

# GENESIS

COMPASS



The First Theme

**Mission-Inspired Prayer**

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# Mission-Inspired Prayer

## Parish Reality

In the earliest days of moving a parish onto a missional footing, it might feel like facing a parish reality “without form and void.” Yet, what do we mean by this? There may be plenty of life and activity already in the parish (unlike God, we are not creating *ex nihilo*!).<sup>1</sup> But the “formlessness” may be felt in two main ways.

### Disorientation

Priests and parish leaders, having been conditioned for and by the ‘Christendom parish’, increasingly perceive that, while Western culture has drastically changed, the parish has not adapted well to proclaiming the Gospel in this new culture. Therefore, the needs, expectations and milieu of the secular culture present a disorienting experience. What needs to be accomplished feels like a formidable voyage to set out on. This realisation is a little like moving to a completely new neighbourhood. In a new locality, you don’t know the routes to reach stores and services you need; the local community is unfamiliar; all the daily tasks that were once second-nature now require intentional thought and planning. In a new milieu, we need new ‘maps’.

### Discontent

It is likely ‘holy discontent’ that motivated a priest’s desire to embark on this journey. But starting the journey does not mean that the ‘holy discontent’ is pacified. Rather, it may even grow! Imagine, in the example of moving to a new neighbourhood, you arrive in your new house. In the first couple of days, you are surrounded by chaos. Boxes everywhere, a thousand things need to be done at once. In the old house, you knew how everything worked, rooms were ordered, you knew where everything was.

As we embark on the journey of parish renewal, things tend to get messy before they get reordered. In the Creation account, earth is without form – depicted in Jewish consciousness as an amorphous mass of land submerged in water. Jews were not a seafaring people, the seas were dangerous and to be avoided. In Semitic cosmology, the cosmic ocean that forms the seas was thought to lie beneath the earth (see Exodus 20:4). Before dry land emerges, the seas seem to engulf the earth (Psalm 103:6). On day one of creation, there is no dry land.

Our parish may even feel like such a mass – plenty of raw material which needs form and shape. It may feel like there is no ‘dry land’ on which to stand. The emergence of ‘dry land’ happens over time. As we grow in leadership, we develop new capacities to tolerate the countless realities that are not where we want them to be. In the early days, we don’t have enough hands to do all that needs to be done. It can feel a daunting journey that one has set out on. We may even experience moments of regret.

If we don’t begin this voyage with prayer, we will undertake a great work of God in our own strength...and will not even leave the harbour!

## Prayer Reality

We turn to explore our current prayer reality. Prayer is the reality of God’s life in us. In the midst of chaos, he wants to be the One who re-creates, shapes, and brings life. But he can only do that through the intimate life he shares with you in prayer.

### Personal Prayer

For each of us, our lived experience of relationship with God is unique and unrepeatable. Maybe this is a vivid daily experience for you. Maybe this is the first time you have even considered that it is possible. Either is fine: what matters is that we are real with ourselves and with God.

In what ways does your lived, daily experience of relationship with God sustain your leadership and ministry life? In what ways do you wish it were a stronger reality in your life? In our highly technologized culture, we are frenetically

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distracted – pulled in multiple different directions at once, our hearts and minds scattered. How do you find silence, stillness, and solitude in your daily life currently? What is your current experience (if any) of allowing the Holy Spirit to “hover” over the waters of your life, making you new? What is your deepest longing in terms of your relationship with God?

How would you describe the culture of ‘personal prayer’ in your parish? How you answer this question will likely depend on the ‘temperature’ of discipleship in your parish. If you have a high proportion of intentional disciples, who desire daily intimacy with Jesus, you will likely already have a strong culture of personal prayer. When people are living the life of discipleship, it doesn’t matter too much the form that their prayer takes (whether it’s Adoration in the parish, devotions, the Liturgy of the Hours, or *lectio divina*). But what you will notice is the quality of a culture of prayer: maybe deep silence and stillness at different moments during the liturgy, for example. But please know that, for the majority of Catholic parishes, this would be an exception, not a rule!

