

## Renew My Church: What is it? Why are we doing it?

Our parish, like all parishes of the Archdiocese of Chicago, is participating in an effort of renewal. Some may ask, “why now?” since we are slowly finding our new pace, there is still a great deal of concern for people’s well-being. The most honest answer I can offer is that the opportunity for renewal is ever-present and is perhaps more important now than ever.



When we look at the signs of the time, what do we see? A culture more ambivalent toward religion; declining faith participation of younger generations; Mass attendance in our archdiocese that has decreased by 27% over the past 20 years; across the U.S., 2 in 5 children baptized are not confirmed; and, 85% of children that are confirmed stop practicing their faith by age 21. In many quarters of our society, Christian morality, once the norm, is pushed aside. The consequences are all around us: breakdown of families, disregard for innocent life and human dignity, violence in our communities, addictions, depression, loneliness and despair. For many of us, we see this in our own families and neighborhoods, brokenness and separation from the life of Jesus Christ.

Now, consider the actual words, “renew my church.”

What a wonderful gift we have as Jesus invites us to renew His Church. The Lord of the universe speaks these words to us just as he spoke them to the saints before us. Finally, we have the word Church. It seems like a tall order to renew the Church. Isn’t that someone else’s job? Our own little parish, maybe. But the whole Church? Yes. And we will, because renewal always, always, always begins within our own hearts.

To be clear, Renew My Church is much bigger than anything we’ve ever done in the Archdiocese of Chicago. It is a faithful response to Christ’s call to renew His Church, a journey that is both spiritual (to re-encounter Jesus Christ as disciples and parish communities) and structural (to ensure our parishes have adequate resources for vitality).

Through Renew My Church initiatives, the Archdiocese will re-commit our local Church to our gospel commission to make disciples, build vital communities of faith and inspire witness to bring the light and hope of Christ to a world in need. These mission imperatives guide all that we do in and through the spiritual and structural efforts of renewal.

One initiative of Renew My Church is focused on increasing the vitality of our local communities. Cardinal Cupich has asked our parish to come together with the other parishes in our grouping to start a process of reflection, discernment, and planning to consider how we can collaborate and combine resources so that we are better equipped to bring Jesus Christ to the world today.

Let’s acknowledge up front that change is not always easy, and renewal can be stressful. For a lot of parishes, this renewal means some form of structural change, such as uniting with another parish. For others, it will be painful with the closure of a church or school.

But something new is needed. Despite the valiant and beautiful efforts of so many pastors, lay leaders and ministry leaders, fewer and fewer people are encountering Jesus and experiencing him in parish community. Change we must, and it will involve frank discussions and some hard decisions to help all of our parishes invest in new ways of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.