

Your mission is to believe



FROM THE BISHOP

THIS MONTH, I'd like to speak to those in our diocese who may be retired, or elderly, and may feel cast aside. Who may feel worthless. Since our society puts so much value on performance or earning money – and we idolize the young and the beautiful – it's easy to understand.



**BY BISHOP
MICHAEL C.
BARBER, SJ**

Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ has been bishop of the Diocese of Oakland since May 2013.

When I visit with elderly members of our parishes, some feel they have lost their purpose in life, as they are no longer working full time, or even hosting dinners and social events for their families. Some who live in assisted-living facilities get frustrated at their lack of independence due to declining health and physical limitations.

If you feel this way, I want to share a lesson we priests learned on retreat this summer. The purpose of a retreat is to follow the Lord's command to his apostles "to come away and rest awhile."

On this particular retreat our speaker was Bishop Gordon Bennett, SJ. The bishop was able to show us things in the Scriptures that have always been there, but we never noticed (or at least I never noticed). What he told us may help some of you reading this.

In studying the appearances of Jesus following His resurrection, Bishop Bennett noticed that all the reports from those who saw Him have four things in common:

- 1. The persons who saw Jesus were in a bad mood.**
- 2. They were slow to recognize Jesus.**
- 3. It was Jesus who took the initiative and came to them where they were.**
- 4. To all those to whom He appeared, Jesus gave a mission.**

My favorite example is the appearance to St. Thomas. He and the other apostles were still afraid of being arrested, for they were hiding in the upper room with the doors locked. They were in a fearful "bad mood." Yet even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood in their midst.

He came to them where they were, at this anxious moment in their lives. The apostles were slow to recognize Jesus. Even though Jesus had appeared to the apostles the week previously, and they told St. Thomas all about it, he famously said he wouldn't believe unless he could insert his hands into Jesus' wounds. Slow to believe. Yet when Jesus does appear and invites Thomas to place his hands in Jesus'

wounds, Thomas exclaims, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus tells Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen, yet believe." Here's the key: Jesus gives St. Thomas a mission. His mission is to believe.

My friends, maybe you are like Thomas. You may have doubts about Jesus being alive and rising from the dead — even though so many witnesses have given you their testimony through the centuries. Yet when the priest comes and gives you the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, or brings you Jesus Himself in Holy Communion, you can say, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus gives you the same mission he gave Thomas.

YOUR MISSION IS TO BELIEVE

Even from a wheelchair or a bed, this is a mission you can accomplish. And then you join the ranks of the apostles and disciples who give testimony that Jesus is alive. Your faith is a witness to your family and friends, and the nurses and staff and fellow residents of your care home.

And you can express your belief through prayer. I have baskets of prayer intentions from parishioners at the foot of the altar in my private chapel. Please, join me in praying for all these people who are beseeching the Lord for mercy and healing. By interceding in prayer for our brothers and sisters, you are exercising the priesthood of your baptism. You are joining in Christ's mission of interceding for us with the Father.

And that is an excellent reason to live each day to the fullest, knowing Jesus has appeared to you through the sacraments, and given you a mission. Your mission is to believe. †

The Good Pastor



Friends, I prepared these remarks for the installation of Father Matthew Murray as new pastor of St. Isidore Parish in Danville on Aug. 14. But they apply to all good pastors.



**BY BISHOP
MICHAEL C.
BARBER, SJ**

Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ has been bishop of the Diocese of Oakland since May 2013.

What's the definition of a good pastor? He must be a good shepherd, after the example of the model Good Shepherd, Christ Himself. What does that look like?

First, a good pastor willingly and lovingly cares for the sheep entrusted to his care. Father Matthew, you immediately and happily accepted the assignment to care for the good people of St. Isidore. No pushback, no anger at being moved, no sulking or cynicism. Just a willingness to go where the bishop and the Church need you. Like Our Lady, who when responding to the angel at the Annunciation said, "Let it be done unto me according to your word." (Lk 1:38) You are off to an excellent start.

This assignment was not of your making or asking. In fact, the only time you had expressed to me any preference for a parish was in 2016, when as a deacon you were assisting me with Mass at St. Mark in Richmond. Richmond is dangerous: There had been multiple shootings in the neighborhood. It was poor; the rectory had bed sheets tacked over the windows for curtains; yet it was full of faith! As we processed down the aisle of the church

packed full of humble yet enthusiastic worshippers, you whispered to me: "When I am ordained, Bishop, may I please serve in a parish like this one?"