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In the book, *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission*, co-authored by Mgr. James Shea, he writes about the culture of Christendom:

***‘As the Christian ideal gets into the soil of the society, remarkable cultural fertility results. Such a society will develop its institutions and expressions almost unconsciously, with a characteristic strength and unanimity that seems mysterious. ... There is something mysterious in the way Gothic cathedrals were raised in city after city, or hospitals and orphanages and other charitable ventures sprouted like a natural growth, or villages grew as almost organic things out of the living rock, with a ruling spirit ever in evidence but often not explicit.’***  
(p. 21)

In our apostolic age, however, the Christian ‘soil’ has become acidic and has lost its fertility. In the past, we might have relied on Christian ‘soil’ in our parishes to ‘birth’ new initiatives and expressions in the faith. It happened organically with little struggle. But, as the soil we are rooted in no longer gives life, we find ourselves in arid ground. We need to turn, in a new way, to the ‘Giver of Life’ – the Holy Spirit – to make the soil healthy again. This is where we turn to **mission-inspired prayer** in a way that was not necessarily needed in a Christendom context.

Mission-Inspired Prayer is **aligning our desires with, coming into communal agreement with, and purposefully interceding for, the Holy Spirit’s work in transforming the hearts of people in our parish and neighbourhood**. What is your current experience of prayer for the mission of your parish? Amid chaos or void, we can react in different ways. Some people will move immediately into frantic, anxiety-driven work, desperate to bring order. Others will fall into paralysis, overwhelmed at the immensity of the task and unable to take a first step. It is worth observing where you tend to lean on this spectrum. Of course, neither response is aligned to how God creates out of chaos and void. He creates differently: his Spirit hovers over the water. What is my experience of beholding, in prayer, the Holy Spirit hovering over the chaos of our parish? His creative work precedes my own, even if we glimpse no signs of this.

Based on the definition above, how would you describe the culture of mission-inspired prayer in your parish? It is very powerful when we ‘come into agreement’ with what the Holy Spirit is already doing, and what we long to see, and pray for it to become reality. Here are a few signs that a mission-inspired prayer culture might be developing in our parish:

- a “quick prayer” at the start of meetings is no longer enough,
- we drop the mentality of “outsourcing” prayer, e.g. to an intercessory prayer team, a contemplative community, the sick and housebound,
- we grow in expectancy of hearing God’s voice, that he will show us the way ahead,
- a relaxed culture develops where people are comfortable praying aloud in their own words,
- we offer to pray for people in the moment when they ask for prayer,
- we practice the early Church custom of laying hands on one another in prayer.

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Once again, few Catholic parishes will experience this kind of culture right now! But it is good to form a picture of what a powerful prayer culture would look like. It helps us take stock of where we are now and stirs a desire in us for more.

Whatever your current parish reality, prayer is never a rival to the work, mission and ministry that need to happen in your parish: rather, it goes first. *It is the engine behind the mission of your parish.* Renewing your parish with no prayer is like trying to drive a car with no engine.

## Theological Reflection on Genesis 1

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.'* Genesis 1:1-2

We are using the Creation account in Genesis 1: God's own approach to Creation reveals how he wishes to undertake the work of 're-creation' of our parish.

### **God's presence precedes his work**

Lectio divina on these two verses from Genesis 1 reveals a profound theological truth: *God's presence precedes his work.* We have reflected on the experience of formlessness and void, but Genesis 1:2 reveals deep truth: God is present in the chaos.

It is fundamental to the 're-creation' of our parish to root ourselves in this truth before we 'get to work'. Especially in the west, we are wired to 'get to work', but Genesis 1:2 should stop us in our tracks: *contemplation precedes action.*

Getting things in the right order is critical because we discover that the Holy Spirit is already at work in our parish and neighbourhood. We want to cultivate in ourselves an ability to see and enter into his work. We hear about working 'smarter'. This is the quickest shortcut to 'smart working': to see what God is already doing: to come into agreement with it, to align our desires with it, and to intercede for it.

### **Victory is Assured**

Feeling we are consumed by the waters of chaos and void can leave us discouraged. But the reality that 'the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters' is the greatest encouragement we can receive.

The seemingly engulfing seas, the darkness and chaos we experience in our parish, have been overcome by Christ's victory. Not only does he cause 'dry land' to emerge where we might find a place to stand. Jesus also transforms the waters themselves. No longer do they hold fear for us. They are now baptismal waters of new life.

