



Frequently Asked Questions

What is *Renew My Church*?

Renew My Church is a proactive, strategic effort to ensure the sustainable growth of our Church for the future. *Renew My Church* is meant to ensure that all parishes are vibrant, vital, and life-giving and have the resources they need to carry out the mission of the Church. *Renew My Church* is a diocesan wide effort and its success is dependent upon local ownership, participation, input and support.

Why do we need this initiative?

Pope Francis has called us to dream big for the Church: *“I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”* (Joy of the Gospel #27)

As we looked at how to answer the Holy Father’s call in the Archdiocese of Chicago, we took an honest look at the significant changes in our diocese over the past several decades:

- Demographics have shifted dramatically.
- Maintenance has overtaken mission in many places.
- We have fewer priests to pastor our Catholic communities
- Parishes lack the resources they need to remain vital.
- We are not connecting with younger generations.

We cannot be afraid to face these realities, but rather see this moment as a graced opportunity to chart new ways to live out our mission more fully.

What is a grouping?

A grouping is a set of parishes and schools that will together undertake a structured and facilitated planning process as part of *Renew My Church*. All parishes and schools in the



Archdiocese will be in a grouping. For some groupings, the planning process may result in new configurations. There will be some groupings, however, in which reconfiguration will not result. All groupings will be charged with more formal collaboration and/or support of parishes in other areas of the Archdiocese.

Why are groupings being proposed? What is the ultimate goal?

In June the Archbishop wrote, “As parishes, the challenge is to become communities of communities that are stronger and more effective in mission than when we worked in isolation.” The ultimate purpose for forming groupings is to better position ourselves to most effectively carry out our mission of evangelization and making disciples, in a sustainable manner, with the opportunities and challenges of our current times. No parish can be everything to everyone. Many of today’s challenges, both of evangelization and finances, require looking and working beyond our individual parish.

In some areas, this may require the use of new models such as multi-site parishes or multi-parish pastoring. In all areas, groupings will be called to greater collaboration and interdependence among one another. Grouping parishes allows local-level ownership and planning to take place, and ensures that local feedback is surfaced and taken into account. Ideally, forming groupings also helps us think in a more future-oriented, collaborative, and visionary way about what it means to be Church in a local area.

How do we know if this is a good grouping—what should we consider?

A set of parishes should be considered a good grouping if they:

- Are reasonably close geographically
- Serve the same broader community (e.g. the parishes serve the same public school district(s).)
- There are obvious commonalities and affinities (e.g. parishioners occasionally attend Mass at more than one parish in the grouping)

What will happen after groupings are decided? What is the overall timing?

Groupings will be decided towards the end of this calendar year, expected in November or December after vicars, deans, and Archdiocesan staff review the feedback forms submitted by pastors. A small number of groupings will begin the planning waves as “pilots” this fall by beginning the first phase of planning. Around the same time frame, we will provide you with guidance around “what to do” until your grouping enters the planning process. This guidance



will largely focus on ways to build relationships across the parishes. All groupings will be sequenced into the planning process over the course of the next 3-4 years.

What will the planning process look like for a grouping?

Once a grouping begins planning, the process will take place over the course of several months, and be structured and supported by facilitators and other resources provided by the Archdiocese. The phases are being specifically designed to include what worked well in ours and other dioceses, and to address typical challenges. We are currently developing more details about the process, but it will likely take place across five main phases:

1. A preparation phase
2. A discernment and decision phase
3. A phase to support and accompany people through any transitions that may be taking place
4. A phase to support parish leadership in the operational transitions that may occur
5. A phase of pastoral planning. During the pastoral planning phase, the parishes will focus on identifying the priority mission needs of the local area and on building the new reality of how the parishes will collaborate to address those needs.

Local ownership, participation, and input will be critical to the success of the planning process. Parish and grouping teams will be formed to drive the consultation and planning at the local level across all five phases. Through recommendations from these teams, key decisions and plans will take local input and perspectives into account.

How many parishes will be closed or merged?

There is no pre-determined number for how many parishes will merge or close nor how many church buildings might close. This process is first and foremost focused on how to ensure we have vital parishes that form missionary disciples. In areas where that is not possible today due to the challenges we face, new models will be considered. There are a variety of models that can be used to help address our challenges. Some examples include multiple parishes sharing a pastor, or a set of parishes merging to form one parish with multiple churches. In some cases, however, closures will likely be unavoidable. Each grouping, through the planning process, will explore and discern all of the possible, applicable models.

Will every grouping experience closures or reconfigurations?

No, not every grouping will experience closures or reconfigurations. Some groupings will have significant challenges and will need to consider new configurations. Other groupings, however, may not require any configuration changes. The planning process will still apply to



those groupings, but they will place more emphasis on planning for opportunities for greater collaboration and sharing for the good of the Church in that community.

What happens between the groupings being finalized and the launch of the planning process in our area?

We know many people will be excited to begin planning in their grouping after the groupings have been finalized. At the same time, we know that there can be disappointment if groupings start planning without adequate support. Accordingly, after grouping decisions are made, we will provide direction regarding initial grouping collaboration and what to do before the planning process formally starts for your grouping. This guidance is likely to include ideas for relationship building across parishes (e.g., social events) as well as working together to address existing challenges as a result of inadequate resources (e.g., coordinated Lenten Reconciliation services). In general, initial efforts will not be focused on activities requiring significant cross-parish planning, coordination, or re-prioritization.