

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



Renew My Church

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION



INTRODUCTION

The closest followers of Jesus Christ knew well what it was like to dream about a world transformed by God's power, to encounter the Son of God in the flesh, and to dare to leave everything behind when he called them by name. They knew the excitement of first discovering him, and the desire to share with everyone the life-changing message, "We have found the Messiah!" (Jn 1:41). At the same time, his earliest followers also knew the experience of acute grief, dashed hopes and anxiousness about the future.

We can imagine that as the disciples of Christ gathered in the Upper Room, they were experiencing a potent mixture of these emotions: grief at the departure of Jesus, yet tangible faith in the imminent arrival of the Spirit; uncertainty about the future, yet deep hope in the dawning awareness that Christ's Resurrection had already transformed the world; anxiousness about the "times" (Acts 1:6–7), yet profound trust in the power of Christ's promises. The intensity of these emotions likely grew as they awaited the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And while we know how long they had to wait, they had neither a timeline nor a roadmap. All they knew was that they were to pray, to trust and to remain together as they awaited the promised arrival of the Spirit.

At this moment in our Church and in the world, we may also be grieving, troubled, or anxious. Or perhaps, by God's grace, we may feel a sense of hope in a brighter future. Maybe we do not even know what to feel. But together we are gathered as one people, members of Christ's Body, in this one place, the Church of Chicago. Together we pray. Together we hope. And together we remain, asking the Lord to send us anew the life-giving and transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

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Pentecost is rightly associated as a day of birth and continual renewal for the Church since the Church, as the *Catechism* teaches, “was made manifest to the world that day by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”¹ With this image in mind, we would like to share more about the renewal currently underway in the Church here in Chicago. In 2015, Cardinal Cupich launched Renew My Church as the fruit of an archdiocesan-wide discernment about the need for renewal in our local Church, and as a vision to guide that movement of renewal.

Many people across our archdiocese have heard about Renew My Church—yet, unfortunately, many have heard about it only in connection with decisions about the future of their parish. While Renew My Church does provide a forum to discern the need for structural changes and operational improvements, it is about far more than that: *it is fundamentally a movement of archdiocesan-wide spiritual renewal that has evangelization at its heart.* It is a pivotal moment for our local Church to draw closer to Christ and call upon the Holy Spirit, who “renews the face of the earth” (Ps 104:30).

So now is a good time to review the background, foundations, and vision of this crucial moment of renewal in our archdiocese. As a member of our local Church, you have an important place in this renewal that will shape the future of our archdiocese. So, we invite you to see this document as an invitation to your role in the Spirit’s work of renewal here in Chicago.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1076. See also Vatican II, SC 6, LG 2. On Pentecost as “the birthday of the Church,” see Pope Francis, General Audience of 31 May 2017. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, #25.

“BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW” (Rv 21:5)

The call to renewal is central to our lives as Christians. While our faith is ancient, Christ—who is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8)—is the perennial source of all newness. He makes “all things new” (Rev 2:15) by drawing all things to himself on the Cross (Jn 12:32) and offering from there the streams of living water and sacramental grace (Jn 19:34; see also Ez 47, Jn 7:37–39).

Through the “new birth to a living hope” (1 Pt 1:3) we receive in the waters of baptism (see Jn 3:5), we become a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; see Col 3:10, Eph 4:24). This rebirth makes us members of his Body, the Church (Col 1:18, 1:24), fills us with his Spirit (Rom 5:5, 8:9), and initiates us into a life where we are renewed day-by-day (2 Cor 4:16).² As the Second Vatican Council says of the work of the Spirit, “by the power of the Gospel, [the Spirit] makes the Church keep the freshness of youth. Uninterruptedly he renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse” so that “we might be unceasingly renewed in him.”³ Following this path of individual and communal growth, Christ continually renews his Church, and through the Church, Christ continues his work of renewing all things (Eph 1:10).⁴

While this call to renewal is an abiding part of our lives as Christians, the challenges of our present day highlight the critical need for this spiritual renewal. The global coronavirus pandemic has profoundly impacted our communities, our families, and our own lives. As many among us have suffered from this illness and its effects, our Catholic Charities, Catholic hospitals, and parish communities have lived out the works of mercy in heroic ways. While the pandemic has been a time of acute loss, pain, and suffering for many, as people of faith, we are attentive to how this time of crisis has also taught us important lessons about renewal.⁵ As an archdiocese, this time has prompted us to examine what is most fruitful about our pastoral outreach, identify areas of vitality, and recognize the different needs of our parishes.

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² See Council of Trent, Session VI, *Decree Concerning Justification* (1547), Ch. 10.

³ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #4, 7; Cf. *Ibid.*, #9.

⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #12, 15.

⁵ See Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Roman Curia,” 21 December 2020, #5–9.



Recent events have raised our awareness about the urgent need to address longstanding racial and social injustices, and work for a profound transformation in how we relate to each other.

