

## CREATING A NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH

To prepare for my ordination 30 years ago, I had to visit the pastor in my home parish in Athy, Co . Kildare. As we sat down to talk, he graciously offered me a glass of wine. The conversation went well, he was quite cordial and we finished the plans quicker than either of us expected. As I was about to leave, he offered me another glass of wine which I politely declined. But he was having none of it and immediately refilled my glass while sharing a very Irish expression when it comes to drinking with friends: "A bird never flew on one wing."



I've never forgotten his remark - perhaps because for a significant part of the Church's history, she has been flying on one wing. Certainly, it is an appropriate metaphor for today's Church.

In Luke 12:49-53, Jesus said to his disciples, "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!" This was the mission for which he lived, suffered and ultimately, died. It is a mission rooted in the Blessed Trinity: a mission of love, forgiveness and liberation.

Jesus' anguish is still great because the fire of love with which he came to set the world ablaze has been profoundly diminished by human failings. Today, many leaders contend the problem stems from relativism, secularism or individualism, focusing the blame on the people missing from the pew. The abuse crisis and its handling by some bishops took a devastating toll, but many people also have concluded the Church is irrelevant. The latter perspective highlights the dire need to change how the Church governs as well as inspires, informs and ignites the flame of faith.

Watching the coverage of Notre Dame engulfed in flames, it struck me that the iconic Paris cathedral was being mourned only as the loss of a place of magnificent architecture and art - as if it was a museum rather than the home of a vibrant faith community. Even in families where for generations the Church has been central to their lives, today the children and grandchildren say the Church no longer provides meaning or purpose. Unfortunately, these families are becoming the majority.

Yet, there are hopeful developments and I firmly believe now is an opportune time for healing, refining and re-imagining. Before we can move forward to achieve this however, it is necessary to look backwards. This was the call of Vatican II, inviting us to return to the sources of our faith, to the practice of the Apostles. Communities for the Kingdom do this as they are:

Communal in promoting authentic friendship;  
Contemplative in being Christ-centered;  
Compassionate in loving service.

The Apostolic time was also an apocalyptic time, the end of one era but containing within it the seeds of something new and better. Today, we live in apocalyptic time as we come to the end of one way of being church and begin another.

Communities for the Kingdom, the seeds we are planting to nurture and grow a better Church, reflect the mission of the Archdiocese's Renew My Church initiative to create vibrant faith communities that form missionary disciples who by their lives and commitment share Christ's love, witness to their Catholic faith, and are better prepared to pass on the faith to future generations.

At the Mass in the Park two years ago, I asked, "Who among you are going to be the last generation of Catholics in your family?" Thankfully, 700 people responded by attending three CFTK formation sessions. Today, 350 people are actively involved in our small groups, meeting regularly in their homes, forming deeper friendships, focusing on the word of God to fully experience His presence in their lives and making the world a kinder, gentler place through compassionate service.

Today I ask, "Who among you are willing to be the first of your generation to create a new way of being church, by reclaiming the Church of the Apostles?"

For those involved in one of our 60 ministries, I express my profound gratitude for your dedication, compassion and generosity. Like Pope Francis and Cardinal Cupich who are inviting all of us to take our Baptismal calling to the next level, I encourage your involvement in these ministries as a way to establish a CFTK group.

For those not involved in any ministry, I invite you to join in creating the Church of the future. We all need authentic friendships, purpose in life and opportunities to make the world a better place. Ultimately these groups, regardless of their origins, are to become the Sacrament of the Risen Lord, the sign and source of His presence to each other and to the world. The future of our Church depends on it. Parishes moving in this direction are increasing members and they have become vibrant, enriching and relevant communities of faith for all generations - especially young people.

The Scriptures underscore the divine power behind both the Petrine and Communal expressions of establishing the Church. In Matthew 16, Jesus gives the great commission to Peter and the Apostles and in Matthew 18, Jesus gives a similar commission to the community of the faithful to establish the Church and bring about the Kingdom of God. From my experience, if any group of people can set the world on fire with Christ's love, it's the parishioners of St. Joseph Parish, Libertyville.

In our narthex's stained glass window of the Baptism of Jesus, the artist Gabriel Loire from Chartres, France (1965) depicts the Holy Spirit as a dove. The Holy Spirit has been flying too long on one wing. Let St. Joseph Parish be among the first to give the dove two wings, creating a new people of God, renewing the earth and building God's Kingdom.

*John Trunt*

### **Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come Holy Spirit,  
fill the hearts of your faithful  
and kindle in them the fire of your love.  
Send forth your Spirit  
and they shall be created.  
And You shall renew the face of the earth.  
O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,  
did instruct the hearts of the faithful,  
grant that by the same Holy Spirit  
we may be truly wise  
and ever enjoy His consolations.  
Through Christ Our Lord.  
Amen.

