



DIVINE RENOVATION

Book Aid



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CHAPTER 1

HOUSE OF PRAYER

Remembering Our Identity and Purpose

We have forgotten our true identity. We are the People of God, but we need to relearn who we are, what our true identity actually entails. This crisis of identity within the Church is our deepest crisis.

This loss of identity has happened before. When Jesus drove out the money changers from the temple (Mark 11:15-16), he shut down the entire temple and invoked the authority of the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11). What is key to understanding the actions of Jesus is to recall Isaiah 56:6 – “for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.”

By looking at chapters 56-66 of the Book of Isaiah, “It is clearly God’s intention not only for the temple, but for the nation of Israel itself, to be a conduit of salvation for all people.”

The temple, however, was one of exclusion – the Jewish people excluded the Gentiles and the very architecture of the temple excluded groups from each area. “By his death and resurrection, Jesus allows the temple of his body to be destroyed and rebuilt so that in his person, he manifests the new temple of God, where earth is joined to heaven” (p. 17). This is an inclusive temple “where there are no walls of separation (Ephesians 2:14). There is now no Jew and Greek, no male and female (Galatians 3:28).”

In this, Jesus fulfills the ancient prophecies of radical salvific inclusion. “The mission of inclusion is handed on to...the ones who are called out by Jesus...to go and make disciples of all nations.”

We forgot just like Israel and are fine with “keeping it all for ourselves” – we have a similar identity crisis.

“It is said that it’s not so much that the Church of Christ has a mission, as that the mission of Jesus Christ has a Church. We, however, have so forgotten our essential missionary calling that we have contented ourselves with maintenance and serving ourselves.” (p. 17)

What is our true identity? What is the mission of the Church?

The answer is found in the Gospel of Matthew in the passage known as the Great Commission:

Go therefore and make disciple of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)

On Page 19, Father Mallon breaks the Great Commission into four tasks for the Church: “go, make, baptize and teach.” Referring to the grammatical structure of the sentence, Father Mallon indicates that one is a finite verb, the others are participles. The finite verb is the “grammatical center” of the sentence and also “the theological center.” He often asks groups which of the four expresses, “the heart of our purpose, the very task that gives us our identity?” Father Mallon says that people invariably answer this incorrectly.

The finite verb is “make” – literally, “make disciples.”

This task is the very heart of the Great Commission, and it is around the making of disciples that all the other missionary aspects of the Church revolve: the going, the baptizing and the teaching. Think about this: in recent centuries, the Catholic Church had the distinction of being a great missionary Church. We went. We have a rich didactic tradition and are famed for our schools and universities and curricula. We teach. We surely know how to baptize and celebrate all the other sacraments, but our one pastoral weakness, the task we struggle with the most, is that which lies at the very heart of Christ's commission to the Church: to make disciples. (p.20)

Making Disciples

The word “disciple” is used a lot, but we don't always understand its meaning. Breaking down the original Greek and Latin, Father Mallon points out that “to be a disciple is to be a learner. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be engaged in a lifelong process of learning from and about Jesus the master, Jesus the teacher” (p. 20). This is an “intentional and disciplined” commitment to a process of growth.

When we look at our churches today, most pastors would say that this definition of disciple only “describes about 6 to 10% of regularly attending Catholics.”

While we value learning about faith for our children, it is seen as optional for adults. We do not encourage the lifelong commitment of growth needed to make disciples.

Over the last 50 years, our society has witnessed what can arguably be called the most accelerated social change in human history.... [Yet] the pastoral practice of the Catholic Church in the West remains,

for the most part, unchanged from what existed prior to this state of flux. (p. 21)

The Christian culture that surrounded us, the population growth, and increase in migrants led to growth in our churches and practicing Catholics, but we weren't necessarily making disciples. The result is that today, “hundreds of thousands of faithful, believing Catholics carry the enormous burden of children and grandchildren who have abandoned ‘the faith’.” (p. 20)

“The only solution going forward is to return to what Jesus asked of us 2,000 years ago: to not just make believers, or ‘practicing Catholics,’ but to make disciples. ...This is the heart of the matter and the lens through which we are to evaluate all activity of the Church – all pastoral programs, all expenditures and all use of our buildings.” (pp. 21-22)

Evangelization

How do we make these disciples, those who want to learn, who want to grow, who hunger for more? Just because someone believes in Jesus or goes to church doesn't mean they have this hunger. “Something has to happen to awaken this hunger: that something is evangelization.” (p. 21)

To evangelize “literally means to announce the good news.” While the ‘good news’ could fill volumes, Father Mallon suggests that the Good News can be summarized in one word – Jesus. “In Jesus, we have the very embodiment of God's salvation presence, love, mercy and life.” (p. 22)

Through hearing the Good News, one comes, “to know him – to not just believe in him, but to love him and to be in love with him.” Only when we encounter Jesus as “alive and real” does that hunger and desire to walk with him and learn from him come alive in us. The difficult truth is that many of our people do

not know Jesus personally and “therefore have not hunger for him.” (p. 22)

But what can we do? The answer is in what popes since Pope Paul VI have called us to – a New Evangelization. We need, “to create spaces for people to come to know Jesus as the living Lord, awaken that hunger and then begin to form them, to make them disciples” (p. 23).

From Disciples to Apostles

It is not enough to be a Church of disciples. That is just a part of our calling. We are to, “go’ and ‘make disciples’ of all nations, of all peoples. We are mandated by the Lord to proclaim this Good News not just to lukewarm or fallen-away Catholics, but to all who do not know Christ and his Church...We are called to go.” (p. 24)

We are sent by Jesus to go out to fulfill the Great Commission. Pointing to the Greek, Father Mallon indicates that the word *apostellein* means to send and to be an apostle means one who is sent. “Disciples must eventually become apostles.” (p. 24)

The Church is healthy when she evangelizes, makes disciples and, “sends them out as missionaries to go and evangelize, to make more disciples who can be baptized and taught, eventually sent out.” The opposite is true of an unhealthy Church. The unhealthy Church turns in on herself, forgets her calling to reach out to all.

According to Father Mallon, “Something must be done. Drastic action is required.” (p. 25)

CHAPTER 2

REBUILD MY HOUSE

From Vatican II to Pope Francis

Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and especially today with Pope Francis, we are challenged to recall our identity and to be a Church that goes out and a Church that makes missionary disciples. Pope Francis continues the call of his predecessors (Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI) for a New Evangelization. This call harkens back to Vatican II's theological insights of "the universal call to holiness" and "the universal call to mission." What is unique is not a focus on holiness or mission, but rather the reminder that the call is not just to the ordained or for religious, but for all who are baptized. "We are called to holiness because we are baptized. We are called to mission, to evangelize, to share the Good News because we are baptized." (p. 28)

Each of these pontiffs, in his own way, understood the proclamation (kerygma) of the Good News to be the responsibility of all Christians and the way for Christians to rediscover their baptismal identity.

Father Mallon warns us against the temptation of thinking that the witness of our lives alone is sufficient to evangelize: "The witness of life must come first, but it must lead to the word of life being proclaimed. Without actions, our words are not believed by our cynical post-modern, post-Christian society, but without words, our actions are not understood." (p. 29)

Pope Paul VI, in his ground breaking Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), gave a one-sentence definition of evangelization:

... evangelization will also always contain—

as the foundation, center, and at the same time, summit of its dynamism—a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God's grace and mercy. (EN, no. 22) (p. 30)

Pope John Paul II coined the term New Evangelization and the theme of evangelization consistent throughout his pontificate. In 1990, he echoed Pope Paul VI in stating that, "the proclamation of Christ is not only the summit of all evangelizing activity, but is the supreme duty of the Church and every individual believer. None of us can avoid it." (p. 31)

Pope Benedict XVI, following Pope John Paul II, extended this call of evangelization and added new language by speaking "of the necessity of the personal encounter and personal relationship with Jesus." (p. 33) In speaking to the bishops of the Philippines in 2011, he reminded them that "Your great task in Evangelization is therefore to propose a personal relationship with Christ as key to complete fulfillment." (p. 33)

For some in the Catholic Church, this sense of a "personal relationship" with Christ may seem "not Catholic." But Pope Benedict, in the *Lineamenta* document that led up to the synod, expressed, "Being Christian and 'being Church' means being missionary; one is or is not. Loving one's faith implies bearing witness to it, bringing it to others and allowing others to participate in it." (no. 10) (p. 34)

Furthermore, "People are able to evangelize

only when they have been evangelized and allow themselves to be evangelized, that is, renewed spiritually through a personal encounter and lived communion with Jesus Christ.” (no. 22) (p. 34)

Pope Francis, who followed Pope Benedict XVI, has continued, “this call for the Church to go out, to rediscover her essential missionary identity.” (p. 35) Pope Francis emphasizes, in this regard, the Church’s need to overcome a crippling self-referential tendency which is a “temptation” that prevents the Church from creating “missionary disciples.” (Father Mallon develops this theme in Chapter 4, “Cleaning out the Junk”).

Father Mallon concludes by placing great emphasis on the document put out by the Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM) at their meeting in Aparecida in 2007– a document which Pope Francis, as Cardinal Bergoglio, helped create. This document, a document of the Church’s Magisterium, is a call to action for the Church in South America, but it also has importance for the Universal Church. Father Mallon sees that this document from Aparecida, which is the predecessor of *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), gave the Church in Latin America about a six-year lead in renewal.

“It addresses the need for the Church’s mission to include a ‘preferential option for the poor,’ to work against poverty, injustice, ecological degradation and exploitation of any kind. In spite of the scope of this document, however, its central theme dominates throughout: to remind ‘the faithful of this continent that by virtue of their baptism, they are called to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ.’” (no. 10) (p. 37)

Father Mallon first focuses on Section 5.4 of that document, entitled, “Those Who Have Left the Church to Join Other Religious Groups.” Based on research from hundreds of

exit interviews of those who left the Catholic Church and joined Evangelical Protestant groups, there were four main reasons why they left:

1. “The faithful had never experienced ‘a personal encounter with Jesus Christ’ (that was ‘profound and intense’) within the Catholic Church but had in other churches.”
2. In the Catholic Church, they did not experience “the presence of meaningful community life where people are ‘accepted...and feel valued, visible, and included in the Church.’”
3. In other churches, they experienced Biblical and doctrinal formation “not as ‘theoretical and cold knowledge’ but something that brings about ‘spiritual, personal and community growth’ and brings people to maturity.”
4. In the Catholic Church, they did not experience a “missionary commitment that moves Church members from the pews to go out to meet those on the periphery to bring people home to the family of God.” (p. 38-39)

The conclusion is that, “often sincere people who leave our church do not do so because of what ‘non-Catholic’ groups believe, but fundamentally for what they live” (no. 225), that is, for pastoral – not theological – reasons. (p. 39)

Father Mallon believes Chapter 6 of the Aparecida document is the most important section, “as it not only lays out a theology for the formation of ‘missionary disciples,’ but provides a detailed outline of the necessary formation process.” (p. 39)

Father Mallon then focuses specifically on Section 6.2.1, which proposes “five fundamental aspects in the process of forming missionary disciples.”

1. Encounter with Jesus Christ, linked directly

and explicitly to the kerygma: “Without the kerygma, the other aspects of this process are condemned to sterility, with hearts not truly converted to the Lord.”

2. Conversion “that transforms our lives and leads to a decision to follow Jesus as Lord.” This brings the person to either baptism or the sacrament of reconciliation.
3. Discipleship where the person “‘constantly matures’ in knowledge and love of Jesus.” Catechesis and sacraments are critical for this stage.
4. Communion is being in a vital community of other disciples.
5. Mission comes if all of the above are authentic. One is led to “proclaim Jesus to others in joy, to love and serve the needy and to build the Kingdom of God.” (pp. 39-40)

Please refer to the, “ schema that outlines, in a linear fashion, the process proposed by the Aparecida document for the formation of missionary disciples. Every stage of this process takes place within a vital and caring community of faith.” (p. 40)

CHAPTER 3

HOUSE OF PAIN

The Experience of a Maintenance Church

Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, shortly before becoming Pope Francis, wrote out by hand his thoughts on the type of pope the Church would need.

He, “described a pope who would help the Church remember her true identity: to be a Church ‘called to come out from itself and to go to the peripheries.’ He warned that if the Church does not do this, if it ‘does not come out from itself to evangelize, it becomes self-referential and gets sick.” (p. 43)

The Church, when sick, becomes a house of pain. Why? Because we have forgotten our deepest identity: “that we are missionary, that we are a Church ‘called to come out from itself.” (p. 43) Father Mallon points out that to renew the Church, we need to be healed and “the first step in healing is acknowledging the pain.” (p. 44)

We start with confessing the pain and hurts, which has “deep biblical roots in the tradition of lamentation. We find both communal and personal lamentations in many of the psalms, in the Book of Jeremiah (20:7-18) and, of course, in the Book of Lamentations.” (p. 44)

Father Mallon shares some of the pain he has seen as a priest. Faithful people ask, “did I do wrong?” as they see their children and grandchildren indifferent or hostile to the Church and to faith. They have every right to ask what they did wrong, because they don’t know. “They did for their children what their parents did for them.” (p. 45) The problem is that the rules have changed.

He points out that as shepherds, priests

failed because it was up to the priests to acknowledge the signs of the times, that the rules had changed and to give warning.