***'Lord our God,  
... for us who recall the wondrous work of our creation  
and the still greater work of our redemption,  
graciously bless this water.  
... through water, which Christ made holy in the Jordan,  
you have renewed our corrupted nature  
in the bath of regeneration.  
Therefore, may this water be for us  
a memorial of the Baptism we have received...'  
Blessing of Water, Easter Vigil***

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Cooperating with the Holy Spirit on the work of our parish is to cooperate with his 're-creation'. *Lumen Gentium* 48 tells us,

**"...the promised restoration which we are awaiting has already begun in Christ, is carried forward in the mission of the Holy Spirit and through Him continues in the Church ... we perform with hope in the future the work committed to us in this world by the Father, and thus work out our salvation (cf. Phil. 2:12). Already the final age of the world has come upon us (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11) and the renovation of the world is irrevocably decreed and is already anticipated in some kind of a real way; for the Church already on this earth is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect."**

"We perform with hope in the future" the work of the renewal of our parish. We stand in faith that the "renovation of the world is irrevocably decreed and is already anticipated in some kind of a real way". How does it feel to know that, despite the chaos and void around you, your parish "already ... is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect"?

Mission-inspired prayer for the renewal of our parish is rooted in faith in this future reality. We can proceed with 100% certainty of God's work. Mission-inspired prayer and personal prayer are inextricably linked. But mission-inspired prayer as we have defined it is not possible without a life of personal prayer. So, this is where we will start.

## **Jesus' Victory Transforms our Personal Prayer**

If you are ordained, the importance of your prayer life will have been impressed on you throughout seminary formation. Likewise, as an active lay leader, you likely have some form of prayer life (or know that you should have!). But how does our personal prayer change when the costs of the mission are high? Being surrounded by formlessness and void in your parish may have brought you to knees. Mission-inspired prayer is costly and isn't something we can switch on or off. That would be like having a high stake, intimate and intense conversation with someone with whom we barely have a relationship. Rather, 'high stakes prayer' is underpinned by a daily, personal, intimate, and growing relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is a relationship of a son or daughter with his or her loving Father. It is the relationship of one whose identity in God is secure: their identity as loved, seen, and known by God is prior to and not dependent on their performance or achievement in ministry. It is the relationship of abiding in the Father's gaze and being transformed in his presence. Under his gaze, we allow him to change us. We allow him to see the dark places in our hearts – the wounds, the fears, the unredeemed places of pain.

It is a relationship in which healing takes place, in which our hearts are reformed through experiencing immense and unconditional love, and in which ego, self-seeking and self-protection are increasingly burned away. It is the prayer of transformation as the image of Christ the Son is formed in us. As the presence of Christ increasingly fills our faculties, our personality, our desires, he imperceptibly and beautifully becomes the agent of our lives, including all our missional activity.

Finally, it is a relationship of fellowship with the Holy Spirit. As we begin the journey of leading our parishes in renewal, it cannot be done without getting to know and working with the Holy Spirit. Fellowship with the Holy Spirit means talking with him and allowing him to talk to me. It means praying, 'Come, Holy Spirit' numerous times every day and experiencing his sweet freshness.

This is the life of holiness, and holiness and mission are inextricably connected. Just as they are one in the Person of Jesus, so they will be one in us as we grow in union with him.

This is an extraordinary beginning to the journey of parish renewal because we discover that it involves nothing less than our complete, personal transformation! Is this what you were expecting?!

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As the Holy Spirit 'hovers over the waters' of your parish, he first of all hovers over *you*.

He is creating; we are cooperating. How do I 'come into agreement' with the Holy Spirit's creating work? Scripture gives us examples of how people interacted with the Holy Spirit while in darkness.

- a) **Enquiry:** Nicodemus "came to Jesus by night" because he feared the unbelieving leaders of Israel (John 3: 1-21). Darkness is symbolic of a spiritual darkness, and in the early days of the renewal of our parish, we too may face confusion and doubt. Following Nicodemus, we can 'interrogate' Jesus. Maybe we understand intellectually what we are doing – our 'why' – but now we want to enquire of the Holy Spirit: how can this be done? What steps should I take? Where do I start? A dependence on the Holy Spirit's promptings from the outset is a vital habit to cultivate if we will go far on this journey.
- b) **Wrestling:** In a mysterious contest by night, Jacob wrestles with a nameless angel (Genesis 32: 22-32). Jacob outwrestles him, petitioning, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (v27). Our journey with God as he renews our parishes will at times feel like a wrestling match. The Church teaches us, "From this account [of Jacob's wrestling], the spiritual tradition of the Church has retained the symbol of prayer as a battle of faith and as the triumph of perseverance" (CCC 2573). From the very beginning, we will need close contact with the Holy Spirit, with our hearts and our time dedicated to the battle of faith and prayer.
- c) **'You must be born from above':** The routes that God takes to renew our parish might not be the routes we had in mind. Time and again, we will find ourselves adjusting ourselves to the ways he is taking. As Jesus told Nicodemus, we have to be "born from above" – letting go of previous ideas and experiences in preference for something "new" God is doing.

