

RENEW MY CHURCH - THE SUMMIT

Four weeks ago, several parishioners and staff members accepted my invitation to attend a two-day conference in Rosemont which aimed to help parishioners, pastoral staffs and priests from all over the Archdiocese focus on the essentials of this ongoing process called *Renew My Church*. We were part of a group of over 2,000 Catholics from most of the parishes of the Archdiocese who spent nearly nine hours each day praying, listening to presentations and at times discussing our response to what we had heard. It was no fun being on the road to Rosemont at 7:30a.m. for the ninety minute rush hour drive, but there were worthwhile thoughts to be taken away from these two days.

The first takeaway was simply seeing so many dedicated and generous parishioners from all over Cook and Lake counties—and even a few from the Joliet diocese—who were eager to learn a bit more about this challenging program that will be going on for at least another three, possibly four, years. I'm made a passing reference to *Renew My Church* in the past two weeks and this week I want to say a bit more to try to clarify the real focus of this process.

If you read the *Chicago Catholic* (formerly the *New World* before it became the *Chicago Catholic*, then the *New World* again) you will know about the changes that have taken place in a number of areas in the Archdiocese as designated parish groupings have met and brainstormed during their year-long discussions. In many cases, these discussions have resulted in the consolidation of parish structures, with one pastor and one pastoral staff overseeing multiple parishes—often with a new, common name—but with the churches remaining in place as “worship sites”, meaning that Mass will still be celebrated in those churches. In only a few cases will parishes actually be closing or churches sold or torn down. Hopefully these results can put to rest the fear that the primary purpose of *Renew My Church* was to close churches.

Which brings me to the second important takeaway from the *Renew My Church Summit*. The message communicated there over and over again was the need to make the parishes of the Archdiocese **vital, evangelizing** and **viable**, with more and more parishioners committed to living their baptismal calling and inviting others to join them in a wide variety of ministries—not necessarily within or sponsored by their parishes. If you look closely at the photo from the summit (which you can enlarge on the parish website) you'll see examples of those values which were expressed and discussed during those two days. But that's something that already happens here, with PADS, Catholic Charities and Respond Now being examples of the ways St. Joseph parishioners reach out beyond the parish to live their call to discipleship. The hope and goal are that those sorts of efforts will expand in all the parishes of the Archdiocese in coming years.

The final takeaway from the Summit was the need for parishes to work **together** to accomplish their goals and to inspire their parishioners to live their baptismal calling. To that end, our own Parish Pastoral Council proposed that we take the initiative in bringing together the priests, pastoral staffs and parish leadership from the parishes in our grouping to begin the process of simply getting to know one another. Even though our grouping has yet to be “activated” and we have no idea when that will happen, the Archdiocese has been encouraging parish groupings to promote informal gatherings or to join in common projects so that when we begin our formal discussions we’ll have a greater level of comfort in working with one another.

So I’ve invited parish leadership, pastoral staff members and priests from the other five parishes in our grouping—St. Anne, St. Lawrence O’Toole, St. Emeric and Infant Jesus of Prague—to gather here next month for a relatively informal “get-to-know-you” evening. Our Parish Pastoral Council and possibly a few other parishioners will attend along with the Parish Council of St. Anne and parish leaders from St. Emeric and St. Lawrence O’Toole which don’t have parish councils. Unfortunately, the leadership at IJP hasn’t replied to my invitation, but hopefully they’ll get on board somewhere down the line.

In the meantime, we should all be praying for our sisters and brothers in parishes around the Archdiocese who are currently engaged in these often challenging discussions and decisions. And we need to continue to do our best to challenge one another to live the faith of our baptism, both here in the parish and in our community where the message of the Gospel always needs to be proclaimed.

Fr. Bob