As we continue to address the ongoing effects of the pandemic, we have also become aware of the acute need for healing in other dimensions of our society. Recent events have raised our awareness about the urgent need to address longstanding racial and social injustices, and work for a profound transformation in how we relate to each other. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are commissioned to be “ambassadors” of the healing and reconciliation that only God can truly bring (2 Cor 5:19–20). Called to be “a sacrament of the unity of all humanity in God,” the Church has a vital role to play in bringing about the healing our society so deeply needs.⁶

May the Spirit fortify us with his grace as we respond to the Gospel call to work for a more just society, and renew us as we strive to manifest more perfectly “a Church which speaks all tongues, understands and accepts all tongues in her love,” and thereby overcomes every human division.⁷ Rooted in Christ Jesus (Jn 15:1–17), we call upon the Spirit to “heal our wounds, our strength renew,” as we sing each year in the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* sequence on Pentecost.

⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #1.

⁷ Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* (1965), #4.

BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

Before we consider further the renewal that is occurring in our midst, let us step back and take stock of who we are as a local Church. Our archdiocese has a rich tradition of strong and vibrant parishes that have served people from every ethnic, linguistic, and economic background. The Catholic schools, hospitals and missions that have historically surrounded our Catholic parishes witness to the diverse ways in which Catholics in Chicago not only related to their parish as the center of their spiritual lives, but also turned to their parish for their material and social needs as well. So closely did people identify our parishes with their surrounding communities that many of us can still remember how Catholics—and even non-Catholics—in Chicago used to identify their origins by asking, “What *parish* are you from?” We have a lot to be proud of in our rich history of parishes that have nourished generations of Catholics and served as pillars of their wider communities.

The Archdiocese of Chicago has been a leaven in society in other important ways as well. Across the years, clergy, religious and laity of the archdiocese have pioneered movements that have had a profound impact both locally and well beyond. Priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago anticipated the Second Vatican Council and played a pivotal role in liturgical reform. They created a score of organizations such as the Christian Family Movement (CFM), the Cana Conference, the National Catholic Social Action Conference and the Chicago Inter-Student Catholic Action. They fought unjust home lending practices through the Contract Buyers’ League. And they provided a powerful Chicago presence to national initiatives, including the Catholic Worker Movement, the Young Christian Workers (YCW), the Young Christian Students (YCS), the Catholic Committee on Urban Ministry (CCUM) and the National Conference on Interracial Justice (NCIJ).

In addition, Catholic Extension (formerly known as the Catholic Church Extension Society) was encouraged by Chicago’s Archbishop Quigley and headquartered here shortly after its founding. The Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), an important catalyst for racial harmony and positive youth activity, was founded here by Bishop Bernard Sheil, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The Catholic Campaign for Human

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Development, the national anti-poverty and social justice program of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) had its origins in the 1960s with Chicago priest and later bishop, Michael Dempsey, while he served as pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish on the West Side. He served as the organization's first leader after his appointment as an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Chicago. More recently, *Theology on Tap* was founded here and has been adopted across the U.S. and in many other countries.

The USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, adopted in 2002, was based on the pioneering 1992 policies enacted in Chicago by Cardinal Bernardin. It was believed to be the first comprehensive plan for dealing with the then-cresting wave of clergy abuse cases. Cardinal Bernardin's leadership and the continued commitment of Cardinal George and Cardinal Cupich remain a standard for the protection of children and the healing of victims.

From groundbreaking movements to pioneering policies for the protection of the vulnerable, the foundation has been here. This distinctive history of the Archdiocese of Chicago is not just a rich legacy for us to recall and celebrate, but it also provides us with a perennial blueprint for spiritual renewal in the archdiocese. Since true spiritual renewal, as we have always understood it in the Catholic tradition, builds in continuity with our past, so the spiritual revitalization of our archdiocese must be attentive to our history and build upon it. The great movements of faith formation and social action that helped shape the archdiocese in the past can give us a good sense of resilience for the current challenges we face and a source of perennial wisdom as we take stock of the concrete factors that distinguish our archdiocese in the present moment.

As we consider our current situation, we can note that a major element of the concrete reality of the Archdiocese of Chicago is the increasingly multicultural makeup of our parishes. Alongside the ever-growing Hispanic community—which already comprises well over forty percent of the Catholic population of our archdiocese—we have an increasing percentage of Black Catholics and Asian Catholics in the archdiocese. Many of these communities, together with communities of Catholics of European heritage, have been integral parts of our archdiocese from the very beginning and many are still welcoming new members who have recently immigrated and now call Chicago home. As our archdiocese has been, and continues to be deeply shaped by the reality of migration, we must ask how spiritual renewal will allow us to be a church that welcomes newcomers from both near and far.

With the rich ethnic backgrounds of our people also come manifold expressions of faith in the form of popular piety. For spiritual renewal to take hold and flourish in our archdiocese, we must appreciate what Pope Francis has called “the evangelizing power of popular piety.”⁸

⁸ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #122–126.

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Considering how spiritual renewal touches all parts of our local Church, we are also aware of the large numbers of poor and often excluded people who live in our archdiocese. Pope Francis has taught that central to the vision of the mission of the Church to transform the world is the inextricable link between evangelization and inclusion of the poor.⁹ So, any spiritual renewal must address how the Church will serve the poor among us—both in works of charity and in a firm commitment to social transformation.