Well, Danville is not Richmond, but it IS filled with people of faith. And these people need a good pastor who will love them, serve them, and care for them. They need a pastor after the heart of the Good Shepherd.

Secondly, to be a good pastor, you need to make St. Isidore a "Christ-centered parish," not a "pastor-centered parish." Your motto should be that of St. John the Baptist, who saw Jesus walking by and said, "He must increase, I must decrease." A Christ-centered parish begins with a Christ-centered priest. You, and your parochial vicar, Father Candelario, must have a loving, personal relationship with the living Jesus Christ. Only then can you lead and invite others to have such a relationship. You have to love Jesus like the first apostles did, before you can go to others and announce to them, "We have found the Messiah!"

Christ said a "good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." It's not the other way around. The parishio-

ners do not exist to serve the pastor.

Your vocation is to serve them with your whole heart and soul, and if need be, even to "lay down your life for them." Just as Christ laid down His life for us on the Cross. You have already shown your ability to "lay down your life for the sheep" when, as the COVID-19 epidemic broke out, you contacted me and volunteered to minister to COVID-19 victims anywhere in the diocese who needed the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. You volunteered to perform this ministry, even though it might put your own health at risk. Just as St. Aloysius Gonzaga, a fellow alumnus of yours from the Gregorian University in Rome, who gave his life ministering to plague victims in Rome. That's just one example of what Christ is talking about when he says you need to be willing to lay down your life for your parishioners.

A third aspect of a good shepherd is that he seeks out the lost and the stray. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." (Lk 19:10) Father Matthew, I ask you to make it a priority of your pastorate at St. Isidore to:

- Seek out and reconcile those who have left this parish and who now worship at other parishes or even at other Christian denominations.
- Seek out those many young people who have been confirmed here, and do not return to Mass the Sunday following their Confirmation ... or any Sunday after that!
- Take special care of the young who are in your Catholic school and in your religious education program. Lead them through the heart into a personal relationship with the living Jesus. Lead them through their minds to address their intellectual



Between October 14 and November 22, 2021, each one of us has the chance to strengthen the future of the Diocese of Oakland.

For some months a commission of lay faithful and clergy of our diocese has been working on the Mission Alignment Process (MAP). Your voice is a vital component of this process. Between October 14 and November 22, 2021, you have the opportunity to participate in the MAP through a parish survey. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we look to align our parishes, parishioners, clergy, schools and structures for an even more fruitful living of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Please join in our survey and support this process with your prayers!

**SURVEY OPENS OCTOBER 14! TAKE THE SURVEY ONLINE AT:
<https://www.catholicleaders.org/oaklanddmi>**

**Take the survey in your parish, on the diocesan website or through your school community.
The survey is anonymous and available in many languages.
You may also request a paper survey at your parish.**

doubts about the existence of God or their mistaken assumption that science conflicts with faith. Choose carefully, religious education teachers. Pick those who know and love Jesus Christ, and who understand the modern challenges to the faith.

It was to prepare you for a pastorate like St. Isidore, filled as it is with young people, and to prepare you to meet the challenge of pastoring them in these times, that when you had just finished seminary, I assigned you to teach religion and be a chaplain at St. Joseph Notre Dame High School in Alameda. That assignment delayed your ordination to the priesthood by two years. You accepted that mission with the same equanimity and trust that you have accepted this assignment to St. Isidore. Now I pray that two-year investment in youth ministry will come to full fruition.

Finally, to be a good pastor, be a priest-in-communion. Maintain communion with Christ and His Church. That

means live in communion with your bishop. When you were ordained, like all priests in the history of the Church, you placed your hands in mine and solemnly promised “obedience and respect” to me and my successors. That is part of “laying down your life for your sheep.” When that promise is lived out, Christ and the Holy Spirit will work through you. St. Paul said, “It is not I who live, but Christ living in me.”

A pastor who lives in communion with Christ and His Church creates a parish in communion with Christ and the Church. And that means in communion with the bishop and the Holy Father as well. A pastor turned in on himself creates a parish turned in on itself.

