

GENESIS

COMPASS



The Sixth Theme
Become the Leader You Are

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 **DIVINE**
RENOVATION

Become the Leader You Are

1. Current Parish Reality

Introduction

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” ²⁹ Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Genesis 1:26-31

In God’s blueprint for the ‘re-creation’ of the parish, the culmination of his creation is the human person. On the journey of parish renewal, you might set off to transform your parish, but sooner or later, you discover that the first person God wants to transform is... *you.*

In Day Six, we will consider,

- the current parish experience of leadership, including self-leadership and our baptismal authority as leaders,
- a theological reflection on this reality, based on Genesis 1,
- practical application suggestions as your parish takes concrete steps.

Reality Check: Self-Leadership

At Divine Renovation, we use Andrew Bryant and Ana Kazan’s definition of self-leadership: “Self-leadership is having a developed sense of who you are, what you can do, where you are going, coupled with the ability to influence your communication, emotions, and behavior on the way to getting there.”¹ Self-leadership means taking responsibility for fostering the environments, mentalities, and networks that I need to grow in self-knowledge, self-awareness and healing. The purpose of self-leadership is so that I can fulfil God’s unique mission for my life, lead others, tackle tough challenges, and thrive.

Perhaps there has never been a time in the Church when the need for self-leadership has been so great. The challenges besetting our Church both internally and externally are considerable, and the toll they take upon leaders in our Church is unmistakable. Frederick Nietzsche famously said, “I will believe in the Redeemer when the Christians

¹ Bryant and Kazan. (2012). *Self-Leadership: How to Become a More Successful, Efficient, and Effective Leader from the Inside Out.*

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look a little more redeemed” – and certainly, our ability as Christians to embody joy has a direct impact on our evangelistic effectiveness.

It is our conviction that the missional impact of your parish is directly correlated to the inner renewal and spiritual and emotional health of you and your leaders. To put this another way, your parish will grow in its missional impact to the extent that you and your leaders are personally renewed in the Holy Spirit and commit to growing in spiritual and emotional health.

Self-leadership and inner renewal are not ‘added extras’ or a nice side-project for those interested ‘in that sort of thing’. Our experience of parishes growing in missional health indicates that this renewal is an indispensable dimension of the parish renewal journey. John Maxwell states that, ‘The speed of the leader is the speed of the team’, but we would also add, ‘The *health* of the leader is the *health* of the team.’

Have you considered before that the first person that God invites you to lead in the parish renewal journey is yourself? Considering the definition of self-leadership above, you may have already reflected on how you take responsibility to show up at your best. Or maybe this is a brand-new concept for you that you have not considered explicitly before.

In this first part of Day Six, we consider the brokenness in our societies and in our Church that affects us as individuals and decreases our parishes’ capacity to be missional. As we consider these areas of brokenness, we begin to see how unnatural and inhuman some of the social and ecclesial circumstances are in which we live. As individuals, we are powerless to change societal structures, and, unless we have influence in our diocese, we cannot change ecclesial ones either.

While there is plenty that could be done in dioceses to move towards health, in this Day 6 module, our focus is *self-leadership*, all that falls within our control. As we turn towards solutions, we will be concerned with our own agency – the things we can change – and how we can take responsibility for ourselves, within the given structural limits we face.

We will consider the unnatural circumstances and faulty mindsets which demonstrate powerfully why healthy self-leadership is needed in our parishes more than ever before:

- Isolated leadership
- Perceived lack of agency
 - Priests
 - Laity
- Faulty theological mindsets
 - Pelagianism
 - Jansenism
- Our human brokenness

a. Isolated Leadership

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One area of brokenness experienced within our society and our Church today is a culture of isolated leadership. Two predominant factors have created such a culture in the Church.

One is internal: our clerical models of the past have culturally clung on in our parishes. Fifty years ago, it would have been common for two or three priests to live communally in a presbytery, sharing the load of leadership together. They would also likely pray, eat meals, and socialise together. In such a scenario, a clerical approach to leadership – while not biblical or in line with the authentic Tradition of the Church – was at least more functional. But today, few priests live with other priests. The clerical model has left them carrying the weight of leadership – along with all the elements of their daily lives – alone.

The second is external: as priests have become structurally more isolated, our culture has grown more atomised and individualistic. Individuals are less integrated within nuclear families, and families are less integrated within their local communities. The U.S. surgeon general, Vivek Murthy, wrote: “Our twenty-first-century world demands that we focus on pursuits that seem to be in constant competition for our time, attention, energy, and commitment. Many of these pursuits are themselves competitions. We compete for jobs and status. We compete over possessions, money, and reputations. We strive to stay afloat and to get ahead. Meanwhile, the relationships we prize often get neglected in the chase.”²

No wonder people feel lonely. A 2023 Gallup study found that 1 in 4 people worldwide feel lonely.³ Loneliness is structurally wired into our 21st Century western world: it is, in physician Gabor Maté’s words, “the concrete manifestation of a particular socioeconomic system, a distinct worldview, and a way of life.”⁴ The Catholic Church frequently highlights the danger of such structures in our world. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis wrote, “there is no life when we claim to be self-sufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes, death prevails” (n. 87; see also CCC 1905).

All of this is having a profound effect on the parish. As relationships are neglected, it is easier for a person to be anonymous in his or her parish; it is more socially acceptable for him or her to take what they need from their parish without giving anything back. These realities have a direct impact on the pastor. The loneliness and striving of his parishioners compound his own loneliness as he becomes an isolated service-provider.

Isolated leadership, then, is another example of the broken, unnatural human circumstances in which we live, that have profoundly damaged the parish – priests and parishioners alike.

b. Perceived Lack of Agency

In the midst of circumstances that are not conducive to our thriving, it is unsurprising that many of us feel helpless, with a depleted sense of agency to do anything about it.

² Vivek H. Murthy (2020), *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*, p. 98.

³ See: <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/512618/almost-quarter-world-feels-lonely.aspx>

⁴ Gabor Maté (2022), *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture*.

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Professor of psychiatry, Bessel van der Kolk, defines agency as, “knowing where you stand, knowing that you have a say in what happens to you, knowing that you have some ability to shape your circumstances.”⁵

When it comes to our parishes, a perceived lack of agency has a profound impact on the culture of leadership within the Church. Leadership precisely means “shaping our circumstances”, in Professor van der Kolk’s words. To lead is to influence and mobilise people and tackle tough challenges. A perceived lack of agency means we do not see ourselves as leaders. A vacuum of leadership is created where *no one* sees it as their role to influence or mobilise anyone else, and where a blind eye is turned to tough challenges, or they are tackled reluctantly or half-heartedly.