Finally, central in envisioning future spiritual renewal here in the Archdiocese of Chicago is the fact that our local Church is a community that embraces and unites people of all these different backgrounds. Again, the Second Vatican Council teaches that the Church is called to be “a sacrament of the unity of all humanity in God.”¹⁰ This calling to be a “sacrament” of Christ¹¹ is meant to be realized not only at the global level, but it must animate the identity and mission of the local Church as well. With the many diverse and rich backgrounds of the people in our archdiocese, our local Church is uniquely positioned to live out this service since we are a community of faith that cuts across innumerable divides of race, ethnicity, culture, language, economic standing, educational background and geography. These factors of our concrete ecclesial situation highlight our calling and responsibility to build bridges, to be a reconciling presence, and to be, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, “a leaven and...the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God.”¹²

9 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #187–216.

10 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #1.

11 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #8 and *Ad Gentes* #15.

12 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), #40. Cf. CCC #854.

DISCERNING THE “SIGNS OF THE TIMES”

As in every age, the Church is called to continually re-examine the “signs of the times”¹³ to discern the needs of our people today and how we can best live out the mission that Christ has given to us in light of the concrete, present realities of our place and time.¹⁴ In addition to considering how the call to renewal will relate to the concrete demographic and socio-economic factors of our local Church, another pressing dimension to consider—touching upon *all* parts of our archdiocese—is the wider shift in how people relate to the Church and to their faith.

National studies show that Catholics today are disengaging from their faith at an alarming rate. For those who remain, studies before the pandemic showed that only 23% of Catholics attend Mass regularly; about half (49.5%) go to Mass at least once a month.¹⁵ Sadly, this trend has accelerated over the years. Even if we look at the relatively recent past, 35% fewer people attended Mass regularly in 2019 than in 2000. We do not need official statistics to tell us this; even before the pandemic, each Sunday we saw increasingly empty pews in churches that once were full of Sunday worshippers.

This is not just a temporary downturn. 36% of today’s 24- to 39-year-olds (the generation known as the “Millennials”) claim to have no formal religious affiliation, comprising a group sociologists call “the Nones.”¹⁶ Among the Millennials who *do* identify as Catholic, only 17% attend Mass weekly. This disengagement from the Church is set to continue with the generation that is currently aged 9 to 23 (the generation known as “Generation Z”), as studies have found that 85% of today’s eighth graders will stop practicing their faith by the time they reach the age of 23.¹⁷

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¹³ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), #4. Cf. Ibid., *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965), #9.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #231–233.

¹⁵ Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice Among U.S. Catholics* (2015).

¹⁶ Pew Research Center, Dec. 14, 2021, “About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated.”

¹⁷ catholicleaders.org/news/leadership-and-caves.

As we consider these trends, our concern lies not only with what statistics tell us or what people report on surveys, but with what those trends reflect in the spiritual lives of our people. As Catholics, we know that the practice of our faith flows from the heart of our relationship with Jesus Christ and renews it at its core. Apart from Christ and his Church, our spiritual lives wither (Jn 15). So, it should be no surprise that along with declining Mass attendance, people are reporting a decline in their relationship with God. Recent studies have shown that many Catholics in our archdiocese report that they do not know who God is and do not have a meaningful relationship with him. Studies also show that people have doubts about certain core aspects of our Faith, such as belief in the Eucharist.¹⁸ Again, what is most concerning about these figures is the spiritual void they reveal as people disconnect from the foundations of their faith and grow distant from God and his Church.

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These trends are not only local; they reflect profound social changes occurring on a global level. As Pope John Paul II observed, “Even in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a ‘Christian society’ which...measured itself explicitly on Gospel values, is now gone.”¹⁹ The age we live in today is characterized by secularism, consumerism, indifference to religion and a general distancing of life from faith.²⁰ The root causes of these social-historical movements are multifaceted and complex, and so it is not easy to pinpoint simple causes of these trends without deeper socio-cultural analysis. Nevertheless, it is clear that there has been a fundamental “change of age”—as bishops of Latin America have identified it.²¹ We are witnessing a loss of the cultural elements that once supported institutional religion and the regular practice of the faith, such as the bonds of family and cultural background and a society that revered the place of Sunday worship.²²

18 Survey of Chicago Catholics, Archdiocese of Chicago (2018).

19 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001), #40.

20 See Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (1988), #34; Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #2.

21 CELAM, V Conferencia General, Documento Conclusivo, *Discípulos y Misioneros de Jesucristo*, 3 ed. (2007), #44.

22 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (1988), #34. See also University of Mary, *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission: Pastoral Strategies for an Apostolic Age* (Bismarck, ND: University of Mary Press, 2020).

For those who have labored in the vineyard for years, these trends can be discouraging. Since many of us grew up before these trends emerged, it can be hard to accept that the religious landscape around us has changed so much. Yet, we sense that something indeed has changed, and sadly, we see these results in our own families and in the lives of our people. We hear from so many parents and grandparents who share with us their frustrations and their sorrows at having worked hard to raise their children and grandchildren in the faith, only to see them leave the Church.



