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Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond, who grew up in Gentilly, will be installed Aug. 20 as the 14th Archbishop of New Orleans. He is the first native-born New Orleanian to become Archbishop of New Orleans. At a news conference June 12, he promised to meet with those critical of the archdiocesan post-Katrina pastoral plan but added he thought the reorganization plan "was given a great deal of thought and prayer."

Native son returns to lead archdiocese

By Peter Finney Jr.
Clarion Herald

Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond, the first New Orleans native named to head the Archdiocese of New Orleans in its 216-year history, said June 12 he was humbled by Pope Benedict XVI's appointment and pledged to listen and minister to those who have been affected by the restructuring of the local church in the four years since Hurricane Katrina.

Archbishop Aymond, 59, who has been Bishop of Austin, Texas, since 2000 and who previously served for 19 years as professor and then rector of Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, succeeds Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes as the 14th Archbishop of New Orleans.

Archbishop Hughes turned 75 on Dec. 2, 2007, and served for 18 months past the age limit established in canon law for bishops to submit their resignation to the pope. Archbishop Aymond will be formally installed as archbishop Aug. 20 at a 2 p.m. Mass at St. Louis Cathedral, and Archbishop Hughes will act as administrator of the archdiocese until then.

Archbishop Aymond said he would examine the pasto-

ral plan necessitated by Hurricane Katrina and promised to meet with people who have been hurt by the closings of churches and schools. The archdiocese promulgated the final phase of its post-Katrina pastoral plan in April 2008, reducing the number of parishes from 142 to 108, citing a shortage of active priests, declining population and uninsured damage to churches, schools and other institutions.

"I would be more than willing to reach out in a spirit of reconciliation to those who have been hurt, for whatever reasons, in the church," Archbishop Aymond said.

He said the "reorganization" of the archdiocese "was given a great deal of thought and prayer, and obviously I am not here to second guess my predecessor and the work that his staff did."

"But I certainly want to be a shepherd who would be willing to meet with people and talk to them and walk with them in a time of hurt ... to make sure that the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of New Orleans is reaching out in all areas to care for the people," Archbishop Aymond said.

Also present for the news
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Financial Report Inside

In a special 8-page section included in this issue, the Archdiocese of New Orleans releases a Financial Report covering the fiscal years 2007 and 2008. In a letter accompanying the report, Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes says, "The sacrifice of returning parishioners and the reconfiguration of our parishes and schools have made it possible to return to a balanced operating budget." He adds: "We continue to have significant challenges ahead to ensure fiscal solvency as we complete the rebuilding of our newly configured archdiocese."