What are some of the reasons behind this perceived lack of agency?

i. Priests

When priests are ordained, they give over their lives to an organisation not only with 2000 years of tradition, but one that is divinely instituted. When Pope Francis dreamed 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, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 27), he likely knew how tough that transformation would be.

Every social reality – including a parish or a diocese – comes with a structural dimension that conditions its reality. A priest understands that he has promised obedience to his bishop and that he may be asked any given day to move to a different parish. A parish has certain levels of financial resources available to it. A priest may have to take care of one or ten parishes – depending on what the needs in the diocese are. Parishioners may be blessed with beautiful, hospitable buildings in which to host groups and ministries – or they may have just one ramshackle room. A priest may find large numbers of talented, ‘can-do’ lay people when he arrives in his parish, or he may struggle to find anyone who wants to engage. A bishop may have an abundance of priests to distribute across the parishes of his diocese, or he may struggle to ensure sacramental provision. Particular countries or regions have unique realities: multiple languages to cater for; vast distances to travel; or, as in some German parishes, for example, lay pastoral teams that are already in place beyond the decision-making of the pastor.

These are all structural realities. They exist prior to us as individuals, so to speak, and have strong conditioning power on how we think about our reality and what we can change. Certainly, many of our structures, fossilised in centuries of custom and culture, now militate against a new culture of mission so urgently needed.

Sometimes these realities feel like immovable ‘givens.’ They certainly impinge on us in Catholic parishes more strongly than in churches of other traditions, which may feel greater control to “shape their circumstances”. How limiting our unique structural

⁵ Bessel van der Kolk (2014), *The Body Keeps the Score*, p. 112.

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factors are determines how optimistic we feel about what might be “transformed” – “customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures”.

Where you have an extremely limiting set of structural circumstances, it is understandable to feel that you have no “say in what happens to you”, or no “ability to shape your circumstances”, in van der Kolk’s words. It is understandable, perhaps, that some resign themselves.

And yet, history demonstrates that structure is constantly worked on and modified by the individual agents living in it. When we passively resign ourselves to our circumstances, we unconsciously reproduce these structural realities. But, history is made by those who intentionally work to change them: we have within our power to consciously produce new, emerging structure.

ii. Laity

In 1906, Pope Pius X noted in his encyclical, *Vehementer Nos*, that, “the right of the laity is to allow itself to be led.” Two decades later, in 1929, Pope Pius XI wrote a letter to Cardinal Segura y Saens to share about his new initiative, Catholic Action. He wrote:

“...unfortunately, the clergy no longer suffice for the necessities and requirements of our time, either because there are too few priests present in certain places or because their voice and their exhortations no longer reach whole groups of people who consciously withdraw themselves from their influence. This is why it is so necessary for all to become apostles, so that the Catholic laity does not stand idly by but is closely united to the Church’s hierarchy and to its directives...”

Neither of these papal contributions reveal teaching on the laity in its authentic fullness which came into focus at Vatican II, and in subsequent magisterial teaching. Pope Pius X’s ‘pay, pray, and obey’ attitude towards the laity was slightly improved in Pope Pius XI’s sense of urgency about laity becoming apostles – thanks to too few priests, rather than the intrinsic call of their Baptism!⁶

The quotations show the development of doctrine in this area, but we know that, wherever there is doctrinal development, culture takes decades – and maybe even centuries! – to catch up.

An ingrained culture of laity as passive recipients of ministry remains prevalent with many lay people suffering a perceived lack of their own agency to contribute to the renewal of the Church. Pope Francis spoke strongly at the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting (CELAM) in 2013:

⁶ The Code of Canon Law speaks of both the “obligation” and the “right” of lay people to evangelize: “they are bound by the general obligation and they have the right, whether as individuals or in associations, to strive so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the world. This obligation is all the more insistent in circumstances in which only through them are people able to hear the Gospel and to know Christ” (*CIC*, c. 225, 1; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 6, 13).

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“...in the majority of cases, it has to do with a sinful complicity: the priest clericalizes the lay person and the lay person kindly asks to be clericalized, because deep down it is easier. The phenomenon of clericalism explains, in great part, the lack of maturity and Christian freedom in some of the Latin American laity. Either they simply do not grow (the majority), or else they take refuge in forms of ideology like those we have just seen, or in partial and limited ways of belonging” (§5).

“As pastors, bishops and priests, are we conscious and convinced of the mission of the lay faithful and do we give them the freedom to continue discerning, in a way befitting their growth as disciples, the mission which the Lord has entrusted to them? Do we support them and accompany them, overcoming the temptation to manipulate them or infantilize them?” (§3)

Laity suffer too from an exaggerated focus on the hierarchical dimension of the Church at the expense of the charismatic. *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, teaches that God “both equips and directs [the Church] with hierarchical and charismatic gifts” (§4). In other words, the Holy Spirit pours grace both through the hierarchical structures and through the charisms of all the baptised.

Importantly, “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills, (see 1 Corinthians 12:11) He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank” (*Lumen Gentium*, §12).

In other words, the Holy Spirit intends both to sanctify and to lead the people of God through charisms that are bestowed on all the baptised – not just the ordained. As the Church increasingly recognises this culturally – not just in her doctrine – laity increasingly grow in confidence in the authority of their Baptism and in exercising the charisms they have received from the Holy Spirit.

c. Faulty Theological Mindsets

Our external circumstances are not the only causes of our personal brokenness: our mindsets, too, cause us to suffer. Mgr. James Shea, co-author of *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission*, has proposed that the greatest wounds of our day are intellectual wounds. Intellectual wounds alter our mindsets or ‘mental furniture’ – how we see God, one another, and ourselves. They play out in how we think, speak and act; how we lead, make decisions, order our lives, and interact with others. Here, we consider two pieces of theological ‘faulty mental furniture’ that many of us carry.

i. Shrinking God: Pelagianism in its new guise⁷

Many of us mentally carry an intellectual wound of a modern version of the heresy condemned in 418AD, Pelagianism. It has reared its head repeatedly throughout history in different guises.