Also, there is the pain within our Church, “as a result of the loss of so many of our institutions that framed our identity and were a source of pride in the largely immigrant Catholic communities of North America.” (p. 46)

There is pain at the collapse of the parish infrastructure. All over the Western world, the faithful are experiencing parish closures and “clustering.” While there are good reasons to do so, “no matter the rationale for these actions...it hurts.” (p. 46-47)

Although the Church is people, and not buildings, “it hurts because it reminds us of the institutional decline we are facing.” (p. 46) There are very valid and necessary reasons for change, but no matter how much it makes sense, we can never “remove the deep-down conviction that it is always ‘tragic’ to close a church” because closing a church is a consequence of the Church not being healthy, not growing.” (p. 47)

There is the pain within the hearts of all, over the scandals of the sexual abuse of children by priests and, “the complicit tolerance of such behavior by so many in leadership, often for the sake of protecting the institution.” (p. 47) This is what Cardinal Bergoglio had in mind when he spoke of “the worldly Church that lives in itself, of itself, for itself.” (p. 47)

Additionally, as a result of the clerical sexual abuse scandals, we experience the pain of the loss of the credibility of the Church, and we all

deeply feel the impact of the scandals.

Many priests did not wish to become “maintenance priests” yet they may have been forced to “navigate within a Church culture that was not that interested in conversion and transformation.” (p. 52) Especially for those in a position of leadership, there is a gravitational pull towards a Church that is “about maintenance, a Church that is self-referential and enclosed within itself.” (p. 52) Many priests feel trapped: “caught between an experience of a call and desire for renewal and the weight of a Church culture that tends towards maintaining the status quo.” (p. 53)

A very concrete way that we experience this tug-of-war is around the place and time of Mass. With dwindling Mass attendance and parish consolidations, often our energies are dissipated attempting to maintain an obsolete schedule of Masses. The same problem occurs when bishops, trying to placate interest groups, believe that they are not free to reform the infrastructure of dioceses: “too often, rather than restructuring so that the infrastructure serves the mission, we subject the mission of the Church to the infrastructure.” (p. 54)

All of this amounts to the pain of witnessing a Church in decline.

What are the options in such a situation? “The first is to quit and stay. This person chooses to let go of their passion, zeal, and idealism. They have given up hope and yet, bound by fear, they remain at their post. This sadly describes some of our priests and lay people in pastoral ministry.” (p. 55) “Pope Francis named this reality in *Evangelii Gaudium* as a form of ‘worldliness.’ He said, ‘This way of thinking also feeds the vainglory of those who are content to have a modicum of power and would rather be the general of a defeated army than a mere private in a unit which continues to fight.’ (EG, no. 96) (p. 56)

The preferred option is to stay and fight, to

hold on to the vision, zeal and passion. This is a struggle, and at its heart, it is the struggle for hope. “When we consider the work of grace in the life of any individual or within the Church itself, we stand before a great mystery.” (p. 57)

“The biblical tradition of lamentation teaches us that denial of our pain and sorrow is not an option.” (p. 57)

The mystery of God’s grace is always at work in the life of every Christian and in the life of the Church, and it always involves the process of dying and rising.

“Redemption from our suffering does not lead us to illumination only, but also to action, to make changes and reforms.” (p. 58)

CHAPTER 4

CLEARING OUT THE JUNK

What We Need to Jettison if We Are Going to Rebuild

In the House of God there is “junk” that needs to be cleared out. What are these structures that do not serve the mission, attitudes, ideas, or theological perspectives that hinder our ability to fulfill the missionary mandate given to us by Jesus?

Pope Francis has addressed this problem a number of times, including in 2013 in his pointed remarks to the leadership of CELAM, the Bishops’ Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Pope spoke about three temptations against missionary discipleship that he said were the work of the “evil spirit”.

According to Pope Francis, the first temptation is making the Gospel message an “ideology”. Father Mallon here emphasizes a particular aspect of this first temptation, to wit: “the Pelagian solution”. For Pope Francis, this is a form of “restorationism” that is closely associated with moral and disciplinary rigorism that seeks to recover a lost past. Pope Francis spoke of this also in *Evangelii Gaudium* as being about those, “who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past.” (EG, no. 94)

The Pope spoke of the second temptation as “Functionalism,” which “is the reduction of the Church to a mere business, a kind of NGO that leaves no room for mystery.” (pg. 61) Finally, he named the third temptation as “Clericalism.”

Father Mallon focuses, in Chapter 4, on two of these three temptations: namely, Pelagianism

and Clericalism. According to Father Mallon, these two temptations constitute the bulk of the “junk” that needs to be cleared out before authentic renewal can take place in the Church.

Pelagianism

This is a heresy from the early Church, which is named after Pelagius, a monk. He taught that God’s grace was not necessary for salvation since human nature had not been truly impacted and enfeebled by original sin. “For Pelagius, God’s favor could be obtained by moral rigorism or ascetic practices alone, and could be achieved outside of God’s grace.” (p. 62)

Saint Augustine, who lived at the same time as Pelagius, opposed this heresy and laid the foundation of the Catholic understanding of the intertwining of God’s grace and human free will. The teachings of Pelagius’ were condemned and he was excommunicated from the Church.

In brief, Catholics believe that the Original Sin of our first parents so weakened human nature and inclined it to sin that the result is no one can desire or carry out the good apart from the vital help of God’s grace. “The Good News is that God has not left us to our own devices, but has sent his Son as our Savior.” (p. 63)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (John 3:16) This passage from the Gospel of

John is at the very heart of the Good News – “Jesus Christ has saved you.” (p. 63)

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are made members of Christ’s Body and we receive the unmerited gift of the complete remission of Original Sin. There is nothing that we can do ourselves that will merit God’s grace, but with God’s grace at work in our lives, manifested by “faith that works in love” (Galatians 5:6), we receive the gift of being right with God. This is the heart of the Good News, what Pope Francis, in his famous interview with the Jesuit magazine *America*, called the “first proclamation:” “Jesus Christ has saved you.”

Even though Baptism removes Original Sin in us, its lingering effects remain, and so, throughout our lives, we always stand in need of God’s grace.

We stand before the mystery of a God who has first loved us: “the very desire to draw close to God is already a result of God at work in our life, that there is nothing we can do to draw close to God that is not the result of his grace already at work in our lives.” (p. 64)

The Good News we proclaim is that God’s grace does work to heal us and rehabilitate us to become co-workers with him. By cooperating with the supernatural action of God in our lives—as baptized members of his Body, the New Temple—we receive the grace that is needed to correspond with God’s work in our lives and, in that free gift of God’s grace, we can realize the fullness of redeemed life to which God has called us in Christ.

Although long ago condemned as a heresy, the Pelagian Solution has not gone away and has raised its head throughout the history of the Church. It is very common for us to believe, deep down, that we earn our heavenly reward based solely on our efforts alone. Operating on this assumption, humans have long found the graciousness of God to be scandalous and unjust. Think of the parable

of the workers in the vineyard: they work all day and are angry that those who worked only one hour receive the same wage as they do. (Matthew 20:1-16)

The Good News of salvation can only be received as Good News, “if we have truly grasped the bad news of our fallen condition. The news that I am cancer-free really will mean nothing to me if I have never realized that I was cancer-ridden.” Ultimately, “moral rigorism and asceticism replace grace and mercy.” (p. 67)

Father Mallon believes that most church-going Catholics have been so deeply impacted by Pelagianism that they really do not grasp the fundamental message of the Good News of Jesus Christ. “How often have funerals become not a proclamation of the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ, but a proclamation of the righteousness or goodness of the deceased, with Scripture readings chosen to eulogize the deceased rather than proclaim the grace of God’s merciful love?” (p. 68)

This points to “the very human tendency to reduce the Christian faith to a form of moral rigorism, or mere ethics.” (p. 69) In prior generations, this may have focused on issues of sexual morality, and more recently, on issues of social justice. “They are always and will always be secondary issues, and can never supplant the first proclamation, or kerygma – lest, as Pope Francis said, the Church fall like ‘a house of cards.’” (p. 69)

Father Mallon identifies three consequences of Neo-Pelagianism. The first is a culture of seeing “the Christian life as a scorecard of salvation” (p. 69). For those who think this way, salvation is about getting your card punched: “I do certain things for God (go to Mass, be nice, say my prayers once in a while), then God lets me into heaven.” (pp. 69-70) This is not covenant faith; it is basically Pelagianism in which favors are sought by

fulfilling external obligations. This breeds a culture of minimalism. When my needs are met, I am done. A covenant faith, on the other hand, is a relationship in which the community “can never do enough or get enough...It is the only kind of faith that can yearn for authentic holiness...and to give all and do all.” (p. 70)

The second consequence he identifies is a Church filled with people who believe themselves to be justified by their own “niceness” and thus, “will never know the sheer audacity of God’s mercy.” (p. 70) Thus, the Good News remains undiscovered and cannot be shared with others.

The third is a Church of little enthusiasm for the call to the New Evangelization since those who have not received the Good News cannot proclaim it to others. “Obviously, only the evangelized can evangelize. With neo-Pelagianism so present among the faithful and those in ministry, the Church suffers an identity crisis about its missionary nature.” (p. 71)

To take out the “junk” of Pelagianism, “we recall the words of the Latin American bishops in the 2007 Aparecida document, which says, ‘Without the Kerygma, the other aspects of this process are condemned to sterility, with hearts not truly converted to the Lord! It is the kerygma that opens hearts; it is the kerygma of the Good News of salvation that needs to be articulated clearly for people to hear and understand.’” (p. 71)

“We remove this ‘junk’ by making a clear commitment to the first proclamation as both distinct from what we know as catechesis, and as integral to it.” (p. 71) It needs to be heard over and over. In the 2010 instruction to priests issued by the Congregation of the Clergy under Pope Benedict, priests were told, “this proclamation [the kerygma] ought to be present in every homily, in every class and in every talk.” (p. 72)

Our fundamental identity can be found in

Pope Francis’s fundamental identity. When asked by a reporter for America magazine, “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?” his answer was, “I am a sinner whom the Lord looked upon.” “This was not just a figure of speech or literary genre, but was the clearest, most authentic description he could offer.” (p. 72)

Clericalism

When we hear the word “clericalism” do we see priests in cassocks or collars, those obsessed with religious minutiae, or an old boys club with a sense of privilege and superiority?

Pope Francis however defined it as a “sinful complicity: the priest clericalizes the lay person and the lay person kindly asks to be clericalized.” (p. 72)

In Father Mallon’s experience, he has had many people say, “I am not that religious,” referring to their belief that only priests or nuns are called to holiness or to evangelize, not average Catholics. “Ordinary Catholics just do not do these things; they are fundamentally unable to do these things.” (p. 73) After much thought and many years, Father Mallon came to believe that the disconnect with what the Church teaches – all are called to holiness and to evangelize – and this “popular theology” is actually clericalism.

“Clericalism is nothing but the appropriation of what is proper to the baptized by the clerical caste.” (p. 73) Father Mallon includes all religious professionals in this caste. The priests and the nuns, then, “become the super-Christians who have the super-powers to do what ordinary Christians cannot.” (p. 74) This leads to clergy who are isolated and the baptized who are immature in their faith.

“The isolation of clergy - left alone to be holy and to do the work proper to all members of the Church - has been, and is, death-dealing and unsustainable.” (p. 74)

Priests are not only isolated, but with this sense that they are somehow apart from the rest of us, they are not held to professional standards of accountability or evaluated on an ongoing basis. This leads to priests only being given help or direction after they fail. There is not a system to evaluate or give them the support and help they may need along the way. "There is only one way to live a healthy, life-giving life as a priest, and that is to be first and foremost a Christian among other Christians before being a priest for the people." (p. 75)

Father Mallon was a vocation director for his diocese. He met with those who felt a "call" to priesthood or religious life. In his interviews, he often heard the call to live out ordinary Christian living: "To mature in prayer and spiritual life, to grow in knowledge, to evangelize and to serve others." (p. 76) It seemed that if someone was "that religious" they needed to be a priest or religious.

Since the Second Vatican Council, there has been an attempt to break away from the clericalism of the past. Inadvertently, and unfortunately, these good intentions for the "empowerment" of the laity resulted in our teaching our people. "that the fulfillment of their baptismal identity was to perform ministries that were essentially clerical in nature." Being a lector, distributing Holy Communion, presiding at "communion services," and so on is the appropriation of what is proper to the ordained. The true lay vocation was still ignored. (p.77)

The fresh call of the Second Vatican Council to rediscover the universal call to mission died a rapid death. The "lay apostolate" referred to in the conciliar documents again and again, has virtually disappeared within the life of the average parish. "Lay ministry" has replaced the "lay apostolate." According to this mindset, the Pilgrim People of God would reach eschatological fulfillment when all would become professional lay ministers

and spend all their time ministering to one another within the Church. However, this leads many to think that most Catholics can continue to be passive spectators, while it falls to the really committed to do the readings and even distribute Holy Communion.