Make yours the prayer of St. John Henry Newman, a prayer so favored by St. Mother Teresa that she has her nuns recite it every morning after Holy Communion:

*Dear Jesus, help me to spread Your
fragrance everywhere I go.
Flood my soul with Your spirit and life.*

*Penetrate and possess my whole being
so utterly,
That my life may only be a radiance
of Yours.*

*Shine through me, and be so in me
That every soul I come in contact with
May feel Your presence in my soul.
Let them look up and see no longer me,
but only Jesus!*

When the patron of parish priests, St. John Vianney, was assigned by his bishop to become the new pastor of the village of Ars, he was walking trying to find the town and got a little lost. He met a boy on the road and asked if he knew the way to Ars? The boy said, “Yes.” The saintly priest replied, “You show me the way to Ars, and I will show you the way to heaven.”

Father Matthew, today I put on your shoulders responsibility for the care of the souls of the people of Danville. Show them the way to heaven. Better yet, be out in front, and lead them there yourself. †



Aligning our mission:

THE CHURCH HAS ALWAYS DEPENDED ON THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. THIS FALL, THE DIOCESE OF OAKLAND IS ALSO LOOKING TO THE FAITHFUL.

This fall, parishioners in the Diocese of Oakland are being invited to participate in the Mission Alignment Process.

BY MICHELE JURICH

Michele Jurich is editor of The Catholic Voice.

“The Mission Alignment Process is just that,” said Rick Medeiros, co-chair of the commission appointed by Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ. “The diocese has lots of great resources and people,” Rick said. “We need to make sure everything we’re doing is aligned with the mission of the Diocese of Oakland.”

The process is data-driven, with commission subcommittees focusing on priests, demographics, schools, parishes and parishioners.

“This is a process that is seeking the engagement of everybody in the diocese,” Rick said.

The active participation of parishioners in the Diocese of Oakland in a survey available from Oct. 14 to Nov. 22 is a crucial part of the process.

“We want their input and we’d like them to be intentional with it,” Rick said.

The survey has been developed by the Catholic Leadership Institute and has been used by dozens of dioceses, Rick said.

The survey, he said, has been very successful in helping other dioceses get a good picture of where they are and where they need to go.

Additionally, he said, “we can learn from the experience other dioceses have had.”

The Lilly Foundation funds the Diocese of Oakland’s participation.

The survey, which is anonymous, “asks where they in their faith journey, what their hopes are for their parish and their family’s faith life, what

they’re looking for and what they need,” he said.

“We need that input,” he said.

To help as many people as possible participate in the survey, it will be available online — each parish will have its own link — and on paper, in several languages.

Those taking the survey on paper will be supplied an envelope for mailing it.

Parish participation is 100%. Each pastor has named a person who will lead the parish effort. The Catholic Leadership Institute is training them, via Zoom meetings conducted at the end of August.

The priests of the diocese will have their own surveys.

The surveys should show the commission “where we are and where we need to go to fulfill the mission,” Rick said.

“There might be some terrific ideas brought up by our parishioners or pastors that have not been considered before,” he said.

Prayer is an important part of the work, with eyes focused on being faithful to the mission entrusted to the commission.

The survey results will be used not only by the commission, but each parish will receive its results. †



This is an opportunity to realign our resources to support evangelization and the formation of missionary disciples.

When we are better aligned, we are better able to enhance our Sunday experience and be strengthened to continue acts of spiritual and corporal works of mercy.”