⁷ Fr James Mallon discusses the damage of Pelagianism in *Divine Renovation: Bringing your Parish from Maintenance to Mission*, p. 62.

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Pelagius was an Irish ascetic who lived from 390 – 418AD. He travelled to Rome, and after the sack of Rome, to Africa. He feared that St Augustine’s teaching on grace was too abundant: if people believed that God’s grace was so vast and freely given, it could lead them to moral laxity! Rather, he proposed the view that much discipline and effort are required to achieve salvation. Our will was not corrupted by original sin, as St Augustine claimed: rather, we have full freedom, and if we simply embrace a harshly ascetic regime of penance, prayer, and hard work, we can be saved. Pelagius’ teaching in effect removed the need for a Saviour. It was condemned at the Council of Carthage in 418AD but our human tendency to believe in our own capacities without God’s help is so pernicious, that this heresy frequently emerges over the centuries in different guises – including today, in the 21st Century.

Even for those of us who have embraced a worldview and lifestyle of mission, Pelagianism makes its infection known in how we think, speak and act in relation to mission. How does Pelagianism play out in the 21st Century Church?

- “*We’ve got this.*” God is distant and impersonal, not already at work. We don’t seek what God is already doing in prayer, we impose our own ideas and will and carry them out. We ask God to “bless what we are doing” rather than “do what he is blessing.” Change is needed, but we are the ones tasked with bringing it about. If we just “pull our socks up” and “get organised” we can figure everything out and make the changes needed. Professional sciences show us how to get the Church running like a well-oiled machine. We can control risk, professionalise our services, and limit chances of failure. Priests are tick-boxing professionals rather than apostolic leaders. Ultimately, we operate in a diminished Church that can run just fine without the Holy Spirit.

In his address to the 2013 meeting of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America previously mentioned, Pope Francis described this approach as “functionalism.” “Its effect on the Church is paralyzing. More than being interested in the road itself, it is concerned with fixing holes in the road. A functionalist approach has no room for mystery; it aims at efficiency. It reduces the reality of the Church to the structure of an NGO. What counts are quantifiable results and statistics. The Church ends up being run like any other business organization. It applies a sort of “theology of prosperity” to the organization of pastoral work” (§4).⁸

- “*Stay in control.*” God intends for us to understand everything, and to bring it under our control. Control can masquerade itself as clericalism (in priests or laity in authority positions). In the parish, our tendency is to control every ministry or group. Individuals must constantly seek approval. As leaders, we may feel threatened by individuals’ charisms or initiatives. Pastoral ministry that is not strongly managed or contained, or that involves elements of the unpredictable

⁸ See: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-celam-rio.html

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(e.g., spontaneous prayer or worship, healing or deliverance ministry), makes us nervous. On a wider scale, this mindset can be disastrous within the Church: any corruption or scandal in the Church needs to be controlled by silencing or cover up.

In the same CELAM address, Pope Francis comments, “The Church is an institution, but when she makes herself a “centre”, she becomes merely functional, and slowly but surely turns into a kind of NGO. The Church then claims to have a light of her own, and she stops being that “*mysterium lunae*” of which the Church Fathers spoke. She becomes increasingly self-referential and loses her need to be missionary. From an “institution” she becomes a “enterprise”. She stops being a bride and ends up being an administrator; from being a servant, she becomes an “inspector”. Aparecida wanted a Church which is bride, mother, and servant, more a facilitator of faith than an inspector of faith” (§5).

- “*There’s nothing wrong with me, I don’t need anyone.*” We recognise that change is needed, but we are focussed on the external problems that need fixing – not the internal ones. If something is broken, the blame lies on something or someone external to me. This leads to isolated leadership. I am not broken, and therefore I do not need anyone else. It is dangerous to show my vulnerability or weakness. Ultimately, this mentality tragically leads to my internal brokenness manifesting in other ways: in numbing behaviours, addiction, and patterns of sin I cannot escape, however much I try.

This ‘Pelagian wound’ can even manifest itself in a missional key. Imagine a pastor who gets inspired by the movement of parishes around the world seeing renewal and fruits in mission. He realises that his own parish desperately needs this kind of renewal. In his sense of urgency and conviction, he jumps immediately into the work of parish renewal. A mission-focused parish should have lots of opportunities for people to encounter Jesus, so he starts to generate a lot of new programmes and groups. A mission-focused parish should have many lay people leading different ministries, so he starts inviting many parishioners into leadership, into initiating new ministries and events. After a year or two, the impact looks great on paper. The pastor could demonstrate all the activity has happened; he could create an organisational chart showing all the lay people in leadership roles.

But, after initial bursts of enthusiasm, things start to fray at the edges. People are feeling a sense of pressure to keep all the plates spinning. They are being spread too thin: either they are finding good excuses to step back from their roles with no one to take over from them; or they soldier on, motivated by a sense of guilt and a desire to please the pastor. Lay people who know they need to grow more deeply and authentically in their own personal discipleship journey have taken on leadership roles before they are ready.

This scenario is maybe more common than we realise. The reality may unfold itself in a number of different ways.

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The pastor may keep blindly pushing ahead. Maybe he lacks self-awareness of the impact his driving leadership is having on his parishioners. Maybe his personal worth is identified with needing much activity to take place in his parish. Maybe he has no idea how else to lead a parish into mission, and he is afraid of simply slipping back into maintenance.

All of these will likely and unfortunately lead to a crisis moment at some point.

But, another reality may unfold. This will be a moment or a process of awakening. The pastor comes to certain realisations. That the renewal of his parish is not solely down to his driving or striving. That the Holy Spirit's vision and desire for the flourishing of the parish are greater than and precede his own. That the gifts and charisms needed for the renewal of the parish already exist in the lives of his parishioners, but that it may take time for these to emerge. That he does not have to sprint, but instead take time to learn the pace of the Holy Spirit (which may also be fast at times!). That new ministries and groups will start and be sustained only at the pace at which mature leaders emerge. And, perhaps most importantly, that the renewal of the parish will only take place when built on a foundation of personal renewal, relationship with the Holy Spirit, and prayer.

ii. **Shrinking Ourselves: Jansenism in its new guise**⁹

At one of the instances in history where Pelagianism reared its head, as often happens, another movement arose as a corrective. In 17th Century France, the thinking and outlooks of Jansenism became widespread, and it, too, was eventually condemned as heresy. Jansenism swung to the opposite extreme from Pelagianism, claiming that God's grace was so overpowering, it was basically irresistible. In other words, it significantly played down the role of human freedom. So great was God's grace that Jansenists developed a highly rigorous morality: the "elect" few were called to live this rarefied life, but the vast majority were not so chosen: rather, they were not predestined to be saved and were unworthy to receive sacraments such as Holy Communion.

