

# A Resurrection Story

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While looking at the stories of churches that have contemplated the possibility of closing their doors and ending life as they have known it, I am struck with how many of their stories fit into the season of Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. These congregations face the possibility of death head on—with the accompanying dynamics of fear, mistrust, denial, betrayal, guilt, posturing, and hope. Just as Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem and spoke openly with his disciples about his impending death, these churches pull back the curtain of silence and denial to consider the possibility of dying with dignity, closing with compassion, ending with strength, and sometimes even transitioning into new life.

When Father Thomas Murphy became bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Great Falls-Billings in Montana, he inherited a number of small, struggling, mission outposts that had been created across the years to serve outlying communities of miners, farmers, and ranchers. He saw the need to close these missions but did not want to impose a decision upon them that would destroy their spirit. He invited several sisters from the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose motherhouse was located in Dubuque, Iowa, to come to the diocese and serve as pastoral administrators of small parishes. He also assigned them to lead several of the struggling missions in order to help those churches explore their future, which could include the option of closing. If they were to close, Bishop Murphy wanted them to end with hope. To read more go to:

<http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=9592>

(By Charles Olsen)

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