The significance of this substitution of lay apostolate for lay ministry is great. "If the deepest crisis in our Church is an identity crisis because we have forgotten our fundamental identity as a missionary Church, the imposition of clerical categories as a supposed fulfillment of the call to renewal in the conciliar documents deepened the identity crisis and led the Church to be even more turned in upon itself." (p. 78)

Father Mallon proposes that part of the solution to this clericalism is to redefine how we think of pastoral care. In most Church circles, "pastoral care" usually refers to care given to those who are sick, dying, or grieving. While these are important components, this is not the full meaning of pastoral care. The term "pastor" refers to the "shepherd." In the familiar Psalm 23, we are reminded that the "first task of the shepherd was to lead the sheep to food and drink. To feed the sheep so they can grow and mature." (p. 81)

Equipping the Saints

In Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we hear the words:

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

This passage echoes the truth "that the end game of pastoral care is to bring people

to maturity.” There are different gifts and charisms, which God has given for the Church as a whole. “Saint Paul explicitly tells us that these charisms exist ‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry.’” Thus, the primary task of the pastor is not to do all the work of ministry himself, but to equip the saints to do the work of ministry. (p. 82)

Father Mallon says that, as a pastor, he constantly seeks, “to focus on the three fundamental tasks of the priest: to preach the Word of God, to celebrate the sacraments and to lead the Church. All other ministry not only can be pushed out but ought to be pushed out to others.” (pp. 82-83)

“As parishioners mature in their Christian life, they ought to be called into service according to their gifts and equipped to serve in that ministry,” to become missionary disciples. (p. 83)

Father Mallon reminds his staff that they are, “to call forth and equip others to do the work of ministry so that the Church may be built up. If they do it all themselves, then they, too, have fallen into a clerical model of ministry.” (p. 83)

Risky Business

In the beginning of the Church, it was risky to be a Christian as witnessed by the early martyrs. After the peace of Constantine, that risk diminished, and it was easier to be Christian. Today the Christian culture that existed since the time of Constantine (for 1650 years) has ended. “We now find ourselves in a situation like that of the first Christians. It is once again unpopular to be a Christian...It is time for all who follow Jesus to heed the call to maturity and to be equipped for service within the community of the Church that takes them far from the altar from which they are sent every Sunday.” (p. 85)

In this chapter we have reflected on Pelagianism and Clericalism, two of the obstacles to the realization of the Church’s deepest identity to be a missionary Church: a Church “called to form baptized believers into missionary disciples who go forth, through the grace of God, to build God’s Kingdom.” (p. 85)

Now that we have addressed the need for renewal, “we can begin to lay a foundation and prepare a welcoming and warm home. Now we can go out from ourselves, inviting some to return and others to enter for the first time.” (p.86)

CHAPTER 5

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

How to Transform the Culture of the Parish Community

So far, we have focused on the Church's missionary identity, the need to speak of and acknowledge the pain, and to get rid of the "junk" that fills our theological subconscious. Moving forward we will look at how to lay the foundation of the rebuilding process. The foundation of any human organization is the culture of that organization. The Church is no exception. (p. 88)

Father Mallon points out that if we build a healthy human organization, we will contribute to the overall health of the Church. "If the human foundation of the Church is not healthy, then no matter how intense or sincere our spiritual commitment is, the foundation will be a fragile blend of clay and iron." (p. 88-89)

Values

The culture of the parish is not about ethnicity, but rather what we truly value in the parish. "The values are seen not primarily by what is said, but what is done or left undone." (p. 89) The budget, staffing positions, calendar of events, and use of its buildings tell the story of the parish's values. "An honest evaluation of a parish budget will remove any doubt about the true values of any parish, regardless of what statement may be framed on the wall. The sum of what a parish values will constitute its culture." (p. 90)

Every parish has an invisible and unnamed culture. The culture or set of values of a healthy and growing parish are extremely different from those of a dying or shrinking

parish. As we recall from an earlier chapter, the research for the Apareceda document tells us that most people aren't leaving the Catholic Church for theological reasons, but rather for reasons related to "how we live our already rich theology of the Christian life." (p. 92) In short, the primary challenge of the New Evangelization is the transformation of our values. (p. 92)

There are no quick fixes to renewal and transforming the culture of our parishes. People are looking for the next best program to run in their parishes. "No matter how good the program, these attempts will fizzle and die out...Any course in a parish will be only as good as the culture of the parish." (p. 94)

Changing the culture of a parish is hard work, but doable. Pope Francis speaks of the capacity for the cultural transformation of a parish in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community." (EG, no. 28) (p. 94-95)

Values are transferable from parish to parish whatever the context of that parish, but they will manifest differently. "It is the values that bring health, and not the mere imitation of another parish's best practices." (p. 95)

In the rest of Chapter 5, Father Mallon outlines ten common values he has seen in healthy, growing churches, both Catholic and non-Catholic. He then shares his experience of how his parish, St. Benedict Parish in Halifax,

Nova Scotia, lived out each of those values.

The first such common value is “Giving Priority to the Weekend.”

1. Giving Priority to the Weekend

This is the day that the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

Over the years at St. Benedict Parish, Father Mallon has been accused of turning the celebration of Mass into a production. His response is, “Thank you, I’m glad you noticed.” Father Mallon cites the 80/20 rule. The only time the priest and staff see 80% of the parishioners is on the weekend, yet typically only about 20% of a priest’s time in any given week was invested in planning, preparing, and executing weekend Masses.

Instead, “the priority of any parish, of any priest, ought to be about preparing for and celebrating the Sunday Eucharist to make it the best possible experience for the maximum number of people.” (p. 96) All too often, the Mass is an afterthought to everything else that has to get done during the week.

If the weekend is a priority, then there needs to be time for all to “gather, celebrate and connect afterwards.” (p. 96) The problem arises when the Mass schedules are so close together that the parking lots must be emptied quickly or the priest has to jump in his car and move onto the next church for the next Mass. The question becomes whether we really value a transformative celebration of the Eucharist. Are we willing to change Mass times to allow for “more breathing space” between each Mass?

This concept of having Mass limited to one house is not universal in the Church or in other faith communities. North American and most European Catholics, however, “formed the habit of fast-track Masses at a time when our churches were full and it was a societal value to go to church.” (p. 98) This habit was

formed also in recognition of the rigors of the discipline of fasting from midnight the night before. These conditions are no longer true.

Father Mallon challenges the culture of minimalism and convenience – shorter Masses, leaving Mass immediately after receiving communion, and the sense of “getting Mass over with.” “Minimalism and convenience have no place in the life of the disciple who is called to save his or her life by losing it.” (p. 100)

2. Hospitality

I was a stranger and you welcomed me. (Matthew 25:35)

The difference between a club and a church is that a club exists for the members and the church exists “mainly for the sake of those who do not belong.” As the pastor of a church, Father Mallon points out that his role is principally to lead an army of missionaries. To reach out to those who are not a part of the church, not to just meet the needs of his parishioners. (p. 101)

This missional orientation is the identity that needs to be embraced. Again, this is a question of fundamental values. This is the “difference between what we say we value and what we value deep down. Hospitality, therefore, does not mean being friendly with our friends and all the people who look, think and talk like us, but reaching out to the stranger.” (p. 101)

Who’s on the Team?

The first step in embracing the value of hospitality is to begin with a hospitality team. This team’s ministry begins even before people enter St. Benedict, Father Mallon’s parish. Somebody should be outside greeting people. Inside the foyer, he has two to four people who welcome all comers. In addition, there is a team of first responders, appointed

for every Mass to be ready in case of medical incidents. Another vital part of hospitality is cleanliness of the buildings, especially the bathrooms.

Of course, hospitality is not the domain only of the formal welcoming team. Pew hospitality is important. Parishioners need to be taught to remember to smile.

Welcoming the Stranger

Pope Francis talked about this in a weekday homily he preached on the parable of the wedding feast told by Saint Matthew. (22:1-14) He summarized the attitude of those who do not practice Gospel hospitality as saying:

“I go to the feast, but I don’t go beyond the antechamber, because I want to be only with the three or four people that I am familiar with...” However, you can’t do this in the church! You can’t pick and choose: the Church is for everyone.

The earliest recorded words for parish hospitality ministers are found in the Letter of James, which chastises Christians who give preference to those who appear in fine clothes:

For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Stand there,” or “Sit at my feet,” have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:2-4)

The Liturgy

As hospitable as we want to be, the liturgy is a struggle for those who do not attend church or who are not Catholic. Because it is the worship of the initiated, by its very nature, the liturgy is not hospitable to the outsider. The Catholic liturgy “presumes knowledge of basic theology, gestures, postures, prayers and ritual that are often foreign to the non-

Catholic or non-churchgoer.” (p. 106)

Part of the problem is that we assume that everyone knows what to do, which is inhospitable. When there are people from various backgrounds, such as at weddings and funerals, we must first welcome them and invite them to enter into our worship as they are able. Father Mallon will often give a brief description of what comes next in the liturgy, listen to readings from Scripture, or pray the Eucharistic prayer. Other ideas include displaying the prayers of the Mass on a screen or directing guests’ attention to booklets in the pews can also be a great aid to hospitality.

Catching the Fish

The ultimate goal of hospitality is to welcome guests so well that they themselves decide to join the parish and help welcome other guests. (p. 107)

Father Mallon recalled that during his first year at St. Benedict parish, there were at least 30 to 40 guests each week “checking them out.” But they were not “catching” very many of the guests due to a chaotic foyer and their parishioner sign-up system – blue cards on a table or an online form, neither of which asked for more than simple contact information and whether they wanted envelopes.

They needed to make their foyer more user-friendly for guests and their parishioners. To address this issue, they built a mobile welcome booth for the foyer that housed a computer, parish brochures, and other informational material. This booth is attached to a big screen TV that runs slides on upcoming programs and events. This booth is a point of contact for any questions or inquiries. If Father Mallon greets an interested visitor, he now walks them over to the welcome team who are able to assist the guests.

A better sign up process for new parishioners was also created. Instead of a “registration

card” approach, St. Benedict uses a “communication card.” One side of the communication card gathers the typical registration information; the other side outlines the process of registering as a parishioner. It is intentionally relational and reads like this:

“We can’t wait to meet you! In such a large parish as ours, we need to be purposeful in being personal. It’s important to us that you feel at home here. Our membership process is set up so that we can get to know each other a little better. It’s a four-step process and is as follows.

1. *“I like this church!” Complete the Communication Card.*
2. *“But I don’t know enough about it.” A member of our welcome team will call and arrange to meet with you.*
3. *“Sign me up! I want to be a part of the team.” Attend a New Parishioner Welcome Event to fill out a formal registration card.*
4. *“Do they remember me?” Your Welcome Team members will check in with you periodically to see how you are doing.* (p. 109)

The welcome team then follows up intentionally with each person or family to schedule a visit to their home to drop off various materials to welcome them into the community.

The final step in the process is the NPE, or New Parishioner Event. The NPE is held on a Saturday night and is limited to no more than 20 parishioners to allow for personal connection. In addition to a brief formal program, the time at the NPE is “spent mingling, chatting, laughing and enjoying getting to know one another over a glass of wine.” At the end of the evening, all new parishioners are invited to fill out their formal communications card.

3. Uplifting Music

O sing to the Lord a new song. (Psalm 96:1)

Christian renewal can be said to be about the three H’s: hospitality, hymns and homilies. Hospitality is covered in the preceding Section 2 of this Chapter; Hymns are covered by this Section 3; and Homilies will be covered by the section to follow, Section 4.

The Second Vatican Council “sounded a clarion call for a renewal of all aspects of the liturgy so that all the faithful could enter into ‘full, conscious, and active participation’ (SC, no. 14) in the liturgy.” (p. 110-111)

In the years following the Council, music was seen as the principle avenue to effect this “full, conscious, and active participation.” Sadly, Father Mallon comments, “what followed in those decades was a wholesale turning away from the beautiful and transcendent to the merely functional. The overall quality of liturgical music was greatly lowered.” (p. 111)

With this, there ensued a conflict between the old music and the new music. Father Mallon believe that because of our ancient traditions and our need to be missionary, “the music we experience in the liturgy must strive to embrace both the new and the old and must resist the temptation to settle for some kind of lowest common denominator. Uniformity is not a Catholic value, and diversity ought to be welcomed into our experience of music at the liturgy without fear of its impact on unity.” (p. 112)

At St. Benedict Parish, they seek to embrace the new and the old by using distinct flavors of the liturgy at each of the weekend Masses. No one style is imposed on the whole parish. They leave it to parishioners to choose which music they prefer and offer different music at each Mass. The various Mass music options include a mid-sized choir and pianist/organist singing from typical hymnbook; a contemporary band that is professionally

mixed that plays old and new hymns in a contemporary style; a 30-voice choir that sings classic congregational hymns and choral pieces accompanied by the organ, and at times, includes Gregorian chant and Latin Mass elements; and a 15 member contemporary choir that sings from a contemporary hymnbook.

In short, there are four unique liturgical flavors at St. Benedict Parish to choose from, bringing out the old and the new.

In liturgical music, Father Mallon adds, we should be asking, “To whom are we speaking?” and “What are we saying?”

“We can be speaking to God (hymns of praise or petition), about God (confessional hymns), with God (singing the words of God from Scripture) or to one another (exhortation).” (p. 114)

The oldest hymnbook in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Book of Psalms, has all these genres of hymns. But Father Mallon believes that hymns of praise should have pride of place in parish life because they are the most transformative.

“They do not just suggest that we pray, call us to pray or tell us how wonderful it is to pray: they are prayer itself.” In spite of this, Father Mallon feels that, “if you scan the most commonly used hymnbooks and drop into the occasional parish celebrations of the Eucharist, hymns of praise are not as common as they should be.” (p. 115)

Why should hymns of praise be more common? It is in praise to God that we are moved from the idea of God to the experience of God. (p. 114)

Praise of God should be personal, since the Eucharist is not an idea or a thing: it is Jesus himself really present in the Blessed Sacrament.

Lastly, in this Section 3, we must delve into

the question of the quality of the music. We require competency and skill of the musicians, but we should also require a level of technical support so that their music will sound right. Father Mallon believes that installing, maintaining, and operating a quality sound system that will highlight the spoken word and allows a full range of music is an important investment for a parish. In short, hymns, homilies, and hospitality are keys to leveraging the weekend experience, and a proper sound system touches each of these dimensions.

