



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

## ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

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ARCHBISHOP QUIGLEY CENTER  
835 NORTH RUSH STREET \* CHICAGO, IL 60611-2030

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,

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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 Eastertide 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.

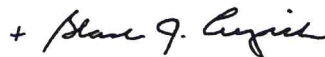
### **5. Prayers**

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

## PARISH GUIDE FOR

### **We Belong to Christ in the Church: A Practical Ecclesiology for *Renew My Church***

**Father Louis J. Cameli**

In his letter to priests of the Archdiocese, Archbishop Cupich said, “The whole process of *Renew My Church* depends largely on mobilizing the participation of all 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.” To foster that clear and true sense of belonging to the Church, we do have an instrument, “We Belong to Christ in the Church: A Practical Ecclesiology for *Renew My Church*.”

In a few pages and in non-technical language, “We Belong to Christ” offers a basic overview of our Catholic faith convictions about the Church and our belonging to the Church. It is meant for catechesis and faith formation in parishes. It has seven parts. Each one concludes with reflection questions to help readers appropriate the content.

**How can “We Belong to Christ” be used in the parish?** There are a number of possibilities:

- It can be reproduced in the parish bulletin across seven weeks.
- It can be used as a fifteen minute reflection-discussion in parish council and commission meetings.
- It can be used in conjunction with adult faith formation sessions, with enrichment sessions with parish ministers, or with religious education/youth ministry for young people who could benefit from it.

There may be other formats as well for using “We Belong to Christ.” Whatever the setting, it is important to keep in mind the overarching goal—to help people in our parishes expand their understanding and sense of the Church. That larger awareness will give us a greater flexibility and security in moving forward with

*Renew My Church*, as we assess our needs and resources, discern the direction in which God is leading us, and make challenging decisions for the future.

If you are facilitating a group that is using “We Belong to Christ,” it may be helpful to have a clear understanding of the learning goals for each part. I have identified those goals below, and I have also indicated a passage from Scripture which help frame the topic for each other. The text itself contains reflection questions. A group process, then, might involve:

- an introduction by the leader,
- reading through the text of the particular part,
- noting the questions at the end of the text,
- having some quiet time to reflect on the questions,
- and sharing the results of reflection in the group.

The Scripture passage which I indicate for each section can be part of an opening prayer or, if it seems more appropriate, a part of a closing prayer service.

Here, then, are **the learning goals for each part** of “We Belong to Christ” and a suggested Scripture reading.

### **Part 1: I believe in the Catholic Church, I belong to the Catholic Church: What does that mean?**

#### **Learning goals:**

- to make our participation in the life of the Church a subject for reflection and prayer
- to understand our “belonging to the Church” as a deliberate and intentional decision
- to recognize the rich complexity of meanings when we speak of “Church”

#### **Scripture: 1 Peter 2:9-10**

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

**Part 2: The beginnings of the Church: disciples gathered around Jesus.**

**Learning goals:**

- to understand the relationship of discipleship of Jesus and belonging to the Church
- to grasp the grace or gift dimension of belonging to the Church
- to begin to see the different sides of Church—community and individuals, staying with Jesus and being sent from him, called and yet still fragile

**Scripture: Mark 3:13-19 (as in the text)**

**Part 3: The Church is born in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the great mystery celebrated and made present in the Eucharist.**

**Learning goals:**

- to know the origin of the Church in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus (and to know that Mystery as his death and resurrection)
- to recognize our immediate encounter with the Paschal Mystery through the Church when we are gathered to celebrate the Eucharist
- to understand that our Church is not static but moves into the future, that the Church is on a journey in time and space “until he comes”

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (as in the text)**

**Part 4: Empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church fulfills the mission which Jesus entrusted to all believers.**

**Learning goals:**

- to understand that our Church not only holds the Mystery of Christ but is directed outward in mission to share him with the whole world
- to realize that the Holy Spirit directs the mission of the Church

- to know that all of us are gifted for the mission and, therefore, all of us are responsible for it

**Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20 (as in the text)**

## **Part 5: The many ways that we experience and live our life in the Church**

### **Learning goals:**

- to understand our many different experiences of belonging to the Church
- to learn how to value all of these experiences
- to recognize the connections among these experiences

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-18, 27-28**

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many...God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.*

## **Part 6: God's essential gifts which give the Church its form and identity**

### **Learning goals:**

- to identify the essential elements that shape our Church: unity, word, sacrament, mission, ministry
- to see how these essential elements keep the Church alive and vital
- to comprehend how we all have a stake in these essential gifts

**Scripture: Ephesians 2:13-22**

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace...and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the*

*cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.*

## **Part 7: The pilgrim people of God on their journey to God**

### **Learning goals:**

- to reclaim a dynamic sense of the Church
- to know that the Church is not a perfect community entirely populated by saints but that it has its share of sinners
- to understand how the Church is a witness to hope

### **Scripture: Philippians 3:10-14**

*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*