Seeing this, we might be tempted to lessen our labors and slacken our zeal. Yet, we know that a disciple of Christ never grows hopeless when surveying the “signs of the times” (Mt 16:4), but always looks for new ways “to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit,” as the Second Vatican Council teaches.²³

Considering our current situation more closely, we see signs of hope in the fact that 35% of millennial non-Christians report that they are “interested to learn about Christianity and what it could mean for my life,” and 50% of lapsed Christians report that they are interested in learning more about God.²⁴ We see a true openness there. We also see that there is a genuine longing among many that only God can fulfill. Finally, as the pandemic has shown us the fragility of our lives, it has reminded us how important it is to base our lives on that which endures (see Jn 6:27). Alive to this, we should never grow discouraged but be renewed in hope (Gal 6:9; cf. 2 Pt 1:19).

²³ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), #3.

²⁴ Barna Group, *Reviving Evangelism: Current Realities that Demand a New Vision for Sharing Faith* (2019).

Rather than retreat from the world, this is a time for the Church to *increase* its mission in the world. We have now entered what is being identified as a “New Missionary Age” where, despite numerous challenges, “the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel” are opening before us, as Pope John Paul II stated.²⁵ In response, the Church must approach her mission in traditionally Christian spaces with a “renewed missionary impulse, an expression of a new, generous openness to the gift of grace” that invites people to encounter Jesus Christ and to become his disciple.²⁶ In this era of missionary outreach, as Pope Francis teaches us, we are called to be a “Church which goes forth”—“forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel!”²⁷

As we undertake this work of renewal, we are reminded of the account of how St. Francis of Assisi received his calling to work for the renewal of the Church. As St. Francis was praying before the crucifix in the dilapidated Church of San Damiano, near Assisi, he heard Christ speak to him from the Cross, saying, “Go, repair my house.” At first, St. Francis took the message literally. So he started rebuilding the physical building around him, brick-by-brick. However, soon he understood that Christ was calling him not to reconstruct a material structure, but to *renew the Church itself*.²⁸ This account, and the image of that crucifix, have been a guiding light for us in this time of renewal. Just as the crucified Christ gave St. Francis the mandate to renew the Church, we pray that Christ will inspire us to have the discernment necessary to know what we need to rebuild and what needs to be made anew in service of *renewing his Church*.

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25 Pope John Paul II, Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), #3.

26 Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter ‘Motu Proprio’, *Ubi Cumque et Semper* (2010). See also Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), #51–57.

27 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #20.

28 See St. Bonaventure, *Legenda maior*, 2, 1.



Saint Francis, 1615, Peter Paul Rubens, The Art Institute of Chicago, George F. Harding Collection

DISCERNING HOW TO LIVE OUT OUR MISSION IN THIS TIME

Just as the disciples navigated the uncertainties of the early days of the Church by turning to prayer, so must we do today. The characteristically Christian way of making important decisions is by **discernment**. In discernment, we are guided not by opinions or worldly ways of thinking, but by the Holy Spirit, whom we have received in baptism and who leads us into all truth (Jn 16:13). In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), Pope Francis teaches that discernment is a prayerful dialogue that is “born of a readiness to listen: to the Lord and to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways.”²⁹ This prayerful listening, done in the context of attentiveness and mutual exchange, allows us to perceive the vital direction of the Spirit, who “perpetually renews” the Church, as the Second Vatican Council teaches.³⁰ We discern because we are a people conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst and we trust that he guides us in making the decisions that we face in each time and place.³¹ Seeking spiritual renewal through communal discernment allows us to “build communion,” even amidst differing opinions, to seek our unity in Christ, and to discover our path forward by the light of the Holy Spirit.³²

With this in mind, under the direction of Cardinal Cupich, the leadership team of Renew My Church has placed a high priority on discernment as we have navigated decisions about the future of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Guided by this discernment, when we embarked on this process of renewal, we sought to initiate a conversation that would include as many people as possible, in every parish, in every part of our archdiocese through parish gatherings, an archdiocesan-wide survey and various consultative groups. By direct consultation and conversations with representatives, we have received input from across the archdiocese and we have been graced

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²⁹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), #172.

³⁰ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), #4.

³¹ See: Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), #166–169.

³² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #226–230. Cf. Pope St. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2000), #3.

and challenged by the input we have received. In addition to the feedback from within the archdiocese, representatives from our archdiocese have consulted with experts globally in the field of parish renovation and vitality.

This process has led us to discern certain foundational insights about the need for renewal, both in terms of our structures and also in terms of our methods.

First, as we look to the future, we are aware that a vital and fundamental part of the renewal of our archdiocese consists of discerning what *structures* will allow us to carry out our mission, in light of the pastoral needs of our people today. In the structural dimension of renewal, we work with parishes as they discern the spiritual and pastoral needs of their communities and whether the structures and institutions that have served our mission in the past so well will continue to be the best way of serving our mission to those communities in the future. This process is designed to foster open conversations and widespread consultation. Every step of the discernment is made in prayer, inspired by Paul's admonition to "test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess 5:21).