17th Century Jansenism saw the majority of humanity as an amorphous, unsaved mass. The devotion to the Sacred Heart grew up as an antidote to this false image of God: on the contrary, Jesus' Heart loves, cares for, and longs to save every human person.

What are the Jansenist temptations in the 21st Century Church?

In the 21st Century, we see three different – but similarly Jansenist – mentalities emerge.

- *“Don't get above yourself: your parish is fine just as it is.”* This is an outlook which considers any desire for change as having high notions of oneself, getting too big for your boots! It is an outlook which would likely be more common in Irish, British or Commonwealth countries. Given the monumental problems around the world, why would God be concerned with our humble, little parish?! Behind this outlook is the faulty theological mindset: universalism. Universalism is the

⁹ Fr James Mallon discusses the damage of Jansenism in *Divine Renovation: Bringing your Parish from Maintenance to Mission*, p. 66.

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heresy that most people are “good” and going to Heaven. God does not demand very much of them at all; he loves and is happy with them just as they are. In this outlook, there is no need for a Saviour at all.

Universalism is a 21st century heresy, but it is loosely connected to Jansenism. Jansenism considered humanity as an amorphous mass which was largely condemned. Universalism considers humanity is an amorphous mass which is generally *saved*.

In this 21st century version of Jansenism (as with the 17th century version), human beings are not seen in their individuality: in their personal ability to respond to God’s invitation to enter into intentional relationship with him. The universalists believe that universal salvation is the only imaginable approach of a loving God. Yet, it eclipses indispensable elements of God’s loving nature: his desire to love us personally and individually, and his respect for our freedom. Where the 17th Century took an overly pessimistic stance of despair, the 21st Century takes an overly optimistic stance of presumption. Neither of these accords with human hope.¹⁰

With our parishes too, the universalist mentality is that God similarly looks upon our parishes as a universal mass, rather than at the potential of each one in its individuality. God does not have a unique and personal vision for any particular parish. Any parish that breaks away from the status quo is a “tall poppy” that needs to be brought down a peg or two. Those who want to change things should stop agitating.

- “*God will only do small things through me.*” Timidity masquerading as humility also serves as a convenient excuse for laity not to take initiative in the parish but leave everything to the priest and paid professionals. This outlook is the personal version of the parish outlook described above. It is a lack of confidence or inferiority, often masquerading as humility, crippling lay people who have been conditioned by a “pay, pray and obey” spirituality. Imagine a few scenarios. A parishioner who seeks Father’s approval to run a Bible study in her own home; a catechist who cannot teach a class if a priest is present but will defer to him; a ministry leader who will consistently ask a priest to lead a prayer if he is present. It enables a comfortable degree of consumerism, where we engage in areas of familiarity, but avoid challenging ourselves to go deeper. Think of the thousands of parishioners around the world who will happily serve at a parish social event but who would do all they could to avoid an event which engages their personal faith. This mentality paralyses countless lay people in the earliest threshold of conversion: a bridge of trust is securely established, but a web of timidity and fear of getting notions above one’s station holds them back from believing that God might have a personal mission for them or call upon their life.

¹⁰ Jessica M. Murdoch’s article gives helpful insight into this version of 21st century Jansenism: <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2017/02/the-new-jansenism#:~:text=Whereas%20the%20Jansenism%20of%20old,insignificant%20as%20the%20human%20heart.>

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The pernicious, two-tier belief that God only works through the “holy” infects much everyday Catholic practice. We tend to believe the majority of us are sinners who occasionally do a good deed, rather than saints who occasionally fall. Supernatural acts such as miracles or healings are only told in the lives of canonised saints who operated on a different plane from us. Everyday parish life tends to default towards exacerbating this faulty belief: we only hear preaching and teaching from the ordained, or the educated professionals; those visible in pastoral leadership or in leading worship or prayer tend to be the few, rather than the many; certain charisms are valued in laity more than others (e.g. hospitality and service, over healing or pastoring).

- “*Safeguarding holiness is more important than pursuing mission.*” In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II wrote, “*The universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission*” (§90). A third Jansenist temptation arises amid the growing darkness of western culture as it falls away from Christ. Our temptation is to ghettoise ourselves as Christians, distancing ourselves from sinful, secular influences, and expecting suffocatingly high standards of those in our communities. In our pastoral practice, our concern is to create hoops for people to jump through to test their commitment. Pope Francis describes the mentality as, “a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyses and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §94).

In this approach, we stall ordinary parishioners from growing in leadership roles because we are fearful that they have not received enough formation. We struggle to identify leadership team members because we overvalue orthodoxy of belief or completeness of formation at the expense of human qualities or potential. We have a hard time trusting that an event or class will meet our exacting standards and that it can run without us.

This mentality can create a culture where newcomers or “outsiders” do not feel welcome. Conversations revolve around niche theological, liturgical, or political issues. Experience of ushers or welcomers may not be inviting, generous or hospitable. Those unfamiliar with Christianity may feel like no one in the pews is “like them”.

Pope Francis’ comments in a 2013 interview address precisely the culture that can arise from this mentality:

“I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. ...

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“The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of mercy above all. ... The confessional is not a torture chamber. ...

“The church’s pastoral ministry cannot be obsessed with the transmission of a disjointed multitude of doctrines to be imposed insistently. Proclamation in a missionary style focuses on the essentials, on the necessary things: this is also what fascinates and attracts more, what makes the heart burn, as it did for the disciples at Emmaus. We have to find a new balance; otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel. The proposal of the Gospel must be more simple, profound, radiant. It is from this proposition that the moral consequences then flow. ...

