



## THE ROAD TO RENEWAL

*A collaborative diocesan-wide journey to renew the purpose, mission and impact of Catholic Faith throughout Western New York*

**“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ... Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’”** (Luke 24:30-32)

The Catholic Faithful, priests, deacons, religious, parish administrators and school leaders of the Diocese of Buffalo have embarked on a journey to reinvigorate Catholic faith, more fully optimize parish and diocesan resources, and increase the impact of our varied ministries throughout Western New York. Much as the disciples rediscovered the Lord - and had their hope renewed - while breaking bread together after walking with him on the long road to Emmaus, we are traveling together, supporting one another, facing our challenges and opportunities together, and seek a renewed spirit of purpose and solidarity, united by our common faith in the One who makes all things new. **“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”** (2 Cor. 5:17).

Reflecting and relying on the guidance provided by the **“The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church,”** as issued this past summer by the Congregation of the Clergy, we seek to reawaken in each of us, and collectively as a Family of Faith, the zeal to proclaim boldly the Gospel of Jesus Christ in keeping with our baptismal commitment and to serve those most vulnerable with renewed vigor and uncompromised devotion.

**“A renewed vitality is required that favours the rediscovery of the vocation of the baptised as a disciple of Jesus Christ and a missionary of the Gospel, in light of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent Magisterium.”** - The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community

We fully acknowledge that the scandals and turmoil that have led to a crisis of faith and a loss of confidence in Church leaders by many of our diocese - lay and clergy alike - have distracted us from our common purpose and mission as disciples of Jesus Christ.



Our hearts ache for those harmed by abuse at the hands of clergy and by the inadequate acknowledgement - even denial - of Church leaders regarding the pain they have been forced to suffer and endure through no fault of their own. Their healing as members of our Family of Faith must be our constant work and preoccupation.

At the same time, we cannot allow the pall of scandal and betrayal to conceal the Light of Christ which in every instance is able to pierce the darkest circumstances and conditions. The added burden of financial hardship currently confronting the diocese and parishes - and exacerbated by the Covid-19 threat - is one that necessitates that we work more collaboratively and harness the resources of individual parishes for broader benefit. At every stage - we must continue to ask ourselves - what can we do better together? How can our efforts and ministries add up to more than the sum of our many parts, and in a way that revitalizes our mission and brings about this new era of renewal that our parishioners crave?

Toward this end, a Diocesan Renewal Task Force has been formed and is currently conducting regional consultative sessions in late September and early October in order to gain insight and input from parish leaders, school administrators, and from parishioners across the diocese that will inform decisions about how we will be structured and operate going forward. Special emphasis is being given to “best practices” identified both regionally and nationally that indicate how parish and school leaders elsewhere have faced similar challenges with regard to diminished financial resources and reduced church and school attendance, but have nonetheless been successful in promoting a culture of co-responsibility among laity, clergy and religious in carrying out the work of evangelization and service.

While we have not come to specific conclusions that will impact parishes or schools at this stage, we recognize that maintaining the status quo is not an option. As we look at other examples around the country, we must acknowledge that traditional ways of thinking about parishes - as defined territory, property and buildings - is increasingly a thing of the past:

***“It is true that a characteristic of the Parish is its rootedness at the centre of where people live from day to day. However, the Parish territory is no longer a geographical space only, but also the context in which people express their lives in terms of relationships, reciprocal service and ancient traditions. It is in this “existential territory” where the challenges facing the Church in the midst of the community are played out. As a result, any pastoral action that is limited to the territory of the Parish is outdated, which is something the parishioners themselves observe when their Parish appears to be more interested in preserving a nostalgia of former times as opposed to looking to the future with courage.”*** - The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community #16



This is not to suggest that a parish can merely be disbanded or eliminated. As a Family of Faith defined by a legacy of sacramental life, in which Catholic identity has been nurtured and life's most profound moments have been shared and celebrated, a parish community reflects the very soul of those who belong to it. As such, our focus will necessarily be on how best to preserve that identity as a "Family of Families" - regardless of decisions that may change the way any one parish family is organized and experiences the fullness of Catholic life.

***"At the heart of a process of renewal, instead of passively undergoing change by supporting and going along with it, there exists today the need to individuate new structures that will incite all those who make up the Christian community to fulfil their vocation to evangelise, with a view to a more effective pastoral care of the People of God, the "key factor" of which is proximity."*** - The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community #44

Throughout this journey that we now travel together, our guiding principles will be to listen and to learn; to be open and transparent about the challenges we face, and collaborative in devising solutions that must ultimately lead us to greater dependence on and support for one another, while renewing in each of us as members of this Family of Faith the zeal to proclaim Christ's Gospel of unconditional love and forgiveness.

May our hearts burn within us with renewed passion as we hear anew and recommit ourselves to following and demonstrating the transformative power of His Word.

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