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“The Catholic Diocese of Lafayette and Desegregation, 1947-1972”

by

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In 1955, Bishop Jules B. Jeanmard of Lafayette (1918-1956) excommunicated two white Catholic women in Erath after they assaulted a white catechism teacher in response to unfounded concerns that catechism classes at Our Lady of Lourdes, the town's sole Catholic church, would be integrated. Jeanmard's intervention sealed his reputation as an advocate of racial equality in the South following his assignment of the first black priests trained by the Society of the Divine Word (S.V.D.) in 1934, acceptance of an African American candidate for the diocesan clergy in 1947, opening of Immaculata Minor Seminary in 1948 without racial restrictions, a 1951 pastoral letter that condemned discriminatory suffrage, and ordination of the South's first African American Catholic diocesan priest in 1952. Yet Jeanmard presided over the creation of most of the diocese's numerous racial parishes and schools, and he left the task of desegregating them to Bishop Maurice Schexnayder (1956-1972), who has received much less attention from historians and been overshadowed by his predecessor.¹

¹ "Excommunication in Erath," Time 66 (December 12, 1955): 88; Jules B. Jeanmard, "A Decree," attached to Jules B. Jeanmard to the "Parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes Church," November 26, 1955, folder "Lourdes OL, Erath - Racial

Jeanmard's biographers Mary Alice Fonteneot and Kathleen Toups interpret his 1951 pastoral letter on voting as "a step towards integration," but it did not address the subject. Approvingly, they write that when Jeanmard died in 1957, "Time Magazine reported that he had taken a solid pro-integration stand and that he had requested that his body lie in state in St. Paul's, an all-Black church [in Lafayette]." However, Bishop Jeanmard made no public statements about integration. As he had instructed, his body was taken to St. Paul's so that people of color might attend a Requiem Mass and then returned to the Cathedral of St John the Evangelist in Lafayette, attended largely by whites, for a second Requiem Mass. Rather than challenging segregation, these arrangements observed it. Historian R. Bentley Anderson claims that during the Erath incident "Catholics and non-Catholics were proud that the Diocese of Lafayette had shown such a firm commitment to racial justice." Yet Jeanmard's excommunication letter did not address racial justice but "violence on one of the catechism teachers." The bishop warned against interfering

Incident 1955," Archives of the Diocese of Lafayette (hereafter cited as ADL); Mary Alice Fontenot and Kathleen Toups, The Gentle Shepherd: A Memoir of Bishop Jules B. Jeanmard (Rayne, LA, 1998), 41-57, 226-27; Stephen J. Ochs, Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960 (Baton Rouge, and London 1990), 336-41, 359, 404-405, 421; Mark Newman, Desegregating Dixie: The Catholic Church in the South and Desegregation, 1945-1992 (Jackson, MS, 2018), 13, 24, 32, 55-57; Adam Fairclough, Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972 (Athens, GA, and London, 1995), 132, 171, 178.

“with the ministry of the priest in charge of Our Lady of Lourdes church, or with the teaching of catechism to the children of this parish.”²

Historians have given insufficient attention to how Bishop Schexnayder addressed desegregating the numerous segregated churches and schools built during Jeanmard’s episcopacy. Herbert J. May, Jr.’s master’s thesis outlines the “official policy” of the diocese regarding “race relations between 1940 and 1978” but “not its implementation, enforcement or effect,” and includes only “eight of the thirteen civil parishes” that comprised the diocese. Justin D. Poché’s dissertation on Catholics and

² Fontenot and Toups, Gentle Shepherd, 44-45 (first quotation on p. 44), 71 (second quotation), 232-34; Herbert J. May, Jr., “The Official Policy of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lafayette in Relation to Black Catholics, 1940 to 1978” (Master’s thesis, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1981), 26-27; “Last Homage to Negroes’ Friend,” Life 41 (March 18, 1957): 57; Ed Holmes, “In Louisiana: Signs of Progress,” Sign 35 (July 1956): 15; R. Bentley Anderson, “Prelates, Protest, and Public Opinion: Catholic Opposition to Desegregation, 1947-1955,” Journal of Church and State 46 (Summer 2004): 640 (third quotation); Jeanmard, “A Decree” (fourth and fifth quotations).

race in Louisiana concentrates mostly on the city of New Orleans. Adam Fairclough's study of Louisiana's civil rights struggle mentions the diocese fleetingly. Sister Patricia Lynch's history of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament (S.B.S.), a mostly white order founded by Philadelphia heiress Katherine Drexel in 1891, briefly discusses desegregation of the diocese's S.B.S. schools in the early 1970s. My broad study of Catholic desegregation in the South addresses the diocese periodically but without the sustained analysis of the episcopacies of Jeanmard and Schexnayder presented here that argues for significant continuity in their cautious approaches to desegregation and use of clerical authority against those who interfered with religious activities.³

³ May, "Official Policy of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lafayette in Relation to Black Catholics," 1 (first and second quotations), 2-3 (third quotation on p. 2-3; fourth quotation on p. 2); Justin D. Poché, "Religion, Race, and Rights in Catholic Louisiana, 1938-1970" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2007); Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 132, 171, 178; Newman, Desegregating Dixie, 37, 140, 142, 154, 163, 166, 167, 186, 199-200, 209, 227, 245, 246, 275, 348n84; Sr. Patricia Lynch, S.B.S., Sharing the Bread in Service: Sisters of the Blessed

Other works provide snapshots of the diocese and desegregation. In 1967, sociologist William A. Osborne noted considerable desegregation “at the deanery and diocesan levels” but minimal desegregation at the local level. Historian Dolores Egger Labbé’s master’s thesis on the beginning of segregated parishes in South Louisiana concluded with “some evidence of movement toward re-integration of parishes in Southwest Louisiana” in 1971. Thirty-one years later, Rhonda D. Evans, Craig J. Forsyth and Stephanie Bernard explored “the role segregated churches continue to have, and the attitudes of religious leaders within these churches towards the issue of racial integration.”⁴

Sacrament, 1891-1991, Vol. 2 (Bensalem, PA, 2001 [1998]), 120-22. May subsequently completed a study of Canon Law and the establishment of racial parishes in the diocese by Jeanmard and his successors. Herbert J. May, Jr., “A Canonical Investigation of Racial Parishes and Its Application to the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana, 1918-1978” (Degree of Licentiate in Canon Law diss., Catholic University of America, 1983). Poché’s later essay on the desegregation of Louisiana Catholicism terminates in 1962 and also focuses mostly on New Orleans. Justin Poché, “Separate but Sinful: The Desegregation of Louisiana Catholicism, 1938-1962,” in Louisiana Beyond Black and White: New Interpretations of Twentieth-Century Race and Race Relations, ed. Michael S. Martin with a foreword by Adam Fairclough (Lafayette, LA, 2011), 35-56.

⁴ William A. Osborne, The Segregated Covenant: Race Relations and American Catholics (New York, 1967), 48-69 (first quotation on p. 51); Dolores Egger Labbé, Jim Crow Comes to Church: The Establishment of Segregated Catholic Parishes in South Louisiana, 2d ed. (New York, 1978 [Lafayette, LA, 1971]), 85-95 (second quotation on p. 86); Rhonda D. Evans, Craig J. Forsyth and Stephanie Bernard, “One

Building on these studies, this article analyzes Catholic desegregation in the Diocese of Lafayette between 1947 and 1972, encompassing Jeanmard's limited efforts against segregation and the episcopacy of his successor. It contests Fontenot and Toups's claim that Jeanmard "pursued a course that would eventually lead to acceptance of the idea of integration in the churches and schools of the diocese." Despite his reputation as an advocate of integration and racial equality, Jeanmard oversaw the growth of segregated Catholic churches and schools, did not condemn segregation, and made only minor inroads against it in Catholic institutions. Schexnayder prioritized the church's sacral role in saving souls by providing Mass and administering the sacraments. Accordingly, he acted when segregationists excluded blacks from church but tolerated segregation within churches. Focused on the church's institutional survival and growth and likely concerned not to jeopardize the free transportation, textbooks and lunches that the state of Louisiana provided for Catholic schools, he was unwilling to desegregate Catholic institutions ahead of secular change. After federal authorities cut off aid to students in Catholic schools in 1966 for insufficient desegregation, the diocese accelerated its efforts, but hundreds of whites responded to more advanced desegregation in public schools under federal court order by enrolling in mostly white Catholic schools. When Schexnayder retired in 1972, desegregation of Catholic schools and churches remained incomplete, many whites had evaded its impact, and Catholic people of color increasingly favored retaining the institutions that had nurtured them.⁵

Church or Two? Contemporary and Historical Views of Race Relations in One Catholic Diocese," *Sociological Spectrum* 22 (April 2002): 225-44 (third quotation on p. 225).

⁵ Fontenot and Toups, *Gentle Shepherd*, 41.

Although most white Catholics in the Diocese of Lafayette preferred segregation during the civil rights era, they differed in their commitment to it. Militant segregationists were unyielding and claimed religious justification. By contrast, moderate segregationists preferred racial separation by custom and tradition but acquiesced when Schexnayder eventually mandated Catholic school and church desegregation, although many sought to delay or evade its consequences. A minority of white Catholics favored integration, and a few actively strove for its achievement.⁶

Catholic people of color were diverse in their composition and views. They included Creoles of Color, whose mixed race ancestry derived from African, French, Native American and Spanish roots, and blacks whose ancestors had been enslaved before the Civil War. Creoles of Color had enjoyed some freedoms as a distinct group between whites atop the social structure and the enslaved during the colonial

⁶ Raymond Bernard, S.J., “Attitudes and Opinions on Race Relations: Report of Field Survey of 42 Communities in a Southern State, July 14-August 3, 1956,” 1-65, B38 S100 01 Race Relations, Bernard, Raymond S.J., ADL; letters in folder “Lourdes OL, Erath – Racial Incident 1955,” ADL; Claude F. Oubre, A History of the Diocese of Lafayette (Strasbourg, France), 124.

and antebellum eras. In the twentieth century before the civil rights era, Creoles of Color and blacks were often as, if not more, divided by culture and social networks than by phenotypes. Creoles of Color were more likely to speak French or Creole, yet there were also many French and Creole speaking blacks, who were often light-skinned and descended from the offspring of white slaveholders and enslaved black females before the Civil War. To a considerable degree, a decline in French and Creole speaking, a common struggle against white racism through the civil rights movement, and the advent of Black Power in the second half of the 1960s and the early 1970s overrode distinctions between Creoles of Color and blacks, particularly among young people, but they not disappear entirely. Increasingly, but not uniformly, younger Creoles of Color and subsequent cohorts began to identify as black or as black and Creole. Although diminished, colorism nevertheless persisted in some communities and churches.⁷

⁷ Labbé, Jim Crow Comes to Church, 8-11, 13, 18-19; J. Hardy Jones, Jr., and Vernon J. Parenton “The People of Frilot Cove: A Study of Racial Hybrids,” American Journal of Sociology 57 (September 1951): 145-49; Carl A. Brasseaux, Keith P. Fontenot and Claude F. Oubre, Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country with a

During the antebellum era, Louisiana's Catholic churches had been open to all, although, unlike free people of color, the enslaved were segregated within them, and since that time a few Creoles of Color communities, such as Bois Mallet, had supported chapels. In 1895, Archbishop Francis Janssens established St. Katherine's Church in New Orleans as the first Catholic church designated for people of color in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, which then included the entire southern half of Louisiana. As a special parish, St. Katherine's did not have the territorial boundaries of an ordinary parish and was open to all people of color. Although attendance at the church was voluntary and Creoles of Color and blacks could still attend ordinary parishes, many Creoles of Color objected to its founding as racial discrimination in line with the enactment of state legislation that segregated public conveyances and accommodations. Janssens hoped that St. Katherine's would help keep others in the

foreword by Clifton Carmon (Jackson, MS, 1994), 110-114, 116-117, 119-22, 124-25; Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 3, 5, 13-17; James H. Dormon, "Ethnicity and Identity: Creoles of Color in Twentieth-Century South Louisiana," in Creoles of Color of the Gulf South, ed. James H. Dormon (Knoxville, TN, 1996), 166-72, 175-78; Alexandra Giancarlo, "Democracy and Public Space in Louisiana's Creole Trail Rides," Southeastern Geographer 56 (Summer 2016): 229-30; Teranda Joy Donatto, "Cultural Identity and Language: The Narratives of People of Color with Creole Descent in South Louisiana" (Master's thesis, University of Alabama, 2012), 2-7, 9, 11-13, 54-55, 84; Christopher Landry, "A Creole Melting Pot: The Politics of Language, Race, and Identity in Southwest Louisiana, 1918-45" (Ph.D., diss., University of Sussex, United Kingdom, 2015), 104-105; Nicholas Randolph Spitzer, "Zydeco and Mardi Gras: Creole Identity and Performance Genres in Rural French Louisiana" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1986), 200-202.

faith by providing them with a church in which they would not face discrimination. Shortly before his death in 1897, Janssens decided to establish Immaculate Conception at Petite Prairie (later renamed LeBeau), the first special parish in what would become the Diocese of Lafayette, having earlier allowed Father John Engberink, a diocesan priest, to open a chapel for African Americans in Leesburg (Cameron). Staffed by the Society of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart (Josephites), a mostly white order dedicated to missions among African Americans, Immaculate Conception's construction was partly funded by Mother Katherine Drexel.⁸

Archbishop James Hubert Blenk (1909-1918) resumed establishing special parishes, which he expected people of color to attend. White priests from religious orders, such as the Josephites and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans or Holy Ghost Fathers), mostly staffed special parishes, whereas diocesan clergy largely

⁸ Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 32, 51, 54-55, 111-12; James B. Bennett, Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans (Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2005), 142-43, 162-92; Labbé, Jim Crow Comes to Church, 2, 3, 14-15, 17-18, 27-41, 49-56, 58-62; George Turner, "The Josephites and Catholic Education in the United States" (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 1957), 73-74, 265-66, 272.

tended to territorial parishes. While many people of color accepted and attended special parishes with reluctance, increasingly they found them preferable to growing segregation within churches, receiving communion after whites, and exclusion from parish organizations in majority white churches.⁹

When consulted by their pastor, Catholic people of color in Lafayette asked for their own church, rather than contribute to the construction of a larger Catholic church for the city's burgeoning population in which they would remain segregated and excluded from parish societies. Mother Drexel helped fund the building of St. Paul Church, which opened as a special parish in 1912. Two years later, the Holy Ghost Fathers assumed responsibility for St. Paul's from the diocese. Drexel also provided funds for the building of St. Edward Church, staffed by the Holy Ghost Fathers, and school in New Iberia, both of which opened in 1918.¹⁰

⁹ Labbé, Jim Crow Comes to Church, 63-64, 69-72.