*'Do not be surprised when I say:  
You must be born from above.  
The wind blows wherever it pleases;  
You hear its sound,  
But you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.  
That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit.'* John 3: 7-8

Our personal postures of prayer in the Holy Spirit make possible communal, mission-inspired prayer.

## Jesus' Victory Makes Possible Mission-Inspired Prayer

The assurance that God's presence precedes his work, that the Holy Spirit is already at work in the renewal of our parish, and that Jesus' final victory is assured, is the faith basis from which we can pray.

Mission-Inspired Prayer is **aligning our desires with, coming into communal agreement with, and purposefully interceding for, the Holy Spirit's work in transforming the hearts of people in our parish and neighbourhood.**

## Features of Mission-Inspired Prayer

### Mission-Inspired Prayer Faces Outward

As we grow in discipleship, our hearts turn increasingly outwards towards others. We desire others to know Christ and to experience the transformation we've experienced. We want for others transformational encounter in the Holy Spirit. As trusting sons and daughters of the Father, it is the most natural thing in the world to turn to him asking on behalf of our brothers and sisters. We long for the same things for them we ourselves have tasted.

### Mission-Inspired Prayer Flows from Love

When our love for others is strong, it enables us to take lengths we would not normally take for someone we do not love. We pay a cost we don't even experience as cost. It is nothing in the face of love. Strong love compels strong

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prayer. It is the prayer of Jesus to his Father at night, forgoing sleep in order to dialogue with the One who loved him and who loved the ones he loves. This relationship sees its culmination in the Garden of Gethsemane where he stays awake to pray for those he will redeem. The strength of his love is ultimately seen on the Cross, his Sacrifice being the ultimate prayer.

## **Mission-Inspired Prayer is Directional**

Mission-inspired prayer involves intentional intercession. As Catholics we are used to intercessory prayer. We offer the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass, we offer intercessions in the Liturgy of the Hours, we pray for people's intentions when they share them with us.

But a parish embarking on a missional identity begins to have direction it did not have before. It is a direction inspired by God, a vision for the future that drives our present. And this is no less true for prayer in the parish. When we discern the direction in which the Holy Spirit is leading our parish, prayer also has a direction. Intercession is taken to a whole new level.

The strength of prayer is determined by the strength of desire. When we as a team come into agreement with the Holy Spirit's transformation of our parish, there is power in approaching our intercession strategically.

When Joshua followed God's direction to take the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-27), they approached it strategically and with discipline.

First of all, they knew God had given it to them: "I have given into your hand Jericho" (Joshua 6:2). Reaching confirmation and conviction in God's vision for our parish results in greater authority in our prayer.

Secondly, they were disciplined. They undertook God's instructions to march around the city every day for six days, and they only shouted when Joshua commanded. Consistency, faithfulness, and obedience in our prayer shows God the strength of our desires.

Thirdly, they worshipped, "blowing the trumpets continually" (Joshua 6:13). Praise is a powerful prayer because it acclaims God for who he is in himself. It declares that he is good and victorious, in spite of apparent setbacks and struggles. It enables us to live already in the reality God is preparing for our parish in the future.

Fourthly, they declared aloud what God had given to them. "Shout; for the Lord has given you the city" (Joshua 6:16). They knew victory was already theirs and declared what they knew to be true with a shout. When we are convicted by the vision God has given us for our parish, there is power in declaration: declaring what we know to be true, even if it is not reality yet. The context might seem dark, and nothing further from the truth, but there is power in words, and we declare the truth of God's vision over our parish.

The results are astounding: "So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city" (Joshua 6:20). Imagine the breakthrough in your parish. Imagine the spiritual "wall falling down flat" and your parish "advancing" by making new disciples, by new people coming to your church, and by people's lives being changed. This is all possible through mission-inspired prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **Mission-Inspired Prayer Is Apostolic Labouring**

In Galatians 4:19, St Paul describes labouring, contending prayer. Entering "labouring prayer" means entering this Paschal Mystery with Christ, to say 'yes' to being a co-redeemer. It is allowing ourselves to be "weighed down" spiritually by the burden of those who have not yet accepted Christ and interceding that his victory will become real in their lives, that they will come into relationship with him. This is the spiritual work that takes place prior to a person being born into new life in Christ. It truly is the "labour pains" of birthing new disciples.