Yet, Renew My Church is not only about structural changes; it is also about discerning and implementing the best means of carrying out our mission in today's context.³³ The goal of this process has been to discern a vision for spiritual renewal that is inspired by Christ's Great Commission (Mt 28:16–20), guided by the Spirit, fueled by a prayerful reliance on God's grace and refined by extensive consultation and discernment with all involved. Bringing this all to ongoing prayer with pastoral leaders from across the archdiocese and working closely with Cardinal Cupich, we have discerned an approach to spiritual renewal in our archdiocese that seeks to "enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people," to "mold communities," and to "have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture," as John Paul II called us to do in this new millennium.³⁴ In particular, *three central imperatives* surfaced throughout this process that guide this work of renewal: make disciples, build communities and inspire witness.³⁵



33 See: CELAM, *Discípulos y Misioneros de Jesucristo* (2007), #19.

34 Pope St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2000), #29.

35 These imperatives draw upon and foster all three "levels of faith" as outlined by Louis J. Cameli in *Stories of Paradise: Classical and Modern Autobiographies of Faith* (Paulist Press, 1978), 56–60.

**When we encounter the living Christ,
he does not leave us where we are
but calls us to become his disciples.**



The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew, 1308–1311, Duccio di Buoninsegna, courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

FIRST IMPERATIVE: MAKE DISCIPLES

The first mission imperative is to **make disciples**—that is, to carry out in our time the Great Commission: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). While Christ gave this mission to his disciples at the end of the Gospel, the call to invite others into discipleship was also present from the beginning: the first apostle, Andrew, no sooner heard Jesus’ call to discipleship than he immediately found his brother, Peter, and “brought him to Jesus” (Jn 1:40–42). Indeed, those who encounter Christ naturally desire to share that encounter with others. This happens in two ways.

First, we are *made* disciples. As Pope Benedict XVI taught, “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”³⁶ When we encounter the living Christ, he does not leave us where we are but calls us to become his disciples. This is always our starting point. Before we can invite anyone to encounter him, we ourselves must have truly encountered him; it is only within a profound and ongoing

³⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), #1.

encounter with Christ that we can ask what the right methods are for bringing others to him.³⁷ Likewise, before we can share him with others, we must have received his Word ourselves.³⁸

Second, as Christ makes us his disciples, he also works *through the Church, through us*, to continue making disciples of all people, “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). To say that Christ is the center of who we are means that we are dedicated to the timeless mission of proclaiming him to be the One to whom all times belong (Jude 1:25, Eph 3:21, 1 Tim 1:17). This is not an optional addition to our Christian calling, as Pope Francis teaches: “every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries,’ but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples,’” and “in virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples.”³⁹

As “missionary disciples,” we are called to go *outward* and invite others to meet Jesus Christ, and we accompany them into the life of the community. This is a dynamic task and calls for a missionary outlook: we are sent to “go out to the highways and hedges, and bid people to come in” (Lk 14:23). This is the full expression of what it means to be a member of the Church that is “missionary by her very nature.”⁴⁰ While we have this calling by our baptism, we need to lay claim to it by the way we live our lives. This first mission imperative, therefore, aims to awaken in us a lively sense of our baptismal identity as disciples of Christ and active collaborators in the work of inviting others to follow Christ, “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (Jn 14:6).

As a Renew My Church team, we have studied what it means to claim our baptismal identity as missionary disciples. There are *four primary marks of a missionary disciple*. First, missionary disciples are animated by an awareness that they have *encountered* Jesus Christ in all the dimensions in which our relationship with him is lived out: personally, communally in the Church, and globally in the wider world.⁴¹

Second, missionary disciples are alive to the fact that they have *received* the gift of God’s unconditional love—through their baptism, and later

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Four primary marks of a missionary disciple:

1. Encountered Jesus
2. Received God’s love
3. Active prayer
4. Serve and share

37 Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter ‘Motu Proprio,’ *Ubi Cumque et Semper* (2010).

38 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #3–8.

39 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #120.

40 Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes* (1965), #2. Cf. *Ibid.*, #35. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #767.

41 See Louis J. Cameli, *Stories of Paradise: Classical and Modern Autobiographies of Faith* (Paulist Press, 1978), 56–60.

through the sacrament of reconciliation. Third, aware of the need for an ongoing response to this divine gift of love and mercy, missionary disciples cultivate a profound and lasting relationship with Christ through a life of prayer, active participation in the Sacraments—especially in the Eucharist, “the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life”⁴²—through study of Scripture, ongoing learning about the faith and committed engagement in the Church. Finally, as missionary disciples grow closer to Christ, they become ever more ready in their joy to serve others generously in Christ’s name and to share his love with all.



The work of renewal of Christ's church
is...a new call for the conversion of our
hearts.