¹⁰ Labbé, Jim Crow Comes to Church, 73-76, 79; Evans, Forsyth and Bernard, "One Church or Two?," 228, 229; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette 65-67, 71, 72, 77, 85.

Unlike Catholic churches, Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New Orleans had long been segregated. In territory that later became the Diocese of Lafayette, the Sisters of the Holy Family, an Afro-Creole of Color order founded in New Orleans in the antebellum period, opened St Joseph elementary school for people of color in Opelousas in 1874. White orders of sisters also staffed schools for people of color in Grand Coteau, New Iberia, Washington, and Charenton. Mother Drexel part-funded a school for people of color at St. Paul Church in Lafayette that opened in 1916. The Sisters of the Holy Family staffed the school, as they had its predecessor St. Joseph's, and the Holy Rosary Institute, a girls' boarding school established in Lafayette in 1913. By 1918, Mother Drexel had "helped build or provide substantial support to nine" of the eleven schools for people of color in the diocese. Parishioners sometimes helped build the schools.¹¹

¹¹ Labbé, Jim Crow Comes to Church, 19; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 48-49, 77, 85; Loretta Myrtle Butler, "A History of Catholic Elementary Education for Negroes in the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1963), 52, 72, 74, 76, 78-79, 82-83, 86-87, 162; Patricia Lynch, "Mother Katherine Drexel's Rural Schools: Education and Evangelization through Lay

In December 1918, Jules B. Jeanmard, who was born in Breaux Bridge in 1879 and reared in Carencro, Louisiana, became the first Bishop of Lafayette, which spanned southwest Louisiana between the Atchafalaya and Sabine rivers. By 1919, the diocese had 152,792 Catholics, including 40,000 people of color. Jeanmard encouraged Drexel to fund more schools for people of color, some of which were constructed on land they donated. He also recruited the Josephites, the Holy Ghost Fathers, the La Salette Missionaries, and the Society of the Divine Word (S.V.D.), a mostly German order based in the Netherlands, to staff more churches and missions for people of color. The diocese mirrored and contributed to Jim Crow. In 1923 and 1933, the first and second diocesan synods declared that “Whites [were] not to attend Negro churches” and instructed pastors of predominantly white churches to provide a

Leadership,” in Cross, Crozier and Crucible: A Volume Celebrating the Bicentennial of a Catholic Diocese in Louisiana, ed. Glenn R. Conrad (New Orleans, 1993), 264-65 (quotation on p. 265). Lynch claims there were twelve schools for people of color in the Diocese of Lafayette in 1918 but other sources suggest eleven. Butler, “History of Catholic Elementary Education for Negroes in the Diocese of Lafayette,” 72; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 77. Holy Rosary Institute later accepted day students and became coeducational. Benedict Joseph, “Picture of a Catholic School,” Our Colored Missions 41 (February 1955): 18; “Holy Rosary Institute, 1913-1988,” box D38 R100 00 Racism (Copied Publications, Etc), ADL. When accounts differ about schools’ founding dates, those given are from Oubre’s diocesan history.

“place” for “Negroes” within them that would “avoid difficulties, due regard being had for the social usages of this region.”¹²

¹² Jean-Marie Jammes, “Lafayette, 1918,” in Cross, Crozier and Crucible, ed. Conrad, 145-46, 148, 151-54; May, “Canonical Investigation of Racial Parishes and Its Application to the Diocese of Lafayette,” 60-65, 82; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 57, 74, 77, 82-89; Our Negro and Indian Missions: Annual Report of the Secretary of the Commission for the Catholic Missions Among the Colored People and the Indians, January 1942, 13, Archives of the Society of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart, Baltimore, Maryland (hereafter cited as ASSJ); Butler, “History of Catholic Elementary Education for Negroes in the Diocese of Lafayette,” 66-67 (quotations on p. 67); “La Salette Missionaries, Province of Mary, Mother of the Americas: La Salette in Louisiana,” <https://www.lasalette.org/index.php/news/la-salette-news-america/223-la-salette-in-louisiana>, accessed December 7, 2021. The diocese’s civil parishes were Acadia, Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Evangeline, Iberia, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, and Vermilion.

Pressured by the S.V.D., in 1934 Jeanmard accepted the order's first African American priests, trained at its seminary, St. Augustine's, in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, and became "the first southern bishop to accept black priests in his diocese." In May, Bishop Richard O. Gerow of Natchez ordained the four clergymen, Anthony Bourges of Lafayette, Maurice Rousseve of New Orleans, Vincent Smith of Lebanon, Kentucky, and Francis Wade of Washington, D.C. Jeanmard established the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a black parish in Lafayette, especially for them where they served as assistant pastors under a white S.V.D. priest, Herman K Patzelt, until Bourges replaced him as pastor in 1939.¹³

Jeanmard was not personally committed to segregation and accepted it in a pragmatic concession to segregationist preferences among many whites within and outside Catholic ranks, and in an effort to evangelize and serve people of color by providing them with churches and schools. When Monsignor A. F. Isenberg, the rector of St. John's Cathedral in Lafayette, remonstrated with Father Bourges for attending a memorial service for the late Pope Pius XI in 1939, Jeanmard, who had invited priests to attend, told Bourges to ignore the "old crank." The bishop routinely

Fontenot and Toups, Gentle Shepherd, 40. By 1940, the diocese had thirty-one churches and missions and by 1947 thirty schools for people of color. Our Negro and Indian Missions, January 1940, 5-7, ASSJ; Butler, "History of Catholic Elementary Education for Negroes in the Diocese of Lafayette," 73.

¹³ "History of Black Catholicism in Louisiana" (quotation), ASSJ; "Congratulations and Prayers," Colored Harvest 71 (May 1959): 4; Ochs, Desegregating the Altar, 323-41; May, "Canonical Investigation of Racial Parishes and Its Application to the Diocese of Lafayette," 66.

had a black priest accompany him at significant occasions, such as the annual Christ the King parade held at St. Charles College in Grand Coteau. Rather than confining special parishes to the parade's rear, Jeanmard ensured that all parishes marched alphabetically. In 1950, he incardinated, that is formally accepted into his diocese, Father Austin Chachere, an African American ordained by the Trinitarians five years earlier. In 1953, the bishop ensured that Murray Martin became a Knight of St. Gregory and Eleanor Figaro received the papal Pro Ecclesia medal, the first people of color in the diocese to receive these honors.¹⁴

Even as he proudly reported the building of more "Negro" churches to the Washington, D.C.-based Commission for the Catholic Missions Among the Colored People and the Indians which helped fund them, Jeanmard made tentative inroads against segregation. In 1947, he accepted an African American Vernon Dauphin for training as a diocesan priest. With no seminary in the diocese and Notre Dame Seminary in the Archdiocese of New Orleans restricted to whites, Jeanmard sent

¹⁴ Ochs, Desegregating the Altar, 341-42 (quotation on p. 342); Fontenot and Toups, Gentle Shepherd, 43-45; James F. Geraghty to Steve Ochs, January 13, 1988, folder "Racism," ADL.

Dauphin to St. John's Abbey Seminary in Collegeville, Minnesota, but he left a year later. In 1948, the bishop opened Immaculata Minor Seminary in Lafayette with a black student among its intake. In 1952, Jeanmard ordained Louis LeDoux, an African American who had studied at St. Augustine's Seminary and the Grand Seminaire in Montreal, Canada.¹⁵

Jeanmard also addressed secular racial discrimination. In a March 1941 letter to the Lafayette Daily Advertiser, the bishop praised African American soldiers, criticized racial inequalities in education and healthcare, and endorsed equal opportunity. In an October 1950 letter to the St. Landry Parish public school board, Jeanmard contrasted black soldiers' service in the Korean War with their treatment "at home as pariahs robbing them of their equal rights to education." In November 1951, he declared in a pastoral letter read in the diocese's churches: "the official who has recourse to subterfuge in order to rob a citizen, otherwise qualified, of his right to

¹⁵ Our Negro and Indian Missions, January 1946, 14-16, January 1949, 9-13, January 1951, 7-10, ASSJ; Thaddeus C. Boucree, "Negro Priests, American Apostolate," Our Colored Missions 39 (May 1953): 70; Ochs, Desegregating the Altar, 404-405; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 95, 102-103, 107.

register and vote, because of the color of his skin, violates his oath of office and makes him guilty of the sin of perjury.” The bishop urged people of color to vote, exclaiming that “to abstain from voting ... is like an act of desertion or treason: it is playing in[to] the hands of those who would not want you to vote.” Jeanmard’s words may have had an effect. In 1956, black voter registration in Louisiana was 51 percent in largely Catholic parishes (counties) and 23 percent in heavily white Protestant parishes (counties).¹⁶

¹⁶ [Lafayette] Daily Advertiser, March 14, 1941; May, “Official Policy of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lafayette in Relation to Black Catholics,” 15-16 (first quotation on p. 16); Jules B. Jeanmard to “The Clergy, Religious and Laity,” November 28, 1951 (second and third quotations), folder 15, box 52, Joseph H. Fichter Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Loyola University Library, Loyola University New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter cited as Fichter Papers); Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 132; John H. Fenton and Kenneth N. Vines, “Negro Registration in Louisiana,” American Political Science Review 51 (September 1957): 704-13; Osborne, Segregated Covenant, 60; John H. Fenton, “The Negro Voter in Louisiana,” Journal of Negro Education 26 (Summer 1957): 322-24.

Jeanmard was also influenced by Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel of New Orleans, who headed the Province of New Orleans that comprised Louisiana's three Catholic dioceses (Alexandria, Lafayette and New Orleans). In March 1953, Rummel declared in a pastoral letter "let there be no further discrimination or segregation in the pews, at the Communion rail, at the confessional and in parish meetings, just as there will be no segregation in the kingdom of heaven." The archbishop explained that because all Catholics were members of the Mystical Body of Christ on earth there should be no racial distinctions among them. Although Jeanmard, like all Catholic prelates, had virtual autonomy in running his diocese, his biographers observe that he "followed the archbishop's mandate, slowly, but surely, along the rocky road of integration." In October, the Diocese of Lafayette's synod, which ten years earlier had reiterated its acceptance of segregation in majority white churches, declared that there should be no racial discrimination in churches or chapels.¹⁷

¹⁷ "Pastoral Message of Archbishop Rummel: 'Let There Be No Segregation,'" (first quotation), folder 4, box 8, series 33, "Keep Your Cool," Southwest Louisiana Register, August 21, 1969, press clipping, folder 7, box 7, series 33, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice Records, Marquette University, Milwaukee,

However, as in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, there was no enforcement and minimal compliance. People of color were routinely segregated in majority white churches or told to attend a special parish or mission. Father Albert J. McKnight, an African American Holy Ghost priest from Brooklyn, New York, who became assistant pastor of Lafayette's St. Paul Church in 1953, recalled that at Good Hope Chapel, a mission of St. Paul's, blacks and whites sat on opposite sides of the church during Mass with both races accustomed to the practice. Taken aback, McKnight recalled that "It took me several months before I could sway some of the [black] high school kids to sit on the White side." When McKnight's white Provincial Francis McGlynn learned about his efforts, McGlynn "ordered me not to discuss integration with the lay people under the threat of immediate removal from the South. I disobeyed this order, but I became more circumspect."¹⁸

People of color were diverse, and they did not necessarily wish to integrate with whites, who were also often unwelcoming or hostile. The diocese created several parishes for Catholics of color at their request, such as Our Lady of Victory in Loreauville, erected in 1953 and separated from a white church by a cemetery.

Wisconsin (hereafter cited as NCCIJR); Fontenot and Toups, Gentle Shepherd, 48 (second quotation); May, "Official Policy of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lafayette in Relation to Black Catholics," 7-8, 66.

¹⁸ Ronnie M. Moore, ed., Whistling in the Wind: The Autobiography of the Rev. A. J. McKnight, C.S.Sp. (Opelousas, 1994), 21-22 (first quotation on p. 21; second quotation on p. 22).

