

27 March 2023

His Excellency  
The Most Rev. Mitchell Rozanski  
Archbishop of St. Louis  
20 Archbishop May Drive  
Saint Louis, MO 63119

Your Excellency:

As you may know, I serve as Procurator for over 3,100 members of the Catholic faithful in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. A copy of my mandates are attached with this letter (Attachment 1—Mandates). We oppose the implementation of All Things New archdiocesan reconfiguration plan, both the original plan presented in the Fall of 2022 and the current iteration presented in early February 2023. After prayerful study of the past and current plan, we do not see how the pastoral plan will improve the pastoral care of the Faithful, encourage vocations, increase the evangelizing mission of the Church, revitalize parishes or bring advantage to the Church. Please consider the following facts that support our position.

1. Your choice to hire the Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI) to provide consultation and direction on the pastoral planning of the Archdiocese. Its Disciple Maker Index survey (DMI) was used to survey the parishes and provide information used for pastoral planning. You reportedly received 70,000 responses to an on-line, anonymous survey that could be accessed by anyone and completed as many times as an individual chose. All were sent directly to CLI for analysis. Moreover, CLI continues to direct the process with email communications being directed through its services.

Based on a review of the CLI website and its history, the organization represents itself in this way:

*Catholic Leadership Institute provides bishops, priests, religious, deacons, lay persons in the Roman Catholic Church with world-class, pastoral leadership formation and consulting services that strengthen their confidence and competence in ministry, enabling them to articulate a vision for their local church, to call for the gifts of those they lead, and to create more vibrant faith communities rooted in Jesus Christ.*

*How We Serve:*

***Called for More:*** *A two-year revitalization process using data and analysis of ministry to provide Church leaders with focus and courage to engage the culture with an apostolic mindset, creating a space for clergy to recall and live into the joy of their ministry and forming them to be more intentional with those they serve for and with.*

***Next Generation Parish:*** *A 4-year experience that transforms the future of the Church through innovative, dynamic insight that helps parishes meet the challenges of our time through visionary models that foster spiritual maturity, share leadership, offer a vibrant Sunday experience, and embrace a missionary impulse.*

**Disciple Maker Index (DMI):** *A survey tool that supports informed Truth with objective data, helping Church leaders recognize their potential and envision future possibilities through a deep analysis of attitude and belief, participation, relationship/satisfaction, and demographics.*

**Discern & Implement a Diocesan Priority Plan**

- *A Three-Year, Integrated Pastoral Plan that rallies the diocese around one unifying theme and three Pastoral Priorities with two SMART goals supporting each Priority.*
- *Diocesan priorities and goals that are highly relevant, clear and actionable by the Bishop and his collaborators.*
- *A resource allocation plan that aligns people, budgets and ministries in support of the priorities and growth initiatives outlined by the diocese.*
- *Opportunities for the entire People of God in the local church to engage in a planning process and exercise discipleship in support of the diocesan pastoral plan.*

In short, it appears that CLI was founded primarily to promote strong, Catholic leaders by providing leadership training to Catholic clergy and lay leaders. The DMI was written to assist parish leadership in understanding where renewal efforts in their parishes should be focused. In practice, the DMI would be used in a particular parish and the results would be shared with parish leadership to identify where subsequent efforts should focus. Put another way, it was a starting point for discussion within parishes to encourage renewal of Faith within the parishioners. It was intended to help strengthen the weak and evangelize the ill-formed.

Despite the good intentions of CLI, the DMI appears to be a “one-size-fits-all” metric. Further, there is no indication in the materials provided by CLI that the metric is intended for use in making pastoral planning decisions affecting all the parishes of a diocese, particularly one with the size and diversity of St. Louis.

2. According to 2020 statistics (catholic-hierarchy.org), the Archdiocese of St. Louis comprises 179 parishes with diverse circumstances. Categorizing parishes by geographic demographics, the Archdiocese has parishes in the inner-city, suburbs, semi-rural, and rural areas. Each parish represents a unique heritage within a unique situation; some being as old or older than the Archdiocese itself, others having been formed within the past 20 years.

The same DMI was sent to all parishes, regardless of their demographic. The results were never discussed with the Faithful in the parishes as a way to help them identify areas of potential improvement. Rather, the index seems to be the basis for determining the viability of parishes; something the DMI was not developed or advertised for use.

3. Repeatedly, archdiocesan officials have admitted that the implementation of All Things New will drive at least 20% of active Catholics away from the Faith (Father Christopher Martin, Vicar for Strategic Planning, 19 August 2022 and 2 February 2023). Shockingly, some priests have openly said things like, “*That’s not significant...they would leave anyway...they are not contributing much as it is...they are already lost...*” or similar statements. The recognition by archdiocesan officials that All Things New will cause immediate and grave harm to the salvation of souls and the admission that this is not considered significant is scandalous.

Rhetorically, I ask you: would you invest archdiocesan finances in a plan that is anticipated to lose 20% of its capital with no assurance or plan of recovery?

I understand that the actual percentage of Catholics who will be driven away by a diocesan reconfiguration plan ranges from 20% to 60%. The actual number depends on how the Faithful are

treated within the process and whether they perceive being part of a collaborative plan that determines the future of the parish where they belong.