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

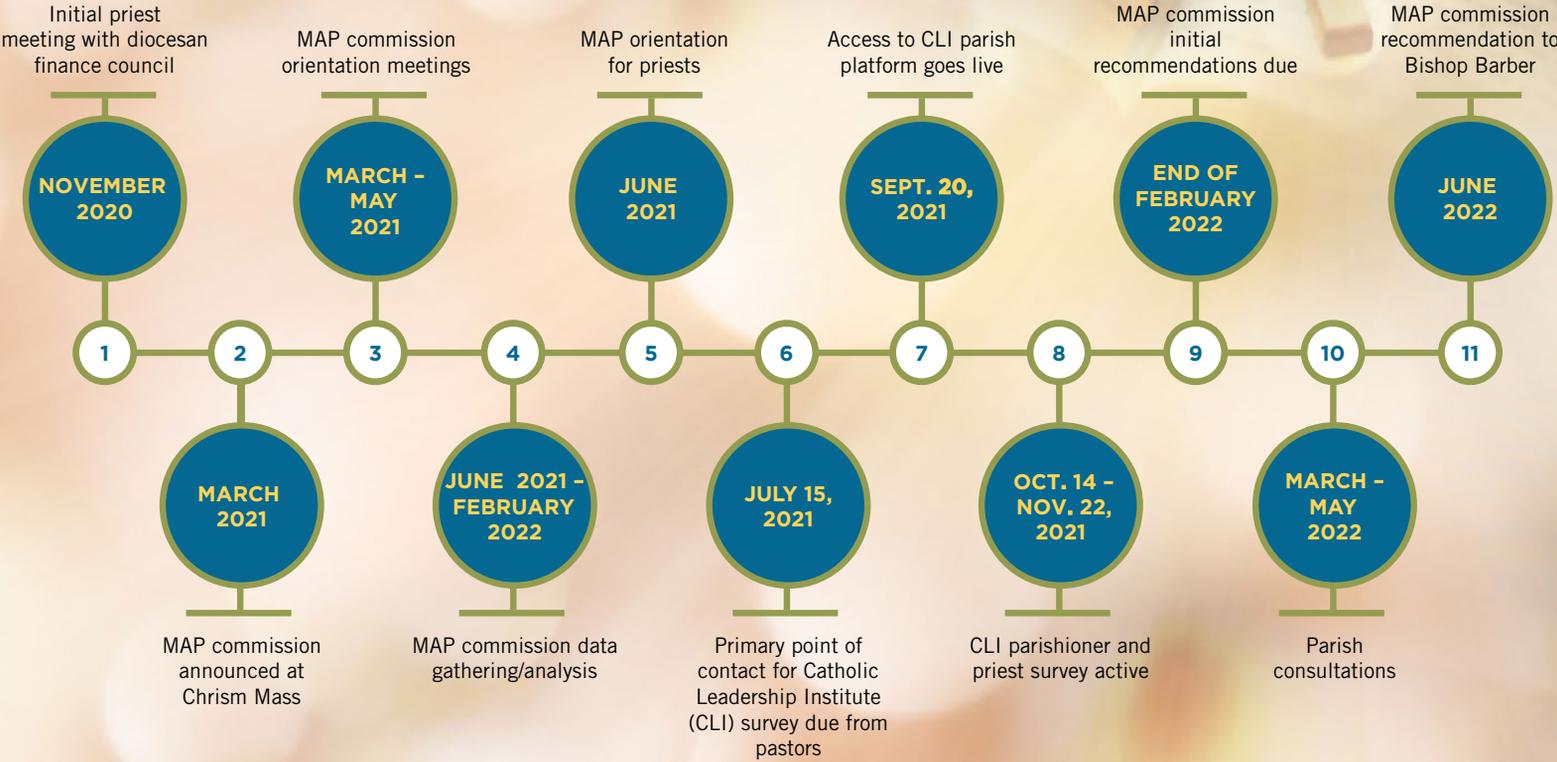
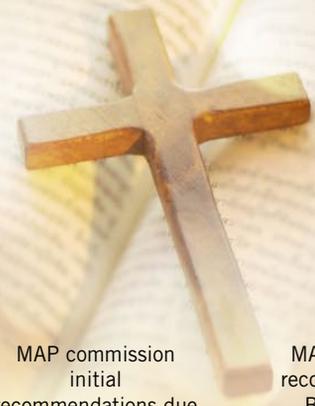
The Mission Alignment Process survey is live

Oct. 14-Nov. 22 at catholicleaders.org/oaklanddmi.

Learn more at oakdiocese.org/mission-alignment-process.



Leading With Mission In An Age of Change



▲ The Mission Alignment Process commission members at the Cathedral of Christ the Light, after their first meeting. Front row: Paul Bongiovanni (ex-officio); Mary Fair; Father Mark Ruiz; Rick Medeiros (co-chair) and Bishop Michael C. Barber, S.J. Second Row: Cristina Torres; Jocelyn Pierre-Antoine; Amanda Wehrman. Third row: Eric Hom; Father Jimmy Macalinao; Steve Wilcox (ex-officio); Father Lawrence D'Anjou (co-chair). Top row: Father Anthony Huong Le; Father Brandon Macadaeg; Father Leo Edgerly; Father Jayson Landeza.

