John the Baptist de LaSalle (Richmond)



Purchased and operated by the Korean Catholic Apostolate.



# Parish Closings: Our Lady of the Rosary (Westchester)



'After losing its parish priest, Our Lady of the Rosary, which has always served Portuguese immigrants, has had a priest travel from New Jersey to say Mass.'

"'This is part of my family,'" said Dulce Ginja, who moved from Portugal 15 years ago and comes from Mount Vernon every Sunday.'

# Parish Closings: Saint Stanislaus (Westchester)



"Knowing no one is head of your church makes you feel very alone. Our heart is not the same." The 180 parishioners at St. Stanislaus are grateful, Mrs. Ciborowski said, for the Rev. Virgilio Franco, a Spanish-born priest. Mrs. Ciborowski said there had been no priest to hear her mother's confessions in Polish since the pastor retired, but Father Franco, although he speaks no Polish, "hears my mother confess in Polish, and he accepts it." (1986)

Now a live music venue.

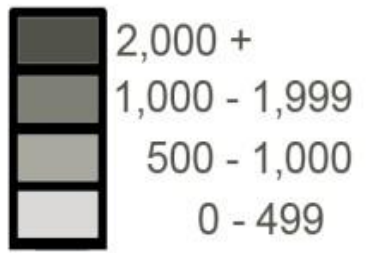
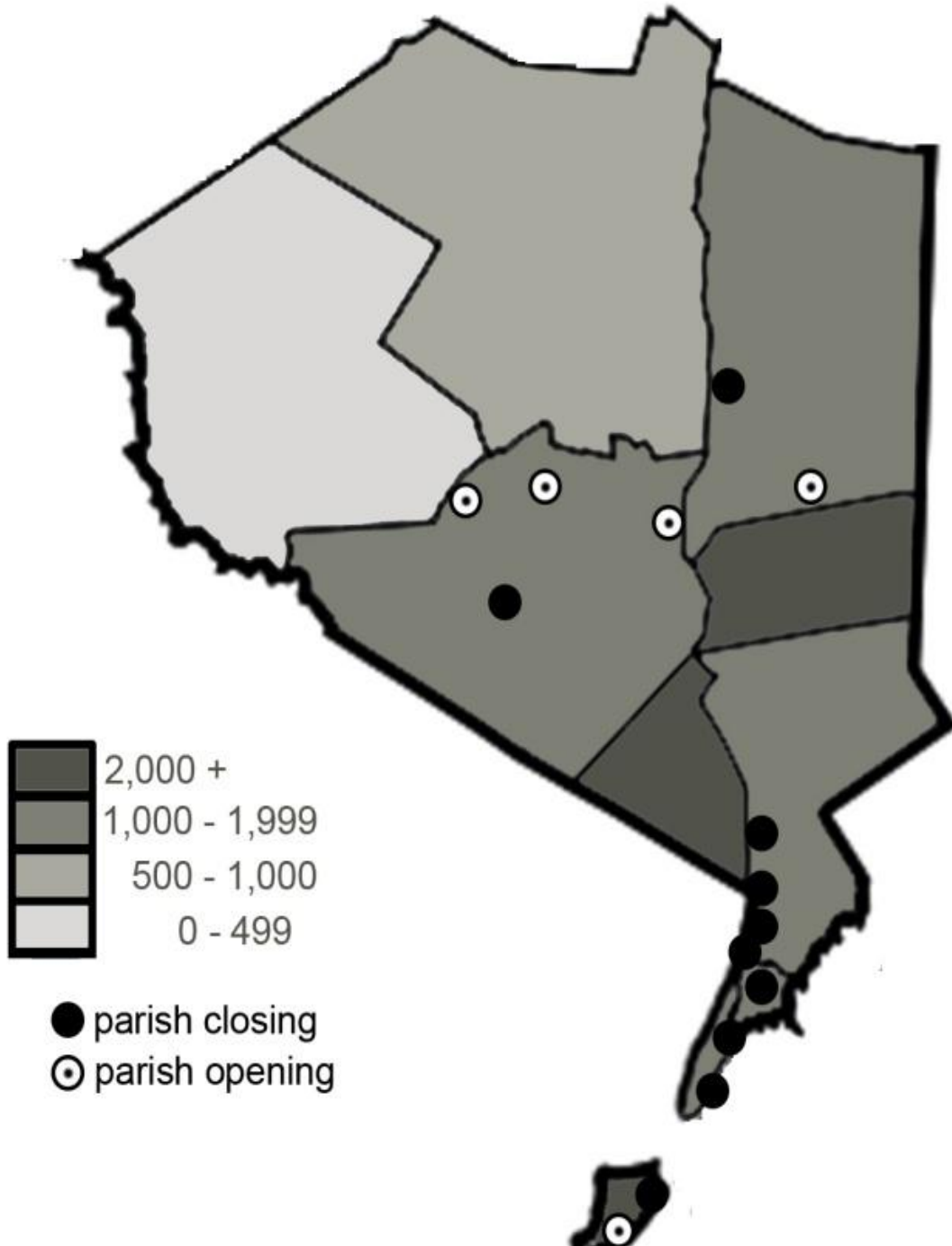
# Parish Closings: Holy Cross (Westchester)



"Our young people moved to Rockland or Putnam where the homes are cheaper. We have no young people here. We haven't had a single altar boy in 20 years," he said.

"Our people have a lot of pride in their parish. The kids want to come back here to get married even if they've been away for many years," he said.'

Now offered for sale as a commercial property.



- parish closing
- ⊙ parish opening

# Conclusions

Aggregated data does not support the trend towards closures along the Hudson River Valley and further investigation is necessary.

It is clear that the ADNY believes itself to be acting on a strategy of reorganization to promote the long term financial success of their organization and also that the closures have the potential to upset existing community enclaves supporting traditionally vulnerable populations such as the poor, the ill, the elderly, recent immigrants, and non-English language speakers.