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THE PRINCIPLES & FOUNDATIONS



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
WOLLONGONG

1. The principles

PRIORITISING THE SUNDAY MASS

Despite the importance of the Sunday Eucharist, it often receives less attention and time compared to other aspects of parish community life. We must adopt a more intentional and meaningful approach to Sunday Mass as it should be a profound and transformative experience for our communities. We must challenge the notion of rigid one-hour or less Masses. Convenience and minimalism should not be our primary values. Ultimately, a renewed commitment to making the Sunday Eucharist a priority and source of inspiration is key to any transformation in parish life.

See *Divine Renovation* pp 95–101, *Great Catholic Parishes* pp 97–135, and *Rebuilt* pp 87–93, 106–114.



THE 3 Hs

Hospitality

Our faith is not a private, anonymous experience, but must become welcoming and inclusive. True hospitality is not simply friendliness towards people whom we know, but must extend to welcoming strangers. To enhance hospitality, we might adopt a team structure—welcoming guests as they arrive, providing assistance and information about the parish, and so forth—however, it is the responsibility and attitude of the whole community. The goal is to create an environment where guests feel welcome and encouraged to participate. Ultimately, the aim of hospitality is to inspire newcomers to become parishioners, and then help to welcome others.

See *Divine Renovation* pp 101–110.

Hymns

Music plays a pivotal role in parish renewal, particularly in the context of liturgy and worship. Hymns and songs of worship can help foster a deep connection with God, and with each other. In order to engage a diverse congregation effectively, we should embrace both traditional and contemporary music styles (cf. Matt 13:52). There must be a balanced approach to music, especially in the liturgy, that combines the old and the new while maintaining a focus on quality, beauty, truth, and active participation in praising God.

See *Divine Renovation* pp 110–123, and *Rebuilt* pp 93–105.

Homilies

Preaching plays a vital role in nurturing the faith of the community, and therefore, pastors should continue to strive for improvement in this aspect of their ministry. We ought to aim for authentic, engaging, and Christ-centred preaching that speaks to the whole person, including the mind, heart, conscience, and will of the listeners.

See *Divine Renovation* pp 123–135, *Rebuilt* pp 129–149, and *Preaching on Purpose*.

COMMUNITY

Meaningful community



In our hyper-individualistic culture, the importance of belonging is paramount. We are challenged to form an authentic Christian community where deepening relationship with one another is valued. The *Alpha* course is exceptionally useful in helping communities to create a welcoming and non-judgemental environment which can positively effect the culture of the whole community.

See *Divine Renovation* pp 136–153.

Small-group community



Building on the principle of *meaningful community*, forming small communities within the larger parish setting is integral to the life of a healthy, growing church. It should not be viewed as an optional extra. In this highly effective model, the local church, the parish, is viewed as a “community of communities”, consisting of smaller groups that gather for the Eucharist on Sundays. These smaller groups typically range in size from 8 to 35 people. The goal is to create an environment where individuals can experience belonging, support, love, and growth.

This approach counters the challenge of integrating meaningful community within the Catholic Church given the traditional focus on the priest as the hub of the community, requiring his presence in all facets of community life, and limitations due to the large size of parishes.

The concept of *connect groups*, mid-size groups of 25 to 35 people, influenced by the example of Holy Trinity Brompton in London, is a good model to implement. These groups serve as a bridge for individuals who have completed the *Alpha* course—providing ongoing community, support, and faith development. Lay leaders facilitate these groups, allowing for a balance between intimacy and growth potential. Accountability and low control are necessary for these groups to thrive.

See *Divine Renovation* pp 168–176, *Rebuilt* pp 151–170, and *Small Groups with Purpose*.

DISCIPLESHIP

See *Great Catholic Parishes* pp 55–95.

Clear expectations



The culture of a parish community (which is: how we see ourselves, what we value, and what activities and behaviours we will say “yes” or “no” to) is directly impacted by our willingness to communicate clear expectations, both as members of a parish, and as a parish community. Our culture deteriorates when the community lacks clarity about what is expected of us. Research shows that healthy and growing churches are unambiguous about their expectations. Understandably, many will have a negative connotation regarding the word “expectations”, believing it to be synonymous with “demands”. That is not what is meant by “clear expectations”. In a vision-oriented parish, we can only move towards the “goal” by having the courage to describe the grace, motivation, actions, and expectations that will get us there.

See *Divine Renovation* pp 153–164.

Strength-based ministry



Many parishes observe a prevalent feeling of duty-driven participation rather than genuine passion—a “no one else will, so I probably should” mentality. We need to shift our approach from filling roles to empowering individuals based on their strengths and passions, aiming for a more fulfilling experience for the ministers, volunteers, and the community. One method of achieving this is through the Gallup *Clifton’s Strengths* finder philosophy which focuses on recognising and nurturing individual talents and strengths given to us by God. The goal is to align individuals with roles that resonate with their unique abilities and passions, fostering a sense of fulfilment and effectiveness in ministry. Using *Clifton’s Strengths*, we are able to identify and celebrate the diverse talents of parishioners, striving for a balanced mix in leadership and ministry teams.

See *Divine Renovation* pp 164–168.

EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The experience of the Holy Spirit plays an important and irreplaceable role in the Christian faith. We need to move beyond a mere theological understanding of the Holy Spirit, and into a personal and transformative relationship with the Spirit.

There are three mysteries of Christian theology: the mystery of God (Trinity), the mystery of God with us (the Incarnation—Jesus Christ), and the mystery of God in us (indwelling of the Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit's presence within believers is a profound and powerful experience.

In light of the role and impact of the Holy Spirit in the early Church, especially on the day of Pentecost and how it led to the growth of the Church, we should encourage and facilitate experiences of the Holy Spirit to revitalise and renew our mission.

