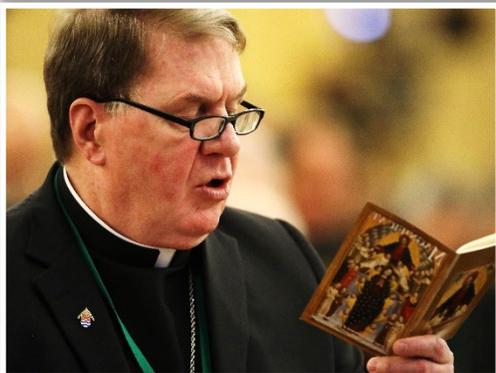


Rejoice in the Lord

**By Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Newark**

Ministry in a Time of Pandemic



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For nearly half a year now, it seems like we have all been living in the Twilight Zone. Things just don't appear to be the way they should be, and it's kind of eerie.

I certainly don't want to joke about this deadly serious pandemic. Too many people have lost family members, friends and close colleagues. Many others have lost their jobs or are experiencing severe economic hardships. And all of us have had our lives uprooted one way or another. COVID-19 is not a joke. It is a

worldwide crisis that has hit all of us very close to home.

Earlier this year, I participated in the 2020 Catholic Partnership Summit sponsored by the Leadership Roundtable, a not-for-profit organization that promotes best practices and accountability in the management, finances, communications, and human resources development of the Catholic Church in the U.S., including greater incorporation of the expertise of the laity. Participants gathered to advance a national conversation about how to create a new culture of co-responsible leadership to help the Church address its multiple crises, including but by no means limited to the impact of COVID-19 on our life and ministry.

Attendees included both bishops from the Vatican and the United States, theologians, leaders of national Catholic nonprofits, canon lawyers, philanthropists, young adult leaders, and more. The results of this conversation, which included some 260 Catholic leaders, were recently published in a report entitled *We Are the Body of Christ: Creating a Culture of Co-Responsible Leadership*. An Executive Summary and a link to the full report are provided below.

Pastoral Conversion

My contribution to this dialogue included some reflections on what Pope Francis calls "pastoral conversion." Here is a brief summary:

Pastoral conversion calls us to make the joy of the Gospel a reality that permeates all our church structures and activities, bringing them into close alignment with the evangelizing mission of our Church. This is more than simply "restructuring" or realignment of the Church's institutions. It is a true *metanoia*, a

transformation of the way we minister to one another as sisters and brothers, that requires new ways of thinking and acting in conformity with the Gospel.

I believe that pastoral conversion can lead us forward in faith together by helping us to:

- Listen as a community to what the Holy Spirit is saying to our Church through the Word of God, which resonates in our current situation and interpret the signs of the times with the eyes of faith.
- Create a pastoral culture that respects the diversity of gifts while always looking for the unifying principle that sustains us as one Body of Christ.
- Be critical of the wider social environment and avoid an unconscious appropriation of values that are antithetical to the Gospel, not to condemn the world but to transform it.
- Continually discern what is essential to the Church's mission while regarding questions about resources (personnel, facilities and money) as important but secondary

These reflections were added to those of many others who participated in the Summit. I urge you to read the Full Report. The issues addressed in it are vitally important to the ability of our parishes, and our Archdiocese, to not only “survive” this pandemic, but to truly “thrive” as communities of faith, hope and pastoral charity both now and in the future.

Ministry in a Time of Social Distancing: Synodality and Closeness

As Christians, we encounter Jesus in his people—our families and friends, our neighbors and fellow parishioners, our co-workers and school mates, even people we don't know personally (strangers) who we come in contact with as we go about our daily lives. Jesus tells us that we find him in the “least of these” brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25: 31-46), so being close to them means being close to Him.

During this unprecedented time of pandemic, we need to be especially concerned about those who are experiencing intense anxiety, feel lonely and abandoned, and who really count on public worship for their own support. We also should be concerned about how the spiritual lives of our people will be impacted by the drastic changes we are all experiencing for the first time in our lives. The Eucharist and the celebration of the Mass are so central to our Church that those who are unable to participate physically really suffer as a result.

“Social distancing” is necessary for the common good, but we need to counter this with a dramatic increase in what Pope Francis calls “spiritual closeness.” How can we stay close to Jesus, and all our sisters and brothers, at a time when concern for them demands that we keep our distance? How can we remain spiritually close at the same time that we practice social distancing?

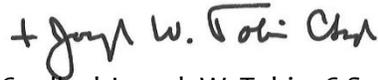
Ministry in a time of pandemic is like walking a tightrope. *We must keep our distance*—out of respect for the health and well-being of others, especially those who are most vulnerable. At the same time, *we must find ways of being close to our brothers and sisters*, and we must search for opportunities to invite all members of the Body of Christ to walk with us (synodality) and to become intimately involved in the Church's life and ministry.

No one ever said it would be easy. After all, as Pope Francis reminds us (See message below): “Embracing your cross means finding the courage to embrace all the hardships of the present time,” and it means

“finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity.”