Parishioners often raised funds for, donated land, and built churches with their own labor.¹⁹

Many white clergy did not support desegregation. Father Roger J. Moag, a white clergyman from New York who served in the diocese between 1946 and 1960, recalled that “I never heard more than two sermons that dealt with inter-racial matters, from the pulpit.” While other deaneries (groups of parishes from an area) held regular dinners, Moag’s deanery “served only coffee and beer” at its semi-annual meetings and “would not serve dinner, because that would have meant having Negro priests eating with whites.”²⁰

Nevertheless, there was some easing of segregation. Although Catholic school segregation continued, in the early 1950s Monsignor Ignatius A. Martin, the diocesan

¹⁹ “Church Renewal: St. Joseph’s Has Many Workers in Welsh,” Josephite Harvest 79 (July-August 1967): 16; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 102, 107, 112-13, 115-16.

²⁰ Roger J. Moag to Father Louis J. Twomey, January 5, 1961, folder 6, box 21, Louis J. Twomey Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Loyola University Library, Loyola University New Orleans (hereafter cited as Twomey Papers).

superintendent of schools and a native of New Iberia, desegregated teachers' meetings held at the diocesan level, including seating and meals. Operated by the Religious of the Sacred Heart and so outside of the diocese's direct control, the College of the Sacred Heart, a white women's college in Grand Coteau, admitted two African American undergraduates in 1953, making it "the first college in the deep South to integrate effectively."²¹

²¹ "The Diocese of Lafayette: 60 Years of Growth and Change," Morning Star, June 21, 1979; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 134; Osborne, Segregated Covenant, 50; "College of Sacred Heart to Close in June '56," Southwest Louisiana Register, February 3, 1956 (quotation); "Enrollment Lag Threatens College of the Sacred Heart," Interracial Review 29 (February 1956): 33-34; "Commission Notes," Christian Impact, November 1953, 1, folder 1, box 47, Fichter Papers. In 1956, mounting financial difficulties, caused by increasing costs and too few students that were unconnected with desegregation, compelled the college's closure. [Lafayette] Daily Advertiser, January 25, 1956; "College of Sacred Heart to Close"; "Decision to Close Sacred Heart College Final, Superior Tells," Southwest Louisiana Register,

In the same year, Jeanmard accepted a second priest of color, Father Jean-Baptiste Toussaint, for his diocesan clergy. While Toussaint's arrival furthered desegregated the clergy, his assignments buttressed the diocese's racial parishes and missions and illustrated segregation's complexity in southwest Louisiana. Born in 1912, Toussaint had been ordained for the Diocese of Cap-Haitien in his native Haiti in 1934 and spent twelve years in Canada before moving to Louisiana, initially for missionary work. Toussaint's French-speaking Haitian background and light skin influenced his appointment in 1953 as assistant pastor to Father Henry Van Boxel, the white pastor of Chataignier's Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, a territorial parish. Boxel assigned Toussaint to minister to people of color, who were also mostly light complected, in their chapels. According to the Eunice News, "Over 150 negro families, mostly quadroons and octoroons flock [to a chapel] at Pain Clair every Sunday from miles around to hear the eloquent young pastor of their color." In 1954, Jeanmard assigned Toussaint as pastor of St Joseph, a parish for people of color at Ville Platte opened by the Josephites seven years earlier.²²

In May 1954, the United States Supreme Court declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional in Brown v. Board of Education. The Louisiana legislature denounced the ruling as "an unwarranted and unprecedented abuse of power" and

February 17, 1956; "Last Commencement Is Held At College of Sacred Heart," Southwest Louisiana Register, June 1, 1956.

²² Eunice News, April 1, 1954 (quotation); Geraghty to Ochs, January 13, 1988; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 103-104; May, "Official Policy of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lafayette in Relation to Black Catholics," 19-20.

passed three bills designed to preserve segregated education. According to historian Adam Fairclough, “white support for integration was all but invisible” in Louisiana. Unwilling to divide Catholics and generate segregationist hostility from within and outside Catholic ranks, Jeanmard made no public comment about integration.²³

Nevertheless, some further easing of segregation occurred. In September 1954, the Southwestern Louisiana Institute in Lafayette, a state institution that had a largely Catholic enrollment, admitted its first students of color under a federal court order. Faculty member Julius Gassner reported that “there were practically no ‘incidents’” in response. At a March 1955 meeting of the Newman Club at the Catholic Student Center on campus, Gassner “noticed a colored girl of mixed ancestry apparently very much at ease in the [white] group.” According to Kathleen Toups, a Jennings native who was assistant editor of the Southwest Louisiana Register, the

²³ Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 167-70 (first quotation on p. 169; second quotation on p. 170).

diocesan newspaper, Father Alexander O. Sigur, the center's chaplain, "welcomed the black students at the student center, and it became a kind of hangout for them."²⁴

Sigur, a native of Crowley, Louisiana, who had been ordained by Jeanmard in 1946, was also the editor of the Southwest Louisiana Register. With the bishop's approval, Sigur condemned segregationist defiance. In a July 1955 editorial, Sigur reproached southern political leaders for attacking the United States Supreme Court

²⁴ Julius Gassner, "Integration in Acadia," Interracial Review 32 (February 1959): 28 (first and second quotations); Kathleen Toups, interview by author, November 8, 2006 (third quotation); "Obituary for Kathleen G. Toups," <https://www.mourning.com/obituaries/Kathleen-Toups/#!/Obituary>, accessed November 17, 2021; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 106; Michael S. Martin, "'A Peaceful Demonstration of Our Feeling Toward the Death': University Students in Lafayette, Louisiana, React to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Assassination," Louisiana History 41 (Summer 2000): 315; "50 Years Later: The Desegregation of SLI," <https://louisiana.edu/news-events/news/20040901/50-years-later-desegregation-sli>, accessed November 28, 2021.

regarding Brown, rebelling “against legitimate authority,” and “making a mockery of justice” in violation of “basic, democratic principle.”²⁵

Catholic lay segregationists were vigilant in defending Jim Crow. In November 1955, two white women, Etta B. Romero and her sister Lota B. Menard, assaulted a white catechism teacher Lula B. Ortemond at Erath because they feared catechism classes would be desegregated. According to Anderson, “Jeanmard’s decree of excommunication made it clear that he did not favor segregation or any attempt to impose or reimpose racial segregation once the practice had been discontinued.” Diocesan historian Claude F. Oubre describes the incident as “violence on a catechism teacher who was teaching an integrated class.” However, the children were segregated by race in class, which was no more ‘integrated’ than churches or chapels in which people of color and whites sat separately from one another. It was, as Anderson concedes, an unfounded rumor that the children would

²⁵ “Biographical Data Rt. Rev. Msgr. Alexander O. Sigur, J.C.D.,” folder 6, box 4, series 4.1, NCCIJR; Jules B. Jeanmard to Joseph G Vath, March 3, 1956, folder “Racism,” ADL; “A Troubling Matter,” Southwest Louisiana Register, July 15, 1955 (quotations).

be seated alphabetically that motivated the assault. Jeanmard's excommunication decree and letter to the parishioners at Our Lady of Lourdes Church did not end segregation. His letter declared that "things were to continue as in the past" and explained that he had refused the call of "some few dissatisfied persons who would demand that these children be even further separated from each other than they have been in the past." The two women repented, and the classes resumed. Rather than advancing desegregation, the Erath incident bolstered local white support for segregation.²⁶

On December 1, Romero was among more than two hundred people, many of them Catholic, who met in Erath to establish a chapter of the segregationist Southern Gentlemen's Organization of Louisiana. Jeanmard made no public comment, but his vice chancellor A. J. Vincent wrote to the Lafayette Daily Advertiser vehemently

²⁶ Anderson, "Prelates, Protest, and Public Opinion," 643 (first quotation); Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 95 (second quotation); [Lafayette] Daily Advertiser, November 28, 29, 30, December 1, 1955; "Excommunication in Erath," 88; Jeanmard, "A Decree"; Jeanmard to the "Parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes Church," November 26, 1955 (third and fourth quotations).

denouncing the organization and its opposition to Brown, a letter that he is unlikely to have sent without his bishop's approval. Vincent accused the Southern Gentlemen of "undermining the very foundations of the United States of America" by urging "their fellow citizens to take the law into their own hands, and to ignore spitefully the decisions of our courts and the clear meaning of the Declaration of Independence as well as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights." Citing Galatians 3:28, Vincent accusing the Southern Gentlemen of rendering "a disservice to Christianity" by not hearing "the words of St. Paul: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman.... For you are all one in Christ Jesus.'"²⁷ In a Southwest Louisiana Register editorial, Sigur condemned "the venom of illogical bigotry and hatred" which he claimed had caused the incident at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, and he lamented that "Needless pain has been caused by insane prejudice."²⁸

Jeanmard and Father Emery Labbe, Our Lady of Lourdes' parish administrator, received letters from Catholics and non-Catholics supporting and opposing the bishop's intervention. Correspondents from outside the South mostly

²⁷ [Lafayette] Daily Advertiser, December 2, 4 (quotations), 1955.

²⁸ "Touches of Color," Southwest Louisiana Register, December 2, 1955.

praised Jeanmard's action, but he also received some support from residents of Louisiana and elsewhere in the South. A Catholic in Lake Charles, Louisiana, who had repudiated segregation after witnessing integration in the armed forces and other parts of the United States, expressed "great admiration for your wonderful stand." Other letter writers, more often but not exclusively from the South, defended segregation, claimed religious justification, and sometimes asserted that Communists orchestrated the civil rights movement to divide and weaken America by pursuing integration as a means of supposedly debasing the white 'race' through miscegenation. A Catholic woman from Covington, Louisiana, claimed that God had created different races and consequently "PRIDE in keeping races PURE is what you should be teaching." A male Catholic convert from Slidell, Louisiana, warned Jeanmard about the Communists' supposed "Satanic mongrelization scheme" and asserted that "God intended it [segregation] when He established different boundaries for the different races" and "did not confuse or amalgamate colors."²⁹

²⁹ [Lafayette] Daily Advertiser, November 28, 1955; undisclosed to Jules B. Jeanmard, December 3, 1955 (first quotation), undisclosed to Labbe, December 5,

In March 1956, a few months after the Erath incident, Jeanmard, who was in declining health, retired. When he left office, there were “sixty-three churches, chapels and mission churches” for people of color, which were served by fifty-three priests, the vast majority of whom were white and members of religious orders. There were twenty-four schools for people of color, staffed by the Sisters of the Holy Family, lay people of color, and members of mostly white religious orders of sisters. Jeanmard had presided over the creation of the diocese’s system of racial parishes, which had increased from three to thirty-three, and his tenure had more than doubled the number schools for people of color. In the 1950s, he permitted some desegregation. In 1956, Sign, a Catholic magazine published in Union City, New Jersey, reported that “Diocesan activities are integrated in varying degrees and youth groups have mixed meetings on a diocesan level.” Jeanmard also encouraged Sigur’s editorial condemnations of racial prejudice and resistance to Brown, telling him “to take every opportunity to throw light on the race question.”³⁰

In March 1956, Sigur condemned “The Racists’ Rebellion” against Brown. A month later, Sigur’s Catholic Student Center hosted the annual convention of the Gulf States Province’s Newman Clubs. Julius Gassner observed, “The numerous colored delegates moved about freely” and “white and colored students and guests sat together

1955 (second quotation), undisclosed to Jules E. Jeanmard, January 9, 1956 (third, fourth and fifth quotations), folder “Lourdes OL, Erath – Racial Incident 1955,” ADL.