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Australian Christian pastor and cultural commentator, Mark Sayer, remarks that, “The future belongs to the contenders, not the comfortable.” We have begun to glimpse how embarking on the journey of renewing our parishes is ultimately to co-redeem with Christ. It is to spiritually “labour” and “contend” for the birth of new disciples in Christ.

As you lead your parish as a team, you will discover that you will “spiritually contend” for the advance of the Kingdom. It is an experience of stepping into the arena to contend with formlessness, chaos, and darkness. And yet, the reality of our contending is light and even joyful because we are children – sons and daughters trustingly asking for good things from our Father.

## **Mission-Inspired Prayer is Authoritative**

“For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1). Did you know you share in God’s authority? As the Father’s son or daughter, if you stand in right relationship to him, he has given you the gift of standing in his own authority. Authority is the right to act on someone’s behalf. We exercise authentic authority on the Father’s behalf to the extent that we submit to his will. Our authority as his sons and daughters is to carry out not our own plans and ideas in his name, but rather, to discern what he is doing, to **come into agreement with it, align our desires with it, and purposefully intercede for it.**

Why do we need to exercise authority? Authority is needed in the midst of chaos. Think of any schoolteacher who walks into a raucous, chaotic classroom, or a police officer who walks into a crime scene. Someone needs to take authority and restore order. The ‘chaos’ that you experience in the parish is likely one of fruitlessness. Our long experience of our Catholic parish probably tells us that new disciples are unlikely. We struggle to visualise our parishes as thriving places brimming with new disciples because we have never seen this. We are conditioned to expect and even hope for meagre fruits, or permanently to be ‘planting seeds’ and never to reap. But this situation is not the Father’s will for our parish! His desire is to bring our parish to health and make it teem with life. When we come into agreement with his desire, we can stand in his authority in our prayer.

We can pray with different stances. One stance is that of a beggar or orphan, pleading before a miserly tyrant, extremely doubtful of his willingness to give. Another stance is the prayer of the sons and daughters of the Father: confident and full of trust that the Father gives good things. And yet, he does not bestow this abundance without the cooperation of our faith. God’s gifts are not automatic; he needs us to align our desires, he needs the substance of our faith.

Faith is our supernatural weapon. As a baptised son or daughter of the Father, your soul has received a tremendous muscle of supernatural faith that works in cooperation with all that God wants to give. Like operating a muscle that has not been frequently or strenuously used, it may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable at first – like reaching for something that is just outside our comfort zone. We might feel presumptuous (“Who am I to think that God would do this for our parish?!”) or audacious (“Surely it is more ‘holy’ not to expect or ask for so much?!”) or reckless (“I’m just setting myself up for disappointment when this doesn’t materialise”) but this is the faith God calls for, and the faith needed to activate radical change in our parish. Abram accepted the rename ‘Abraham’ (father of many) before there was any sign of a son. Are you ready to ‘rename’ your parish as the home of many new disciples – even before there is one? This is the kind of faith that pleases God.

Practising our belief in “things unseen” (Hebrews 11:1) means ‘taking authority’ over spiritual fruitlessness. We don’t need to plead with God for different results. We ask with confidence that we are heard, and that God will change things. The deeper we grow in union with the Father’s will, the more in tune we will be to how the Holy Spirit is working, and the more we will be able to pray in a way that advances the Kingdom.

The Bible is full of examples of protagonists who pray with authority on behalf of God’s people. Daniel is one who prays authoritatively in Daniel 9. As Daniel humbles himself in prayer, God reveals that the Devil has opposed Daniel’s

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prayer (“the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days” Daniel 10:13) and yet Daniel’s three weeks of sustained prayer, fasting and humility lead to breakthrough.