“Using screens in churches is indirectly related to the issue of music and helping people feel part of things.” (p. 118) When building St. Benedict’s, the architect created a design that allowed for screens to be used during the liturgy in a dignified way that is not distracting. The screens enable the parish to use diverse music during the liturgy, which is much less expensive than hymnbooks in every pew. They have found that the screens also increase participation in the singing. Father Mallon says even teenagers, who would never pick up a hymnbook, become drawn to the screen.

We must continue this work of inviting the people of the parish to know the joy of praising God in song and to not be passive spectators. We must continue this work of inviting and teaching, regardless of the style of music we use.

4. Homilies

Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!
(Corinthians 9:16)

Saint Paul says that, “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17) It is the call to faith through the proclamation of God’s word that leads those who hear and accept it to the “obedience of faith.” (Romans 1:5) (p. 123)

Since preaching is a huge part of the ministry

of the priest, we need to learn to do this well and give it the best we can.

Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* wrote that: “A preacher may be able to hold the attention of his listeners for a whole hour, but in this case his words become more important than the celebration of the faith.” (EG, no. 138)

Father Mallon preaches on Sunday for twenty minutes, and he makes no apology for the homily’s length. The ministry of preaching is key and “it’s the biggest bang for our buck in ministry.”

Pope Francis has over and over again reminded us of the centrality of the kerygma, or first proclamation. Saint Paul said, “We proclaim Christ crucified.” (1 Corinthians 1:23) (p. 125)

Every homily, no matter the setting – Sunday, weekday, wedding, or funeral – ought to preach Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, and the new life found in him through a life of faith, hope, and love. In this way, those who hear can be led to that necessary personal encounter with Jesus, which is the starting point of being his disciple.

Preaching is directed to the whole person but, as is the case with any relationship, it first needs to address the heart and not the mind. And to speak to the heart means seeking to move people emotionally.

If we are truly to speak to the whole person, we cannot stop at the mind and the heart, but must seek to cut into the heart as well, so that our preaching leads to action. To preach to the conscience and the will, preachers must know exactly what they want their hearers to know and what they want them to do. (p. 127)

Father Mallon uses Twitter to focus his preaching. He uses two tweets: one that sums up the core message of his homily (what should we know) and one that describes what should we do. (p. 127)

If the core message of a homily cannot be summarized in one sentence, remarks Father Mallon, it probably should not be given.

Pope Francis reminded us in *Evangelii Gaudium* that it is not enough to know “what ought to be said”; the preacher must also be intentional about “how it should be said.” (EG, no. 156) (p. 128)

The preacher must pay strict attention to his own emotional state when preparing to preach, lest he speak out of frustration or anger. Difficult or challenging truths must be spoken only out of love – a concrete love for the people themselves, not a love for an abstracted truth. (p. 128)

Before any preacher can afflict the comfortable or comfort the afflicted, he himself must be afflicted and comforted by the same Word. The Word of God is a “two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12): it cuts both ways. Those who would dare wield this sword to cut others must first be cut themselves.

This vulnerability to the two-edged sword of the Word of God should be present not only during the preacher’s preparation, but must be evident in the preaching itself. Pope Paul VI said that our contemporaries no longer listen to teachers but to witnesses. People desire authenticity. We first ask of a preacher: Is He real?

Father Mallon here offers some tips to help preachers give their message meaning and impact:

- **Get maximum input for your homily preparation.**
Prepare with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. Know what is on peoples’ minds. Listen to them.
- **Remember to preach on what has been proclaimed.**
Preach the Scriptures that have been proclaimed for that week.

- **Start with a hook and land the plane.**

This is about the opening and closing of a homily. If a preacher does this well, much will be forgiven. Father Mallon, when preparing a homily, often prepares the opening and the closing last.

- **Go text free.**

Most of Father Mallon's preaching is text free. He uses simple speaking points to help him stay on track. This requires a great deal of preparation but a homily delivered without constantly gazing at a text is more engaging than a brilliant oration that is read out loud.

- **Humble yourself.**

Father Mallon often uses this prayer before preaching: "Lord, help me not be a total idiot. Use me. Come, Holy Spirit. Let me get out of your way. Let my only motive be your glory and the building up of your kingdom."

- **Don't believe your fans.**

"Nice homily, Father!" is often said but is not to be relied upon. Solicit honest feedback. Listen to recordings and view videos of you preaching.

- **Screen your homilies.**

We are audio-visual learners. Fr. Mallon uses eight to ten slides – sometimes even a short video clip – to accompany his homily.

- **Avoid the stand-alone.**

We need to be much more intentional about interconnecting homilies in a parish. Our preaching should be consciously building upon previous homilies. And the pastor especially needs to preach programmatic homilies on a regular basis that speak about the vision, the plan and the strategy of the parish.

- **Have fun.**

If something is onerous or pleasant for you, it will also be that for those who listen to you. (pp. 131-135)

5. Meaningful Communities

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul. (Acts 4:32)

Father Mallon asks what do we mean by the term "Christian community" when used to describe our parishes. Does the gathering of a group of often isolated and anonymous individuals under the same roof for an hour constitute a community? Father Mallon thinks not.

Authentic community is a place where we are known and loved. It is a place where we find others to whom we are accountable and who are accountable to us. This is the heart of Christian community, of *koinonia*, the Greek word for "fellowship." (p.137)

When Father Mallon first arrived at St. Benedict Parish he knew that the question of authentic community was going to be a huge challenge. He never had oversight before of such a large parish as St. Benedict's which has an average weekly attendance of 2,000 over four Masses. And the values he saw manifested there indicated that a primary value there was a desire to practice the faith in private, coupled with the desire to get out of church at the end of Mass as quickly as possible.

Culturally, the times have changed. Today the question of belonging and loneliness is more crucial than in the past. Fifty years ago, there was a strong sense of communal morality and social mores. Just as people then knew how they were expected to behave, they also knew what they were expected to believe.

Now we live in a hyper-individualistic, post-modern culture. The generation after the Baby Boomers and the Millennials will behave in a certain way only if it lines up with their personal beliefs; appeals to authority or tradition hold no water for them.

When it comes to believing, a similar dynamic can be observed. Belief systems are of

little value for people today, Father Mallon observes. As a result, most people today neither join, stay, nor leave a Church because of belief or doctrine. People join, stay or leave because of a sense of belonging, because of community. The old order of behaving-believing- belonging has been reversed. It is now belonging- believing-behaving. Beliefs are changed not by preaching and teaching, but by building trust through relationships, through caring and through belonging.

The implications of this new reality for the Church are huge. First, the state of community in the average parish is a big liability when it is trying to attract a younger generation. Second, the typical parish's pastoral approach is shaped by the older and no longer useful behave-believe-belong paradigm.

How do we transform the culture of our parishes to begin to live out a belong-believe-behave model?

Are we ready and willing to provide opportunities for a real and authentic experience of belonging for those who do not believe what we believe, or do not behave as we believe they should? And how will we do this if the only time we gather as a community is at the Eucharist, which by its very nature demands a certain measure of believing and behaving before full belonging can happen?

It is the age-old question of whether we are willing to go out to the highways and byways and welcome the "good" and the "bad." It about going to the margins and the marginalized.

How do we stand by our moral code – our sense of right and wrong – while standing by the person who is gradually moving, changing, transforming? This will be a gradual process that cannot be defined or confined. We must be ready to walk with each person as they move from an experience of community, to reframing their belief systems, to allowing the Lord to change their lives (belonging-

believing-behaving).

Evangelii Gaudium tells us that, "The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel." (EG, no. 114) (p. 140)

Father Mallon next looks at some practices and tools from his experience at St. Benedict to address this question of meaningful community.

Alpha

Father Mallon is a supporter of Alpha. It is a ten-session process that introduces the Christian faith. The secret to its success is that it embraces the belong-believe-behave approach to evangelization. It is suited for the post-modern mindset by creating a welcoming, non-judgmental environment – without judgment about lifestyles. (p. 141-142)

At the end of the ten-week process, trust will have been built through shared meals and small group encounters. As the sense of belonging grows, the participants begin to let down their guard and receive the message of the talks. This process has led many to a personal encounter with Jesus and to a decision to follow Him. And what happens after this transformation of belief is a total re-evaluation of lifestyle and behavior, as the journey of discipleship begins.

To find out more about this, visit www.alpha.org/Catholics.

Sunday morning.

Alpha is the door through which many people begin to walk the path of discipleship. At St. Benedict, they then offer a wide assortment of catechetical programs to those who have completed Alpha so they can continue their own formation and journey towards maturity. (p. 144)

Father Mallon addresses three specific

changes made at St. Benedict that were, in effect, attempts to move a little bit of Alpha into the Sunday Eucharist:

- **Name Tag Sunday**

It is just that: name tags for two thousand people! This is done once a month. Some parishioners bring their own name tags and the parish sets up tables in the foyer where people can write their own names on paper name tags. Since most people go to the same Mass every week and most sit in the very same pews, it is reasonable that even at Sunday Eucharist you can begin to break through the wall of anonymity and take the first step towards building meaningful community.

- **Prayer Partners at Mass**

Over the years, Father Mallon has changed how he has used the short time at Sunday Mass to build community. He has gone beyond the typical ways of getting people to acknowledge those around them. He now invites people at every Mass to find a prayer partner, someone whom they will pray for, and who will pray for them. Father Mallon invites people to partner with someone they do not know. Each week, at the end of the Prayer of the Faithful, every person in the congregation pauses in silence to pray by name for the person he or she met at the beginning of Mass.

- **Prayer Ministry after Mass**

Father Mallon is frequently asked to say a prayer for someone. He tries to respond immediately with a prayer, shared with the requester. This has led to profound encounters. The difficulty is that this often occurs when he is in the midst of 600 people who are leaving Mass. His solution is to use trained teams of lay people to offer this kind of ministry at the end of Mass. This is based on the Alpha model where team members pray over guests. Now, St. Benedict has two to four trained teams available after each Mass, and each week

it has teams available in a chapel to pray for those who may need prayer. Each week about 60 to 70 people are receiving prayer ministry. (p. 145-146)

Gallup

The value of belonging is a key to the transformation of culture necessary in our parishes. Why? Because it opens the door to faith. The move toward meaningful community has the end game of making missionary disciples. (p. 149)

Several years ago, St. Benedict's diocesan's stewardship team introduced tools developed by the Gallup organization for measuring the health of churches. The core philosophy of these tools is outlined in the book *Growing an Engaged Church* by Al Wiseman. (p. 149)

Gallup's research indicated that the Church – in its call for more programs for spiritual growth, and volunteers to sign up for ministries and for financial giving – was looking and working in the wrong places. Rather, they found that the most important indicator was engagement. Engagement reflects a psychological connection to the local church and its mission, and a sense of ownership of what is happening and of where the Church is headed.

Engaged parishioners are far more likely to commit to spiritual growth, serve others, and give sacrificially. This is the belong-believe-behave paradigm in action. In Gallup's vocabulary, engagement (belonging) drives spiritual commitment (believing), which, in turn, drives the outcomes (behaving) of growing, serving, and giving. (p. 150)

In January 2011, over 1,330 St. Benedict parishioners participated in a Gallup survey to measure parishioner engagement. The results showed St. Benedict to be slightly above average for Catholic parishes, but its ratio of engaged to unengaged parishioners marked it as being still very deficient, as measured

by the Gallup's definition of organizational health.

The survey, however, did help St. Benedict in determining an engagement-based strategy and, over the subsequent two years, the same Gallup survey showed a definite improvement in level of parishioner engagement. Commenting on this, Father Mallon says, "The number of adults in programs of evangelization and faith formation has tripled. The number of parishioners in ministry has doubled, and our weekly collection has gone from an average of \$10,000 per weekend to between \$20,000 and \$21,000 each weekend. This has occurred while the overall number of parishioners in the pews has remained the same."

6. Clear Expectations

Whosoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete? (Luke 14:27-28)

Father Mallon asks if you ever noticed that most ex-Catholics who have joined another community generally join a church that expects more of them than the one they left behind. As counter-intuitive as it is, this seems to be the case. (p. 153)

Well-meaning Catholics ask: "Won't communicating expectations to people be a turn off? Won't the value of clear expectations as a parish conflict with the opposing value of hospitality or welcoming?"

The key is to see them not as opposing values but as two important values in creative tension. Father Mallon sees the values of high expectations coupled with high hospitality as being respectful of people. By holding both values, we are saying, "We believe that God will work in you and work through you; we expect it, and you should, too."

In fact, nobody has been better able to model this interrelationship between welcoming and high expectations better than Jesus. The lame, the lepers, the sinners, the tax collectors, the rich, the poor—all received the invitation to come to him. At the same time, Jesus was clear about what was expected of those who would follow him. "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:27)

Jesus' expectations were not limited to the commitment of becoming his disciple. He said that, "from everyone to whom much has been given, even more will be demanded." (Luke 12:48) In the Parable of the Talents in Matthew's Gospel (25:14-30), we hear again what God expects of us. In fact, the point seems to be that God does not expect a moderate return on his investment in us, but expects a kind of spiritual venture capitalism, even if it means taking a risk. (p. 155)

How do we communicate such values of welcoming and expectations in parish life? At St. Benedict Parish, they speak of five expectations of parishioners and clergy alike: to worship, to grow, to serve, to connect, and to give.

A brochure with St. Benedict's expectations is given to all who show an interest in becoming a member of the parish. It introduces the concept of expectation.