“The confessor... is always in danger of being either too much of a rigorist or too lax. Neither is merciful, because neither of them really takes responsibility for the person. The rigorist washes his hands so that he leaves it to the commandment. The loose minister washes his hands by simply saying, ‘This is not a sin’ or something like that. In pastoral ministry we must accompany people, and we must heal their wounds.”¹¹

Each of these Jansenist mentalities are examples of intellectual wounds that impact our approach to leadership and the culture we unknowingly create. Only a “renewal of our minds” can heal the impact that these mentalities have on our parishes.

d. Our Human Brokenness

Humans have always suffered from personal brokenness thanks to the Fall. In our society and culture today, it is likely we experience in ourselves, our family members, and our fellow parishioners even greater levels of brokenness than would have been the case 50 years ago. Sadly, how few of us today can say we grew up in a stable, faith-filled family with parents who lived out a loving and faithful marriage? Even if we were blessed to experience an upbringing like this, no family is perfect and every single one of us has had life experiences which have caused us pain or even trauma.

Many of us, as missionary disciples and parish leaders, passionate about sharing Jesus with others, may be somewhat aware of areas of interior pain in our lives, but do not realise two things. Firstly, the full extent that these wounds have on our ability to evangelise and lead others. Secondly, the fact that healing of these wounds is even possible this side of Heaven. Most of us feel too busy with all that needs to be done. Surely giving attention to the wounds in our own hearts is self-indulgent? Surely we need to work hard at practising virtue, avoiding sin, and just get on with the mission?

Let’s consider a few fictional parish scenarios.

¹¹ See https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html

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Scenario 1: A newly-retired parishioner now has much time available, and he wants to offer it to the parish. Transitioning from a busy working life, that supplied him with a strong sense of identity, into retirement, is more challenging than he realises. He isn't able to explicitly acknowledge to himself the feelings of insecurity and confusion he is experiencing, and to cope, he throws himself into parish life. He is available to help with every project and work on every team. He has some very helpful skills and people enjoy the capacity he is able to offer. But soon, this gentleman is deeply involved everywhere you look. He is having a hard time allowing others to make decisions without him, he doesn't seek to raise up others in leadership but prefers to do everything himself, he inadvertently is making himself indispensable everywhere. When he is not invited onto the newly formed leadership team he reacts badly. He becomes more controlling in the areas he is leading, refusing to communicate with leadership team members or collaborate with other teams that do not include him.

Scenario 2: One member of a parish leadership team is a 'people-pleaser' who has been well-liked all her life because of her availability to help. She will drop what she is doing at a moment's notice and assist with a project where she is needed. She is reliant and always completes what she says she will do. She is often in demand by many people and she never complains. However, her constant availability and her inability to say 'no' stem from wounds in her life of which she is not explicitly aware. Her drive to please everyone and keep everyone happy means that when the leadership team enters into any conflict, she freezes and struggles to engage. The team soon realise that she finds it very difficult, if not impossible, to enter into conflict. She is unable to put forward a point of view if it contradicts with someone else. Over time, the team perceive this as her inability to be vulnerable. As the rest of the team grow increasingly in vulnerability-based trust due to their ability to disagree with and still love each other, this lady is emotionally left behind. The team feel frustrated with her inability to share authentically her true feelings and emotions, rather than presenting what she thinks people want to hear from her. And she increasingly feels her disconnect with the team, and, recognising she is an outlier, her instinct is to withdraw from the team.

Scenario 3: As he was growing up, one pastor had a very demanding mother. She was very driven on behalf of her son and pushed him into situations that he did not always feel ready for or comfortable in. In these situations, he tended to cope by shutting down, and being paralysed into inaction. Even today, as he leads in the parish, whenever he experiences particularly pushy parishioners he tends to withdraw from them or avoid them. It is an unconscious and reflexive behaviour, and he does not recognise it in himself. In relating to someone with a strong executing make-up, he freezes when they present him with actions or tasks that need to be taken forward. He rarely acts on these tasks. The strong executor gets frustrated and thinks the pastor is lazy. The pastor sees this person as overly task-oriented.

Scenario 4: One female lay parish leader has suffered through her life with feeling that she is not listened to. She was one of many siblings growing up and she had to fight for her voice to be heard. She experiences an unacknowledged insecurity when she puts forward her views or opinions that people are not hearing her. Over her life, she has developed a coping mechanism that involves expressing her opinion quite forcefully.

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People experience her as dominating: they tend to allow her to express her view, do not disagree with her in fear of having an argument, but then go ahead with their own course of action. The parish leader perceives this happening to her again and again and it exacerbates her frustration that she is never listened to. Over time, she increasingly becomes even more dominating when she expresses herself.

Maybe you can resonate with some of these scenarios or think of some in your own parish. The reality is that *for every single one of us* – no one excluded! – a similar scenario could be written! Perhaps it makes you to cringe to think of this, but, welcome to the human race. If you are human and not immaculately conceived, you have brokenness that impacts the way you form relationships, lead, evangelise, pastor, interact and work together with others.

The most liberating reality in the world is when you discover you are on a team with people *who know exactly the brokenness you bring into your leadership...* and they love, forgive, accept, and choose to work with you anyway.

This final section of Part 1 exploring our current parish experience is perhaps the most painful, but also the most liberating. There is much that is beyond our control in the previous sections we explored. But, when we discover that not only does Jesus see our wounds, but cares about them, loves them, and wants to tend to them – and that this is indispensable for our growth and effectiveness as leaders – a whole new world opens up to us. We hope that this journey will be one of great healing and abundant new life for you.¹²

2. Theological Reflection based on Genesis 1

We have considered our current reality as 21st century parish leaders, with all the joys and challenges this entails. What happens when we turn to sacred scripture to cast supernatural light upon this reality? As always, we encourage your own *lectio divina* on Genesis 1:26-31: the Holy Spirit will illuminate astonishing insights. What follows here is our own meditation.

“Image” and “Likeness” (Genesis 1:26)

We have seen how lies from the wider culture about our identity infect our minds and hearts. But the truth about who we are is clearly revealed in the very first chapter of the Bible:

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...” ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

The same awesome truth is expressed too by the Psalmist:

¹² Divine Renovation collaborates with and warmly endorses the work of the John Paul II Healing Center (<https://jpiihealingcenter.org>). Excellent resources are offered here for both priests and laity to begin their individual journey into healing and freedom to be the person God created them to be.

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³When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
⁴what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
⁵You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.
(Psalm 8: 3-5)

The way God created *adam* – the first human beings – was different from how he created all the other animals.

Two Hebrew words are used to describe how man is created like God – *tselem* “image” and *demut* “likeness.” *Tselem* refers to a physical representation (e.g. Numbers 33:52); *demut* refers to a visible resemblance (e.g. Isaiah 40:18). Both words are also used in Genesis 5:3 and show that sonship is implied, because the father produces an image of himself in his son.