Mission Alignment Process Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, look kindly upon the Diocese of Oakland as we take stock of the many gifts you have given us.

Send your Holy Spirit to inspire and guide us so that our efforts to proclaim the saving Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ more effectively may bear tremendous fruit.

May we, as your people, courageously proceed on this path of self-reflection and renewal.

In the end, with your divine assistance, we know that we cannot fail.

Holy Mary, Queen of the World and St. Francis de Sales, co-patrons of our Diocese, pray for us!



Aligning our mission:

THE CHURCH HAS ALWAYS DEPENDED ON THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. THIS FALL, THE DIOCESE OF OAKLAND IS ALSO LOOKING TO THE FAITHFUL.

A Q&A with the Most Rev. Lawrence D'Anjou, vicar general of the Diocese of Oakland and pastor of St. Bonaventure Parish in Concord. He serves as co-chair of the Mission Alignment Process.

BY MICHELE JURICH

Michele Jurich is editor of The Catholic Voice.

The Catholic Church is the longest continually running institution in the world. She keeps herself relevant in every age because she is more than a human institution; she is also divine. It is the Holy Spirit that makes sure the Catholic Church is relevant in every age, and every age must look to her for inspiration and guidance.

Recent declines in Mass attendance, baptisms, vocations to the priesthood and other factors are challenging us to take a fresh look at ourselves. In response, Bishop Michael Barber, SJ is asking every Catholic in the Oakland diocese to support the Mission Alignment Process (MAP).

Guided by the Holy Spirit, this process will help us align our precious resources: our wonderful lay faithful, our parishes and schools, our clergy and our financial resources for missionary fruition. Change is never easy, but when did God ever say that our lives would be easy? The way to salvation always has a cross in its path.

But it is precisely the cross which leads us to new life. Dear Catholic faithful, please support this process of self-reflection and renewal with your prayers/participation as we call on Mary, the Queen of the World and our mother, to please pray for us.

What's at stake in the Mission Alignment Process?

The reality is some of our parishes are being subsidized by the diocese and this is something that we can't continue indefinitely. So part of the process is to take a look at that reality, which, if not addressed, would put extreme financial constraints on the diocese and possibly could lead to bankruptcy within four to six years. We have to address that part as we look at the big picture of how to not eliminate parishes, per se, but to make them more available to everyone in a way that's sustainable in the long term.

What is the role of the people in the pews in the Mission Alignment Process?

Their role is an important one in that they are going to be contributors to the process. The process works by looking at what the parishioners are saying and what the data is telling us about parish life and parish health, such as financial health,

Mass attendance and the utilization of our resources. Demographic data as well: What does the surrounding area tell us about who it serves and the kind of people we are trying to reach there. Schools data comes into the picture, too, as well as the availability of our resources in clergy, priests and deacons. Parishioners have a very important role in giving us information that will go into this process of looking at our resources and aligning them for the mission of announcing the Gospel of Jesus Christ more effectively in our day and our time.

How — and when — will parishioners participate?

We want them to know they're an important part. Their input in the surveys this October is really important for our process.

Surveys will be available online and also paper copies in as many languages as are needed so everybody can have a voice in the survey. They have 15 languages. We'll translate for any needed language; I heard we will be doing a form in Tongan.

What kind of survey is it?

It's a simple survey, where we're looking for your input. It's a fill-in survey.

What happens after the survey?

In March, April and May of next year, we will be reviewing what the data is telling us at the parish level and doing consultations at the parish level. How we better align our resources. In June 2022, we will want to make our final recommendations to the bishop.

And after that?

