



RENEW MY CHURCH TO GROW AND BECOME THE HANDS OF GOD'S MERCY

IMPORTANT INITIATIVES IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

By Father Louis J. Cameli, S.T.D.

A FEW MONTHS AGO, the news media in Chicago reported that the Archdiocese was going to close one hundred parishes. The story took many Chicago Catholics by surprise, as they speculated about the fate of their own particular parish. But no one, I can honestly tell you, was more surprised than Archbishop Cupich. There is no specific plan, and there certainly are no decisions made. Rather, we are all standing at the beginning of a process.



ARCHBISHOP CUPICH HAS NAMED THIS PROCESS *Renew My Church*. He was inspired by the story of Saint Francis of Assisi in the Church of San Damiano. From the crucifix in that church, Francis heard the Lord say to him, “Renew my Church, repair my Church.”

In the Archdiocese of Chicago, *Renew My Church* means, first of all, taking an honest look at our situation – the spiritual needs of people in Cook and Lake Counties, the resources and facilities that are available and their condition, the projected number of priests who can serve as pastors in parishes in the future, a realistic projection of funding for the mission of the Church, and the key markers of vital parishes and faith communities. The next step is a discernment process, in other words, listening to each other and, most



especially, listening to God. We want to know where the Lord is leading us. The final part of the process entails decision making and implementation. What will all of this mean? What will the Church in the Archdiocese of Chicago look like after *Renew My Church* is implemented? Certainly, the hope is that we would have a better and more effective use of the material and personal resources which the Lord has given us. There is, however, an even more significant hope attached to the

process. The great hope is that we will become a more faithful Church, that is, more faithful to what God wants of us. More faithful, then, means reclaiming and authentically living our identity as believers and disciples of Jesus Christ. More faithful also means reclaiming and authentically living our mission or purpose as the Body of Christ in the world.

At this point, we can begin to understand that there is a great convergence of the process of *Renew My Church* and the vision of Pope Francis in calling us to observe a Jubilee Year of Mercy, which is translated in the Annual Catholic Appeal as becoming and being the *Hands of God's Mercy*. There are also connections with the capital campaign *To Teach Who Christ Is* which seeks to insure a long-term and secure foundation for the Church's mission. Let me explain with more detail how these initiatives support and build on each other. Knowing the connections is very important.



CNS/Paul Haring

RENEW MY CHURCH

Dreaming Big about the Archdiocese of Chicago

Archbishop Cupich invites everyone across the Archdiocese to join together in launching a historic new moment for the Church of Chicago to respond to Christ's call to "Renew My Church." What we are undertaking will chart the course for greater vibrancy and vitality of our parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago for generations to come.

Visit www.archchicago.org/renew for more information

Why is it important to know the connections? If we are unaware of how these pieces work together, these various initiatives may seem to be a jumbled string of disjointed efforts, just one activity after another. And consequently we may be confused about where to invest our energy and resources. So, it is important to take a deeper look and see the connections.

A good place to begin is the vision of Pope Francis. He has consciously fostered the legacy of the Second Vatican Council, and this is evident in two ways. At the time of his election, he said that the Church must not be an introverted Church but rather a Church that moves out into the world and brings the world Christ, its savior. That is exactly the vision of the Second Vatican Council – a Church deeply aware of its own identity as the Body of Christ and the People of God that is committed to carrying on the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.

The process of *Renew My Church* corresponds exactly to the renewal

initiated by the Council and fostered by Pope Francis (as well as by his predecessors). This becomes even clearer when we realize that there are four fundamental questions that will be addressed in *Renew My Church*:

- Who are we? the question of our Christian identity as disciples of Jesus
- How do we belong to God and to each other in the Church? the question of our ecclesial or church identity
- What is our mission or purpose? the fundamental question of our direction as the Lord has given it to us
- How can we better fulfill it? the practical question of embodying our identity and mission in practical ways, in order to be faithful.

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Let us return to Pope Francis and his initiative in summoning the Church to a Jubilee Year of Mercy. In doing this, his intention is very clear. He wants to call the Church back to the center and heart of the Gospel – which is the mercy of God freely given to us in Jesus Christ,

a mercy once received that is meant to be shared by believers who bring it into the world. In the Archdiocese of Chicago, we have, of course, observed the Jubilee, but we have also shaped the Annual Catholic Appeal around the theme of the *Hands of God's Mercy*, our call to be ambassadors of God's mercy in the world. And this finds a complement in the efforts to develop and fund the long-term financial stability of the Archdiocese.

In a rather extraordinary way, the questions of *Renew My Church* find their responses in the Gospel's central message of mercy which we celebrate and try to live out. Who are we? The people who have been touched by the mercy of God revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. How do we belong to God and to each other in the Church? By the bonds of God's free and merciful gift given to us by the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament. What is our mission or purpose? To be the living instruments, the hands of God's mercy in the world and so bring all people to the Lord. How can we better fulfill our mission? By always being mindful of the central reality of our lives and of this world – the healing and transforming mercy of God.

Members of the *Lumen Cordium Society* can be proud and confident of their participation in the Annual Catholic Appeal whose initiatives make them instruments of mercy in a renewed Church. Support for local communities, religious education, parish transformation, lay formation, priests' education, social justice initiatives, and respect for life from conception to natural death – these are essential contributions to the presence of mercy in a renewed Church.

In the Archdiocese of Chicago, we are living in a truly grace-filled moment. We are on a journey of renewal. We are reclaiming the heart of our faith in the mercy of God. We are equipping ourselves to be the very hands of God's mercy in a world in deep need. In all of this, we can only be grateful and be renewed in a sense of our responsibility to claim this moment. ■