³⁰ May, “Official Policy of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lafayette in Relation to Black Catholics,” 21 (first quotation), 27; Holmes, “In Louisiana,” 15 (second quotation); “Integration Survey,” Colored Harvest 68 (September 1956): 1; Jeanmard to Vath, March 3, 1956 (third quotation); Fontenot and Toups, Gentle Shepherd, 226-27.

at the same tables” during the banquet. In the summer, St. Charles College in Grand Coteau, which was part of the New Orleans Province of the Society of Jesus and outside of state and diocesan control, quietly desegregated without publicity by admitting Numa Rousseve, Jr., a New Orleans Creole of Color.³¹

In May 1956, Maurice Schexnayder, Jeanmard’s auxiliary bishop since 1951, was installed as his successor. Born in 1895, Schexnayder, a native of Wallace, Louisiana, had spent his life in the state, apart from studying in Rome where he was

³¹ Jeanmard to Vath, March 3, 1956 (first quotation); “Integration in Acadia,” 29 (second and third quotations); R. Bentley Anderson, “Black, White, and Catholic: Southern Jesuits Confront the Race Question, 1952,” Catholic Historical Review 91 (July 2005): 503-504. In 1952, the New Orleans Province of the Society of Jesus, which included ten states in the South and Southwest, rejected racial segregation in principle. Two years later, the province formulated an implementation policy that permitted local superiors discretion but required them to secure the provincial’s permission to act and notify the resident prelate. Anderson, “Black, White, and Catholic,” 484-502.

ordained in 1925. Schexnayder did not discuss his background or inner thoughts in correspondence or interviews, but he does not seem to have been discomforted by the segregationist society in which he had been reared. According to Toups, Schexnayder's upbringing in "old plantation style" country along the Mississippi River affected his racial attitudes, making him more conservative than Jeanmard, who had grown up near Lafayette "which had always been a little more moderate." Nevertheless, between 1951 and 1956 Jeanmard and Schexnayder oversaw the building of a further seven parishes for people of color. As bishop, Schexnayder continued his predecessor's policy of maintaining and rebuilding churches and schools for them.³²

When Schexnayder became bishop the diocese had 256,000 white Catholics and 74,000 Catholics of color. Catholics were a majority in the diocese's thirteen

³² Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 135; "Black Church Parishes in the Diocese of Lafayette," 3-4, folder "Racism/Integration (Version)," ADL; Our Negro and Indian Missions, January 1957, 12-14, January 1959, 12-14, ASSJ; May, "Official Policy of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lafayette in Relation to Black Catholics," 18-19; Toups, interview by author (quotations).

civil parishes. Many white Catholics, like their white coreligionists elsewhere in the South, were opposed to desegregation. In June 1956, a Catholic Digest survey found that 76 percent of southern white Catholics supported racial separation, 19 percent integration, and 5 percent held no view.³³

In July, Schexnayder granted Jesuit priest Raymond Bernard permission to interview clergy and lay leaders about race relations. Between July and August, Bernard interviewed 152 people in forty-two communities across the diocese. Bernard concluded that there was often little or no communication between the races in more geographically and socially isolated areas, which were more likely to have “unfavorable attitudes.” Among whites, older people were the most and young people

³³ Holmes, “In Louisiana,” 14-15; “The White-Negro Problem,” Catholic Digest 20 (June 1956): 4. In 1950, Catholics comprised 64.1 percent of the population within the borders of the Diocese of Lafayette and in 1966, 56.9 percent of the population. “Diocese of Lafayette,” <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dlafa.html>, accessed October 8, 2006.

the least committed to segregation. French Cajuns, the least educated, and those with the lowest economic status were segregation's strongest adherents.³⁴

Some clergy of white churches maintained segregation or excluded people of color from conviction, while some others bowed reluctantly to white segregationist parishioner sentiment. A few pastors noted that occasionally black people attended Mass and sat apart from whites. Two pastors had held an integrated confirmation class, arranged alphabetically, and two churches had integrated catechism classes. Bernard asked two black clergy about their experiences of discrimination. One pastor recalled that white laity would not address him as Father. The other priest reported that a white church excluded black seminarians and added "Negroes do not trust white men." A black layman told Bernard that he would not attend a local white church because white latecomers had gone ahead of him at confession. Although many white laity favored segregation, Bernard reported that some white pastors and a white sister

³⁴ Bernard, "Attitudes and Opinions on Race Relations," i-ii, 28, 31, 33, 40-41, 50, 60-63 (quotation on p. 63).

believed that many white laity would accept integration if only “grudgingly” because they viewed it as inevitable.³⁵

If Bernard had hoped his findings would spur Schexnayder to order desegregation, he was disappointed. Although the bishop seemed unperturbed by Jim Crow and was inherently cautious, his installation also occurred during a time of growing massive resistance to Brown in the South that induced caution in the American Catholic hierarchy. The nation’s Catholic prelates did not address segregation until November 1958 when their annual meeting approved a statement “Discrimination and the Christian Conscience” that condemned segregation but did not address it in Catholic institutions. The statement also warned that “Changes in deep-rooted attitudes are not made overnight” and cautioned against “rash impetuosity

³⁵ Bernard, “Attitudes and Opinions on Race Relations,” 6-7, 19-21, 23-29 (second quotation on p. 23), 31-32, 38, 40-41, 47, 50-53 (first quotation on p. 53), 56a-b, 58, 64.

that would sacrifice the achievements of decades in ill-timed and ill-considered ventures.”³⁶

The declaration fit Schexnyader’s cautious nature. The state of Louisiana had withdrawn free lunches from Immaculata Minor Seminary for admitting black students, and the bishop knew that free lunches, books and transportation for students at Catholic schools might be endangered if they desegregated. According to William A. Osborne, Schexnayder prioritized the saving of souls and institutional growth over desegregation, which he also feared would be divisive and stimulate anti-Catholicism. The bishop explained that “It really doesn’t matter whether or not a Negro can ride next to a white man on the bus if he’s not in the state of grace.”³⁷

³⁶ “Discrimination and the Christian Conscience,” Journal of Negro Education 28 (Winter 1959): 66-69 (quotations on p. 69); Numan V. Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950’s (Baton Rouge, 1969), 74-75, 135, 200-201, 235-36.

³⁷ Osborne, Segregated Covenant, 67-68 (quotation on p. 67); “Notes for Archdiocesan School Board Meeting held at Archbishop’s Residence, July 28, 1961,”

Archbishop Rummel's experience also provided a cautionary warning against acting ahead of public schools. In 1955, Rummel and his consultants (clergy advisors) decided to desegregate the first grade of archdiocesan schools in September 1956. The archbishop's subsequent public declaration that Catholic school desegregation would not start before then brought mounting state, lay and some clerical opposition at the prospect. Consequently, in July 1956 Rummel postponed desegregation "at least until September, 1957," and then indefinitely. After three years of public silence on the issue, in July 1959 the archdiocese announced that parochial school desegregation would commence "at the earliest possible opportunity" and no later than "when the public schools are integrated."³⁸

While Rummel's experience encouraged Schexnayder's circumspection, by avoiding public comment on integration, accepting Sigur's integrationist advocacy, continuing seminary desegregation, enforcing church discipline against recalcitrant segregationists, and maintaining and opening parishes for people of color the bishop continued his predecessor's approach. With Schexnayder's permission, in February 1959 Sigur joined the Louisiana State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. In the same year, Schexnayder noted that "I have four Negro boys in my preparatory seminary [Immaculata Minor Seminary]." When in October 1959 a small group of whites prevented African Americans from also

folder "Integration, School Board Meetings, Minutes + Notes (1954-1962)," 03-038 box 1, Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans (hereafter cited as AANO).

³⁸ Joseph Francis Rummel, "De-Segregation in Schools," August 19, 1955, folder "Desegregation - Archbishop Rummel," AANO; "Integration is Deferred for this School Year," Catholic Action of the South, August 28, 1955; New York Times, July 8, 1959 (quotations).

attending premarriage instruction courses at Our Lady of Sacred Heart parish hall in Church Point, Schexnayder declared such interference a reserved sin for which only he could give absolution. Between 1960 and 1961, the diocese erected four special parishes for people of color: St. Peter the Apostle in Franklin, Our Lady of LaSalette in North Sulphur, St. Martin de Porres in Scott, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Jennings, the only special parishes established under Schexnayder.³⁹

Schexnayder looked to New Orleans regarding school desegregation. In August 1960 when public school desegregation under federal court order seemingly imminent in the city, Archbishop Rummel issued a pastoral letter that called for compliance and declared that racial segregation was “contrary to the teaching of our

³⁹ “Southern Civil Rights Group Appoints Priest,” Interracial Review 32 (April 1959): 77; Our Negro and Indian Missions, January 1957, 12-14, January 1959, 12-14 (quotation), 1963, 11-14, ASSJ; “Black Church Parishes in the Diocese of Lafayette,” 4; “Intimidate Catholic Negroes,” Guardian, October 30, 1959; “Action Against Negroes Declared Reserved Sin,” Southwest Louisiana Register, October 16, 1959; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 127; May, “Canonical Investigation of Racial Parishes and Its Application to the Diocese of Lafayette,” 71.

Catholic Church.” Schexnayder wrote to Charles J. Plauche, the Archdiocese of New Orleans’ chancellor, praising Rummel’s “great letter.” However, segregationist opposition from Governor Jimmie Davis, the state legislature and city authorities delayed token public school desegregation until November and led to a white boycott of the two schools affected and a white teenage segregationist mob rampaging downtown. In response to these developments and mayoral pressure, the archdiocese abandoned plans to desegregate parochial schools and announced it would act “only when public school integration has been effectively carried out,” leading to nearly two years of delay in issuing a desegregation order. In November 1960, Schexnayder announced that he would desegregate parochial schools in tandem with public school desegregation. He appeared sanguine, commenting that he did not “foresee much trouble” once public school desegregation had been resolved in New Orleans.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ “Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel,” Interracial Review 33 (October 1960): 242-43 (first quotation on p. 242); Maurice Schexnayder to Charles J. Plauche, August 24, 1960 (second quotation), folder “School Integration File Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence March 1956-August 1962,” box “School Integration Files, 1956-1965” AR/00166, AANO; Fairclough, Race and Democracy,

Schexnayder also made efforts to prepare Catholics for desegregation. In the summer of 1961, he informed Henry A. Cabirac, Jr., who headed the Archdiocese of New Orleans' newly formed Catholic Council on Human Relations (CCHR), that he been discussing the idea of forming a similar council. Schexnayder explained, "We are going about this very quietly and without press releases at the present time" to prevent opposition developing. Headed by James R. Oliver, a native of Egan and Dean of the Graduate School, several professors at the University of Southwestern Louisiana (USL; formerly the Southwestern Louisiana Institute) formed a private Catholic group sympathetic to desegregation. Sigur told Cabirac that "Bishop Schexnayder has given his tentative Blessing to their efforts and desires." The bishop solicited the CCHR's advice, which recommended avoiding publicity during a council's formative stage. After visiting Sigur and Oliver in Lafayette in September, Cabirac commended Oliver to Schexnayder "as a fine level-headed person and the right one to head your Council." In October, Schexnayder inaugurated the Bishop's Council with Oliver as chair.⁴¹

234-62; "Statement About Schools Is Issued by Archbishop," Catholic Action of the South, November 20, 1960 (third quotation); "Clarifies Situation Of Schools," Catholic Action of the South, November 27, 1960 (fourth quotation).

⁴¹ Maurice Schexnayder to Henry Cabirac, Jr., June 30, 1961 (first quotation), July 10, 1961, September 21, 1961, October 3, 1961, folder 7, box 7, series 33, C. Ellis Henican to Maurice Schexnayder, July 11, 1961, folder 7, box 7, series 33, Henry Cabirac, Jr. to Maurice Schexnayder, July 7, 1961, October 6, 1961 (third quotation), folder 7, box 7, series 33, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, "Proposal for a Southern Field Service," 4, folder 7, box 4, series 30, Alexander O. Sigur to Mathew Ahmann, March 21, 1961, folder 6, box 4, series 4.1, Alexander O.

In January 1962, Mathew Ahmann, the executive director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice (NCCIJ) an unofficial and mostly lay Catholic body, and Henry A. Cabirac, Jr., who led the NCCIJ's recently inaugurated Southern Field Service (SFS) as well as the CCHR, met Schexnayder and Oliver in Lafayette and tried to persuade the bishop to desegregate diocesan schools. According to Cabirac, Schexnayder "gave us the impression that he is ready to do something, but is reluctant to take the final plunge." Cabirac thought the bishop was "ready to move when [the Archdiocese of] New Orleans does." Oliver, who became president of the diocese's Council on Human Relations on its formation in February, also urged the bishop to act. Sigur confessed to Cabirac, "I really have no idea of Bishop Schexnayder's plans."⁴²

Sigur to Henry Cabirac, Jr., July 6, 1961 (second quotation), folder 8, box 7, series 33, Henry Cabirac, Jr. to Alexander O. Sigur, July 26, 1961, September 18, 1961, October 6, 1961, folder 8, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR; "Dr. James Oliver Named Leading Faculty Member," Southwest Louisiana Register, August 12, 1965.

⁴² Henry Cabirac, Jr., to C. Ellis Henican, January 24, 1962 (first quotation), folder 22, box 3, series 33, Catholic Council on Human Relations Collection, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter cited as CCHRC); Henry Cabirac, Jr. to Maurice Schexnayder, January 25, 1962, folder 7, box 7, series 33, Mathew Ahmann to Maurice Schexnayder, February 1, 1962, folder 7, box 7, series 33, James R. Oliver to Mathew Ahmann, February 5, 1962, folder 6, box 7, series 33, Henry Cabirac, Jr. to James Oliver, February 15, 1962, folder 6, box 7, series 33, Henry Cabirac, Jr. to James Oliver, March 23, 1962, folder 6, box 7, series 33, Henry Cabirac, Jr. to Alexander O. Sigur, October 23, 1961, February 15, 1962 (second

During nearly six years as bishop, Schexnayder had not advanced desegregation beyond Jeanmard's actions. In February 1962, Sigur informed Cabirac that the diocese's only desegregated Catholic institutions were "Immaculata Seminary and St. Charles College at Grand Coteau, and of course, the Catholic Student Center at McNeese [State College in Lake Charles] and USL because of desegregation in the State Institutions. Many organizations like the CCD [Confraternity of Christian Doctrine], DCCW [Diocesan Council of Catholic Women] and others in Diocesan gatherings meet on a mixed basis, but not locally." In 1962, Schexnayder asked each of the diocese's deaneries to establish a human relations council, but two years later only half of the twelve deaneries had done so.⁴³

Cabirac's belief that Schexnayder was waiting to desegregate schools in unison with the Archdiocese of New Orleans proved unfounded. When in March 1962 the archdiocese announced school desegregation for September, Schexnayder declared that he would not desegregate diocesan schools during the coming school year, but added "it has to come." He also instructed Monsignor Martin, the diocesan schools superintendent, to devise a high school program to prepare Catholics for its eventuality.⁴⁴

quotation), folder 8, box 7, series 33, Alexander O. Sigur to Henry Cabirac, Jr., February 9, 1962 (third quotation), folder 8, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR.

⁴³ Sigur to Cabirac, February 9, 1962 (quotation); memorandum, Jack [Sisson] to Matt [Ahmann], "Visit with Bishop Schexnayder, Lafayette, November 30, 1964," December 4, 1964, folder 7, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR.