***“For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). As baptised children of God, we can forget the power that resides in us. Helplessness and powerlessness are lies of the evil one. We have supernatural armour at our disposal as Ephesians 6 outlines: victory is assured, and we just need to put the armour on.***

## Practical Parish Application

*“Your first duty as Pastors is not projects and organizations but to lead your people to a deep intimacy with the Trinity.” John Paul II to the Austrian Bishops*

***“Yes... our Christian communities must become genuine "schools" of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly "falls in love". Intense prayer, yes, but it does not distract us from our commitment to history: by opening our heart to the love of God it also opens it to the love of our brothers and sisters, and makes us capable of shaping history according to God's plan.” (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 33)***

Now we have had time to consider the features of mission-inspired prayer, we will consider what this looks like concretely in the parish. Here are nine practices from parishes that are embedding a culture of mission-inspired prayer.

### Prayer Ministry

Alpha effectively introduces people to simple ways to pray for the Holy Spirit with one another. You will want to look for opportunities outside Alpha, too, to offer prayer ministry. This can be very simple: it is important to demonstrate that anyone can pray simply with another person, “Come Holy Spirit.” By the virtue of your baptism, you have authority to ask the Holy Spirit to touch someone and you can be certain he will respond. Some Catholic parishes will offer prayer ministry at the end of Sunday Masses, and have found that long queues materialise as so many people want prayer! There is also deeper prayer ministry where prayer ministers may share prophetic words of knowledge with the recipient or pray for physical or emotional healing. This is the extraordinary authority invested in us as sons and daughters: he will speak through us and even heal through us. Training is recommended here, as in most Catholic parishes this is very unfamiliar territory.

### Training for Prayer

It may be unfamiliar to listen for words from the Holy Spirit or to be prompted by how he is guiding. While Alpha is a great tool in introducing people to the reality of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we may need deeper training in learning to live and pray in the Spirit. There are some excellent courses available in this regard: two examples are *The Prayer Course* and Encounter Ministry’s excellent two-year *School of Ministry*. This latter example is highly recommended for parishes that are serious about their parishes becoming places of transformation, miracles, and healing.

### Prayer at Meetings

Everything you have read so far will hopefully have you convicted that there is no place at the beginning of a meeting for a “quick prayer”. As we meet, we want God’s vision, God’s values, and God’s way to emerge as we speak. Therefore, we need to show him our open hearts and desire to know his will. Three words are indispensable at the beginning of a meeting: “Come Holy Spirit” (see CCC 2670). Pray these words aloud and in expectation that he will act. Give silence and space to him and allow people to share words or images that seem to come from him. Become accustomed to praying spontaneously at the beginning of meetings. Even for those for whom this is new or

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unfamiliar, normalise and make it safe, as everyone is expected to lead prayer: this is not just for the ‘professionals’ – we are all sons and daughters of the Father.

## Modelling Prayer

Use every opportunity to normalise spontaneous prayer. Some parishes host Worship Nights, opportunities for people to encounter Christ outside the liturgy. These are brilliant times to normalise lay people exercising their baptism by leading others in prayer.

## Adoration

Eucharistic adoration is the ‘rocket-fuel’ of parish renewal. As Jesus gazes on us in Adoration and we gaze on him, we take on his likeness and get filled with his love. Adoration forms us in union with Jesus. Adoration is not just for the regular adorers or those with an intercessory prayer charism. It is for every disciple who is serious about mission. As we grow in union with Jesus, we increasingly enter into his Paschal Mystery on behalf of others, and Adoration is the privileged context in which our “labouring”, mission-inspired prayer can take place.

When the parish is oriented towards a vision – when it has a direction – Adoration in the parish takes on a deeper importance. Now the need for it is greater, for the sake of mission. And now it has a direction. We are praying towards a vision. We are cooperating with the Holy Spirit by interceding and longing with him for that vision to come into reality.

If your parish has regular adorers, as they increasingly grow in their understanding of the new direction of the parish, mission-inspired prayer intentions can be shared with them. Maybe your parish will have longer periods of prayer: a full 24 hours of Adoration, or 40 hours like the traditional devotion. These become not just for the sake of individuals’ prayer lives, but rather, for the corporate advancing of the Kingdom in the parish.

## Intercessory Prayer Charism

As with every spiritual gift, some have received a charism, that is, a special anointing in that gift for the building up of the Church and the evangelisation of the world. For these people, they see an extraordinary effectiveness when they intercede. Maybe you have people with the charism of intercessory prayer in your parish (this can be discerned through processes such as *Called and Gifted*). Calling forth these people and entrusting them with the parish’s mission-inspired prayer intentions can be a powerful way of seeing new fruits through their prayers.

