



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

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March 16
Jubilee of Mercy

Dear Father,

With this letter I want to provide you with an update and an important resource for *Renew My Church*. But, first let me express my gratitude for the support so many of you have expressed as we take up this journey together with our people. We all recognize that the process we are following is both a graced opportunity and a significant challenge.

There is the promise of reclaiming and renewing our ecclesial life as the community of Jesus' disciples charged with a mission to proclaim to the world the coming of the Reign of God. That is why we must take up questions dealing with our identity and our mission, who we are and what is our purpose.

At the same time, we are not naïve about the challenges before us. It would be a mistake to define those challenges solely in terms of statistics, whether that be the decline of participation, major demographic shifts, or even dollar figures projected to maintain and repair aging infrastructure. Admittedly, we would be wise to be conversant with the data. However I am convinced that the greatest challenge lies elsewhere. In a word it is about creating ownership for the process among our people.

The whole process of *Renew My Church* depends largely on mobilizing the participation of all the Catholics across the Archdiocese of Chicago. And, if we are to do that successfully, we will need to help them develop a clear and true sense of what it means to belong to the Church. This is so important and foundational. Thus I want to make unambiguously clear that I need and I fully expect you to join me in this task of ecclesial formation of our people.

Happily, there is a core group of people in our communities who are vibrant, informed, and committed believers. They have what I would call, an "ecclesial awareness." At the same time, we also have to admit that a good number of our parishioners will need help in expanding their understanding of what it means to be Church. For instance, many of our parishioners identify the Church solely through the experience of their ethnic or cultural background or with an experience of their neighborhood. They may not be aware of essential elements of the Church or a sense of mission that could carry them beyond their community to work for the transformation of the world. They may not even have a clear sense of Jesus in his word and sacraments at the center of their community of faith. Many "occasional" Catholics link their participation mainly to requests for particular services and events, such as baptisms, weddings,

and funerals. Another category of educated but secularized Catholics tend to take their cues more from the surrounding culture than the traditions of faith, and they may have a very tenuous or superficial grasp of the Gospel.

As I write this, I willingly admit that you know all of this much better than I. So, as I offer you some thoughts on how to move forward and address this challenge and task. I invite you to feel free to share your ideas as we work together to this end. To get us started, let me outline here five resources that will make available for pastors and their staffs to help engage their parishioners in the process and more intentionally form them in an “ecclesial awareness.”

1. Seven Modules on a Practical Ecclesiology for *Renew My Church*

This is a short course in ecclesiology written in non-technical language. With seven modules and in the space of eleven pages, you will have in hand a convenient summary of our faith convictions about the Church. Each module is followed by questions for reflection, so that readers can make applications to their own lives. Here are the modules:

- 1: I believe in the Catholic Church, I belong to the Catholic Church: What does that mean?
- 2: The beginnings of the Church: disciples gathered around Jesus.
- 3: The Church is born in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the great mystery celebrated and made present in the Eucharist.
- 4: Empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church fulfills the mission which Jesus entrusted to all believers.
- 5: The many ways we experience and live our life in the Church.
- 6: God’s essential gifts which give the Church its form and identity.
- 7: The pilgrim people of God on their journey to God.

The practical ecclesiology material can be used in a number of different contexts:

- printed up in bulletins and/or published on your parish web page
- part of parish meetings, including commissions and special groups, such as gatherings of seniors
- in catechesis and faith formation programs
- talking points for homilies and other public presentations.

2. Targeted Homily Notes

Periodically, priests and deacons will receive suggestions for including references to the Church drawn from the Sunday readings. These will be brief indications of ways to embed the meaning of our life in the Church in the course of preaching. For example, the readings in Eastertime draw from Acts of the Apostles, and provide a rich source for understanding the Church and its mission.

3. Webinars and podcasts

A series of webinars and podcasts is being developed, especially for priests, deacons, other professionals in ministry and the core group of leaders in parishes. These presentations will give more extensive background for those who are leading and guiding *Renew My Church*. The presentations will deal with a wide range of issues, such as the phenomenon of secularization, the larger social trends of religious participation, and the various options for leadership commonly proposed, e.g., do nothing, foster a smaller but more committed community, redouble efforts to be inclusive, and recalibrate efforts of evangelization.

4. Structured discussions at the vicariate and deanery levels

It will be important to take a reading of how things are going, particularly as the various groupings begin to meet. Time will have to be given to inviting feedback as people gather to gauge the level of ecclesial formation occurring and the relative success of the process. This will mean inviting people to share their positive experiences, and what they see as remaining challenges. A similar exercise will occur with the various consultative bodies of the Archdiocese.

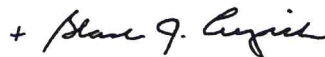
5. Prayers

A special prayer for *Renew My Church* has been composed and will be made available soon. We should look for opportunities to pray this prayer in our parish liturgies and during the various parish gatherings. Suggestions for intentions for the Prayers of the Faithful will also be offered.

A very important part of what we do will involve keeping open the lines of communication. We are a vast archdiocese, and that creates even greater demands on our communications strategy. I am committed to making sure we stay on top of this, and I welcome your suggestions as we move forward.

Many thanks for your support as we move ahead with this process. I pray for you daily and I welcome your prayers for me.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Blase J. Cupich
Archbishop of Chicago