⁴⁴ "Bishop Schexnayder Says: 'It Has To Come,'" Catholic Action of the South, April 8, 1962 (quotation); Maurice Schexnayder to Ignatius A. Martin, March 30, 1962, folder "Integration of Schools," ADL; "School Rolls Are Open to All Catholics,"

Although Schexnayder tolerated segregation within Catholic churches, he acted against exclusion. In April 1962, he responded to “a most unpleasant and uncalled for incident” when ushers told an African American mother and son to leave a white church. The bishop instructed his clergy to tell their ushers not to bar blacks and ordered pastors to use a pamphlet, Let’s Talk Sense About The Negro, by white Lafayette-born Jesuit priest and associate editor of the Catholic magazine America, Father C. J. McNaspy, for two Sunday sermons. The pamphlet discussed the origins and history of segregation, explained why it was morally wrong and biblically indefensible, and refuted racist arguments asserting innate African American inferiority. McNaspy argued that American racism aided Communist propaganda and accused segregationists of adopting “the totalitarian technique” of smearing their opponents. The Southwest Louisiana Register published the pamphlet’s contents in a weekly series.⁴⁵

Catholic Action of the South, April 1, 1962. In the fall of 1962, Catholic school desegregation began in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, despite a boycott in Buras and a partial boycott in Westwego. Almost two hundred African Americans enrolled in formerly white Catholic schools. Newell Schindler, “Studies First Year of N.O. Integration,” Catholic Commentator, June 7, 1963.

⁴⁵ Maurice Schexnayder to the “Members of the Clergy, Diocese of Lafayette,” April 25, 1962 (first quotation), folder 7, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR; C. J. McNaspy, S.J., Let’s Talk Sense About The Negro (New York, 1961), 1-27 (second quotation on p. 24); Alexander O. Sigur, “The Somewhat South: Another Look,” Lamp 62 (June 1964): 28; C. J. McNaspy, S.J., “Let’s Talk Sense About the Negro: Racial Segregation and the Bible,” Southwest Louisiana Register, May 10, 1962; C. J. McNaspy, S.J., “Let’s Talk Sense About the Negro,” Southwest Louisiana Register,

In February 1963, the diocese's Department of Education distributed a guide on race relations to its high schools for compulsory use in grades nine to twelve, modelled on a syllabus developed by the Diocese of Charleston two years earlier. Drawing on biblical verses, the guide explained that the Mystical Body of Christ, universality of the Church, and virtue of justice were incompatible with segregation. The guide also refuted segregationist arguments based on states' rights, biblical verses and supposed African American genetic inferiority, and included the full ext of "Discrimination and the Christian Conscience."⁴⁶

While the diocese focused on educating white Catholics about race, Henry A. Cabirac, Jr. made repeated, but unsuccessful efforts, to enlist Catholic people of color in a letter writing campaign to pressure Schexnayder to end segregation. Frustrated in these efforts, Cabirac lamented to Oliver, "the Negroes were doing absolutely nothing for themselves." People of color may have been understandably wary of heeding exhortations from a visiting white Catholic from New Orleans. However, Clarence A. Laws, an Opelousas born African American Catholic who was the secretary of the Southwest Regional Office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Dallas, concurred.

May 17, 1962; C. J. McNaspy, S.J., "Let's Talk Sense About the Negro: Problems Don't Solve Themselves," Southwest Louisiana Register, June 7, 1962.

⁴⁶ A Guide for Applying the Principles of Justice and the Doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ to Race Relations (Lafayette: Department of Education, Diocese of Lafayette, 1963), folder 21, box 5, series 11, A Syllabus on Racial Justice for use in the Catholic Schools Grades 7-12 (Charleston: Department of Education, Diocese of Charleston, 1961), folder 1, box 14, series 33, NCCIJR.

Laws wrote Cabirac, “there must only be few places in the South where Negroes are as resigned to second-class citizenship as they are at Lafayette. The view seems to be that racial segregation and discrimination are twin evils which Negroes must learn to live with rather than learn to change.”⁴⁷

Nevertheless, many Catholic people of color were NAACP members, including many parishioners from Opelousas’ Holy Ghost Church. Father Albert J. McKnight observed that “pervasive racism,” “very negative self-concepts and low self-esteem,” and long hours working for economic survival had “crushed” many people of color “psychologically,” but they could be motivated and mobilized when they perceived that action would improve their lives. After he had organized a

⁴⁷ Henry Cabirac, Jr. to James Oliver, March 4, 1963 (first quotation), folder 6, box 7, series 33, Clarence A. Laws to Henry Cabirac, Jr., March 8, 1963 (second quotation), folder 6, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR; “Henry A. Cabirac, Jr.,” <https://obits.nola.com/us/obituaries/nola/name/henry-cabirac-obituary?id=14949223>, accessed December 20, 2021; Michael M. Miller, “Laws, Clarence Alvert,” Handbook of Texas Online, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/laws-clarence-alvert>, accessed December 20, 2021.

literacy program in Kaplan, Vermilion Parish (county) between 1957 and 1959 that, despite widespread illiteracy, “had more volunteer teachers than students,” McKnight concluded that the program failed because “I was dealing with my perception of their needs and not their felt needs.” In response, McKnight and the volunteers held “house meetings to discuss the needs of the community” that led him to organize local credit unions and “a statewide investment cooperative,” the Southern Consumers Cooperative, which secured a \$25,000 loan from the federal Office of Economic Opportunity in 1964.⁴⁸

Although Cabirac was unable to persuade Catholic people of color to exert pressure on Schexnayder, in July 1963 the bishop announced that he would desegregate Catholic schools alongside public schools. Schexnayder’s announcement followed Bishop Robert E. Tracy of Baton Rouge’s statement that he would begin

⁴⁸ Francis J. Kichak to Henry Cabirac, Jr., September 9, 1933, folder 11, box 9, series 33, NCIJR; Moore, ed., Whistling in the Wind, 22-28 (first and second quotations on p. 24; fifth and sixth quotations on p. 23; seventh quotation on p. 25; eighth quotation on p. 26); “The Quiet Revolution of A Parish Priest,” Ebony 23 (May 1968): 52-54 (third and fourth quotations on p. 53), 56-57.

school desegregation in September 1964 in East Baton Rouge in response to federal court ordered public school desegregation there.⁴⁹

In September 1963, Schexnayder presented an idealized but still cautious view of race relations to visiting New York reporter Charles Carruth, stating “We've been preparing the people from the pulpit and there is a nice spirit in most of the diocese between the white and colored people. We are teaching the people that segregation is definitely wrong, but we do not dwell on what kind of a sin it is. We can't change a century overnight.” Despite earlier incidents, Schexnayder asserted that “No person is ever turned away from any church because of his color and there is no spirit of segregation among my seminarians.”⁵⁰

However, Schexnayder had little knowledge of the experiences and perspectives of Catholic people of color, whom he typically encountered in subservient roles. Henry A. Cabirac, Jr. also observed that the diocesan Council on

⁴⁹ New York Times, July 29, July 30, 1963. The Vatican erected the Diocese of Baton Rouge in 1961 from territory ceded from the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

⁵⁰ “First Step Hardest, Says Southern Prelate,” Tennessee Register, September 20, 1963.

Human Relations, which advised Schexnayder on racial matters, was composed mostly of white members who did not “completely understand the plight of the Negro.”⁵¹

Although broadly sympathetic to racial equality, the bishop disapproved of civil rights protests. In 1963, he endorsed the American Catholic hierarchy’s pastoral letter on “Racial Harmony” which condemned segregation, and he ordered his clergy to read it in their churches. Nevertheless, Schexnayder informed Cabirac, he was “definitely disappointed” that the NCCIJ endorsed the civil rights movement’s March on Washington in August 1963 that brought between 200,000 and 300,000 people to the nation’s capital. Schexnayder declared: “I am quite opposed to such measures.” Despite these privately expressed misgivings about civil rights marches, like Jeanmard he publicly endorsed equal voting rights. Akin to Archbishop Thomas J. Toolen of Mobile-Birmingham, who publicly condemned the Selma, Alabama, voting rights protests in 1965 while endorsing equal voting rights, Schexnayder seems to have regarded the franchise as a constitutional right but nonviolent civil rights protests

⁵¹ Henry Cabirac to Francis J. Kichak, September 20, 1963, folder 11, box 9, series 33, NCCIJR.

as disruptive and endangering public order, even though it was segregationists who instigated violence against peaceful protesters. When in October and November 1963, the Grail, a Catholic lay women's organization, launched a voter registration project in the city of Lafayette, partly funded by the Southern Regional Council, Schexnayder wrote to his "pastors asking them to encourage the people to register and vote." The project conducted registration classes for people of color in two black Catholic churches and added 272 blacks to the voting rolls in its first month.⁵²

⁵² "Bishops on Racial Harmony," August 15, 1963 (first quotation), folder 720.10, Archives of the Diocese of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina (hereafter cited as ADC); Maurice Schexnayder approval slip, folder 16, box 89, National Catholic Welfare Conference Collection, The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.; May, "Official Policy of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lafayette in Relation to Black Catholics," 39-44; Newman, Desegregating Dixie, 38, 222, 385n75; Maurice Schexnayder to Henry Cabirac, August 2, 1963 (second and third quotations), folder 7, box 7, series 33, Henry Cabirac to Wiley Branton, October 7, 1963, folder 9, box 5, series 33, Wiley A. Branton to Jane Duffin, October 10, 1963,

However, Catholic clergy, including priests of churches for people of color, were divided. In September 1963, Father Francis J. Kichak, a Spiritan priest from Pennsylvania and assistant pastor at Holy Ghost Church, Opelousas, told a NAACP rally in the city that the Catholic Church supported its drive for equal rights. By contrast, the church's pastor, Cabirac noted, was "of the old school." As his subordinate, Kichak lamented "I am not in a position to lead or be more aggressive."⁵³

In February 1964, Sigur, McKnight and Cabirac were among a biracial group of eighteen people, many of them Catholic, who met in New Orleans to refound the Louisiana Human Relations Council, a secular organization that had expired in 1955. They elected Sigur temporary chair, Jane Duffin from the Grail's Lafayette office temporary secretary, and James R. Oliver treasurer, and launched a newsletter. After

folder 21, box 5, series 11, Jane [Duffin] to Henry Cabirac, October 23, 1963, folder 9, box 5, series 33, Jane Duffin to Wiley A. Branton, November 15, 1963 and attached "Lafayette, La. Voter Education Project" (fourth quotation), folder 15, box 5, series 34, Jane Duffin to Wiley A. Branton, November 19, 1963, folder 15, box 5, series 34, NCCIJR; ; "Archbishop Toolen Criticizes Presence of Priests, Sisters in Demonstrations," Catholic Week, March 19, 1965. On the Grail movement see Alden V. Brown, The Grail Movement and American Catholicism, 1949-1975 (Notre Dame, IN, 1989) and J. B. Gremillion, The Journal of a Southern Pastor (Chicago, 1957), 91-95.

⁵³ Henry A. Cabirac, Jr., "September 23rd [1963] Meeting In Opelousas" (first quotation), folder 11, box 9, series 33, NCCIJR; Kichak to Cabirac, September 9, 1963 (second quotation).

his subsequent election as the council's president Oliver called for immediate "social change."⁵⁴

Schexnayder responded to secular developments. After President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in July 1964 outlawing segregated public accommodations, Schexnayder and his auxiliary bishop Warren L. Boudreaux, a native of Berwick, Louisiana, joined the state's other Catholic prelates and the Archdiocese of New Orleans' auxiliary bishop L. Abel Caillouet in issuing a statement urging compliance as a matter of patriotism, duty, "charity, understanding and loyal obedience to the laws of the country." While they maintained that "the root of the racial problem is religious and moral," the bishops considered such legislation necessary. "While neither the Civil Rights bill nor any act of Congress can legislate

⁵⁴ "Organizational Meeting, La. Human Relations Council," February 16, 1964, folder 8, box 6, series 33, "The Louisiana Council on Human Relations Constitutional Assembly," July 11, 1964, folder 8, box 6, series 33, Louisiana Council on Human Relations Newsletter, vol. 1, no. 2, 1-2 (quotation on p. 1), folder 8, box 6, series 33, NCCIJR; Alexander O. Sigur to Louis Twomey, April 2, 1964, folder 1, box 22, Twomey Papers.

morality,” they stated, “it can nevertheless remove and even expunge the causes of past injustices and discriminatory practices.” Following the letter’s publication in secular and Catholic diocesan newspapers, Schexnayder received only one complaint, which he viewed as “a very good sign, especially in view of the fact that I have some danger spots in my diocese.”⁵⁵

In July 1964, several white Catholic men “assaulted and whipped” Father Cornelius Sullivan, the white Josephite priest of Eunice’s St. Mathilda Church, after he had written in his parish bulletin that “we should be rejoicing at the making into

⁵⁵ [New Orleans] States-Item, July 3, 1964; “Louisiana Bishops Urge Compliance With Rights Act,” Southwest Louisiana Register, July 9, 1964 (first, second, third and fourth quotations); “Louisiana Bishops Urge Civil Rights Compliance,” Clarion Herald, July 9, 1964; “La. Prelates Urge Lawful Compliance,” Catholic Commentator, July 10, 1964; Maurice Schexnayder to John P. Cody, July 6, 1964 (fifth quotation), folder “School Integration File Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence Newspaper Clippings March 1958-August 1964,” box “School Integration Files, 1956-1965” AR/00166, AANO; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 137.

