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April 25
Jubilee of Mercy

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

At its heart, *Renew My Church* in the Archdiocese of Chicago is a spiritual initiative. We seek to be more and more attuned to the directions in which the Lord is leading us as a community of faith.

There are many activities that belong to the process of *Renew My Church*, for example, gathering and analyzing data, meeting to discuss choices that are to be made, and working to implement decisions. Above all, however, the Lord summons us to prayer. We are called to pray for wisdom, discernment, and courage as we move forward. We are called to pray for persevering fidelity to accomplish what the Lord wants of us.

The enclosed prayer will help us as a local Church to pray with a common voice as we face a common challenge of moving into the future with faith, hope, and love. In this spirit of unity in prayer, I ask all parishes in the Archdiocese to use this prayer as the final prayer of the General Intercessions at Pentecost weekend Masses. If Pentecost coincides with a special celebration or event in the parish, for example, First Communion or a capital campaign commitment, please use the prayer on the next available weekend.

After Pentecost, continue to use the prayer in different ways. You may pray it on the first Sunday of each month or more frequently. Begin parish meetings or gatherings with this prayer. Incorporate it in religious education and adult faith formation. Consider pasting it in the inside cover of your hymnals. Encourage individuals and families to pray this prayer at home. Encourage the sick and those who are homebound to pray for *Renew My Church*. Their intercessory prayer is powerful in the life of the Church. And, of course, allow your creativity to bring this prayer into the life of our communities in other ways as well.

As we encourage all of God's people to join in prayer for the renewal of the Church, may the good Lord continue to accompany us on our journey.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Blase J. Cupich".

Most Reverend Blase J. Cupich
Archbishop of Chicago

Enclosure

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Renew My Church
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835 N. Rush Street
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Jubilee of Mercy
Pentecost: May 14-15

An Invitation to join Archbishop Cupich in renewing the Archdiocese of Chicago

As Pope Francis recently remarked, we are living not only in an era of change but a change of era. This is a time to dream big. That is why we have launched *Renew My Church*, a pastoral planning process designed to bring those dreams to life and to strengthen the vitality of our parishes for generations to come. Just as the Holy Spirit filled the disciples at the first Pentecost and sent them on mission, the Holy Spirit is with us today, calling us to a new Pentecost to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ in a fresh way to the world. This work belongs to every parish and every Catholic across the Archdiocese.

On this Pentecost day, Archbishop Cupich is inviting us to join him in making real this dream of vibrant parishes that live out the Gospel and share the love of Christ in word and deed. It will take a steady faith – a faith that is imaginative, that trusts that Christ is leading us and empowering us to make bold decisions that will shape the Church for generations to come.

At the heart of this process is the demand to read the signs of the times and discern where Christ is calling us to fulfill his mission. There are challenges: decreasing Mass attendance; treasured church buildings in need of repair, declining numbers of priests, religious, deacons, and lay ministers, as many move towards retirement.

Addressing this situation will require prayer, humility, hard work, creativity, tough choices, and new sacrifices. It is true that by the time this consultative process is complete, we will mourn together the loss of some parishes. But that will not be the final word. By having the boldness to leave behind familiar ways of doing things, we can seize the moment as one not simply of loss, but rather of renewal.

Renewal comes from placing Christ at the center of the community and accompanying each other on this journey toward missionary discipleship. Rooted in Christ and strengthened by sacramental grace and the bonds of fellowship, the Church in Chicago will grow joyfully and fruitfully in response to Christ's call to "Renew My Church." Therefore, *Renew My Church* will have at its core a strong focus on mission. The goal will be to ensure that local parishes have the support they need to strengthen their faith communities and live out our missionary call in ever more vibrant ways.

Why is this process called Renew My Church?

As St. Francis of Assisi was praying in the Church of San Damiano, he heard Christ speak to him: "Go, repair my Church." Eventually St. Francis realized that Christ was calling him to renew the Church - not only as a physical structure, but as *the whole people of God*. The dying and rising of Christ continue to take place in every age in the dying and rising of the Church. We must take up the mission of proclaiming Christ as a Church whose community is united and whose focus is on the renewal that comes through the Resurrection.



(Over)

What will happen next? When will my parish be affected?

All parishes across the archdiocese will be part of "groupings" for pastoral planning. Within a grouping, parishes will come together to gather information and evaluate options for the pastoral needs of the local area. They will all have a say.

Admittedly, the end result of this planning will differ according to the mission priorities, needs, and realities of the Church in that area. The goal is to have a vibrant Catholic presence that reflects responsible stewardship of our collective resources: the gifts of lay people, deacons, religious, and lay ecclesial ministers, our priest personnel, finances, and buildings. For some groupings, the results will include changes to parish configurations, including potentially fewer parishes. For other groupings, parish configurations may not change, but parishes will be expected to plan for enhanced collaboration with one another, and to identify how they may further support parishes in other areas of the archdiocese.

We will begin this fall with a "pilot" program involving a small number of groupings and anticipate we will refine the *Renew My Church* grouping planning process based on learnings from these pilots. Subsequent groupings will then enter into a focused planning effort over the course of the next two to three years.

Who will make decisions?

Representatives from each parish will form a Grouping Planning Committee to gather information and evaluate options for the pastoral needs of the local area. The Grouping Planning Committee will make preliminary recommendations to an Archdiocesan Planning Commission comprised of leaders who represent the diverse backgrounds, skills, and experiences of Church that mark the Archdiocese. The Archdiocesan Planning Commission will review the recommendations. If the preliminary recommendations are accepted, they will be forwarded to Archbishop Cupich for consultation with the Archdiocesan Presbyteral Council. After consulting with the Presbyteral Council, Archbishop Cupich will make the final decisions.

What is expected of me as a Catholic in the Archdiocese of Chicago?

Remain hopeful and open to ways to share, contribute, and collaborate throughout the process of *Renew My Church*. Archbishop Cupich has invited us to pray for wisdom, discernment, and courage as we begin pastoral planning through *Renew My Church*. Please use the prayer card available at your parish beginning on Pentecost to pray at home with your families, at parish meetings, and in other community groups. We will continue to recite this prayer during Mass periodically across the Archdiocese.

When will we know the results of the survey?

Thank you to the more than 30,000 Catholics who responded to the recent online survey, and the thousands who mailed in a response via paper copy. Archdiocesan staff is in process of inputting paper responses. Initial results will be shared this summer.

A final word

This will be hard work. But, what in life worth doing does not involve hard work? The immigrants who built our churches, schools, hospitals and charitable agencies were not daunted by the prospect of hard work. Neither should we be daunted, as we begin this new springtime for the Church, this new Pentecost, this change of era.