(Refer to italicized text on page 156)

The brochure then outlines what parishioners can expect from the parish before it speaks about what the parish expects of parishioners.

(Refer to italicized text on page 157)

Lastly, the St. Benedict brochure addresses the five expectations of parishioners under the heading "What is expected of you as a parishioner of St. Benedict Parish?"

(Refer to italicized text on pages 157-159)

Stewardship

The spirituality of stewardship has been of great assistance at St. Benedict in establishing clear expectations as a parish value.

While the traditional categories of the stewardship of time, talent, and treasure addressed the basic demands of being a follower of Jesus, Father Mallon struggled with the seeming absence of a commitment to invest in discipleship, specifically as personal growth and development. Frequently the traditional understanding of these stewardships resulted either in the “burn out” of the most involved parishioners or in mere “time serving” by other, less- involved parishioners.

As a new pastor at St. Benedict, Father Mallon experienced a eureka moment when he heard a conference speaker tweak the understanding of the three stewardships of time, talent, and treasure. For Father Mallon, the stewardship of time was now to be understood as a commitment to spiritual growth and discipleship, the stewardship of talent as being entirely about the serving of others, and the stewardship of treasure as financial giving. (p. 160)

What followed was a commitment at St. Benedict to implement a series of three distinct stewardship initiatives each year. The first, which focused on time (discipleship), takes place in September, at the beginning of the new ministry year. By doing this, the parish was inviting parishioners to make a commitment to a plan for spiritual growth for in the coming year. It was intentional that the parish placed time before Talent. This emphasized the primacy of the spiritual over the material. The second initiative, stewardship of talent, takes place in early January (in Canada, on the Feast of Epiphany) and focuses on the gifts received from God and the call to share them with others in ministry. The third, the treasure initiative,

focusing on financial giving, takes place around May, depending on the liturgical calendar. (p. 161)

Each of these initiatives, described in further detail in Section 6, “Clear Expectations”, involves much detailed preparation and work in implementation, and typically follows an annual five-week “roll out” period that commences with a letter from the pastor and includes four follow-up homilies. But the effort has been worth it, as St. Benedict is beginning to see the culture of the parish change. The object is that all parishioners see that it is completely normal for everyone to commit to spiritual growth, to serve according to their gifts, and to give a sacrificial and proportional share of their household income to the Church. In the fourth year of these initiatives, St. Benedict now sees a 40% participation rate, as measured by Gallup.

7. Strength-Based Ministry

Whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:11)

At his very first parish council meeting, when first appointed a pastor, Father Mallon realized that so many of the people at the table were just “putting in time.” The problem was that they had ended up in ministries that were suited neither to their strengths nor to their passions.

Father Mallon knows from his own experience that while he considered sitting in certain types of meetings as time off from purgatory, other tasks energized and enthralled him.

Gallup tells us that there are twelve main factors that contribute to organizational health and that, of these twelve factors, having the opportunity to do what one does best is the leading contributor to engagement. Remember, engagement is what drives spiritual commitment, which in turn

drives changed beliefs and changed behavior. (p. 166)

To help organizations identify and encourage the strengths in their members, Gallup employs a tool known as the Clifton Strengths Finder. This inventory, used in organizations worldwide, now has a Christian version, and even a specifically Catholic version. The basic theory behind this inventory is that every person is uniquely made and gifted by God.

The Strengths Finder philosophy says that you should find your God-given talents and invest in them. When we invest in talents by practicing and growing in knowledge and understanding of them, our talents will become strengths – things we consistently and naturally do well. And by developing our unique talents into strengths, we allow God to use them for his glory and the building up of the Kingdom.

Many parishes in North America, including St. Benedict, have found this Clifton Strengths Finder tool to be of great help in fostering strengths-based ministry as a real value. Online Catholic Strengths communities exist, allowing parishes that use this tool to interact and learn from one another. St. Benedict features parishioners who have taken the Strengths Finder in the weekly newsletter, outlining their top five themes of talents and how they use these themes in their ministry. (Clifton Strengths Finder has identified 300 unique talents, grouped these into 34 “themes of talents” and created a survey to help users identify their top five “signature” themes.) (p. 167)

St. Benedict has used this tool to help staff team and ministry teams work better together, as all 34 themes of talent fall within four broad domains: influencing, executing, relationship building, and strategic thinking. The proper mix of talents in any team is necessary for it to function well.

8. Formation of Small Communities

When day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles. (Luke 6:13)

Churches that are healthy, growing and making disciples embrace a model of the local church as a “community of communities.” These small communities then come together for Sunday Eucharist.

As previously pointed out, post-moderns experience conversion and transformation primarily through the experience of belonging. This presents a special challenge to Catholics, since we have difficulty in creating experiences of belonging. But this challenge has to be met since those brought to a personal, life-changing encounter with Jesus become aware of a need for community, someplace where they will be known, loved, challenged, and supported. This community must be a safe place within which the good work that has begun in them can be brought to completion. (Philippians 1:6) (p. 169)

The Gallup survey has six key statements which measure engagement within a church community.

- In the last month, I have received recognition or praise from someone in my parish.
- The spiritual leaders in my parish seem to care about me as a person.
- There is someone in my parish who encourages my spiritual development.
- The other members of my parish are committed to my spiritual growth.
- Aside from family members, I have a best friend in my parish.
- In the last six months, someone in my parish has talked to me about the progress of my spiritual growth. (p. 169)

How can this level of engagement be achieved

within a Catholic parish?

The clerical culture that dominates most parishes presents a challenge in as much as many Catholics place value only on ministry done by the priest. This means that the number of meaningful communities in a parish will be limited.

If we wish to move beyond this, then we need not only alternate structures, but alternate values. Caring needs to become the job of all, not just of the pastor. And priests must have the courage to communicate this to their parishioners.

It is the conviction of Father Mallon that the formation of small and mid-sized groups can provide the answer. As a result, St. Benedict is trying to implement a system of mid-sized groups called connect groups.

The model used comes from Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), the Anglican Church in London that created Alpha. Originally, HTB established a network of small groups to meet the need of people who had experienced Alpha and who wanted a continuation of their experience to share their testimony. (p. 173)

The leadership of HTB meets regularly with the lay leaders of the groups and it invests primarily in them. Today, the weekly attendance at HTB is 5,000 (the average age is 27), and the parish has hundreds of connect groups. They are the also the locus of missional outreach – either evangelistic outreach or work with the poor and marginalized. On weeks that the connect groups do not meet, members meet in small groups with a specifically catechetical focus.

At St. Benedict, they introduced connect groups after their second season of Alpha. After the experience of Alpha and its taste of Christian community, many people wanted more. After four years, St. Benedict had over 300 parishioners in ten different connect groups. Some of them are based on age, some

are mixed generations, and some are “family friendly” with children and parents gathering together. And it all happens in the homes of parishioners. (p. 174)

At the same time, however, there is a line of accountability to Father Mallon as the pastor. There has to be. Several of the parish staff meet regularly with the connect group leaders (each group is led by two couples) to coach them and care for them.

Father Mallon observes that the key to the success of these groups is to choose the right people to lead, to trust them with real responsibility, to set them up for success, and to be in frequent communication with them.

9. Experience of the Holy Spirit

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Father Mallon invites us to ask ourselves these questions: In the realm of faith, are we authentic? Does what is on the outside match what is inside? Father Mallon recounts a funny story about the zoo in Edinburgh, Scotland being short of actual gorillas, and so (as the joke goes) the zoo hired a man, clothed him in a gorilla suit, and had him sit in the gorilla cage. This false gorilla eventually found out that the lion in the accompanying cage is also a man in a lion’s costume, hired to hide the fact that the zoo was similarly short on actual lions.

The point? Faith that is visible on the outside might have no corresponding reality within.

In his first days of formal theological studies, a professor told Father Mallon that all of Christian theology could be contained in three great mysteries: the mystery of God, the mystery of God with us, and the mystery of God in us. The first is the study of who God is: that God is revealed as Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit, namely the mystery of the Trinity. The second mystery is the Incarnation: God with us, that “the Word became flesh and lived among us.” (John 1:14) The third mystery has to do with the theology of grace and living the Christian life. This is the mystery of God in us, communicated through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us. (p. 178)

At the Last Supper, Jesus said something that seems counter-intuitive: that it would be better for them if he left than if he remained. (John 16:7) (p. 178) He said this because if he went, then the advocate, the Comforter or Paraclete, would come. This Comforter (parakletos) is the Holy Spirit, who will abide with us and will be “in” us, bringing about the mystery of God in us. (John 14: 17)

As great as the mystery of “God with us” is, how much more profound is our live with the mystery of “God in us” through the Holy Spirit? Jesus confirmed this when he said, “The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12) (p. 179)

Notwithstanding the activity of the Spirit before and throughout the ministry of Jesus, there is still a sense that the promise of God has not been fulfilled and an expectation that it will come soon. On the day of Pentecost, the clouds burst and those cowering men were transformed by a new Power that we also are promised in our lives: a power that will lead to the Gospel being proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

What follows throughout the Acts of the Apostles is the constant proclamation of Christ, his death and resurrection, accompanied with the power that we also are promised in our lives: of the Holy Spirit.

It is this experience of power that Saint Paul speaks of:

My speech and my proclamation (kerygma)

were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (Corinthians 2:4-5) (p. 181)

This experience of the Holy Spirit was fundamental to the growth of the early Church, and is essential for the Christian life today, especially in the call to the New Evangelization.

Yet, despite this centrality of the experience of the Holy Spirit to any renewal movement in the history of the Church, we remain more comfortable with the idea of the Holy Spirit than with the experience of the Spirit who comes in power.

Theologically we are Trinitarian, but often fail to act this way in practice. The third person of the Trinity is often reduced to a concept rather than experiencing him alive in a relationship.

When Saint Peter went to speak at the house of Cornelius the Centurion in Acts chapter 10, we witness another stage in the fulfillment of the promise of God. (p. 184)

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they had heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. (Acts 10:44-46) (p. 184)

Three things happened in this episode. The listeners had an experience of the Holy Spirit, which was visible to those who accompanied Peter; they prayed using the gift of tongues; and they were praising God. This experience of having God’s love poured into our hearts is moving, it is emotional, and it provokes an enthusiastic response. (Romans 5:5) (p. 184)

This experience of the power of God through the Holy Spirit is foreign to many believing

Christians. It is due in large part to a Western European cultural intrusion upon historical, biblical Christian spirituality. There is a fear of emotive spirituality attributable to post-Enlightenment culture – in particular, idealism. To dwell in the realm of ideas is far safer and less threatening than to encounter the reality of the idea. This Western cultural trait seeks pastoral justification in asserting that we must be on guard against emotionalism of any kind. We draw back in horror, fear or suspicion at anything that appears to be enthusiasm, and quickly label it as “charismatic.”

Enthusiasm is the literal response to the presence of God “in us,” as to be enthusiastic is to be *en theo*, “in God.” With the spirit of God in us, the love of God poured into our hearts and God’s Spirit speaking to our spirit (Romans 8:16), we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:6)

A healthy church is one that does not discredit or exclude experiences of the Holy Spirit that touch the emotional side of life. It is a solid rule for anyone in pastoral ministry to evaluate any religious experience, no matter the degree of emotion connected to it, by determining whether the experience has led the person to demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit that are listed in Galatians 5:22: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

How, then, can we introduce experiences of the Holy Spirit into the everyday life of a parish so that it becomes a value that will contribute to the transformation of parish culture?

Father Mallon offers a few suggestions:

- We must teach that an emotional response to God is a healthy part of being in relationship with God. We must teach that there is no Christian life outside of the Pentecostal experience. We must teach that God gives gifts, including charismatic

gifts.

- Alpha provides an opportunity to teach about the Holy Spirit and create an environment in which each participant can have that essential experience of the Holy Spirit. At St. Benedict, speaking about the Holy Spirit, and praying to and for the Holy Spirit, has become more natural. (p. 187-188)

10. Become an Inviting Church

Come and see. (John 1:39)

In the way of a summary of this lengthy Chapter 5, Laying the Foundation, Father Mallon concludes that if the first nine values mentioned come to be valued by a local church, then the last – establishing an invitational culture – will come naturally. Thus, if real effort is put into focusing on the weekend as a priority so that the liturgy is uplifting and moving. If there is great music, great preaching, a welcoming environment, then parishioners will naturally desire to invite friends, family, and neighbors to come and see.

If our churches become places where there is meaningful community, clear expectations, a focus on gifts, and an intentional system of small and mid- sized groups, an environment in which the Holy Spirit is experienced, then those that come and see will be far more likely to stay and tell.

Nevertheless, a healthy and growing church must be specifically intentional about creating an invitation culture within the life of the church.

The first principle to keep in mind, when creating an invitational culture, is to remind people that it is God who gives the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:7) In church circles, it usually takes five invitations to produce one “yes”. In spite of the inevitable, multiple “no’s,” we will never know how God will work in someone’s

heart even after the invitation has been turned down. We need to be clear about this.

The second principle is the need to name the primary factor that prevents 80% of the members of the average parish from inviting others: fear. This is the fear of rejection, fear of being considered odd, fear of creating discomfort in a relationship, and so on.

The third principle is that nothing inspires people to action like a compelling vision of what can be. Father Mallon cites the statistical rate of growth possible if only half of the parishioners who attend mass on a given Sunday were to invite one person to church. Despite the high rate of expected “no’s,” these invitations could still result in an astonishing growth.