law of the Civil Rights bill.” Sullivan’s call for gradual integration, beginning with Eunice’s library, court, and tennis courts, had not deterred his attackers. His declaration that “What worries me from our own people [of color] is the recklessness of those who might boldly and blindly try to force desegregation, and possibly violence” and warning that “Many whites who would accept integration, will not accept arrogance, defiance, vulgarity and uncleanness” exhibited the condescending paternalism with which some white priests regarded people of color, including parishioners.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Maurice Schexnayder to “the Clergy, Religious and Laity, Diocese of Lafayette,” July 28, 1964 (first quotation), folder 7, box 7, series 33, memorandum, Jack [Sisson] to Matt [Ahmann], “Josephite priest in Eunice, Louisiana – Conversation with Fr. O’Dea,” August 6, 1964, folder 7, box 7, series 33, “Bishop Issues Stern Warning On Interference,” [Baton Rouge] Advocate, August 4, 1964, press clipping, folder 7, box 7, series 33, Alexander O. Sigur, “On Second Thought,” Southwest Louisiana Register, August 20, 1964 (subsequent quotations), press clipping, folder 8, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR; “Louisiana Bishop Teaches Many Lessons at Once,” Southwest Louisiana Register, August 27, 1964; “St. Mathilda Church Parish Celebrates 76

Sullivan persuaded Father George F. O’Dea, the Josephites’ Superior General, and Schexnayder not to seek legal redress from his attackers. Instead, the bishop declared in a pastoral letter that anyone who interfered with “our colored Catholics in the practice of their religion,” or joined “groups whose purpose it is to oppose the teachings of Mother Church regarding racial relations” was guilty of a reserved sin. He also ordered churches to hold “a half-hour of prayer” as “an act of reparation.” The assailants apologized and did penance.⁵⁷

Another white Josephite pastor, Father Leo J. Farragher of Jennings’ Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, received local white criticism for attempting to desegregate a public library. Farragher, a native of Newton, Massachusetts, also noted that “Efforts to integrate the public schools and the bus-station were opposed by white Catholics, clerical and lay. The only ‘accepted’ way of action was for the priest in the Negro church to limit his ministry solely to administering the Sacraments.”⁵⁸

Years of Service,” August 18, 2015, <https://archive.eunicetoday.com/lifestyle/st-mathilda-church-parish-celebrates-76-years-service>, accessed November 23, 2021.

⁵⁷ Memorandum, Jack [Sisson] to Matt [Ahmann], “Josephite priest in Eunice, Louisiana – Conversation with Fr. O’Dea,” August 6, 1964; Schexnayder to “the Clergy, Religious and Laity, Diocese of Lafayette,” July 28, 1964 (quotations).

⁵⁸ Leo Farragher, S.S.J., “The Blacks Among Us,” Priest 22 (October 1966): 812 (quotation); Leo Farragher, S.S.J., “Integration: An Urgent Matter,” Priest 20 (February 1964): 141-43; John P. Sisson to Leo Farragher, December 4, 1964, folder 5, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR; “Rev. Leo J. Farragher,” https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/174257786/leo-j_-farragher, accessed November 27, 2021.

Widespread white Catholic support for segregation reinforced Schexnayder's unwillingness to desegregate Catholic schools ahead of public schools lest they become a target for segregationists and withdrawal of state support. Their dependence on state aid led Schexnayder to regard Catholic schools as a joint venture with secular authorities and their desegregation as contingent on secular change. Within days of his pastoral letter, the bishop wrote to John P. Sisson, who had replaced Cabirac in the SFS, "I have no plans for integrating our Catholic schools this year," but "When I do, it will not be a partial integration. All the grades will have to comply." In public, the bishop reiterated his earlier declaration that Catholic schools would desegregate alongside public schools. In November, Schexnayder informed Sisson that only a papal order would make him desegregate diocesan schools ahead of public schools.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Maurice Schexnayder to John P. Sisson, July 30, 1964 (quotations), folder 7, box 7, series 33, memorandum, Jack [Sisson] to Matt [Ahmann], "Visit with Bishop Schexnayder, Lafayette, November 30, 1964," December 4, 1964; "Action Awaited," Alamo Messenger, August 9, 1964.

Although Catholic schools remained segregated, in 1964 Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Lafayette, operated by the Franciscan Sisters of Calais, and St. Patrick Hospital in Lake Charles, run by the Marianite Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, desegregated. In 1965, the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund claimed that St. Patrick's had not eliminated racial discrimination, but Sister Mary Bernice, the hospital's administrator, responded that patient segregation had ended in February that year.⁶⁰

Other inroads against segregation also occurred. In 1965, Valerie Pullman became the second African American ordained for the Diocese of Lafayette's clergy. In May, the diocese announced that "Catholic schools in the city of Lake Charles and

⁶⁰ Henry Libersat, "A Southerner Works for His South," Southwest Louisiana Register, December 10, 1964; Osborne, Segregated Covenant, 56-58; "NAACP Bias Charges Are Denied by Hospital," Southwest Louisiana Register, April 22, 1965. In 1964, Charity Hospital, a state institution in Lafayette administered by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, and another state facility Opelousas General Hospital, operated by the Marianite Sisters of the Holy Cross, also desegregated. Osborne, Segregated Covenant, 56.

in the civil parishes of Calcasieu, Lafayette and St. Landry will accept all qualified pupils in September 1965” to align with federal court ordered public school desegregation in those areas. When public schools in other areas desegregated, the diocese stated that it would also desegregate its schools in those places. In September, an estimated twelve to fifteen African American families enrolled children in formerly white Catholic schools. Although Auxiliary Bishop Boudreaux stated that “There was no trouble whatsoever,” some African American parents received threatening telephone calls. The Diocese of Alexandria also began Catholic school desegregation to coincide with federal court ordered public schools desegregation, making the two Louisiana dioceses the last Catholic dioceses in the South to begin school desegregation.⁶¹

⁶¹ “Valerie Lawrence Pullman,” <https://www.semien-lewismortuary.com/obituary/6133385>, accessed December 8, 2021; May, “Official Policy of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lafayette in Relation to Black Catholics,” 11; “Lafayette Diocese Will ‘Open Schools to All,’” Southwest Louisiana Register, June 4, 1965 (first quotation); Bonnie W. Heflin, “Bishop Tracy Details Plan to Open ‘Schools to All’ by 1967,” Catholic Commentator, June 11, 1965; “Calm

After diocesan school desegregation commenced, Schexnayder terminated the diocesan Council on Human Relations because it had been inactive. The bishop expected deanery councils to undertake its work, but only three deanery councils on human relations held meetings. James R. Oliver found another outlet in the Southwest Louisiana Register, which in the summer of 1965 published a series of his articles calling for desegregation and racial justice.⁶²

Iberia Integration,” Clarion Herald, September 9, 1965 (second quotation); “There Are Now Two Empty Buildings in Buras,” Tennessee Register, September 10, 1965; Osborne, Segregated Covenant, 52.

⁶² “Human Relations Unit Meetings,” Southwest Louisiana Register, November 19, 1964; “Attitudes Said Keeping Discrimination Alive,” Southwest Louisiana Register, December 31, 1964; “False Ideas About Race Crumble When Tested on Reasonable Basis,” Southwest Louisiana Register, April 29, 1965; memorandum, Jack Sisson to Matt Ahmann et. al, “Monthly Written Summary, Activities SFS,” January 18, 1966, folder 3, box 5, series 30, John P. Sisson to James R. Oliver, January 26, 1966, folder 6, box 7, series 33, memorandum, Jack Sisson to Matt Ahmann, “Phone Conversation 3/23/66 with Charles Jaubert, Lake Charles, Louisiana,” March 24, 1966, folder 10, box 7, series 33, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, “Southern Field Service Diocesan Profiles,” 14, folder 2, box 5, series 30, NCCIJR; Maurice Schexnayder to the “Clergy, Religious and Laity, Diocese of Lafayette,” August 12, 1970, bound volume “Integration of Schools Diocese of Lafayette 1965-1973 The Auzenne Case Correspondence and Data 1970-1973,” ADL; James R. Oliver, “Human Relations: Who’s Responsibility,” Southwest Louisiana Register, May 20, 1965; James R. Oliver, “A New South: Education,” Southwest Louisiana Register,

In January 1966, Schexnayder informed the Commission for the Catholic Missions Among the Colored People and the Indians that “Full integration will take time.” He explained that “No new colored parishes will be opened,” but their physical plant would be maintained or replaced as needed. “Because of the large number of our colored Catholics,” Schexnayder wrote, “we have to take adequate care of them, which makes these new buildings necessary.”⁶³

By September, all of the diocese’s Catholic schools had officially desegregated. However, in October the federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) cut off federal funds for Catholic schools in the diocese for noncompliance with the Civil Rights Act, based on the continuation of all-black enrollments in many traditionally black Catholic schools and insufficient faculty integration. In response, Schexnayder conceded that “lay Negro teachers have not been employed in formerly designated white Catholic schools” and decreed that “no discrimination based on race or color can be tolerated in the employing of personnel in the Catholic institutions of the Diocese.” The diocese formulated a desegregation plan for further progress in eliminating student and faculty segregation, which HEW accepted in May 1967 and restored funding.⁶⁴

July 22, 1965; James R. Oliver, “A New South: Economics,” Southwest Louisiana Register, July 29, 1965.

⁶³ Our Negro and Indian Missions, January 1966, 12-14, ASSJ.

⁶⁴ “Bishop Fears Racial Progress Obscured,” Catholic Week, September 30, 1966; William Stelf, “U.S. Says Diocese Lags on School Integration,” National Catholic Reporter, January 25, 1967; Richard von Phul Mouton to “Dear Principal,” March 14, 1967 (quotations), bound volume “Integration of Schools Diocese of Lafayette 1965-1973 Correspondence, Directives, Reports 1965-1971,” ADL; Harold Howe II to

To promote acceptance of desegregation, in July 1967 Schexnayder reissued instructions for the mandatory organization of deanery human relations councils. A month later, Henry P. Libersat, Jr., a Groves, Texas native, who had succeeded Sigur as editor of the Southwest Louisiana Register, lamented that “In some areas, however, nothing has been done.” By October, all of the diocese’s deaneries had formed councils, but Schexnayder maintained his refusal to re-establish the diocesan Council for Human Relations.⁶⁵

White Catholics were divided in their response to Martin Luther King, Jr. In September 1967, a large majority of white parents at our Lady of Fatima School in Lafayette voted to withdraw a catechism for seventh grade pupils that included King and the civil rights movement’s anthem “We Shall Overcome.” Monsignor Rudolph Arlanti, the school’s principal, agreed with them and criticized King for advocating “civil disobedience.”⁶⁶

In April 1968, King’s assassination in Memphis Tennessee, led to riots in many American cities. Schexnayder publicly condemned the assassination as “a

Ignatius A. Martin, May 24, 1967, folder 7, box 6, series 33, NCCIJR; “State Catholic School Desegregation Cleared By U.S. Office of Education,” Southwest Louisiana Register, July 20, 1967.

⁶⁵ “Formation of Pastoral Councils Synod Nominations Is Emphasized,” Southwest Louisiana Register, July 13, 1967; “Human Relations,” Southwest Louisiana Register, August 24, 1967 (quotation); Maurice Schexnayder to John Sisson, October 16, 1967, folder 7, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR; “Florida Catholic Editor Appointed,” Voice, September 26, 1969.

⁶⁶ [New Orleans] States-Item, September 13, 1967.

crime so revolting that all of us should beg God's merciful pardon and pray for a better understanding of His commandment that we love one another." The bishop expressed responsibility toward and sympathy for African Americans but underestimated their strength and resilience in maintaining their humanity. "Who among us," asked Schexnayder, "shall say that we are not in some measure responsible for the debased and degraded condition of so many of America's children who find themselves reduced to the level of sub-humans?" An interdenominational, biracial group of Lafayette clergy, including Catholics, called for "the actual realization of peace and justice for all people, beginning in our own community" and observance of a "Day of Mourning" on Palm Sunday. African American and white students at the University of Southwestern Louisiana marched on campus in protest at King's killing and then downtown before returning to campus, where some of them, mostly African American, reconvened at the Newman Center, a habitual sanctuary from campus racism since the 1950s.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ "Day of Prayer April 7," Southwestern Louisiana Register, April 11, 1968 (quotations); Martin, "A Peaceful Demonstration of Our Feeling Toward the Death," 301-16.