In the ancient near east, the kings of Mesopotamia and Egypt were said to be fashioned as “sons”, in the “image” of their gods. This distinguished a monarch from his subjects. But here, “likeness” to God is attributed to every human being, distinguishing them from the animals. As well as sonship, the author of Genesis implies a number of connotations in this pair of words, “image” and “likeness”: *royal authority* is implied when the man and women are given dominion over creation (Genesis 1:26); *sanctity of human life* is also implied, since murder of one made in God’s image will be punished (Genesis 9:6).

God created human beings alone for our own sake (*Gaudium et Spes* 24 § 3) and, in the words of St John Chrysostom, “For him the heavens and the earth, the sea and all the rest of creation exist”.¹³ The human person alone is able to enter into personal relationship with God: “You are taken with love for her; for by love indeed you created her, by love you have given her a being of tasting your eternal Good” (St Catherine of Siena).¹⁴

“Let us...” (Genesis 1:26)

In these words, we read the first hint in scripture of God’s Triune nature, that God is a communion of Persons (Matthew 28:19). This has profound implications for us as human beings for, if we are created in God’s image, then we are created in relation to others, not as solitary beings. These simple words of scripture shed light on the human suffering of isolated leadership we considered in part 1. If we are created to image God by being in communion with others, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). In the words of John Paul II, “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not

¹³ *In Gen. sermo* 2, 1.

¹⁴ *Dialogue* IV, 13 “On Divine Providence”.

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participate intimately in it” (*Redemptor Hominis*, §10). This shows how the broken structures and cultures explored in part 1 can damage human beings: when they foster atmospheres of isolation and loneliness, people cannot know even themselves because they do not regularly experience the love of another. Human beings cannot live without love, and even less can they *lead* without an experience of love and communion with others.

“The First Feast of Humanity” (St John Paul II)

The original blessings bestowed on human beings are immense. John Paul II, in his ground-breaking *Theology of the Body*, speaks of the original solitude, unity and nakedness of the first man and woman before the Fall: their lived experience was one of complete innocence, grace, love and justice (TOB 19:3). In our fallen state, we can only imagine what that is like as a daily experience. They see themselves with God’s own vision: they know they are good, very good (Gen 1:31). This experience is so good, that John Paul II describes it as “the first feast of humanity” (TOB 19:6): they know without question that to be alive is good, to be male and female is good.

“*Male and female he created them...*” (Genesis 1:27). An unmistakable dimension of our humanity created in God’s image is our being created either male or female. As our identity and deepest self is determined by our biological sex, so are all the words, actions, and activities we engage in, including leadership. When you lead, you lead as a man, or as a woman. Your sex brings a distinct quality to your leadership. The essential place of both male and female leadership in the Church is clear when we see the complementary qualities that each bring. Men and women are not in competition with one another in leadership; rather, each radically needs, is dependent upon, and is deficient without, the other.

Pope St John Paul II affirmed the role of women in leadership. In his 1995 *Letter to Women*, he said, “Women will increasingly play a part in the solution of the serious problems of the future... [a greater presence of women] will help to manifest the contradictions present when society is organized solely according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity, and it will force systems to be redesigned in a way which favors the processes of humanization which mark the civilization of love.”

The vocation of a woman is in a particular way ordered to the human person. In John Paul II’s words, “God entrusts the human being to her in a special way” (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 30). St Edith Stein (whom John Paul II canonized in 1998) writes extensively on women and shares a thought which expands this idea from John Paul II.

“Woman naturally seeks to embrace that which is *living, personal, and whole*. To cherish, guard, protect, nourish and advance growth is her natural, maternal yearning.”¹⁵

It is clear how vitally women are needed especially where there is a risk of organising people and communities solely according to efficiency and productivity. In these

¹⁵ Edith Stein, *The Collected Words of Edith Stein*, Volume Two: Essays on Woman (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1987), 43.

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situations, the woman's "genius" to see the human person first and foremost – as living, personal, and whole – is a powerful antidote. Considering the dangers of Pelagianism explored above, women are especially needed in leadership roles within the Church to contribute towards a receptive and contemplative posture, overcoming tendencies towards activism. In his *Letter to Women*, John Paul II issues the following invitation:

“It is thus my hope, dear sisters, that you will reflect carefully on what it means to speak of the ‘*genius of women*’, ... in order to let this genius be more fully expressed in the life of society as a whole, as well as in the life of the Church.”

And yet, we cannot generalise about the contributions of female leaders. In Stein's words, “No woman is only woman; like man each has her individual specialty and talent” (*ibid.*, p. 47). There are infinite “manifestations of the feminine ‘genius’ which have appeared in the course of history” (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 31) and, “the Church gives thanks for all the charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes to women in the history of the People of God, for all the victories which she owes to their faith, hope, and charity: she gives thanks for all the fruits of feminine holiness.”

Original Blessing Underlies Original Shame

Unlike the first humans – whose experience was innocence, grace, love, justice – our daily experience as leaders can be one where struggle, effort and disappointment dwarf the joy, contentment, and peace of life in Christ. There are some days when we doubt the truth in Genesis 1:28 that “God blessed me” in creating me. There are days when the “old man” (see Romans 6:6) seems to be more prominent than our new creation in Christ.

That is why our *lectio divina* in Day 6 needs to take in man's fall Genesis 3, too, to understand our daily experience.

Yet, knowing that we have lost this original experience through the Original Sin shouldn't lead us to hopelessness. Rather, knowing where we come from – knowing that this is the truth about our beginning – offers us “a first hope already from the mystery of creation”, says John Paul II; it shows us, on the contrary, that we are called to glory (see Romans 8:30). God does not withdraw the gift: it is stamped into our bodies and souls. We are called to glory.

From the first time the devil tempted the first humans, right up to today, the one who “comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10) plants seeds of lies in our minds. In Genesis 3, he promises Adam and Eve that, if they take the fruit, “your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). The reality is, our first parents' eyes were *already* opened, they were *already* like God, they *already* knew good and evil! The devil falsely promised what they already had, and not only that, convinced them they had to do something in order to get it. They already had what he promised them *without doing a thing!*

This first deception is a pattern for all the deception of the evil one: *he attempts to convince us we do not have what we already have, and that we have to do something to get it.* The great lie he wants us to believe is that we are not blessed by God.