Since it became clear that this pandemic is a serious threat to the lives and wellbeing of millions of people throughout the world, I have been asking Mary, Mother of the Church and our mother, to intercede on behalf of all who are suffering and all who are ministering to the needs of others. May her example inspire us all to find ways to be close to one another even when we are keeping a safe distance.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,



Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Newark

Links to Leadership Roundtable Executive Summary, Report and Press Release:

https://leadershiproundtable.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/09/LeadershipRoundtableReport_WearetheBodyofChrist_2020.pdf

https://leadershiproundtable.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/09/PressRelease_SummitReport_July2020.pdf

Link to CARA Report:

<http://nineteensixty-four.blogspot.com/2020/07/ministry-in-midst-of-pandemic-survey-of.html>

Archdiocese of Newark announces 8 Catholic schools will not reopen this fall in wake of COVID-19

Pandemic Offers Transition Support for Students, Families, Faculty and Staff

In response to the urgent need to address enrollment loss and growing financial challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of Schools of the Archdiocese of Newark has announced that five elementary schools will not reopen this fall and three elementary schools will consolidate with nearby school communities.

The Office of Schools and the Finance Office of the Archdiocese have been monitoring and evaluating projected enrollment, increasing financial fragility, and the level of support these schools would require since they were already experiencing formidable challenges prior to the pandemic.

Noting that funding resources for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese were critically reduced since the outbreak of COVID-19 and that paid registrations for the 2020-2021 school year are dramatically reduced, the Office of Schools and Finance Office agreed that the current status of some schools is unsustainable. Consequently, they presented recommendations to Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., Archbishop of Newark, who approved the following:

The following schools will not reopen:

- Transfiguration Academy, Bergenfield
- St. Joseph Academy, Bogota
- The Academy of St. Mary, Rutherford
- St. Francis Xavier, Newark
- Ironbound Catholic Academy, Newark

The following school communities will consolidate:

- St. Joseph of the Palisades, West New York, will welcome the school communities of Mother Seton in Union City and St. Augustine School in Union City to their campus.
- St. Joseph the Carpenter, Roselle, will welcome Our Lady of Guadalupe in Elizabeth to their campus.

In accepting the recommendations, Cardinal Tobin stated, “I recognize that this news is profoundly painful for our students and their families, teachers and principals, school communities, and those who support Catholic education, as well as for our archdiocesan community. I extend my prayers and support to all those affected. Our schools represent communities that offer vital faith formation for children. The difficult decision to further consolidate our Catholic Schools follows considerable discussion and examination of their viability under the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Education remains a crucial element in the life and mission of this Archdiocese.”

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, school principals, teachers, and school families were informed of the decisions through online meetings and email correspondence and will receive continuing support during this transition. Families affected by the closures are encouraged to enroll in nearby Catholic schools and are offered assistance with the transition, including tuition assistance, for the 2020-2021 school year. Career resources and support, including assistance in identifying possible employment opportunities elsewhere in the archdiocese, will be provided for affected faculty and staff members.

The pandemic makes ongoing vigilance necessary and the Schools Office will continue to assess needs and implement best practices for our Catholic schools and partner with pastors and principals to monitor and evaluate enrollment and finances.

Cardinal Tobin expresses the gratitude of the Archdiocese for the exceptional contributions of teachers, staff, principals, and pastors who dedicate themselves to educating students in the Catholic faith as well as the families and communities who work persistently in support of the archdiocesan schools.

“We pray for all those impacted by these trying circumstances and pledge ongoing support for those who need it,” said Cardinal Tobin. “Together, we will find a sustainable model for Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Newark.”

“See Cardinal Tobin’s letter concerning emergency funding for Catholic schools”

<https://www.rcan.org/message-cardinal-tobin-covid-19-crisis-and-schools>

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope



Synodality, which literally means “walking together” is a style, it is a walk together, and it is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium. Synodality is the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.

Synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself. If we understand, as Saint John Chrysostom says, that “Church and Synod are synonymous”, inasmuch as the Church is nothing other than the “journeying together” of God’s flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with

Christ the Lord, then we understand too that, within the Church, no one can be “raised up” higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person “lower” himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way.

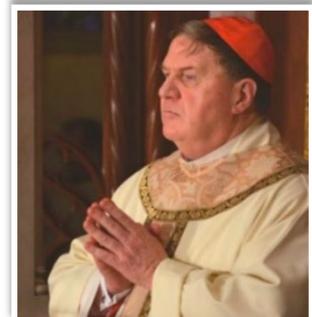
The grace of baptism makes each one of us part of the body of Christ, the Church, and we are, therefore, responsible for her life and mission. This shared responsibility calls for regular, serious and structural forums for listening to all members of the Church. At the same time, this does not mean putting decisions to a vote as if a synod were a parliament. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called ‘ministers’, because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all.

Synodality, which has been present in Christianity since its very beginning is not simply about involving people in decision making, but involving all the baptized in discerning God's will and listening to the Holy Spirit. The goal always is to find the best ways for every baptized person to fulfill the church's mission of proclaiming God's love and salvation in Jesus Christ to the world. (Pope Francis, Remarks to the International Theological Commission in appreciation for producing a document on the theological roots of synodality in the Church published in March 2018: “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church.”)

My Prayer for You

Once again, I wish to make my own the prayer composed by Pope Francis for this time of pandemic. The Holy Father concludes his prayer with the earliest known invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary:

We fly to your protection,
O Holy Mother of God;
Do not despise our petitions
in our necessities,
but deliver us always
from every danger.



May Mary, *Mater de Perpetuo Succursu*, who is always ready to help, stand with all who minister during this time of pandemic to deliver us from every danger. Amen. †

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