Father Mallon cautions that every call to action needs a workable model if it is to be successful. For example, he does not encourage parishioners to extend invitations to strangers on street corners. We should begin within the relationships we already have. And we need to be mindful of the “fit” when we invite non-churchgoers to a parish event. Sunday Mass may not be the best place to begin.

Father Mallon finds that of all of the potential opportunities to invite others, Alpha events are the most accessible and the easiest to invite others to. Although St. Benedict has not yet been intentional about an invitation culture around its weekend liturgies, it is intentional when it comes to running Alpha.

CHAPTER 6

THE FRONT DOOR

The Sacraments as Our Greatest Pastoral Opportunity

Couples, parents, or families who have little connection to the Church regularly come knocking on our church doors seeking Baptism or Marriage. That presents our biggest pastoral struggle, but also our biggest pastoral opportunity. (p. 197)

Father Mallon believes it essential that these callers be welcomed with open arms, but also with a “yes” that is consistent with the “high welcome-high expectation” model outlined in Chapter 5, Section 6, “Clear Expectations”. As such, this “yes” may have to be coupled with a “not yet,” since the journey to a sacrament, such as Marriage, must be one of authentic conversion. (p. 198)

The context for the sacramental aspect of the Christian life is found at the heart of the mission that Christ gave to his nascent Church. In Matthew 28:19- 20, the wavering disciples are told to, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

This is the Great Commission. As we saw in Chapter 2, “Rebuild My House”, our task (“Commission”) is the making of disciples. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that liturgy and sacraments “must be preceded by evangelization, faith and Conversion.” (CCC, no. 1072) (p. 198)

As we considered in Chapter 4, “Clearing out the Junk,” one of the causes for the lack of spiritual fruit is that we have failed to make disciples of the majority of those who seek the Sacraments, especially the Sacraments of

Initiation.

Ex Opere Operato

Ex opere operato was originally short for “ex opere operato Christi” and directed people to have a greater faith in Christ. Over time, the “Christi” part receded in the conversation and the ex opere operato thinking focused on the power of the Sacrament itself. Father Mallon is considering the concept in light of its later usage, but the original meaning of the term had a Christological grounding.

This Latin term (meaning, “from the work being worked”) has to do with the objective validity of sacraments, and is widely perceived to speak to the validity of the sacraments, as considered independent of their fruitfulness. A valid sacrament is one in which what Christ promised has actually been done. If a marriage is valid, two become one. If a Mass is valid, bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus. If an absolution is valid, a sinner is absolved. When speaking of the fruitfulness of the sacraments, however, the Church speaks about how the footprints of “God in us” will be evident, and how the recipient will become more loving, gentle, kind, and patient – thus, more like Jesus.

This concept behind the term ex opere operato originated in an early period of the Church, during what is known as the Donatist Controversy. During the Roman Empire’s persecution of the Church, some priests and bishops publicly failed to live up to their baptismal promises. After the end of the

persecution, some of these clergy returned to pastoral ministry. Then a group of people, known as the “Donatists”, contested the validity of sacraments celebrated by those ‘lapsed’ priests and bishops.

At the First Council of Arles (in 314), the Church decided against the Donatists and upheld the validity of the sacraments celebrated by these clergy. Based on this principle, the Church subsequently developed a theology that affirmed that sacramental efficacy is not rooted in the personal holiness of the minister. Rather, it is rooted in the power of Christ’s work, who is the Priest, as well as the faithfulness of the Church as a whole and the promise of God who can act even through unworthy ministers.

In short, the Church taught that the efficacy of the sacraments arises *ex opere operato* (“from the work [of Christ] itself”) and not *ex opere operantis* (“from the work of the one working” or the minister of the sacrament).

While the Church ascribed the validity of the sacraments to *ex opere operato*, the Church often considered the fruitfulness of the sacraments in the realm of *ex opere operantis*, and later expanded that category to include the disposition of the one receiving the sacraments.

Fruitfulness was considered, therefore, as dependent on the holiness of the minister, and on the openness of the one receiving the sacrament.

While *ex opere operato* was originally a justification of pastoral practice in the face of something seriously missing in the minister of the sacrament, today this concept is used to justify pastoral practice in the face of something seriously lacking in the recipient of the sacrament.

Today, therefore, these concepts serve to underline the theological significance of a “valid sacrament” even when the ability of a

person to receive it fruitfully is in question. As a result, the concept of sacramental validity has become abstracted from actual human experience, and the ontological dimension tends to hold sway over the existential dimension of how the sacrament impacts one’s life.

The Catechism reminds us of the importance of both of these two dimensions when it says that “from the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it... Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them.” (CCC #1128)

The Concept of Sacramental Grace

By the time the Church clearly and definitively affirmed that there were seven sacraments, Scholastic theology had come to distinguish three ways in which these sacraments should be considered.

1. The *sacramentum tantum*: the outward sign (water, oil, bread and wine, etc.);
2. The *res et sacramentum*: the invisible and immediate saving grace;
3. The *res tantum*: ultimate saving grace (the life of grace).

The second of these aspects, the *res et sacramentum*, has a Christological dimension and an ecclesial dimension: namely, the configuring to Christ that is proper to each sacrament and the corresponding grace regarding the Church. The ecclesial dimension is the visible dimension, which is membership in the Church. Father Mallon believes that as a result of the focus on the ontological effect of the sacraments and the debate with Luther on the theology of grace, the ecclesial dimension of the *res et sacramentum* was

short-changed.

Today, the results of this theology can also be seen in the fact that so often we are content with the liturgy of the sacraments (i.e., the sacramentum tantum), and the fact that the concern for “validity” does not take sufficient consideration of the visible ecclesial dimension being lived out.

Father Mallon believes that the practice of infant baptism has accelerated the negative impact of this sacramental theology that developed after the Council of Trent (often referred to as “Post- Tridentine” theology). (p. 204-205)

Scripturally, baptism is predominately understood to be a response to adult faith. Over the centuries, however, as the practice changed, a theology of baptism emerged that had seemed to have less and less connection to conversion or personal faith, and rested more and more on the ontological dimensions already discussed. As a result, the theology of baptism in particular – and eventually that of all the sacraments – became gradually disconnected from conversion, from profession of faith and from fruitfulness.

The cultural changes of the last 50 years have revealed fault lines in this sacramental system. The culture no longer compels people towards a connection with the Church, yet our pastoral models remain essentially the same. But the cultural context has been lost. We are left with an experience of the sacraments that has practically no relation to discipleship. We are settling for external appearances that have little or no connection to the internal reality.

Father Mallon cites, in this regard, not only Baptism but also Confirmation, the sacrament that often completes one’s Christian initiation in the West (although this is not the case in the Eastern Catholic Church). He recounts an experience he had in his second year as a pastor. The bishop was present and all

the young people were there with families, friends, and sponsors. The bishop told the sponsors to stand. “Have these candidates faithfully joined the Christian community for worship?” The sponsors responded, “Yes, they have!”

Father Mallon knew that for many of the confirmandi this was not true and he wanted to shout out that truth. The liturgy itself became an occasion for people to stand up publicly and tell lies before God and the Church. (p. 207)

The same can be said of many baptisms. The Pastor asks the parents of children being baptized, “Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?” they say “yes”, and then most never return. (p. 207)

We are getting accustomed to settling for externals. Yet, we are one body. If the body is to be healthy, we must demand authentic discipleship of ourselves and of those who seek the sacraments of faith, for our own sake and for theirs.

New Models of Pastoral Care

Father Mallon loves the story in Chapter 2 of Mark’s Gospel about the paralyzed man brought to Jesus. The crippled man’s friends had to create a hole in the roof in order to get him before Jesus. But they did because of their deep conviction that Jesus would make a difference in the life of their friend. (p. 208)

This story forces us to face how we respond to those who seek sacraments in our parishes. What obstacles are we willing to climb, and even tear through, to allow every person to encounter Jesus in a life-changing way?

Upon his appointment as pastor of the newly-formed parish of St. Benedict, Fr. Mallon asked for permission to allow St. Benedict to become a kind of pastoral laboratory. For

years, he had been adapting his approach to preparation for Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, and Marriage. Yet, he realized that despite his efforts, most of those who received these Sacraments of Initiation into the life of the Church, or Marriage, he would never see again.

Now with a new parish and a new church building, he saw a window of opportunity to implement many new efforts with the broad goal of changing the very culture of the parish.

Working with Children

Nova Scotia, the part of Canada in which St. Benedict is located, does not have a Catholic school system, so catechesis has traditionally taken place in the parish, usually following a classroom model. (p. 210)

Father Mallon found in his first year at St. Benedict that the usual pattern prevailed. With regard to the children's catechetical program and children's sacramental preparation program, 70% of the families who registered for catechesis did not participate in Sunday Eucharist, only 40% of registered children showed up for class on a given Sunday, there was a large increase in registrations for a sacramental year (e.g., Second Grade), and a similar drop-off occurred when completed. Of previously non-attending families whose children received sacraments, 95% never returned to St. Benedict after the program. (p. 210)

Father Mallon concluded that the problem was not to be solved by the right content (e.g., the right books or the right program), but that this was inherently a problem with the classroom-based, child-centered model used in in most parishes. (p. 211)

Why? Because child-centered catechesis presumes an experience of Catholic culture and active participation in the Church. But this Catholic culture no longer exists in

our society, and most families requesting sacraments are not active members of their parish.

We must work with the parents. This cannot be an add-on to the classroom model, but must involve the faith formation of adults in the parish as a whole. Father Mallon points out that this is the kind of culture shift we have been speaking of in previous chapters.

Discipleship is far broader than catechesis, and presumes that those being disciplined have been authentically evangelized. Even when we work with families who have been evangelized, a discipleship process must foster real personal growth – not only in knowledge, but in maturity of faith, experience of prayer, and discernment of gifts – and it must “equip the saints for the work of ministry.” (Ephesians 4:11) (p. 213)

While catechesis is program based and has fixed start and end points, discipleship, on the other hand, is a way of life.

All of these considerations led Father Mallon and his staff to make the following changes to the catechetical and sacramental preparation programs for children at St. Benedict Parish:

1. Their primary investment of time and resources would be in sacramental preparation. (p. 213)

80% of parish energy now goes into working with small groups of families who present their children for First Reconciliation and First Communion. Each family must apply and demonstrate willingness to take this step.

Catechists are assigned to small groups of families. The program lasts eight weeks and takes place three times a year. Average class size is around ten families.

This has led to a huge increase in families continuing to live their faith in communion with the Church.

The other 20% of time and resources goes into a monthly program called GIFT: Growing in Faith

Together. GIFT is an open-ended, all-are-welcome program where no attendance is taken. Each gathering brings the entire family together. This two-tier system allows St. Benedict to merge the values of hospitality and expectation. In summary, there is no real expectation for the GIFT program, some expectation for the First Reconciliation program, and higher expectations for the First Communion program.

2. All catechesis and sacramental preparation would be family based.

At least one parent per family must participate in the GIFT program and in sacramental preparation. The sacramental preparation programs involve the parents in two ways: in the classes and in

their own preparation for the same sacraments. Most of the parents are themselves returning to the sacrament after many years away. For both sacramental preparation programs, the eight weeks are comprised of several morning-long family retreats, home assignments, and attendance at Mass together.

3. Reception of sacraments would no longer be based on age or grade.

Age or grade levels as a standard for readiness to celebrate sacraments worked when preparation was done in Catholic schools, when there was a dominant Catholic culture. Now the focus is on readiness. (p. 213)

At St. Benedict, the First Communion classes have a real mix of ages, from six to twelve years of age. Parents have to discern not only if their children are ready for this step, but if they and their entire

family are ready. Families that request First Communion for their children but who had no habit of attending Sunday Mass receive a gentle “Yes, but no quite yet.” response.

4. Sunday Eucharist would be restored to the center of parish programs. (p. 216)

An irony at St. Benedict Parish was that parents clamored for their children to receive their First Communion while they themselves never received the sacraments. St. Benedict Parish decided to overcome this mentality by making Sunday Eucharist itself the center of its programs. For both the GIFT and the sacramental preparation program, the families now sit together at Mass.

This has resulted in two trends: overall enrollment is down about 50% and, the impact on the families who do choose to participate is significant. As many as two-thirds of families that did not have a strong connection with the Church have continued to be connected with the parish after the sacramental celebrations.

5. Confirmation and youth.

Confirmation is often for Catholic youth in the West the sacrament that completes their initiation into the life of the Church. However, as a result of its celebration around the end of one's primary school, it has now become for many people, in effect, an event marking “graduation” from the life of the Church. That is the challenge.

The Sacrament of Confirmation has been described as a sacrament in search of a theology. And today there is questioning of the current practice of confirming teenager's years after the other Sacraments of Initiation have been received. But the real question is not the proper age or order in which to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, but rather, “How do we engage the parents of children,

and how do we help people become ready to receive the sacraments?”

At St. Benedict's, there is no conventional Confirmation class. There is no fixed age or grade level for receiving the sacrament. The Confirmation “class” is called the Church and it takes place every Sunday at the gathering called the Eucharist.

St. Benedict's goal is to work to build a culture of discipleship in the parish where every parishioner engages in faith formation, and this applies equally to young people and to their parents.

Specifically, the youth ministry program works with young people ages twelve to seventeen in an age-appropriate manner. The parish uses Youth Alpha to expose them to the kerygma and to invite a response. Once the young person seeks the Sacrament of Confirmation, they are encouraged to return to Sunday Eucharist. Once a habit of Sunday worship begins to form, they are accepted as candidates for confirmation. The celebration of the sacrament takes place once a year in the Easter season.