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This is one of the greatest deceptions for us as parish leaders. It leads us to what John Paul II called, “original shame” – a place where we experience God’s absence when we were made for his presence, where we doubt the reality of God’s gift when we are longing for a sign of his blessing, where we forget the truth that I have been “ransomed ... not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18). In the moments where “original shame” is my most prominent experience, I forget the spring of eternal life within my soul on which I can draw at any moment – that it is given, assured, ever-present – the life of the Holy Spirit.

This “original shame” experience can affect me profoundly as a leader. Regardless of what is in my mind and heart, I am still called to minister and to lead. People count on me for action, ministry, results. Forgetful that my worth has already been measured by the priceless “precious blood of Christ”, I fall back into a mentality of needing to prove what I am worth.

Some of the mindsets we considered in Part 1 start rearing their heads. “*We’ve got this*”: Through responding slavishly to each person’s call on my time and working late into the night I can prove I am worthy. At the same time, our experience of unworthiness leads us to lower our sights and diminish ourselves (“*God will only do small things through me*”). The voice of the enemy – “*Don’t get above yourself*” has a ring of Genesis 3:1 to it (“*Did God really say...?*”) and we play down our vision to something more reasonable and acceptable. The ultimate, tragic “original shame” experience is one where we cannot admit our brokenness and our need: it is one of profound loneliness: “*There’s nothing wrong with me, I don’t need anyone.*”

“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1)

Becoming entrenched in this dual experience of both *unworthiness* and of *needing to prove our worth* leads to a pattern of behaviour that is that of the Pharisee, the “whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27). It is a wound that acts like a “leaven”, a pervasive influence that affects our whole way of being. What are the marks of the “leaven” of the Pharisees, of a Pharisee mentality?

- We forget God’s Fatherhood and our childhood, our living constantly in relation to him. God as a personal, loving, providing Father is far from our hearts.
- We therefore “talk the talk” of God, of our faith, and of ministry, without “walking the walk” of daily intimacy. St Paul describes this as, “holding the form of religion but denying the power of it” (2 Timothy 3:5).
- We are self-righteous and defensive about our own performance as leaders or ministers, and the thought of seeking or receiving feedback is intolerable to us.
- We live as “elder brothers” (Luke 15:25) in the Father’s house but interiorly we are slaves: faithful to externals, fulfilling what is expected of us (the letter of the law but not the spirit of the law (Romans 8:2)), giving the minimum required.
- Unable and unwilling to examine ourselves, we turn our sights on and judge others: “But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge” (James 4:11).

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“From the beginning it was not so...” (Matthew 19:8)

Christ’s words in the Gospel are deeply consoling to us. They are a powerful reminder to us that our original shame, our experience of living as orphans and slaves, is never what he intended. *We are not created to suffer.* The sin and brokenness that affect our daily leadership, that we explored in part 1, is not what God wants for us. Rather it is a result of the sinful structures and cultures in which we live, and the sinful choices and patterns we fall into each day. While we cannot read Genesis 1 except through the lens of Genesis 3, which reveals our current fallen experience, neither can we read it except through the lens of the redemption:

“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²²For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”

1 Corinthians 15: 20-22

Victory and – if we believe in and give our lives to Christ – our ultimate glory, too, are certain!

“...the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death... ²⁸When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” 1 Corinthians 15: 24-28

This is the astounding nature of our dignity: the only creature that exists who has God’s image written into our very being (Psalm 8:4); loved so passionately that God would rather die in the flesh than spend eternity without us (Galatians 2:20); born anew even in this life as the Holy Spirit is poured out into our hearts (Romans 5:5); and promised to be co-heirs with Christ in glory at the end of time (Romans 8:17).

Our lifelong journey as leaders is this: *That our ministry and leadership flow from this identity – this truth about who I am and what God has done for me.* Any good I do, or any fruits that flow from my life into the life of another, flow from this reality. The reason it is a lifelong journey is very simple: because we are damaged by sin, we forget our identity in Christ, and often default to leading out of the “old man” – our broken self – who was put to death with Christ at our Baptism (Romans 6:6).

He Has Come to Save and to Heal Us

The entire purpose of Jesus’ Good News in our lives is to bring each of us to wholeness and healing from the pain, sin, and trauma we have experienced. The pain, sin and trauma that leads us to “talking the talk” but unable to “walk the walk”; that leaves us self-righteous, defensive “elder brothers.” A medieval anchoress named St Julian of Norwich said in her *Revelations of Divine Love* that when God sees our sin, he sees our

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pain.¹⁶ This is the compassion that moved the Father so deeply he sent his Son, Jesus to us.

The Greek word *sozo* (which literally means, ‘to save’) is used also to mean ‘to heal’ in the Gospels. There is a close connection between ‘salvation’ and ‘healing’.

Pope Benedict XVI expressed it in this way:

“Healing is an essential dimension of the apostolic mission and of Christianity. When understood at a sufficiently deep level, this expresses the entire content of redemption.”¹⁷

This is quite a staggering statement. Let’s think about it for a moment.

The whole purpose of God taking on flesh and living among us is for our healing – to bring us to wholeness. This, then, is also the whole purpose of our parishes – to bring every individual in our neighbourhood to wholeness in Christ – that all they have suffered in their lives might be healed through an encounter with Jesus.

This is probably precisely the very reason you say ‘yes’ to leadership in your parish. Because you are passionate for all to experience the saving and healing love of Jesus and to have their lives transformed.

Our Day 6 module recognises that, while Jesus desires us to reach hundreds of people in our parish with his saving and healing Gospel, he also wants to save and to heal *us*.

Think of the fictional parish scenarios we presented in part 1 of the limitations parish leaders experience owing to their interior, unacknowledged wounds. If we would only allow Jesus to attend to our areas of brokenness and bring us to greater wholeness, our fruitfulness in leading others, collaborating with others, and bringing others to Christ, would be even greater.

John Paul II makes it clear in *Veritatis Splendor* that it is possible, in this life, to live from our healed, redeemed reality: “*Christ has redeemed us!* This means that he has given us the possibility of realizing *the entire* truth of our being; he has set our freedom free from the *domination* of concupiscence. And if redeemed man still sins, this is not due to an imperfection of Christ's redemptive act, but to man's will not to avail himself of the grace which flows from that act” (§ 103).