The Sermon on the Mount, 1598, Jan Brueghel the Elder, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

SECOND IMPERATIVE: BUILD COMMUNITIES

In the first mission imperative, we focus on growing in our discipleship of Christ and inviting others into active discipleship with him as well. This always remains central to our life of faith. At the same time, if we look closely at the Gospels, we will see that while the call to be a disciple touches us each personally, it is never purely private: it is a call to active participation in the *community of Christ's disciples* (see Acts 2:42). So, our second mission imperative is to **build communities**—that is, to foster healthy and vibrant parishes where missionary disciples are initiated, nourished, challenged, and sustained together as members of Christ's Body (Eph 2:15–21; 4:16) and collaborators in his work of spreading the Gospel (Mt 9:37–38).

⁴² Pope Francis, Encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (2015), #236.

In the age and culture in which many of us grew up, this vision of the Church was widely taken for granted. Those raised as Catholics before the 1980s likely experienced how their home parish was the center for so many aspects of their family's life and the life of their wider community. However, as described above, in the past four decades, our society has changed in profound ways; today, people increasingly seek to relate to God apart from the Church. Yet, as Catholics, we know that our active membership in the Church is not extraneous to our faith, for our faith is communal by nature. Being a member of Christ's Body means being a part of the universal community instituted by Christ and founded in his sacrifice on the Cross.⁴³ It is a community united to Christ by baptism, centered on the Eucharist and called to share in his Paschal Mystery.

One of the primary goals of our archdiocesan work of renewal is to help our parishes become life-giving communities in which we live out our relationship with Christ...Yet, a vibrant parish does not happen accidentally.

While our membership in the Church is truly “catholic” or “universal,” we also know that the *local parish* plays a vital role in how we encounter Christ and daily grow in our faith. Writing in his document on the role of the faithful in the Church, Pope John Paul II explained how a “parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather, ‘the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit,’ ‘a familial and welcoming home’...”⁴⁴ Every parish is built of the “living stones” of the People of God, “gathered to be ‘built into a spiritual house.’”⁴⁵ It is the “family of families”⁴⁶ and the “community of communities”⁴⁷—the daily context where Christ draws us into communion with him and establishes us in *communio* with each other, all rooted in the communal celebration of the Eucharist.⁴⁸ It is, according to Pope Francis, “an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.”⁴⁹

As it is “the place where the very ‘mystery’ of the Church is present and at work,” every parish stands on the foundation of a *mission* to carry out the mandate of Christ and to serve as a visible “sacrament of salvation” in

43 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), #8.

44 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (1988), #26. Citing Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, #28; Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, #67; *Code of Canon Law*, Can. 515.1. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2179.

45 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1179. Citations of 1 Pt 2:4–5 and 2 Cor 6:16.

46 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), #202. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2226.

47 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #28.

48 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (1988), #26.

49 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #28.

a particular community.⁵⁰ It is also the base from which the Lord sends us out to live an existence that is truly ecclesial in form.⁵¹ And since the parish is where the Church's mission meets the daily needs of people in the world, it plays a vital role in our graced work of forming people to be missionary disciples.⁵² So, one of the primary goals of our archdiocesan work of renewal is to help our parishes become life-giving communities in which we live out our relationship with Christ.

All of us want vibrant parishes. Yet, a vibrant parish does not happen accidentally. True parish vitality requires intentional prayer, well-prepared pastoral leadership, a commitment to engage and commission parish leaders and parishioners, and most importantly, a strong willingness by all to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the work of renewing their parish. Moreover, sustained renewal requires healthy structures that support a culture of spiritual growth and evangelization. As Pope Paul VI taught, "evangelization is for no one an individual and isolated act; it is one that is deeply ecclesial"⁵³; it must always, therefore, be fostered by, sustained in, and renewed within the context of the Christian community.

In an exploration of parish vitality throughout the world, five core elements that seed parish renewal become apparent: kerygmatic entry points, radical hospitality, vibrant and transformative liturgies, readiness-based formation and outward-reaching pastoral care.

Five core elements

- 1. Kerygmatic entry point**
- 2. Radical hospitality**
- 3. Vibrant and transformative liturgies**
- 4. Readiness-based formation**
- 5. Outward-reaching pastoral care**

⁵⁰ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), #48; CCC #774–776.

⁵¹ See Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (1988), #26; Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007), #15, #76; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2179.

⁵² Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #28.

⁵³ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), #60.



...to awaken our people and ourselves to a keen sense of our calling to witness to our faith and to enkindle a deep-seated love for others that “compels us”, in Christ’s name, to seek out the lost and those in need.

Pentecost, El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos), ca. 1600, Museo Nacional del Prado. (Wikimedia Commons)

THIRD IMPERATIVE: INSPIRE WITNESS

While we seek to make each of our parishes life-giving communities of faith and discipleship, we also realize that our parish communities are not meant to remain cloistered within themselves. The Church, instituted by Christ and sanctified by the Spirit, is sent into the world to be “the sacrament of salvation,” “the sign and the instrument” of God’s communion with humankind.⁵⁴

Realizing this was one of the first fruits of the disciples’ experience at Pentecost. The Spirit did not leave the disciples gathered together in the Upper Room but sent them out as *the Church* to witness to the saving power of God, in word and in deed, saying “this Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses...he has poured out this which you see and hear” (Acts 2:32–33). So, in addition to making disciples and building communities, the third mission imperative is to **inspire witness**—that is, to awaken our people and ourselves to a keen sense of our calling to witness to our faith and to enkindle a deep-seated love for others that “compels us” (2 Cor 5:14), in Christ’s name, to seek out the lost and those in need.