## Prayer-Walking

As you begin to set your parish on a missional footing, there are spiritual ways to start “taking ground” and advancing the kingdom of light. Your team together with any intercessors or prayer warriors could trace the geographical boundaries of the parish and gradually walk the whole parish boundary interceding for all those who live in the territory. This prayer-walking can take the form of praying the rosary, or of spontaneous interceding as we pray in the Spirit – noticing what is around us, what the Holy Spirit highlights for us, noting what he prompts us to pray for. Even if you don’t have a team yet, don’t know any prayer warriors, and know no one to invite you on this venture, as a pastor, there is great spiritual power in prayer-walking the boundaries and streets of your parish, and you will likely see spiritual shifts in your parish.

## Fasting

Prayer is about desire. When we have a great spiritual need that requires breakthrough, we can increase the intensity of our desire and therefore the power of our prayer through fasting. Desire for food and drink are among our most primal experiences as human beings. So basic are these natural desires that they are intense desires when we experience hunger and thirst. There is great power, then, when we combine these intense natural desires with our intense spiritual desires. We don’t see our forgoing of food as punishment but rather as an opportunity for deeper communion with our loving and all-providing Father, allowing him to meet us even in the need for physical food. We bring our spiritual desire below his gaze, just as he sees our physical desire. Fasting often has the effect of weakening our body. We humble ourselves physically before God and accept the limitations of our body for the duration of our

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fasting. Yet in the humbling of our body, there is often a clarifying of our mind. People often experience greater freedom in prayer. The Holy Spirit's power is unleashed when we confess through our fasting that we have relied too greatly on our own strength and power.

Fasting together as a team is even more powerful than fasting individually. When there is unity and communion among a team who have come into agreement around an intention they are praying for, powerful results may follow. Teams may decide to fast for one day for a particular intention. Or, over a longer period of time, for a big spiritual breakthrough, they might undertake an additional fast every Friday, for example.

## Stop to Pray

As we increasingly become attuned to the Holy Spirit, we will grow in perception when opposing spiritual forces are at work. The evil one knows what is at stake in your parish becoming missional and wants to do all he can to keep it in mediocrity, lack of health and fruitlessness. Sometimes in a team meeting, we become aware of opposing spirits, disunity or even arguments. Often these result from our human wounds rubbing against each other. Or maybe we're facing a very challenging decision and every way forward seems closed to us. At moments like these, the best course of action is often to stop and pray. We can pause, take a breath, and pray 'Come Holy Spirit'. Then wait. At these moments, we can be amazed at how he will enable us to see things in a whole new light, a spiritual atmosphere will shift, we will glimpse ways forward we didn't see before.

In the prayer of contending, we may not even know for what we pray at times. This is where we can truly partner with the Holy Spirit "because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27). *'Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.'* Romans 8:26. We "groan inwardly" with the "whole creation", waiting "with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19, 23).

## Enable the Nine Examples of Mission-Inspired Prayer: Build a Team

To develop a culture of mission-inspired prayer, you will need a team in the parish who champion prayer, keep it at the forefront of the parish's agenda, and lead the implementation of the prayer practices named above which will change culture. A culture does not become tangible and lived out without taking very practical steps. What would be the features of such a team?

- It is led by someone with a conviction about prayer, a desire for the renewal of the parish, and a gift for intercession.
- It is led by someone with a conviction about prayer, a desire for the renewal of the parish, and a gift for intercession.
- It is led by the Holy Spirit, as the team listens to and perceives how their intercession can cooperate with the Holy Spirit's transformation of the parish.
- It meets regularly (weekly or monthly) to pray.
- It prays for the power of the Holy Spirit to transform hearts. It prays Acts 1:8 for every parishioner: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses."
- It receives strategic insight about what to pray for from the leaders of the parish: what are the greatest breakthroughs required and high-level needs that will most advance the mission, according to the pastor and leadership team members?<sup>3</sup>
- It focuses on outward issues: the groups in the neighbourhood God is calling us to connect with, those we will invite to Alpha over the next few weeks, the strategic preaching series that is coming up, for a new boldness in invitation among the parishioners.
- It prays for unity and protection among parish leaders, priests, ministries in the parish.
- It prays during the significant evangelistic events of the parish, e.g. Alpha.
- It engages the whole parish to pray corporately for specific needs.

# Mission-Inspired Prayer

## Debrief and Evaluation

In the early sessions of Day One, we focussed on the experience of chaos, void and formlessness that are characteristic of the early days of parish renewal. We asked ourselves what we needed to be able to believe that the Holy Spirit is more powerful than the chaos or void in our parish.