We have not been treated well, and All Things New has not advanced a collaboration with those most affected by the planning. It has not given us the opportunity to be heard within authentic dialogue.

4. Personally, I wrote to you and asked for an opportunity to discuss my concerns with you. At the time I wrote last Fall, I was serving my eighth year as a state senator for District 2, which includes the fastest growing areas in St. Charles County (the fastest growing county in the State of Missouri and one of the fastest growing areas in the United States). A very large number of my constituents were Catholic, and I believed that with my experience I could contribute to the dialogue in hopes of avoiding such a large loss of souls. You never responded to my letter. I followed up with two emails. I never received a response, not even from a CLI representative or your Vicar for Strategic Planning, Father Martin.

My experience is not isolated. I know of others who wrote and never even received an acknowledgement, much less a meaningful response.

Worse, the faithful in the parishes across the Archdiocese report that they have been ignored within this process. The CLI survey did not give them a chance to voice their aspirations, concerns, or praise. It gave them opportunity only to respond to pre-determined questions of a vague nature without being allowed to apply their answers to the specific situation of their parishes. I have personally spoken with Catholics and been present in many meetings with hundreds of the Faithful expressing upset over the neglect they are experiencing in this process. Yet, decisions will be made that deeply impact their lives of Faith. The experience is scandalous to them, and only breeds mistrust toward Church authorities.

5. Most recently, All Things New has introduced three elements that are unsettling: the planned formation of “pastorates”, the large-scale transfer of pastors (estimated 135+), and the lowering of the priests’ retirement age. Regarding the first, I note a significant concern over the forming of pastorates between parishes without considering the unique situations of each parish affected. Simply forming a pastorate between two parishes because of proximity does not constitute responsible leadership or pastoral planning. If parishes are to aggregate into a pastorate, such an act should not be done without careful planning, proper catechesis related to the situation, and gradualism lest souls be lost. Not doing so only encourages mistrust and resentment.

Regarding the large-scale transfer of pastors, I ask you to consider how this will advance the pastoral care of the Faithful or provide advantage for the Church? There is significant mistrust right now due to the circumstances of how All Things New is being implemented. Changing pastors on so many parishes will only increase that mistrust and the number of souls lost. It will have a negative impact on pastoral care and prove a significant disadvantage to the Church and her Mission.

I understand that the retirement age of a priest is 75 years, and that a pastor can continue (is encouraged by the Church) to continue in ministry if he is able. You have claimed that the Archdiocese does not have enough priests to go around. If that statement is true, by lowering the retirement age and effectively removing able-bodied priests from ministry, you will worsen a priest shortage and increase the mistrust among the Faithful. A reasonable person would consider this as manipulation of the situation to obtain a predetermined outcome—the closing of parishes and sale of parish churches.

Your Excellency, the motto for All Things New is "*Steadfast in Faith. Forward in Hope.*" We fail to see how a program that admits it will drive the Faithful away and remove a large number of priests from active ministry reflects Faith or moves forward in Hope. How is that effective? How will this bring advantage to the Church?

The parishes exemplify almost 200 years of a strong Catholic presence; so strong that the Archdiocese earned the nickname, "Rome of the West" and was once a cardinal see. The Faithful are proud of our heritage. We stand ready to engage a legitimate process to discuss pastoral planning that focuses on authentic parish renewal that encourages vocations, advances the evangelizing mission of the Church, and does not break the bruised reeds or extinguish the smoldering wicks among us (Mt. 12:20).

My eight years of service as a Catholic, pro-life state senator for District 31, together with my life-long career as a pro-life physician has put me on contact with thousands of Catholics. It's why they asked me to represent them in this effort. Please understand, I no longer write just for myself as I did in the Fall; I now write for over 3100 faithful Catholics who want to be collaborators with you in the evangelizing mission of the Church.

We oppose the implementation of All Things New as presented for the reasons stated above and for other reasons specific to circumstances and situations that space does not allow a presentation here. We want to be collaborators with you. We want to find a path forward with you that will encourage authentic parish renewal, increase vocations, and advance the evangelizing mission of the Church.

**Therefore, on my behalf and on behalf of those for whom I hold mandate, I beg you to:**

- 1. Suspend the implementation of All Things New and make no decisions on the transfer of pastors, development of pastorates, merging of parishes, or any other decision that would alter the current situations and circumstances of the parishes in the Archdiocese of St. Louis at this time;**
- 2. Enter collaborative dialogue with us that is focused on arriving at a mutual understanding and resolution of the mistrust and harm that has already occurred, and identifies a path forward that does not exclude the weak of faith and spiritually vulnerable among us.**

In closing, I hope to hear from you or your designee to arrange a meeting with me and a small group of those who are assisting me in my role as Procurator. Such good-faith meeting can only help us both come to a better understanding of what is happening in the Archdiocese at this time and begin a resolution of the issues and concerns that have emerged from the All Things New planning process.

With assurances of my prayers, I remain,

Yours in Christ,



Robert Onder, M.D., J.D.  
Procurator  
2090 Key Harbour Drive  
Lake Saint Louis, Missouri 63367