See *Divine Renovation* pp 176–190.

BECOMING INVITATIONAL

When a parish values meaningful community, clear expectations, spiritual gifts and the Holy Spirit's presence, parishioners will naturally want to invite others to experience the Church. The vast majority of people will not naturally find us, we will need to invite them.

Three key principles for creating an invitation culture:

- Emphasise that God is responsible for the response to invitations, and individuals should focus on extending invitations rather than worrying about the outcome.
- Recognise and address the fear of rejection and awkwardness that often prevents people from inviting others. Encourage prayer and trust in God's guidance.
- Paint a compelling vision of what can be achieved through invitations, highlighting the potential for growth and impact on individuals' spiritual lives.

Invitation must be intentional. This means identifying and praying for individuals to invite, extending invitations within existing relationships, and providing support to those who accept the invitation.

See *Divine Renovation* pp 190–195, and *Great Catholic Parishes* pp 137–175.

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BISHOP BRIAN
MASCORD

2. The foundations

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

If we are to move forward and become missional parishes, empowering leadership will play a crucial role. We need leaders who can inspire movement and change. **Leadership is not merely a title of power or privilege, but an active role of authority and responsibility.** Beyond good or healthy leadership, empowering leadership occurs when leaders make leaders. This is the kind of leadership that inspires and lasts.

No individual possesses all the necessary gifts to lead and transform a parish effectively. Collaboration with a diverse group of individuals, both lay and ordained, is necessary to fulfil God's purpose in our parishes.

Therefore, we need to be engaging with the best leadership formation available, both religious and secular, and developing pipelines for raising up new leaders in our communities (*Alpha* is an excellent opportunity to gradually give new volunteers more leadership authority and responsibility.)

See *Rebuilt* pp 223–253,
Divine Renovation pp 233–244,
Great Catholic Parishes pp 15–54,
Lead Like Jesus, and *Learning to Lead Like Jesus*.

THE PRIMACY OF EVANGELISATION

The primary purpose of the Church and parish is to evangelise, as stated in the Great Commission. However, many Catholic parishes often confuse the order of priorities outlined in the Commission. **The correct sequence is to first make disciples, then baptise, and finally teach.**

Many parishes tend to teach people who don't believe, or confer sacraments for those without genuine faith. **The ideal scenario would be for parishioners to deeply know and love Jesus, creating a community hungry for sacraments and eager to learn more about him.**

To achieve this, parishes should prioritise evangelisation. This might involve putting other activities on hold, or stopping them altogether. While it comes at a cost, the rewards include reaching people who have not heard or do not understand the Gospel message.

See *Great Catholic Parishes* pp 137–175, and *Divine Renovation 3-Keys Study Guide*.

MOVING IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Personal efforts alone will never be enough to renew the life of a parish. All aspects of parish life—leadership, works, and the entire parish—must be surrendered to God. It is only through God's power, particularly the Holy Spirit, that transformation in a parish can occur. **This means prayer is of vital importance in this mission—personal and communal, spontaneous and planned.** As we face challenges, coming back to God's power is our only option: the Eucharist, prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

See *Experience the Holy Spirit*.



Recommended reading

Divine Renovation: From a Maintenance to a Missional Parish

Fr James Mallon

Rebuilt: The Story of a Catholic Parish

Michael White and Tom Corcoran

Great Catholic Parishes: How Four Essential Practices Make Them Thrive

William E. Simon Jr.

Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus

Sherry A. Weddell

Preaching on Purpose

Fr Alex Colautti CC et al

Lead Like Jesus Revisited

Phil Hodges, Phyllis Hendry, Ken Blanchard

Learning to Lead like Jesus

Boyd Bailey

Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities

Steve Gladen

Unlocking Your Parish: Making Disciples, Raising Up Leaders with Alpha

Ron Huntley, Fr James Mallon

Becoming Missionary Disciples

Archbishop Julian Porteous

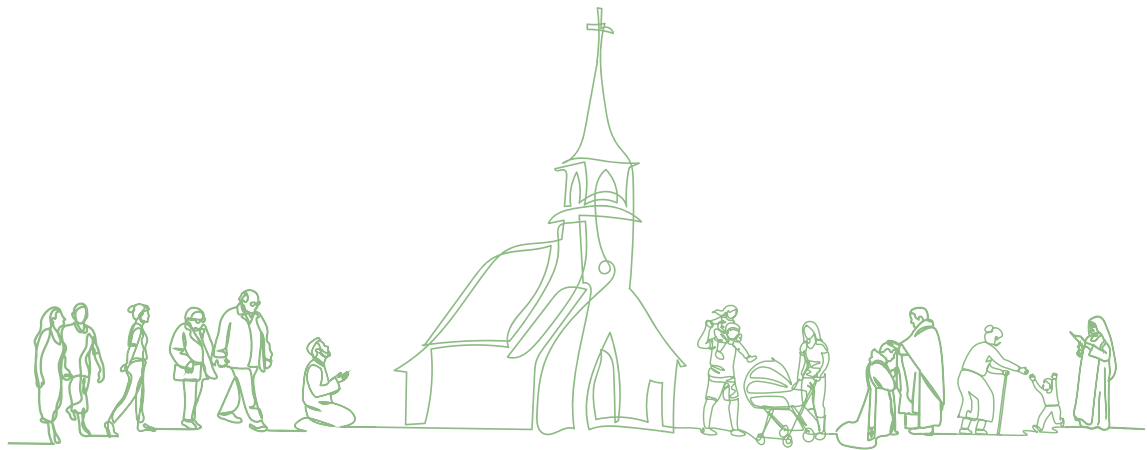
Divine Renovation Guidebook

Fr James Mallon

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