Several thousand people attended interdenominational memorial services for King at Lake Charles High School stadium. Father Patrick O’Sullivan, the Spiritan pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, “led in recital of a prayer for racial harmony.” However, not all Catholic religious honored King. According to Father Peter Blom, a Netherlands native based in Melville, a white sister at a Catholic school had told her tenth graders, “Good news; Martin Luther King is dead!”⁶⁸

King’s assassination temporarily reinvigorated the dormant Lafayette Council on Human Relations, an affiliate of the LCHR formed in 1964, which was open to all Lafayette Parish (county) residents. In April 1968, nearly two hundred people, including several Catholic clergy, attended the council’s reorganizational meeting with John Carlton James, an African American Catholic as president, and Sigur as

⁶⁸ “Lake Charles Thousands Memorialize Dr. King,” Southwestern Louisiana Register, April 18, 1968 (first quotation); Peter Blom, “Position Paper: Committee on Separate Parish – CADL,” September 14, 1968 (second quotation), folder 8, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR; “Permanent Roots, Saint Genevieve Roman Catholic Church, Lafayette, Louisiana,” <https://www.stgens.net/permanent-roots>, accessed December 4, 2021 .

vice president. To eliminate racial parishes, the meeting called for Catholic parish lines to be reconfigured so “people can know to which [territorial] parish they belong.” A Southwest Louisiana Register editorial also called for “the abolishment of color churches.”⁶⁹

Some white Catholics were determined to resist church desegregation, despite Schexnayder’s earlier warnings against interference with religious observance. In the summer of 1968, several white parishioners tried to bar African Americans from attending Sacred Heart Church in Grand Coteau, St. Anne Church in Youngsville, and St. Leo the Great Church in Leonville. Henry P. Libersat, Jr. reported that one of the pastors, a Louisianan, had told militant segregationists that “I am a Catholic priest and anyone is welcome. If Jesus Himself came down to this parish, do you think he would care that ‘they have a parish of their own?’” Libersat noted that “the pastor said

⁶⁹ “Lafayette HR Group Starts Reorganization,” Southwestern Louisiana Register, April 18, 1968 (first quotation); “Human Relations Under Spotlight,” Southwestern Louisiana Register, May 9, 1968 (second quotation); Peggy Siegmund, “Is the Church Speaking Out in the South?,” Ave Maria 104 (October 8, 1966): 14-16.

most of his people have indicated support – privately,” suggesting that sympathetic parishioners feared speaking out.⁷⁰

Sisson urged Schexnayder to provide church ushers and “officers of all parish and diocesan organizations” with “a written statement of Church teachings and diocesan policy.” In rejecting the suggestion, the bishop insisted that “Statements, even from the altar, do not often change mentalities.” Schexnayder’s claim that “We have had very little trouble, which I attribute to the fact that many of our negroes are Catholic” implied that African Americans bore responsibility for the incidents, although they had sought to exercise their right to attend white churches. Nevertheless, in July 1968 Schexnayder declared in a pastoral letter that “It is not to our credit that in this Catholic Diocese there exists in some places a completely

⁷⁰ “Absurdity Marches On,” Southwest Louisiana Register, July 4, 1968 (quotations); Henry P. Libersat, Jr. to John P. Sisson, July 22, 1968, folder 7, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR.

unchristian spirit. It is unfortunately true that Negroes are not allowed in a few of our churches.”⁷¹

Schexnayder did not cite the Second Vatican Council’s condemnation of racism in calling for desegregation, but the council, which had also called for greater lay participation in the church, had an indirect impact on desegregation. Following repeated calls from the diocese’s Clergy Association, established in response to the council’s call for bishops to listen to their priests, in March 1969 Schexnayder appointed a diocesan committee composed of clergy, sisters, and male and female laity to study racially separate parishes. In response to its recommendations, he “changed the boundaries of [some] white parishes to include sections which formerly belonged to all-Negro parishes” and ensured that “Our new parishes include all who

⁷¹ John P. Sisson to Maurice Schexnayder, July 9, 1968 (first and second quotations), folder 7, box 7, series 33, Maurice Schexnayder, July 15, 1968 (third and fourth quotations), folder 7, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR; Blom, “Position Paper,” September 14, 1968 (fifth quotation); Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 125.

live within the parish limits.” Schexnayder reported that “Some whites were displeased but that is to be expected.”⁷²

White segregationist attitudes, Catholic people of color’s attachment to their churches which largely remained under the care of priests from religious orders, and residential segregation in the city of Lafayette and other parts of the diocese limited the practical impact of boundary revisions. Schexnayder “divided” St. Paul in Lafayette, “Our largest and oldest Negro parish,” but the reduced parish remained largely black. Created as a territorial parish from areas once covered by St. Paul and other parishes, Our Lady Queen of Peace also served a mostly black populated area.

⁷² Alexander O. Sigur to John P. Sisson, November 23, 1968, folder 8, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR; “Separatism and the Church,” Southwest Louisiana Register, March 27, 1969; Our Negro and Indian Missions, January 1970, 7-10 (quotations), ASSJ. Although Bishop Tracy of Baton Rouge had successfully proposed that the Second Vatican Council reject racial inequality in Catholicism, he, like Schexnayder, desegregated Catholic schools only when public schools acted. Mark Newman, “The Catholic Church and Desegregation in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, 1961-1976,” Louisiana History 51 (Summer 2010): 309-22, 324-25, 326-29, 331-32.

Parish boundary changes led some blacks, who had previously worshiped at St. Paul, to attend St. Anthony, formerly a white church. However, Father Anthony Warren, St. Anthony's diocesan priest, commented that "many blacks who were assigned here did not want to come" and "just about all the white parishioners either stopped going to church or started attending another church." In rural areas and small towns, white and people of color mostly continued to attend separate churches, partly from preference but also because many white churches remained unwelcoming and made no effort to invite those they had once excluded.⁷³

Catholic school desegregation also remained limited. Although eligible to apply to formerly white schools, in 1968-1969 only 873 nonwhite students attended

⁷³ "Church Renewal," 16; Alexander O. Sigur to John P. Sisson, June 18, 1969, folder 8, box 7, series 33, NCCIJR; Our Negro and Indian Missions, January 1970, 7-10 (first and second quotations), ASSJ; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 133, 134; "A Conversation With The Pastor of an Integrated Parish," Morning Star, August 10, 1972 (third and fourth quotations); "St. Anthony Church," <https://www.diolaf.org/parishfinder>, accessed November 28, 2021; "Keep Your Cool"; Evans, Forsyth and Bernard, "One Church or Two?," 233-34.

desegregated Catholic schools, all of which bar one exception had at least 90 percent white or black enrollment, compared to 4,049 nonwhites in segregated schools. Monsignor Richard von Phul Mouton, the diocesan schools superintendent, explained that “Because the Negro church parishes had their ‘own’ school and because tuition rates were much higher in the white parochial schools, few Negroes were able to enroll [in white schools].” A year earlier, Mouton continued, “the diocesan school board suggested that six formerly designated Negro schools be closed. In each instance, the pastor expressing the wish of his people, preferred to keep the school open.” Mouton and the diocesan school board’s one-sided conception of school desegregation expected people of color to sacrifice the schools they had nurtured their families and communities and which they had often helped build and finance, and their children to desegregate white schools where they were often not made welcome and which often charged prohibitively high tuition.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Untitled, Civil Rights Digest, Winter 1971, 24, clipping, box 6 “Integration of Catholic Schools, Diocese of Lafayette, LA, 1970-1972,” H20E Leadership Councilors, Archives of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Bensalem, Pennsylvania (hereafter cited as ASBS); “Catholic School Integration Stand

People of color were often very attached to the Catholic schools that served their communities and to which they had significantly contributed. James Guidry, an Opelousas native who attended Holy Ghost Church and Holy Ghost Elementary School during the 1960s, recalled that both were rebuilt after World War II through “the generosity and skills of parishioners who were brick masons, carpenters and electricians” and financed by “Our parents [who] made sweet potato pies for bake sales” and “raised money with dinners and dances.” Guidry fondly remembered the Sisters of the Holy Family who provided most of the school’s staff. He recalled, “Some of them remained my favorite teachers even after graduate school. They provided the love and tenderness that some of us from large families could not receive at home.” Guidry also praised the school’s educational quality.⁷⁵

Public schools, like Catholic schools, had token desegregation, but in 1969 federal district courts rejected “freedom of choice plans” that had limited public school desegregation in southern Louisiana and required more effective plans. In a pastoral letter, Auxiliary Bishop Boudreaux warned that defying “the Courts of the Land” was impractical. He appealed for acceptance of desegregation as a Christian

Explained in Superintendent’s Statement,” Southwest Louisiana Register, August 28, 1969 (quotations).

⁷⁵ James Guidry, “Holy Ghost Parish/Opelousas, LA” (quotations), <http://www.creolegen.org/2016/07/30/holy-ghost-parish-opelousas-la/>, accessed November 23, 2021; “Holy Ghost Catholic Church Holy Ghost School Alumnae” at <https://www.hgcatholic.org/153>, accessed November 23, 2021.

and constitutional duty befitting “our Unity in His Mystical Body.” Schexnayder’s public silence suggested ambivalence or a reluctance to speak out.⁷⁶

In August, the Lafayette Diocesan School Board declared that “The Catholic schools of this diocese must not become the refuge of segregationists” and noted that Mouton had “urged” diocesan schools “not to enroll pupils and students whose parents do so simply to avoid integration in other systems or for purely racist reasons.” The board declared that Catholic schools should not “refuse either directly or indirectly the admission of a student because of his race” and added that “Our administrators have been directed to encourage the employing of teachers against whom discrimination has been shown in the past.” However, the board did not adopt enforcement or monitoring mechanisms and relied, like Mouton, on exhortations. Although the board recognized that higher tuition costs were a disincentive to changing schools, it offered no remedies, such as scholarships, declaring only that

⁷⁶ “All Must Join Hands To Solve School Desegregation Problems,” Southwest Louisiana Register, July 24, 1969.

“The board looks forward, with parents of many non-public school children, when this financial problem might be solved.”⁷⁷

In September 1969, when pairing, meaning that two schools would teach different grades and remain open, or consolidation of public schools involving the closure of some schools for racial balance began in the diocese, several hundred white students transferred to Catholic schools to avoid desegregation. Diocesan school enrolment increased by 1,800. With only 556 black students in desegregated Catholic schools, the diocese fell considerably short of the 2,000 it had promised HEW by that date. In October, S.B.S. school principals in the diocese complained to Schexnayder that “No parallel action was being taken to abolish the dual system in the Catholic school system.” They protested that “White public school students were fleeing integration - being admitted to Catholic schools in this area in considerable numbers, even being bussed to Catholic schools at a distance, with the full knowledge, planning and consent of the pastors involved.” In response, Schexnayder referenced diocesan pronouncements against the practice and conceded they had not always been followed. A month later, the school board of St. Edward, an S.B.S. school in New

⁷⁷ “Warns Schools on Segregation,” Southwest Louisiana Register, August 21, 1969.

Iberia, wrote to Mouton “to protest officially what seems to be a public move to further segregation through the instrumentality of the Catholic schools” and cited “the busing of white students from Opelousas to Lafayette to attend Catholic high school and grade school.”⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Richard von Phul Mouton to Edward R. D'Alessio, January 13, 1970, in bound volume “Integration of Schools Diocese of Lafayette 1965-1973 Correspondence, Directives, Reports 1965-1971,” Theodore M. Hesburgh to John Dearden, January 27, 1971, bound volume “Integration of Schools Diocese of Lafayette 1965-1973 The Auzenne Case Correspondence and Data 1970-1973, ADL; “Superintendent: Report Is ‘Dated,’” Morning Star, April 13, 1972; Mother M. David to Dear Sisters, February 16, 1970, 139 (first and second quotations), Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Original Annals Jan-Mar 1970, ASBS; Doughty Broussard et. al to Richard von Phul Mouton, November 11, 1969 (third and fourth quotations), folder “Integration of Schools,” ADL; Donald A. Erickson and John D. Donovan with the assistance of George F. Madaus, George F. Lundy and associates, The Three R’s of NonPublic Education in Louisiana: Race, Religion, and Region (Washington, D.C., 1972), 135, 196-97.