This approach has disappointed many parents who were looking for the no-strings-attached approach to Confirmation. While the annual number of those confirmed is down by 40%, the number of young people who continue to live-out their faith in the Church is now about 80%. (p. 220)

This is a radical shift from just a few years ago when 75% of the confirmed would vanish and never be seen again.

Baptismal Preparation (p. 221)

We have already considered, at the beginning of this chapter, how an undue theological

focus on the ontological dimension over the ecclesiological has affected the Sacrament of Baptism. As we discussed above, far too often the pastoral concern has been whether the sacrament is valid, with little or no corresponding concern about its fruitfulness.

The Church has tacitly accepted that for many people, the Sacrament of Baptism has become primarily a celebration of the biological family, a time of thanksgiving for the arrival of a child and an embrace, to some extent, of the faith as some kind of mysterious “good.”

St. Benedict has been working to implement a working model to deal with this reality. Here is what St. Benedict is striving to do to address it.

First, it has stopped doing “private baptisms.” At St. Benedict's, Baptism is no longer a private rite of passage for the biological family. No longer is it the case that the pastoral concern is for doing the ritual correctly, followed by posing for pictures and then never seeing that family again.

Currently at St. Benedict Parish, they have a baptismal Sunday once a month (except during Lent). If done properly, these baptisms can be celebrated by adding only five or six minutes to the length of the Mass. (Father Mallon does the prayer of exorcism and pre-baptismal anointing before the Mass.)

When it is a baptismal Sunday, there is no creed recited by the community; rather, Father Mallon invites all the baptized, including the parents and godparents, to renew their baptismal vows. Everybody benefits, family and parishioners, by making their profession of faith standing before, and with, the community.

Second, St. Benedict's has rejected a one-size-fits-all baptismal preparation program and firmly distinguishes between families with a connection to the Church and those

who have none. St. Benedict Parish has an immediate baptismal preparation class and a more remote preparation process.

The immediate baptismal program is a four-week program that takes place on Sunday mornings and is based around the Sunday Eucharist. It covers the same content as an average baptismal preparation class and presumes a basic Christian faith and a meaningful connection with the community of faith. Families who are active members of the parish enroll in this program, and they can have their children baptized as soon as they wish.

The remote preparation process is for unconnected families who contact St. Benedict in order to get their babies' baptism "done." These families need to be welcomed and invited into a process whereby they are reacquainted with Sunday Eucharist and even invited to something like a "second baptism," the Sacrament of Reconciliation, before they bring their children to the font.

These less connected families are, however, first invited to an information evening hosted once a month by a team of young couples. The goal is to welcome them and invite them to something bigger, a journey of faith, with the goal of getting them ready for the baptism of their child. The couples are given a baptismal brochure and are invited to take it home, to reflect on it, and then to let the parish know if they are up for the adventure of stepping forward in their faith.

When couples are willing to move forward, St. Benedict welcomes them and works with them, no matter how "messy" their lives may be. A mentoring couple is assigned to support them. These mentoring couples make the recommendation for the families in their care to move on to the next step of remote preparation. This requires some established and demonstrated habit of attending Sunday Eucharist. These families also need to go

through the welcome process for new parishioners and they are encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation before their children are baptized.

Marriage

Much ink has been spilled on the canonical issues around marriage. Why? The couple ministers the sacrament to one another by the exchange of their vows. Thus, proper preparation becomes not only a question of a fruitful sacrament, but also a valid one.

As mentioned earlier, the fact that the unchurched still come to us asking to be married is both our biggest pastoral challenge and our biggest pastoral opportunity. The first step is to welcome their request with open arms.

The traditional Catholic model of marriage preparation presumes faith, Catholic culture, and that the couples are living in communion with the teachings of Church. In contrast, Father Mallon has struggled over the years in trying to meet couples where they truly were. He tried to convince them "by many arguments" of God's plan for them.

His efforts met with limited success. He found that non-church-going couples would come to Mass until the wedding, and then he would never see 90% of them again. This experience taught him that the key issue was a change of heart. These couples were not encountering Jesus, who is the only one who can change hearts.

Basic Christian faith, the intention to enter into lifelong, unconditional, faithful, married love, and openness to children are the minimal conditions for the validity of the Sacrament of Marriage. But what about its fruitfulness? We are called to help these couples encounter Jesus and even have the opportunity to become his disciples.

For this reason, at St. Benedict Parish, they ask all couples preparing for marriage to take Alpha as the first step in their marriage preparation. After Alpha, St. Benedict Parish will run an evening for engaged couples using the Clifton Strengths Finder, and then a Friday evening and an all-day Saturday event focused on the Sacrament of Marriage in particular.

While only 10% of non-practicing couples stuck around after their wedding before Alpha was a part of the process at St. Benedict Parish, now at least 30% continue to live out their faith, and many more are firmly on the path to discipleship.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

St. Benedict Parish has developed a new model of the RCIA process. This was done to address two difficulties: 1) The inevitable seclusion of RCIA candidates from the broader parish community and 2) the unavailability to the parish at large of this high-quality faith formation process.

Their new model of RCIA changed several things. First, the candidates, while keeping their identity as a unique group, are now part of a faith formation process that is open to anyone. Second, the process itself is not envisioned to have a set start date and end date. Since the “inquiry” process is about discernment, it cannot be confined to a fixed time frame.

If the culture of discipleship is present in the parish, then certain candidates could complete several faith formation and catechetical programs before they make their decision to enter into full communion with the Church. Conversely, a mature candidate can begin his association with the RCIA group at the approach of Lent and conclude at the Easter Vigil. Although the rites of the catechumenate are fixed, and on a timeline,

nothing else should be.

Beyond making the RCIA more open-ended, St. Benedict Parish also endeavors to make the program more of a continuing way of discipleship. Besides incorporating Alpha and other adult faith formation programs into RCIA, the parish also encourages participation in connect groups (see Chapter 5) after a person’s completion of RCIA.

Conclusion

This chapter describes the beginning of an attempt to break free from the status quo and the “business as usual” attitude. Father Mallon concedes that the steps he has described from his own pastoral experience at St. Benedict Parish may not be the best solutions for all places, and may not even be possible in smaller parishes. However, they are an attempt to do something different, and the test will be the evidence of changed lives that result from these efforts to re-think pastoral practice.

CHAPTER 7

THE LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Essential Role of Leadership

The Church needs leaders. It will need them in its movement towards being a missionary Church that “goes out from itself toward the existential peripheries,” as Pope Francis wrote days before his election.

Although the primary crisis of the Church is one of identity, a second crisis is one of leadership.

Just as the bishops are the leaders of their dioceses, the priests, in union with their bishops, are the leaders of their parishes. Yet, Father Mallon observes that in his years of seminary formation, he received no training about leadership.

If the primary task of renewal is to move the Church from the inertia of the maintenance culture, we will need priests to be trained as leaders. Father Mallon says his learning curve has been great and he realizes that he must continue to grow, learn, and adapt as a leader.

Cultural Obstacles

Father Mallon sees help for those who care about the renewal of the Church, and he identifies it as coming in large part from the Evangelical world. So he proposes the CASE method of Church renewal. CASE stands for Copy And Steal Everything!

The Evangelical Protestant culture has been actively engaging these questions of growth and leadership for decades.

Although the very idea of an “independent church” is an oxymoron or contradiction, many Evangelical churches function without a local network resembling a Catholic diocese. Protestant pastors who are not strong leaders always run the risk of losing their jobs to someone with greater abilities. In contrast, Catholic parishes that are not healthy will generally be kept on life support by a diocesan structure. There are few consequences for a Catholic pastor who fails to grow in leadership. And the culture of many dioceses discourages innovation and sees uniformity as a means to unity.

Another problem with leadership of Catholic parishes is the length of time pastors are appointed. Father Mallon cites the ten common values shared by healthy, growing parishes (see Chapter 5, “Laying the Foundation”) and sees their accomplishment as requiring long-term leadership. Meaningful cultural change in a parish takes time.

By contrast, the frequent practice of transferring a priest from parish to parish every six or eight years prevents the possibility of meaningful change within a parish. Instead, it facilitates a culture of “maintenance.”

As Father Mallon has emphasized throughout this book, this culture of maintenance worked well when maintenance sufficed. However, the Church is no longer static. It is in decline. By failing to lead meaningful change, the very

lives of our churches are at stake.

Pruning is even necessary. The traditional mindset has been to “spread the wealth.” By spreading out the gifts of pastors and constantly moving them, the result is, at best, mediocre churches. By keeping pastors capable of leading change in parishes that have the potential to have high impact, we create the opportunity for at least some of the churches to be healthy and strong.

Vulnerability

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. (2 Corinthians 11:30)

An effective leader in the Church cannot be somebody who is solitary and invulnerable. Leaders who recognize their inability to do it all by themselves will model for staff and parishioners an essential dynamic that should be at the root of everything we do as a Church. We need one another.

As illustrated in detail in Chapter 5, leaders will be most successful when they lean into their natural strengths and talents. At the same time, such leaders will be aware of and honest about their weaknesses and deficits. Why is this important? Because the idea of a well-rounded person is a myth. We are all imbalanced.

Yet, there is such a thing as a well-balanced team.

Father Mallon confesses that as a pastor he invested huge amounts of energy in trying to be well-rounded. Then he discovered the Strength Finder tools and philosophy. (See specifically Chapter 5, “Laying the Foundation,” at 7. Strength-Based Ministry)

He came to understand, for example, that while he had “strong influencing strengths,” he was weak in developing or coaching others. He simply was not good at this aspect of pastoral leadership. Now he simply matches

up those in need of coaching with other team members who have the gift to do this.

Every leader can benefit from this kind of self-knowledge and vulnerability before the people they lead. “Please help me; I cannot do this alone.” This is all we are saying by our vulnerability.

Team members in any parish must include the pastoral staff or key ministry leaders, pastoral council members, and competent parishioners with demonstrated leadership abilities. Unless a pastor is willing to be vulnerable to this team, it will not be properly composed and will not properly function.

Vulnerability is not only essential between a leader and those who are lead, but also among other leaders. Father Mallon has spoken of meaningful community as a value – of building trust and relationships within our parishes. This same development must take place within the Church’s leadership community, especially among priests.

Vision

Developing a Vision for the Parish

The primary role of a leader is to develop and communicate a vision for what can be. Such a vision is not to be confused with a mission statement. Mission statements often focus on what has to be done – not on a vision of where we should be going.

Vision is “a picture of the future that produces passion in us.” Vision involves thinking outside of the box, and it begins to take shape only after we have looked outside the box.

Getting out of the Box

For Father Mallon, a key experience of getting out of his box occurred when he traveled to Britain to visit Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) in London. While walking to where he thought

HTB was, he turned the corner and came upon something that made him think that he must be in the wrong place: there was a line of hundreds of 20-somethings waiting to enter what turned out to be HTB. He had never seen anything like this before. There were throngs of young people hungering for the Gospel in secular London.

This was for him a picture of the future; one that produced passion in him. He followed this passion, a “crazy dream,” and it eventually resulted in his consolidated and growing parish in Halifax, with activities most days and evenings.

In Chapter 3, “House of Pain,” Father Mallon spoke of the crippling effect of grief and discouragement in the Church.

Pope Francis addressed this in his letter *Evangelii Gaudium*:

One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, “sourpusses.” Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. (EG, no. 85)

Father Mallon says he has seen the vision of a renewed missionary Church once he got out of the box of his small world.

Scratching the Itch

Participation at church conferences and gatherings provoked two strong reactions in Father Mallon. The first was “Yes!” – He was again fired up! But the second was a sense of discouragement, of being overwhelmed. He compares it to scratching a mosquito bite. The more you scratch, the more relief you feel; but also the more you scratch, the itchier it becomes.

Vision begins with a sense of discontent, with a need to scratch at that source of

dissatisfaction. In the Gospel of John, after Jesus cleanses the temple at the beginning of his ministry, we are told that the disciples remembered the words of the prophet Jeremiah, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” (John 2:17)

Too often, those in leadership positions ignore the itch or seek to medicate it. A self-satisfied church is a mediocre church and will never become truly missionary.

Again, Father Mallon refers to the impact HTB has had on him. Three times a year, that parish hosts Alphas for young people of an average age of 27. Each course attracts on average a thousand people. Several times a year, HTB sends out groups of 30 to 40 parishioners with an ordained staff member to take over a small, dying church somewhere in London.

In contrast, the Catholic world of North America seems to be constantly shutting down.

Those who are leaders of the Church must begin with a personal vision: the picture of the future that produces passion in them.

Charisms

Vision may begin with the leader, but that personal vision will be shaped by the leader’s own charism. The leader’s charism will shape the things he or she is passionate about.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul writes that, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” (4:11)

The universal Church is to embody all these charisms; it is unusual for any one leader to be strong in more than three of them.

- An apostle is one with a passion for going out to reach the “lost”, to proclaim the Gospel, and to serve the marginalized.
- A prophet is one who desires to speak

challenging words that may not always be welcomed. Pope Francis addressed this in a homily when he said, “We can ask the Holy Spirit to give us all this apostolic fervor and to give us the grace to be annoying when things are too quiet in the Church.”

- An evangelist is one driven by a desire to see people hear and respond to the saving message of Jesus: the first proclamation and a personal relationship with Jesus.
- A pastor is one who tends the sheep, disciples people into maturity, and visits the sick and dying.
- A teacher is one concerned about catechesis and faith formation.

Writing It Down

The next step is to identify and write down the vision of the future that excites us most. We should all write down a one-page description of a future of our diocese, parish or ministry that excites us.