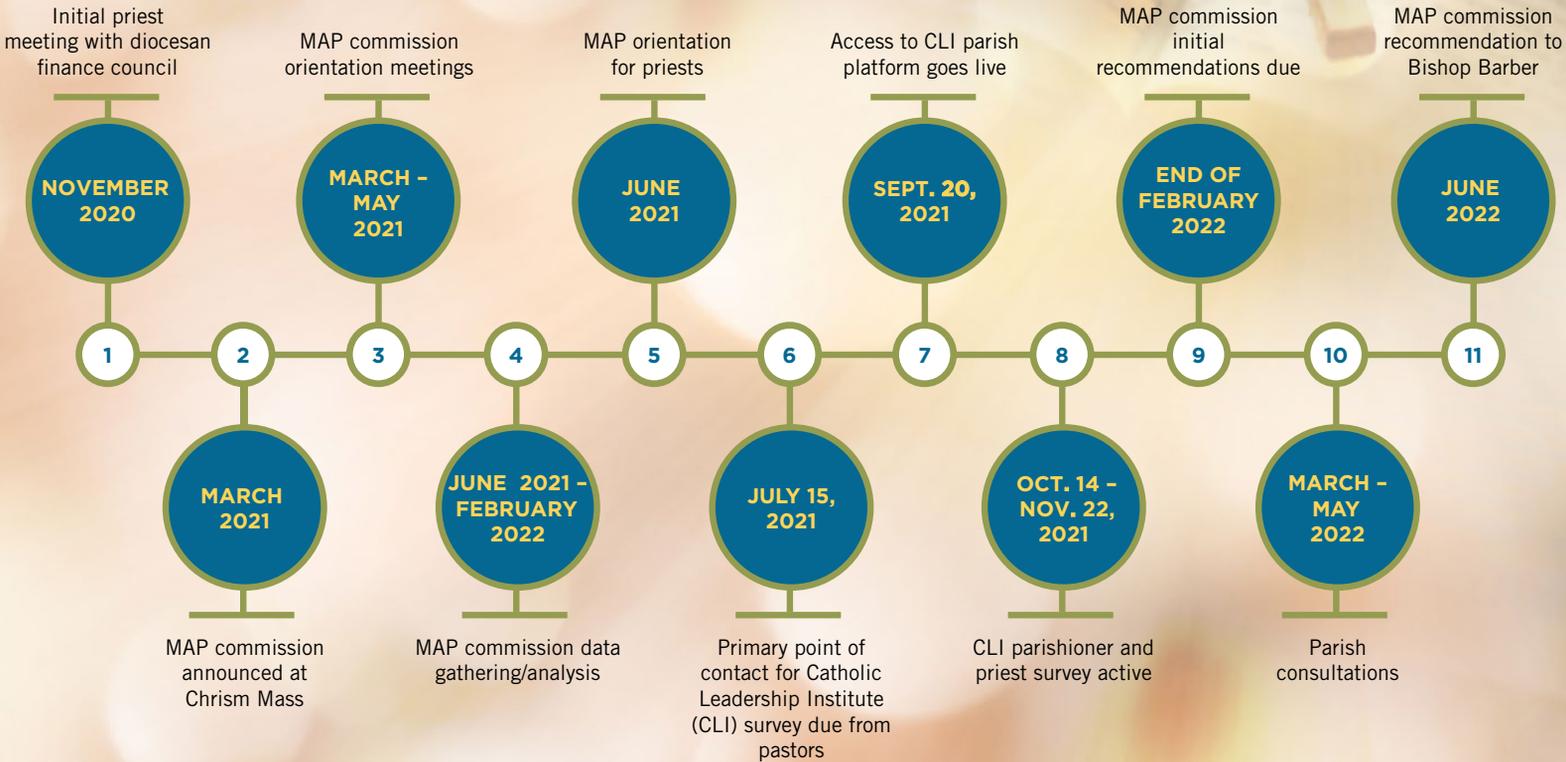
Phase I is doing the work and looking at what the Holy Spirit is telling us, what the data is telling us and getting ourselves better aligned to the mission. Phase II would be bringing that reality to bear. That would be determined as we get closer to the final recommendation date.

What's important to keep in mind as we go forward?

This process primarily is the work of the Spirit. We're very much looking at what the Spirit is telling us, along with data, about how to better align ourselves to the mission. That is the



Leading With Mission In An Age of Change



way the Church has always adapted to the times, to guide us and direct us into the future. That's why the Church has been a continuous institution for 2,000 years.

It's not just data; first and foremost, it's about what God is doing.

What is this process going to ask of us?

It's a courageous process. It's going to take courage. In the end, I think the Spirit will confirm what we proceed toward in people's hearts.

This is what God is doing in our hearts and our Church. It's a process of renewal that's always driven by God.

The hearts of individuals will come to understand this is a path forward that God has put his stamp on, so to speak. That's not to say it's not going to be difficult, for some people, for all of us, to some degree. †



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