⁵⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #780. See also Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), #1.



This outward service flows from our identity as the Body of Christ. For, by our baptism, we become members of Christ's Body and receive the mandate to witness to our faith. Fulfilling this mandate requires us to return continually to Christ in the Eucharist, the "source and summit" of our Christian lives.⁵⁵ In the Eucharist, we receive "the love of God...made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 Jn 4:9). It is from there that we are sent out to be witnesses to his love and mercy in the world. This is clear in the fact that we conclude every Mass by being *sent out*—of course, the word "Mass" itself means "sent." This is communicated well in the new options for the Concluding Rite of Mass in the Third Edition of the Roman Missal, which include: "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord" and "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."

This third imperative entails a mission to all those in any manner of physical and human need. The Gospel that we have heard and live by, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, is "not merely a communication of things that can be known; it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing."⁵⁶ To all those who have profound physical and spiritual needs, yearning for that life-changing grace, we are sent out to witness to Christ's mission to

55 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), #11.

56 Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical, *Spe Salvi* (2007), #2.

proclaim “good news to the poor...release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk 4:18–19). We reach out because “the love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14) in the Holy Spirit to share the message of salvation. And as recipients of that message of salvation, we invite all those whom we meet to share it as well.

In a particular way, we would like to highlight the importance of having *a heart for the lost*. It was to the “lost sheep” that the Lord was sent (Mt 15:24; see also Mt 18:12–14), and so he calls us, his disciples, to develop a perspective that looks for the lost and invites them into a relationship with him (Mt 10:6). If we have a heart for the lost, as Jesus did, we will see the lost present among us in every part of society, from every background, and at every level of income and social status. And if we are living out this calling to be missionary disciples, we can expect that the Spirit dwelling in us will move us to be instruments of that Gospel that is truly “life-changing” for those on the margins of our society.

The calling to witness to God’s love and mercy touches *every disciple*, for all of us are called to share the Gospel attentive to how God’s transformative love has touched our lives.⁵⁷ In the Sacrament of Confirmation, which completes our Christian initiation, the Holy Spirit “endows [us] with special strength”⁵⁸ and empowers us to profess our faith “as if by office (*quasi ex officio*)”, as St. Thomas Aquinas says.⁵⁹ The message we share is the message of the love of Christ, and so “every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus”⁶⁰ This can be done in the ordinary circumstances of our lives, where we can “make Christ known to others...by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity.”⁶¹ Yet, the call to witness is also a call to mission to move beyond the ordinary confines of our lives and look for those on the margins.

This outward mentality should characterize *our parishes* as well. Every parish that is truly an evangelizing community, says Pope Francis, follows the mandate of the Lord to “go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.”⁶² Indeed, the inextricable link between *evangelization and inclusion of the poor* is central to Pope Francis’ vision of the Church’s mission in the world.⁶³ So, any spiritual renewal must address how we, as the Church, will serve the many

The calling to witness to God’s love and mercy touches every disciple, for all of us are called to share the Gospel attentive to how God’s transformative love has touched our lives.

57 See Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), #46.

58 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), #11.

59 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 72, a. 5, ad 2.

60 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #120. See also: Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), #41.

61 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), #31.

62 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #24.

63 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #187–216.

poor and often excluded people in our own midst. While this will include charitable giving, spiritual renewal must include a commitment to social transformation as well. Parish identity should be expressed in service and care for the poor, vulnerable and those in need, for a parish is “a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey and a center of constant missionary outreach.”⁶⁴ A parish that is truly an evangelizing community does not remain aloof from the problems of the world but “gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives...it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others...”⁶⁵

Our age, like many others, looks for an authentic witness in all who proclaim the faith, and so this service carries a powerful witness value in society. Yves Congar, a 20th-century theologian, observed that people today have a “passion for authenticity.”⁶⁶ Notably, young adults who engage their faith in our campus ministries and Young Adult outreach programs often express a desire to have an authentic engagement with the call of the Gospel, encounter with those in need and genuine impact in society. Congar pointed out that vocations to service in the Church flourish “under conditions which require a continual re-creation of an evangelical life and which permit direct, Christian, sincere contact with people and their needs and anxieties.”⁶⁷ So, by fostering a heart for the lost and inspiring our people to live out their faith in service, we will also prepare the groundwork for our young people to consider vocations to service in the Church. Every parish has this responsibility!