In January 1970, the Louisiana Conference of the Major Superiors of Women, representing twenty-three religious communities of women, called on sisters to withdraw from schools that did not desegregate and urged greater faculty and student integration. Archbishop Philip M. Hannan publicly welcomed the statement, but Schexnayder made no comment.⁷⁹

Secular developments continued to influence diocesan policy. In December 1969, the United States Supreme Court dismissed appeals by thirty-four Louisiana school districts against federal court-ordered desegregation plans, and in January 1970 it ordered the state's public school districts to complete integration by February 1. In response, some white parents withdrew their children from public schools and enrolled them in private schools to evade desegregation. In January 1970, Schexnayder joined with Louisiana's other Catholic prelates in issuing a statement that appealed for Louisianans to support public schools as essential for “the social

⁷⁹ New York Times, January 25, 1970; “Statement of Policy on Christian Education and Racial Integration,” January 15, 1970, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Annals January-March 1970, 93, ASBS.

welfare of all the people” and their living standards. In an effort to stem white flight from public schools, the Lafayette Diocesan School Board prohibited children who had not previously attended a Catholic school from transferring “into grades 2 through 8 and 10 through 12.”⁸⁰

Schexnayder came under increasing pressure from within the diocese to desegregate schools. In January, one hundred Catholic school board chairs, principals, and clergy adopted a resolution calling on the diocese to dissolve “dual church parishes” and create “a unitary Catholic school system.” Martin Leday of Our Mother of Mercy, a black school in Church Point, explained that “Even if the white school says we are welcome, we cannot afford to pay the tuition. An order has to

⁸⁰ Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 443-45; “Bishops Support Public Schools,” Southwest Louisiana Register, January 22, 1970 (first quotation); “Board of Directors Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Lafayette,” January 20, 1970, 1-10 (second quotation on p. 6), box 6 “Meetings of CMSW of Louisiana 1970,” H20E Leadership Councillors, ASBS.

come from the bishop to make it work. When we mix with them, they don't like us."⁸¹

Following discussions with the Major Superiors of Religious (women), in May 1970 the Diocese of Lafayette school board mandated the pairing of eleven schools in 1971, and the ending of the diocese's dual school system by September 1972. Preferred by most African Americans as a means of preserving black schools, pairing enabled formerly black and white schools to remain open by teaching complementary grades. However, after what he described as "intense opposition" from whites in Opelousas, Schexnayder vetoed pairing Holy Ghost School, which had a largely black faculty and a black student body, with the Academy of the Immaculate Conception (AIC) which had an almost entirely white faculty and 1,061 white and five black students. The two schools were in close proximity, separated by a cemetery. Schexnayder claimed that the AIC might well collapse if paired and, putting salvation before racial justice, argued that "The first and most important mission of the Church is the salvation of souls and Catholic education is basic to that

⁸¹ "School Personnel Urge Race Action," Southwest Louisiana Register, January 22, 1970.

end.” In June 1970, eighteen African American parents in Opelousas, helped by their Spiritan pastor Father John Walsh, sued the diocesan school board and the local Catholic school boards for operating a dual school system. In response, in August Schexnayder announced that the two Opelousas schools would be paired during 1971, and the diocese would end the dual school system by September 1971 through pairing. The Opelousas plaintiffs sought an injunction to ensure school desegregation in the town by September 1970. The diocese prevailed on the court to stay further proceedings, which became moot. During 1971, the Lafayette Diocesan School Board approved school desegregation plans “proposed by local bi-racial church school boards,” which paired fifteen schools, consolidated four by closing a black school and a white school in different communities, and zoned two by directing students in their vicinity to attend them.⁸²

⁸² Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Original Annals January-March 1970, 120, ASBS; “Diocese Speeds Up School Desegregation,” Southwest Louisiana Register, August 20, 1970; “Bishop Announces Speedup In School Integration,” Southwest Louisiana Register, August 20, 1970; Hesburgh to Dearden, January 27, 1971; National Register, July 19, 1970; Maurice Schexnayder, untitled statement, August 3, 1970

In June 1971, Mouton claimed that the diocese's schools would be significantly desegregated by September. He explained that of "4,155 black children, 2,431 will be in racially-mixed schools." Of the remaining 1,724 children, Mouton stated that 558 would be in three rural black schools, 802 in two other black schools, and 364 in a black school that would be zoned as an "interparochial school" for integrated parishes.⁸³ The National Office of Black Catholics lamented that "In some instances, Black Catholic School facilities are being abandoned altogether, even though they are newer or in better condition than the 'white' schools." Nonwhite enrollment in Catholic schools fell from 4,841 in 1970-1971 to 4,155 in 1971-1972 or 14 percent. Although some S.B.S. schools subsidized or waived tuition for blacks and the poor, many people of color transferred to desegregated public schools to avoid

(first and second quotations), "Relevant Considerations In Opposing The Application For Preliminary Injunction And In Moving To Stay The Proceedings," August 26, 1970, Maurice Schexnayder to Luigi Raimondi, September 22, 1970, "Catholic Schools Of The Roman Catholic Diocese Of Lafayette, Louisiana" attached to Lloyd R. Henderson to Richard von Phul Mouton, February 20, 1973, Minutes of the Diocesan Board of Directors' Meeting, May 15, 1973, 3, bound volume "Integration of Schools Diocese of Lafayette 1965-1973 The Auzenne Case Correspondence and Data 1970-1973," ADL; "Diocesan School Board Acts To Remove Dual Schools," , " Southwest Louisiana Register, January 21, 1971 (third quotation); "Diocese Answers School Critics," Southwest Louisiana Register, June 17, 1971.

⁸³ "Diocese Answers School Critics" (first quotation); untitled, June 10, 1971, Richard von Phul Mouton to Impact editors, June 14, 1971 (second quotation), bound volume "Integration of Schools Diocese of Lafayette 1965-1973 The Auzenne Case Correspondence and Data 1970-1973," ADL.

higher tuition fees in paired and consolidated Catholic schools, white prejudice in desegregated Catholic schools, and transportation difficulties arising from greater distances to school. Both nonwhite and white enrollment fell in many desegregated Catholic schools, such as Carencro Catholic School which saw black enrollment decline by 40 percent and white enrollment by 62 percent in three years. Examining the long-term impact of desegregation on the diocese's S.B.S. schools, Sister Patricia Lynch, S.B.S., concluded that "In the end, although a handful of Black children continued to attend the former all white schools, in all but New Iberia, St. Martinville, and for ten years in Carencro [despite its sharp drop in enrollment], any significant pairing had failed, leading to the withdrawal of SBS from schools in Church Point, Eunice, Carencro, and Rayne."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ "Catholic Schools Of The Roman Catholic Diocese Of Lafayette, Louisiana"; "Diocese Answers School Critics"; untitled, Civil Rights Digest, Winter 1971, 24; "Focus: Catholic Education and the Black Community," Impact 1 (May-June 1971) unpaginated (first quotation), folder 728.40, ADC; "Our Mother of Peace, Church Point, Evaluation of 'Paired' SBS schools in the Diocese of Lafayette November 10, 1972," folder 4 "Integration in SBS Louisiana Schools, 1971," box 4, H40 B2, ASBS;

In the early 1970s as Catholics schools began pairing and consolidation, church desegregation, largely meaning the admission of blacks to white churches because few whites wanted to attend black churches or faced obstacles in doing so, continued, but it was often divisive and incomplete. Despite some closures of black churches, the diocese retained the large majority of them. Schexnayder claimed that during 1971 “Several parishes were completely integrated.” After fire destroyed Our Lady of Lourdes Church, a black church in Abbeville, on New Year's Day 1971, its pastor Father Floyd Calais and parish leaders opposed rebuilding the church as perpetuating segregation. Yet some parishioners wanted to keep their parish as a means of furthering black identity and other, mainly older, parishioners feared discriminatory treatment at white territorial parishes. Feeling unwelcome in the formerly white territorial parishes of St. Mary Magdalen and St. Theresa of the Child

“St. Edward, New Iberia, Evaluation of ‘Paired’ SBS schools in the Diocese of Lafayette November 10, 1972,” folder 3 “Integration at St. Edward’s, 1969-1971,” box 4, H40 B2, ASBS; “St. Edward, New Iberia, La., Evaluation of ‘Paired’ SBS schools in the Diocese of Lafayette October 1, 1973,” folder 3 “Integration at St. Edward’s, 1969-1971,” box 4, “Carenco Catholic School History,” folder 7 “Carenco Catholic School Self-Education, 1976-1977,” H40 B2, ASBS; Erickson and Donovan with the assistance of Madaus, Lundy and associates, Three R’s of NonPublic Education in Louisiana, 135-36; Lynch, Sharing the Bread in Service, Vol. 2, 184-89 (second quotation on p. 188); Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Century Book (Bensalem, PA., 1991), 38, 40.

Jesus and upset by the loss of Our Lady of Lourdes, many African Americans left the faith.⁸⁵

After consolidating two African American parishes with white parishes in 1972, Schexnayder noted that “Some of the older parishioners would still like to have their separate parishes but we have had no trouble.” Father Arthur Warren of St. Anthony Church in Lafayette observed that many African American and white Catholics in the diocese travelled “many blocks” from their homes to attend church with others of the same race, rather than their nearest church. In some cases, particularly in small towns, white and black churches were in close proximity and celebrated Mass “at the same time.” Warren discerned four main reasons for white withdrawals from desegregated churches: “Some felt that they were being

⁸⁵ Our Negro and Indian Missions, January 1972, 7-20 (quotation), ASSJ; “Bishop Joins Two Coteau Parishes,” Southwestern Louisiana Register, March 25, 1971, press clipping, H20E Leadership Councillors, ASBS; Labbé, Jim Crow Comes to Church, 89-90; Rusty Paul Richard, “Integration Forced or Free?,” 5-6, 15, B38 R100 00 folder “Racism,” ADL; Oubre, History of the Diocese of Lafayette, 122.

experimented with. Others ... were afraid of conflicts which might arise in the congregation. Some still have a fear of blacks, especially young black men, and others still have a real hatred for blacks.” He believed that when people of color did not attend their assigned territorial church “for the most part it was because they felt uncomfortable or not wanted in the church”, while others “did not want to leave the church to which they had been going all their lives.” Warren recognized that since St. Anthony’s desegregated “a small group of whites” had worked “with a somewhat larger group of blacks in the church activities.” He believed that “there are a good number of white parishioners who would like to get involved again in the work of the Church but have not been able to overcome the feeling of being shunned or ridiculed by their neighbors.”⁸⁶

In his final report to the Commission for the Catholic Missions Among the Colored People and the Indians before his retirement on health and age grounds in November 1972, Schexnayder claimed that “I see more and more colored in white churches as I go around the diocese,” and he noted that “Because some of the schools

⁸⁶ Our Negro and Indian Missions, 1973, 7-11 (first quotation), ASSJ; “A Conversation With The Pastor of an Integrated Parish” (subsequent quotations).

were paired, we have fewer all-colored Catholic schools.” However, desegregation of Catholic institutions was far from complete. In part, Catholic segregation reflected residential segregation. Accordingly, Schexnayder reported that “We are planning two new churches for the colored in colored centers.” However, many “dual parishes” remained. Many whites were unwilling to attend churches with people of color, or to accept church desegregation when they lived in mixed areas or in close proximity to people of color. According to historian Nicholas Spitzer, as late as 1981 a rural prairie Catholic church segregated worshipers and gave whites communion first. Despite the unifying effects for many people of color of the civil rights movement and Black Power, some Creoles of Color continued to differentiate themselves from blacks. In 1986, Spitzer observed that Opelousas and Lafayette had more than one church that was “almost exclusively light-skinned Creole,” and “there are still several churches in rural prairie areas of southwest Louisiana, and at least two in the bayou region of east St. Landry Parish [county], where the congregations are composed of light-skinned Creoles to the exclusion of whites and darker black Creoles.” After he became the first black pastor of Opelousas’ Holy Ghost Church

and introduced a black liberation flag of red, black and green, Father McKnight claimed that “a hundred mulattoes” left for white Catholic churches and thereby desegregated them. In 2002, scholars Carl L. Bankston III and Stephen J. Caldas found “a strong sense of racial consciousness” among the population of Acadiana, including colorism among people of color.⁸⁷

In the same year, Evans, Forsyth and Bernard found that segregated Catholic churches still existed “in some small towns and communities,” although the diocese had built no formally segregated churches since the early 1960s. African American parish leaders, the study argued, were more likely than their white counterparts to favor separate churches. Taking the opportunity provided by the Second Vatican

⁸⁷ Our Negro and Indian Missions, 1973, 7-11 (first, second and third quotations), January 1975, 18-20 (fourth quotation), January 1976, 7-11, ASSJ; Spitzer, “Zydeco and Mardi Gras,” 200-202 (fifth quotation on pp. 200-201; sixth quotation on p. 202), 204, 208, 215; Moore, ed., Whistling in the Wind, 44-45 (seventh quotation on p. 45); Carl L. Bankston III and Stephen J. Caldas, A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana (Nashville, 2002), 107 (eighth quotation).

Council's reforms to develop a vernacular and culturally sensitive liturgy, more and more black churches, beginning in the 1980s, had incorporated "Black spirituals and gospel music as part of the Mass" and included "the history of Black Catholics in the liturgical celebrations and in religion education classes." Black Catholic churches thereby helped to maintain "identity and culture" and were distinct from white churches. Attempts to merge some black and white churches in the early 1970s had also left many blacks feeling unwelcome in formerly white churches.⁸⁸

In 1972, Father Arthur Warren argued that "The leaders of the Church have never adequately taught the brotherhood of all men in Christ." Jeanmard had publicly condemned disfranchisement of people of color but not segregation. Although diocesan level meetings desegregated in the early 1950s, the system of racial parishes

⁸⁸ Evans, Forsyth and Bernard, "One Church of Two?," 225-44 (first quotation on p. 227; second, third and fourth quotations on p. 241); Ronald LaMarr Sharps, "The Emergence of Black Cultural Expression in the Roman Catholic Liturgy" (Master's thesis, American University, 1985), 130; Moore, ed., Whistling in the Wind, 44, 47-48

for which Jeanmard had largely been responsible in a pragmatic adaption to Jim Crow continued under his successor. The redrawing of some parish lines in the late 1960s and early 1970s brought limited church desegregation. Concerned primarily with the administration of the sacraments, Schexnayder intervened when whites excluded people of color from church. Yet, he tolerated segregation within churches and, like other Catholic bishops in the Deep South, tied Catholic school desegregation to public school desegregation under federal court order. Financial pressure from HEW led the diocese to submit a plan for faculty and student desegregation that advanced beyond tokenism, but the diocese failed to prevent hundred of white students enrolling in its schools to evade public school desegregation. Schexnayder bowed to white pressure not to pair schools in Opelousas, only to reverse himself when Catholic people of color sued the diocese. Kathleen Toups explained that the bishop desegregated Catholic schools “because of the legal things. I don’t think he really believed in it.” Far from monolithic, some people of color were reluctant or unwilling to relinquish the churches and schools that had nurtured them and which they had often helped build and finance. In the decades after Schexnayder’s episcopacy, growing numbers

of them welcomed, although not uniformly, the development of black liturgy that distinguished black churches from other Catholic churches.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ “A Conversation With The Pastor of an Integrated Parish” (first quotation); Toups, interview by author (second quotation).