Now is an opportunity to reflect back on what has changed. What has changed in you? What has changed in the approach of your group towards parish renewal? Most importantly, what has changed about the place of the Holy Spirit in the renewal of your parish?

We are only at the beginning, but the power of the Holy Spirit can transform your parish. There is no reason why people should not have powerful encounters with the Holy Spirit in your parish. There is no reason why miracles should not take place in your parish. There is no reason why the Holy Spirit's power should not bring people to conversion when they hear the Gospel message preached in your parish.

God has all the resources of Heaven ready to transform hearts in your parish. What he needs from you is the 'substance' of your faith and desire.

To finish, we share a story of mission-inspired prayer in action. These kinds of fruits can be seen, too, among young people in your parish.

Joannes Hartl, Catholic German evangelist who founded the *Gebetshaus* in Augsburg, tells the story of a mission event he led for young people. In the first day of the event, the young people do not respond to the evangelistic talks – they are despondent. So Johannes and his friend pray ahead of the Holy Spirit event that evening. Johannes describes the experience as they both begin to pray:

**'...a very heavy blanket is coming down on top of us, as if we could feel that there was some heavy, dark fog there keeping God's light from reaching these young people. As if pushed down by a load, I kneel on my thermal mat. Soon my head is also on the floor. I struggle. Or to put it differently: something has seized me. I am no longer praying, I am being prayed. Tom, next to me, appears to feel exactly the same. He is on the floor, too, weighed down by a burden of his own.'**

This is labouring, contending prayer like we described in session 3.

**'Labour pains are not something you do, they're something that come over you. And in his moment such pain, such struggle for the souls of these young people hits me, it knocks me to the floor. It breaks out of us a sigh, a lament, a cry to God. It does not feel pleasant at all. It's like being in a fight. And yet it is the only thing we can do right now. And it doesn't stop. For over an hour it does not stop.'**

Johannes and his friend keep praying beyond the time the evening event is due to begin. They won't stop praying until they experience breakthrough.

**'Suddenly, in an instant, as abruptly as it came, it vanishes. I realize that I have stopped praying. I notice that I have become calm. All at once a peace and a sense of ease fill the room. A glance to my left shows me that Tom has also stopped praying and is just sitting there quite serenely. With a quick exchange of conspiratorial glances, we agree at once: now we can start!'**

They begin the event and Johannes preaches the Gospel – 'pure, direct, radical' – no jokes, just the message that 'you must be born again.' And the impact is staggering.

## Mission-Inspired Prayer

**'The teenagers ... are now sitting there as stunned as if they have been struck by lightning. I invite everyone who wants to make this decision right here to come forward, now, in front of the watching eyes of their friends. These aloof young people -... all of them, yes all of them, jump out of their seats and rush forward. I lead them in a simple prayer: 'Father, I thank you that you love me, and that Jesus died for me. Jesus, I repent of my evil ways, please forgive me. I want to give you my life today and accept the gift of your cross. I want to follow you. Amen.'** Before we are even done praying, some of them begin to sob heavily, and one begins to shake. Bear this in mind: this is not a charismatic setting. The opposite, in fact. These young people don't even know there is such a thing. We start to sing a simple song to the Holy Spirit, and to pray for each one individually.

**It's as if our hands were charged with high-voltage electricity. When we touch the first kid, he drops to the floor as if struck by lightning. The same thing happens to the second, the third ... many begin to weep loudly, to sob, to scream. Another begins to laugh and repeat, "Thank you, Jesus!" over and over again. Holy chaos, all over again.**

**When the local priest pops into the semi-darkened room for an unannounced visit - entering a room where young people are all lying on the floor weeping, laughing or just sitting there full of joy - I can't explain everything that's happening here, not quickly anyway. All I can think of is to make a suggestion: I ask him to make himself available for confession and pastoral care in an adjoining room. He glances around at the unusual scene one more time and then goes into the room. Tomorrow, I'll explain to him what's happening. But when he comes back the next day, he says, 'What that was last night, I can't really say. But what I can say is that every one of those young people came to confession, and I haven't often heard confessions like that.'**

Do you want to see changed lives in your parish? Let's start cooperating in prayer with the work of the Holy Spirit and praying for the reality of Acts 1:8 to start breaking into people's lives. Come, Holy Spirit!