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A church bursting with vitality

by Tom Roberts

This is a preview of the next part of this series

Ask most people in the Archdiocese of Newark about OLC and they'll know you're referring to an intriguing little parish, Our Lady of Czestochowa, in Jersey City. Some 15 years ago it was a dying Polish parish with little connection to the surrounding community and very little vitality.

Then came Fr. Tom Iwanowski, who has turned things around remarkably and now boasts a parish of more than 600 families whose members regularly fill the small sanctuary and who are mostly between the ages of 25 and 50. I'll be reporting at length on how this came to be a vibrant parish in one of the archdiocese's small cities in transition. Hoboken is another one that used to be an industrial center and has become a bedroom community for young professionals who like the quick train connection to Manhattan, spectacular views of its skyline but somewhat lower rentals (though to anyone outside this rather large urban bubble, even "reasonable" rents would be shocking).

Nearly everyone I spoke to before meeting Fr. Tom mentioned two things: His great innate talent for remembering names and for preaching.

In an interview that will be posted online in the near future he reveals some of the secrets of his success (they mostly involve hard work, organization and subjecting his ideas and sermons to scrutiny before he ever heads to the center aisle to preach.)

I've just returned to the Midwest from this first of several jaunts in search of the emerging church and I'll be filing stories soon on some of the complex and diverse realities of the Archdiocese of Newark and on the meeting in Chevy Chase, Md., of representatives of Intentional Eucharistic Communities from around the country.

Look here in this blog space -- **In Search of the Emerging Church** -- for updates on some of the people and circumstances I ran into during the course of the trip.



Follow Tom Roberts on his journey "In Search of the Emerging Church." Sign up to **receive an e-mail alert** when his stories are posted to this series. If you already receive e-mail alerts from NCR, click on the button that says "update my profile."

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