

All Things New?



“We are still relying on a model of the church that is based on 18th century European immigration patterns. That model is over.” -St. Louis Archbishop Mitchell T. Rozanski

I attended Roman Catholic mass every Sunday morning until my late teens. I was baptized, confirmed, and made my first holy communion. I was an altar boy. I went faithfully to the Stations of the Cross every Friday during Lent, fasted on Ash Wednesday, had fish on Friday and went to midnight mass on Christmas Eve. I graduated from Catholic grade school and Catholic high school. My mom would not have it any other way.

However, I lost my Catholic faith a long time ago. I cannot reasonably support an organization that protects sexual predator priests while paying victims for their silence. That considers homosexuality a sin. Denies reproductive rights. Mandates celibacy for priests and nuns. Imposes limitations on women, including the right to be priests. Closes churches in inner city neighborhoods while building in affluent suburbs.

The Catholic church to me, and millions like me, is hopelessly out of touch; a relic of the past that causes angst and sorrow. But my mom, a devout Catholic, is always imploring me to return to the flock. “You must care for your soul” she says. “You can’t let a few fools persuade you to go against years of tradition.” She’s my mom so I listen.

So I read with interest when Tony Messenger of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that Roman Catholic Archbishop Rozanski is about to lead the St. Louis Archdiocese on a program called “**All Things New.**” This “mission to remake itself, is a process intended to reinvigorate the faithful...”

Wow, I thought. Is the church finally going to embrace real change?

Not so much, as it turns out. This proposed mission to remake itself is a process where the church will “move resources around in a way that makes more sense.” The blueprint for this process, according to Messenger, is archdioceses like Cincinnati and Pittsburgh. In Cincinnati, for instance, the archdiocese reorganized 208 parishes into 60. So the plan to reinvigorate the faithful is to close churches and condense parishes. Doesn’t sound very invigorating to me. Especially if you are a parishioner in a church that will close.

But Archbishop Rozanski is in a tough spot. According to Messenger, there are currently 200 full time priests to serve 178 parishes. This number is declining, estimated to dip to 150 by 2030. As Rev. Chris Martin says “if we don’t do the planning, the planning is going to be done for us.”

It doesn’t have to be this way.

What if Catholic leadership at the highest levels embraced real change. What if, as Archbishop Rozanski says about the strategy behind “All Things New” the hierarchy of the church would commit to “do a better job of simply meeting people where they are and offering them a path to faith.”

What would “meeting people where they are” look like in 2022? What would real change be? Let me offer some suggestions, a kind of “All Things New” plan for the Catholic church.

1. Take a zero tolerance approach to the sexual abuse problem. Pay all the victims what they are owed. Then don’t just excommunicate the predator priests, turn them over to the authorities and help with their prosecution. Enablers too. Every one. Every time. You’ve talked the talk, time to walk the walk.
2. Don’t just allow priests to get married, encourage it! A well adjusted priest, with a strong, supportive partner will do a better job. A married priest’s credibility when advising on family problems will increase exponentially.
3. Allow women into all roles in the Catholic church. Priests, Bishops, Archbishops, Cardinals, yes, even Pope. Your talent pool just doubled. Would Mother Theresa have made a good Pope?
4. Come into the twenty-first century on reproductive rights.

5. Bring the LGBTQ community into the church and make them welcome. They should have the full rights of any member of the church, including the priesthood and all leadership positions.
6. Invest in inner city neighborhoods and poor rural communities before putting a nickel into affluent areas.

Wouldn't these changes "meet people where they are?" Wouldn't this offer a path to faith to millions? Bring folks back to the flock? Attract more clergy. Seems reasonable.

According to Messenger, when Archbishop Rozanski came to St. Louis in August 2020 one of his first meetings was with a group of young priests. "They were expressing their concerns that they were ordained to serve people, (but) they had become caretakers of buildings versus ministers to people." I just don't see how "All Things New" addresses these concerns.

The priority of the church still seems to be managing assets (too much real estate) and not serving people. Until this changes, Archbishop Rozanski needs to plan on less of everything. Closing buildings and condensing parishes won't change a thing, in St. Louis or around the globe.

The Catholic Church will continue to be a relic of a long ago time.

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