"We Are His Witnesses" Update from Cardinal Tobin | June 2026

June 12, 2026 // Announcements

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you (2 Cor 13:13).

Today, the Church throughout the world celebrates the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, one of the most eloquent symbols of the love our Savior has for us. This celebration adores the mystery to which the "Mother Church" of the Archdiocese of Newark, the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart, is dedicated. This mystery is also an invitation, since it reminds us that the heart of the Church's mission is always the love of Christ — a love that draws us beyond ourselves in faith, service, and hope. Even amid the chal-

lenges facing our local Church, I am encouraged by the faith, generosity, and perseverance I witness each day throughout the Archdiocese of Newark.

When I first proposed the initiative, ***We Are His Witnesses***, I wrote that this effort was primarily about pastoral conversion, inspired by Pope Francis' 2013 apostolic exhortation ***Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)***. Pastoral conversion calls us to make a fundamental shift from being an inward-looking Church, focused primarily on maintenance and survival, to becoming a dynamic, outward-looking Church by better understanding and accepting the mission Christ entrusted to us. We have honestly considered the changing landscape of northern New Jersey while staying focused on evangelization and outreach, pastoral care, and the long-term sustainability of our many communities.

One of the guiding principles of *We Are His Witnesses* is to listen to God and to one another in faith and trust. Over the past months, throughout the Archdiocese, parishioners, clergy, religious, and parish leaders participated in surveys, shared in listening sessions, and offered feedback. I am deeply grateful for your honesty, your love for the Church, and your desire to see our parish communities continue to grow in faith and mission.

As I listened to people across the Archdiocese, some themes surfaced repeatedly. By far, the most common was evangelization and outreach. Many expressed a sincere desire to share the Gospel more personally and invite others into the life of the Church, especially young people, families, and those who no longer take part in parish life. Often, that desire came with a question: "How *do* we evangelize?" These conversations revealed both a deep love for parish communities and a growing recognition that no parish can carry the Church's mission on its own.

At the same time, I became aware that collaboration and a faith-filled response take time to discern and develop. This is especially true when the first reaction to *We Are His Witnesses* was heavily laced with fear for the future of one's beloved parish. Hearing this led me to announce a "pivot" in March to adapt

our strategy, use our resources better, and enable us to work together to fully embrace the call to evangelize.

Collaboration does not diminish the identity of any parish; rather, it affirms that no parish is called to "stand alone." Every community shares in a mission that extends beyond its own boundaries and serves the wider Church. True renewal begins not with plans, programs, and timelines but with hearts open to the Holy Spirit.

As we move forward, I would like to return to the three questions that have guided this process from the beginning: Where are we now? Where is God calling us to go? How do we get there together?

We have a better sense of where we are now, based upon the feedback you have so generously provided since we began *We Are His Witnesses*. So, where is God calling us to go?

I believe the Lord is calling us to recognize where our parishes fall short, where the Archdiocese is not present or has not succeeded in leading others to Jesus Christ, and then to work more closely together to respond more faithfully to the needs of the people God loves so much.

What about the third question: *How do we get there together?*

After prayer, consultation, and careful reflection on all that has been shared, I am inviting every parish community in the Archdiocese of Newark to enter a new phase of *We Are His Witnesses*, which emphasizes collaboration through **Parish Mission Partners**.

These partnerships will bring neighboring parishes together to pray, reflect, and discover concrete ways to share the Gospel, strengthen parish life, and serve their neighborhood. Working together, the partners will seek practical ways to support ministry in evangelization and outreach, pastoral care, and

long-term sustainability.

Some partnerships may focus on outreach to youth and young adults. Others may work together to promote social justice, lifelong faith formation, or other forms of shared pastoral services. In some cases, communities may discern that a new configuration, including merger with another parish, offers the best path forward. Remember that a parish merger does not necessarily mean a church must close or that the unique culture and identity of a parish community will be irrevocably lost.

Our experience in synodality has already taught us that every parish community has its own gifts, challenges, and opportunities, so these conversations must begin locally. There is no single model for evangelization and parish renewal.

The Archdiocese will accompany these conversations and support parish communities as they develop local plans for ministry.

All parishes in the Archdiocese will eventually take part in similar conversations, though not all at the same time.

Consultation with deans, pastors, Priest Council representatives, and archdiocesan leadership has identified twelve courageous and generous parishes that will lead the way forward. These parishes have already begun meeting and will continue through December of this year.

I sincerely thank these parish communities:

- Parish of the Transfiguration, Newark
- St. Antoninus Parish, Newark

- St. Henry Parish, Bayonne

- St. John Paul II Parish, Bayonne
- St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Bayonne
- Blessed Miriam Teresa Demjanovich Parish, Bayonne

- Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Scotch Plains
- St. Bartholomew Parish, Scotch Plains
- Holy Trinity Parish, Westfield
- St. Helen Parish, Westfield

- St. Joseph Parish, Bogota
- St. Anastasia Parish, Teaneck

There are also parishes now facing pastoral and financial challenges that require immediate attention. Representatives from these communities will soon meet with archdiocesan staff to discern next steps and the support needed.

In addition, pastors serving multiple parish communities will meet with archdiocesan staff to review current realities and consider opportunities for collaboration and renewal.

This fall, there will be regional meetings of all pastors and parish leaders to prepare for this next phase. These gatherings will promote conversations among neighboring communities to ensure a shared understanding of the process, enhance communication, and prepare all parishes for the work ahead.

This new phase, which calls for your continuing prayer, participation, and feedback, offers a clear path forward for our Archdiocese. It will help parish communities respond more directly to local needs while strengthening our shared mission as the Church in the Archdiocese of Newark.

Above all, I ask you to continue praying for our parish communities and for all who are helping lead this effort in the months ahead. Let us entrust the future of our Archdiocese to the Holy Spirit and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

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