These three mission imperatives—make disciples, build communities and inspire witness—have guided us as we, as the Church here in Chicago, have discerned how Christ calls us to approach the challenges before us and the actual needs of our people today. Keeping focused on the goal of drawing each person in our archdiocese into a transformative relationship with Christ at every level of how that relationship is lived out, we have to do the difficult but necessary work of discerning how to align our structures and methods with our mission so that we can draw everyone deeper in Christ—today, and for countless years ahead.

64 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #28.

65 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), #24.

66 Yves Congar, O.P., *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert, O.P. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press; A Michael Glazier Book, 2011), 40.

67 Yves Congar, O.P., *True and False Reform in the Church*, 45.

AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR RENEWAL

As we move forward with the graced work of spiritual renewal here in Chicago, we find inspiration for this task in the rich legacy of our archdiocese. Over the years, clergy, religious and laity of our archdiocese have pioneered movements that have left a profound and lasting impact on our local church and beyond. In areas such as liturgy, faith formation, youth ministry, marriage ministry, social justice, racial reconciliation, and more, the impact of our local Church can be found in programs that continue to bear fruit throughout the world.

In pursuing spiritual renewal, we are not breaking with this past; rather, we are claiming the mantle of the great Catholics of our history who followed the Spirit's lead to seek renewal in their time.

Indeed, Chicago has been blessed to have several individuals whom the Church has recognized for their lives of outstanding holiness. Notable among them is Venerable Father Augustus Tolton (1854–1897), the first Black priest to serve in the United States, who served as a shepherd to many in Chicago's Black Catholic population. Notable also are St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, MSC (1850–1917), Venerable Mary Theresa Dudzik, OSF (1860–1918) and Venerable Maria Kaupas, SSC (1880–1940): three saintly women religious who labored tirelessly in our archdiocese to establish religious orders and build institutions that have cared for countless people on the margins of society. One with the Spirit that moved them to seek renewal in their time, we seek spiritual renewal in our own time.

We are claiming the mantle of the great Catholics of our history who followed the Spirit's lead to seek renewal in their time.



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It is now our turn to pick up the mantle of those who “have gone before us, marked with the sign of faith.” The pastoral needs of our people today challenge us to adapt to the profound changes we have witnessed in the past few decades and respond with improvements at every level to how we fulfill our mission among God’s people. They challenge us, moreover, to leave our children and grandchildren with the structures and methods best suited to serve the Church’s mission in the future. By making these sacrifices today, we can leave our young people with a more vital and vibrant parish community within which they and their children can grow in Christ.

When Pope John Paul II visited Chicago in 1979, he declared that he had come to proclaim anew the message that Peter proclaimed throughout the world after Pentecost: that salvation is in Christ, and Christ alone (Acts 4:12). This conviction should guide all we do in our local Church: “our service to the needy of the world is exercised in the name of Jesus...In this name—in the holy name of Jesus—there is help for the living, consolation for the dying, and joy, and hope for the whole world. Brothers and sisters in the Church of Chicago: let us do everything ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus’ (Col 3:17)!”⁶⁸

68 Pope John Paul II, Address of His Holiness in Holy Name Cathedral of Chicago, 4 October 1979.

Indeed, let us do all in the name of the Lord Jesus! The work of renewal of Christ's church is never merely a call for restructuring; *it is a new call for the conversion of our hearts*. All the baptized, especially those called to lead this renewal, must be open to this continual conversion of heart. Only by having this disposition can we truly live out what Christ calls us to do in our own lives and in service of others. Our varied ministries, our outreach to the poor, the sick and the lost, our teaching and preaching must all begin and end in the person of Christ. As we undertake the holy task of renewing our parishes and diocesan structures with and in the Holy Spirit, let us do so as one body of the resurrected Christ, united in our shared purpose of making disciples, building communities and inspiring witness to the Gospel of God's saving love.

When our parishes are vibrant and alive with the Gospel, they have the potential to transform lives and change the world around us, locally and globally, for the better. We already see this at work in the parishes that are alive with the Gospel and the power of the Sacraments. But we dream of an archdiocese where every parish is thriving. We believe the path we have laid out will lead us toward this new era of vitality. We now have the opportunity to make a difference in the future shape and face of our local Church. All of us have an essential role to play in this.

You are invited to be a part of dreaming of a world transformed by Christ's death and Resurrection. We invite you to be a part of the Spirit's renewal (Ps 104:30) and the Church's mission to announce his Good News in the world. Let us bring forward any hesitations, concerns, and uncertainties and allow the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, Intercessor, and Counselor (*paraklētos*, Jn 14:26) to grant us his peace and to renew our hope.

Trusting in God's grace, we invite you to join us in planning a vibrant Church for "generations yet unborn" (Ps 22:31, 78:6, 102:18) and to be an active participant of this renewal in the ways you are uniquely graced and called to serve.⁶⁹ You are invited, along with the over two million Catholics in our archdiocese and those seeking to know Jesus more deeply, as together we—grounded in Jesus Christ and sent out in mission by his Spirit—respond to Christ's call to '*renew my Church*'.

The work of renewal of Christ's church is never merely a call for restructuring; **it is a new call for the conversion of our hearts.**

⁶⁹ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #12, 15.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964).

Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965).

Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* (1965).

Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975).

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