Pope Francis wrote down his vision for the Church in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, languages and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. (EG, no. 27)

In the next paragraph he wrote down his vision for what every parish should seek to be:

It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach. (EG, no. 28)

Father Mallon counsels that after you write down the vision statement, you next write your own purpose statement. In other words,

you define your ministry. For Father Mallon this was: “To be a catalyst for the renewal of my parish and of the broader Church.”

The next step, then, is for the leader to share this picture of the future with his or her leadership team. For Father Mallon, the process of identifying his own vision to writing a parish vision statement took about two and a half years. The parish vision statement reads:

Saint Benedict Parish is a healthy and growing faith community that brings people to Christ, forms disciples and sends them out to transform the world. Every member is committed to worship, to grow, to serve, to connect and to give.

This is a vision statement: it does not describe where St. Benedict is today, but it does describe where it is going.

Communicating the Vision

The vision statement process is not a democratic process. It is a consultative and collaborative process led by the pastor. No matter how inclusive the process has been, the statement will need to be presented to the broader parish.

Once the statement has been settled, the leadership of the parish must make a long-term, sustained effort to communicate the vision to all members of the parish, and to invite them to embrace it and make it their own.

Vision processes take years to complete, and the ownership of vision among parishioners can take even longer.

Father Mallon next offers a few concrete suggestions for how vision can be successfully communicated. (He speaks from the context of a parish, but invites the reader to adapt these ideas to his or her own ministry situation.)

Invest in Key People

The pastor must identify the key people in his parish: the people of influence. The key influencers may be found behind the scenes, people with no formal ministry role. Keep your eyes open and flow into them so they can flow into others. Share your dream and your passion. Ask for his or her help in making the vision a reality, and be specific.

Preaching

We must speak about vision over and over again. Father Mallon has committed himself to preaching some form of visioning homily at all the weekend Masses every three weeks.

If a parish is becoming truly missional and is innovating, there will be ongoing change within the parish. Change must always be explained in light of the vision.

Father Mallon recommends finding the point of dissatisfaction the parishioners feel and then beginning to “scratch”. Ask why so many have lost their faith, why there are no young people involved in the community or in attendance at Mass, why so many are spiritually poor and lonely. These are the points of dissatisfaction, the points where it itches, where visioning can lead to change.

Teaching

Repetition is necessary in Sunday homilies and in every gathering of parish leaders. The parish vision statement ought to be the focus of off-site meetings and days of reflection with the staff, pastoral council and ministry leaders.

Strategy

Vision is fundamental to transformation. But once you have decided where you are going, you must discern how to get there. You will need battle plans to overcome the human

tendency to cling to the status quo and to resist change.

Being Strategic About Being Strategic

After about two years at St. Benedict Parish, Father Mallon found himself with initial success, but was suddenly uncertain what to do next. His initial strategy had been to invest in Alpha, connect groups, and stewardship. Activities had doubled, the parish building was overloaded, and the number of disciples was growing. With this, the pastoral staff was beginning to feel the strain.

The first problem was a sense that the pastoral council was not working as it should. Father Mallon felt that it was operating as an accountability group that could testify that the pastor was not completely off his rocker.

The problem was the growing gulf between these people, eager to serve on the pastoral council, and the staff members who were not around the table but were the key people who were developing strategy, leading ministry teams in the parish, and even beginning to lead teams of leaders.

At this point, Father Mallon had a eureka moment. He read a paper by a Presbyterian pastor, Dr. Timothy Keller, entitled “Leadership and Church Size Dynamics: How Strategy Changes with Growth.” It addresses the need to change leadership and ministry styles, and leadership philosophies to fit the size cultures of churches. Father Mallon believes that these insights are vital for many Catholic dioceses as they go about restructuring and closing, clustering or blending parishes.

Some of Dr. Keller’s Main Points are as follows.

A. Church Size

- Keller has five categories of churches:
1. House Church (up to 40 members)

2. Small Church (40 to 200 members)
3. Medium Church (200 to 450 members)
4. Large Church (400 to 800 members)
5. Very Large Church (more than 800 members)

Father Mallon saw that St. Benedict was a very, very large church but that it had the leadership structure of a medium-sized church.

B. Size Dynamics (p. 261-263)

Dr. Keller identifies seven challenges to be expected when a church grows in size. These realities will demand the following changes if parishes are to remain healthy and not stifle.

- **Smaller decision-making bodies**
The larger the church, the smaller the decision-making body should be. As the church size increases, the parish council should become more a “pastoral council.” It should no longer attempt to manage every aspect of Church life. In the very large parishes, such as St. Benedict, the strategy will be developed more and more by pastoral staff.
- **Decentralization**
As the church grows, the pastor needs to exercise less direct oversight of ministries. Otherwise, the parish will be bottlenecked by the limited time and energy of the pastor.
- **More specialized staff**
The larger the parish, the more it will need staff to be trained specialists who lead other leaders. Dr. Keller wrote, “Very large churches do not need theologically trained people to learn a specialty so much as they need specialists who can be theologically trained.”
- **The changed role of the pastor**
Most pastors can directly care for up to 200 people. In a large parish, the pastor will not spend most of his time doing ministry

but will delegate this work so that he can spend time preaching, leading, developing, and communicating the parish’s vision and overseeing strategy.

At St. Benedict Parish, based on their frustration and on the insights gained from Dr. Keller, they learned that the first strategy they needed to adopt was to develop changed staffing and leadership structures. They had to do this before they could become strategic about their mission.

Changes to Pastoral Council

At St. Benedict Parish, the pastoral council no longer was intended to operate as a management committee, but rather as one concerned about broad strategy. Still they were struggling.

Two key changes were made. First, they expanded the number of pastoral staff members on the council so that there would be an even number of staff and parishioners. Second, they switched from having monthly two-hour meetings to a meeting every other month that lasts for four hours.

Now the focus of the pastoral council is entirely on developing the parish vision and purpose statements, aligning and evaluating ministries against the vision statement, and working out the broad strategy for a five-year plan.

Staffing Changes

The demands of the culture shift that St. Benedict Parish was experiencing required the hiring of a full-time staff member for a newly created role. As this person was hired from within, it necessitated not only hiring someone to backfill their position, but also realigning the job descriptions of some other staff members.

Death by Meeting

In their search for a way out of this dilemma, the staff found the most help in a book by Patrick Lencioni, *Death by Meeting*. Lencioni counsels that the problem is not that organizations have too many meetings, but that they do not have enough of the right kind of meetings.

Patrick Lencioni encourages four different kinds of meetings: the daily check-in, tactical meetings, strategic meetings, and quarterly off-sites. St. Benedict Parish has taken this advice to heart.

Developing Strategy

Since St. Benedict Parish made changes to how its pastoral council and parish staff functions, Father Mallon feels that his parish now has the capacity for rich and fruitful strategic planning.

Below are five possible activities he recommends relating to broad strategies for parish pastoral councils to engage in:

1. Vision and Purpose Statements

A parish should have a vision statement. Ask the leadership of your parish what the vision is. If the answer is unsatisfactory, then you need to begin a process of developing a vision statement.

A parish may have, instead, a purpose statement, which is typically short and specific. An example from St. Benedict Parish is, "To raise up disciples who joyfully live out their mission."

2. Values Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter 5, Father Mallon identifies parish values as being what our actions profess rather than what our published statements say. The parish

budget will reflect exactly what the parish values. Often it reflects a concern for the preservation of buildings and for child-centered catechesis, etc.

The real task is to evaluate on a scale of one to ten how your parish is living out the ten values common to healthy and growing churches (see Chapter 5, "Laying the Foundation"). They are: 1) Giving priority to the weekend; 2) Hospitality; 3) Uplifting music; 4) Great homilies; 5) Meaningful community; 6) Clear expectations; 7) Strength-based ministry; 8) Formation of small communities; 9) Experience of the Holy Spirit; and 10) Become an inviting church.

If a parish worked through one of these value conversions every year, the parish would begin to experience real transformation by developing the first four items. In January each year, a pastoral council could begin to develop a strategic plan to grow in a particular value and begin to execute it the following September.

3. Five Systems Analysis

Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church often speaks of the five systems of Church life.

They are worship, evangelization, discipleship, fellowship, and ministry. Father Mallon says that we need to have a clear understanding of what each system entails or we will not perceive our lack of health and will misdiagnose our ailment.

System 1: Worship

As Catholics, our primary act of worship is the celebration of the Eucharist.

System 2: Evangelization

This is the proclamation, or kerygma: the Good News of God's love revealed in Jesus, and the salvation offered through his cross

and resurrection. While evangelization is primarily directed to those outside of the Church, evangelization may also be aimed at those within the Church who might know about Jesus but do not know him personally.

System 3: Discipleship

The lifelong process of growing, maturing, and learning that the believer eagerly enters into if truly evangelized.

System 4: Fellowship

Fellowship happens when parishioners are accountable to and for one another.

System 5: Ministry

Ministry is service to others. It includes essential ministry within the life of the parish, but also includes what Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.” (EG, no. 49)

4. SWOT Analysis

Whether a council uses the ten values to measure health, the five systems, or some other standard, a simple second step is to conduct a SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

5. The Five-Year Plan

The key points in a five-year plan are at the six-month, one-year and three-year marks. At St. Benedict Parish, the current plan was developed through a visioning process based on the five systems of church life. Having completed a SWOT analysis, the leadership team was asked to dream what would worship, evangelization, discipleship, fellowship, and ministry look like in five years at St. Benedict Parish.

The plan was a synthesis of five individual plans, reflecting each of the five systems. Each plan had a series of goals to be achieved on a timeline. These goals were SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely.

Executing the Plan

The pastor is the one who executes the plan. Leading change within an organization is the essential task of any leader today.

Father Mallon shares in the following bullet points how he invested his time in executing the St. Benedict strategic plan.

Low Control, High Accountability

This principle was also covered in Chapter 5, “Laying the Foundation”. The pastor must give up control and the temptation to micromanage. The positive principle of subsidiarity applies here. Subsidiarity means that, as much as possible, decisions that affect people should be made by the people being affected.

A low-control culture must be balanced with the value of high accountability. Every ministry must report in and be accountable to a staff member or a ministry leader who in turn reports to a staff member who reports to the pastor.

The Push Out Factor

The push out factor refers to empowerment. This means that the pastor, as a matter of principle, must always push out to competent parishioners the elements of his ministry that are not essential to his role as priest and pastor.

Leadership Summits

In a large parish, such as St. Benedict Parish,

investment in leaders is critical. That is why, three to four times a year, Father Mallon gathers all parish ministry leaders and potential successors to meet with the pastoral council and stewardship team for a morning of prayer and reflection.

These sessions include an opportunity to unpack the parish vision, hear feedback, have leaders speak to one another, and teach on some aspect of leadership. These summits also provide a mechanism for real accountability. The ministry leaders must attend the leadership summit.

Team Composition

A pastor must play a direct role in the formation of parish teams, while encouraging health and balance in every team in the parish. This includes the pastoral council and the finance committee. If there is no unity of purpose on essential issues, including buy-in on the parish vision statement and culture, there is little likelihood that the parish will be free of division and be healthy. Healthy conflict must take place within the context of full agreement with the parish vision statement and culture.

A pastor who ignores staff who are disruptive or “actively disengaged” seals his own fate by his inaction.

Staff Team Health

The parish staff team is the most important team of all. This importance led St. Benedict to create a formal staff ethos statement. They revisit it each month by reading it before the strategic meetings

(Refer to the “Saint Benedict Parish: Staff Culture Ethos,” p. 278-279)

Having a Thick Skin

A leader must be prepared that, as soon

as he or she begins to lead, there will be unpleasantness. The processes of creating vision statements and strategic planning will raise curiosity, but once the plans are actually executed, there will be change. Change is always resisted by some, and the leader is always criticized by some.

When this criticism wears Father Mallon down, he thinks of Moses and the endless complaints he endured as he sought to lead the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Saint Paul tells us to “take up the whole armor of God” and to “take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” (Ephesians 6:13, 16)

The evil one is very content for the Church to be maintenance-focused and to continue to sink into the mud.

Expanding the Vision

Refer to entirety of the concluding section “Expanding the Vision” found at bottom of page 281 and top of page 282.

Conclusion

Refer to the entirety of the conclusion, p. 283-286.

GLOSSARY

Didactic Tradition – A teaching method that follows a consistent scientific approach or educational style to present information

Apostellein – Means to send; an apostle is one who is sent

Apostolic Exhortation – A type of communication from the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church that encourages the faithful to take up a particular activity. Not as formal as a papal encyclical and it does not define Church doctrine. It is, however, a higher form of communication than ecclesia to undertake a particular activity but does not define Church doctrine. An example of an Apostolic Exhortation is *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) by Pope Paul VI on the theme of Catholic Evangelization.

Lineamenta Document – Text written in preparation for a General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

Aparecida Document – The concluding document from the Fifth General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM) which met in 2007. This reflection of the bishops is also a call to the people of the continent to live out their lives as missionary disciples. The main author of this document was Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Pope Francis).

Evangelii Gadium (The Joy of the Gospel) – Pope Francis' first apostolic exhortation that was released in 2013. This papal communication is focused on the church's primary mission of evangelization in today's world.

Schema – Representation of a plan or theory in the form of an outline or model

NGO – A non-governmental organization is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level

Kerygma – A Greek term that refers to "preaching" and is used to describe the content of the apostolic message of Jesus

Confirmandi – Persons who are candidates for confirmation

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