At the same time, we bear in mind that we will not be healed fully – physically, emotionally, spiritually – until we enter eternal life, and that many wounds we will continue to carry through our life. Here, we recall St Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 12:9 and Colossians 1:24 (see CCC 1508).

¹⁶ “But I saw not sin: for I believe it hath no manner of substance nor no part of being, nor could it be known but by the pain it is cause of.”

¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 176.

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“Fill, Subdue, Rule...” (Genesis 1:26)

The authority that God gives humans in Genesis 1 is quite astonishing and may even make us feel uncomfortable. The passage is filled with imperative verbs: “Fill the earth... Subdue it... Rule over...” To those unconsciously riddled with Jansenist tendencies (“*God will only do small things through me*”, “*Don’t get above yourself*”), and the temptation to make ourselves small or even invisible, these commands sound jarring. Likewise, to those who have suffered from abuse of authority, including authoritarian and clerical attitudes, this command to take authority may feel harmful to us: not what the 21st century Church needs. Rather, we need a meek, humble, listening Church.

Yet undeniably Genesis 1 bestows a generous and trusting authority onto human beings. With the coming of Jesus, this authority is extended even further. No longer is this authority only over “the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky”: now, Jesus promises, “I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). This is a new, redeemed authority – an authority over people.

“There is no authority except from God...” (Romans 13:1)

Authority is *the right to exercise power on behalf of someone else*. Since all authority comes from the Father, we exercise authority only when we act on his behalf. In making us sons in the Son, and co-heirs, God trusts us: to discern his will, to stand confident in it, and to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in bringing it about. What are the features of this redeemed authority?

1. **Redeemed authority is obedient.** We stand in our leadership authority as sons or daughters who know their Father intimately and act according to his nature and his desires. This is precisely from where Jesus’ own authority derives: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise” (John 5:19). In other words, true authority is never ‘of our own accord’; it is always aligned to ‘what we see the Father doing.’ Our sonship and daughterhood are in Jesus’ own Sonship, the One who is perfectly obedient to the Father. Therefore, we act only in authentic authority when we are *submitted* to Jesus: when we lay down our self-will, surrender our plans, and give him a ‘blank-check-yes’ over our lives.
2. **Redeemed authority is confident.** We can stand in the truth of our authority with no pride or arrogance because we know our authority flows from what Jesus has done for us – not anything we have done. It is a display of Jesus’ own supernatural life in our souls: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).
3. **Redeemed authority is priestly.** St Peter calls the early Christians into their identity, “to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). When we exercise obedient authority, it is a priestly offering. The priest is one who offers sacrifice. Our exercise of authority often involves sacrifice: taking the right course of action which may not be the easiest, quickest, or most convenient; suffering backlash from those who disagree with our actions, misunderstand us, or when we have to take an

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unpopular decision. The hidden suffering of leaders in countless ways that largely goes unseen is the “prayer” we offer, that brings about more fruit even than the work: “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2).

4. **Redeemed authority is prophetic.** Authority involves speech: declaring what is true, defining reality, speaking the words that seem to come from God. Like the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord puts words into our mouth (Jeremiah 1:9) – and at times, we may be hesitant to speak them. But this is part of our inheritance as co-heirs: “that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). We are God’s mouthpiece or, in St Paul’s words to the Corinthian Christians, “we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20).
5. **Redeemed authority is kingly.** In St John’s vision in the Book of Revelation, he sees those ransomed for God “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation... a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth” (Revelation 5:10). Our baptismal destiny is to reign with Christ and even now on earth, the Lord tests our faithfulness to him in our sphere of spiritual responsibility. In the parable of the talents, those who bear fruit with what they have been given are entrusted with more: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over little, I will set you over much” (Matthew 25:21). Each of us has a ‘realm’ over which we govern, knowingly or unknowingly: people we influence, nurture and lead; material goods and land over which we have stewardship. As more is entrusted us according to our capacity and calling, so does our authority increase.

Perhaps you doubted that you have authority to lead in your parish. Perhaps, when we considered in Part 1 the perceived lack of agency many feel in the Church, this resonated with you. You have tended to feel trapped and powerless to make any difference.

But the revealed Word of God tells us something very different. We know that scripture proclaims the truth. It tells us we can stand tall in our baptismal authority, which is *obedient, confident, priestly, prophetic, and kingly.*

We are more powerful than we know.

As we come to the end of Part 2, let’s consider again our definition of self-leadership:

“Self-leadership is having a developed sense of who you are, what you can do, where you are going, coupled with the ability to influence your communication, emotions, and behavior on the way to getting there.”

Having “a developed sense of who you are, what you can do, where you are going” in terms of our natural, human strengths will be explored in Part 3. Grace perfects nature. Knowing, strengthening, and increasing the capacity of our natural human wiring allows supernatural grace to work even more extensively through our humanity.

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But Part 2 has revealed spiritual insight about “who you are, what you can do, where you are going” on the supernatural level – and this is quite astounding! *Who you are* is a beloved son or daughter, a priest, a prophet, a king or queen, a co-heir with Christ. *What you can do* is change the course of individual lives, the course of your parish, and therefore, the course of history. *Where you are going* is to reign with Christ forever in heaven!

Can it get much better than that?!

What about the second part of the definition? “...coupled with the ability to influence your communication, emotions, and behavior on the way to getting there.” Many human tools and techniques are helpful here, but part 2 has plunged us into the supernatural renewal of our minds and hearts – the interior work of the Holy Spirit who is reforming – even now – our communication, emotions, and behaviour.

Nature and grace work together in our growth as leaders and our journey to holiness.

3. Practical Parish Application

When we are aware of how much needs to be done in our parish, and how far away we still are from the vision of the future that produces passion in us, it is natural to ask, *why would I spend time working on myself when it is the parish that needs all the work?!* An understandable view, when ministry leaders are so stretched and overworked, may be that spending time on self-leadership is overindulgent naval gazing!

Yet this view could not be further from the truth. Just as, while flying, we are instructed in a crisis to put on our own oxygen masks first, so with leadership, the way we lead ourselves is inextricably connected with the way we lead others. Sam Remus describes self-leadership as, “The ability to successfully lead our own life that provides the firm foundation from which we can lead others.” Spending time on self-leadership is not selfish: it is a sign that you care deeply for those you lead.

We are concerned with radical change in our parishes, and as we embark on this journey, and as you have worked through parts 1 and 2 of this module, you’ll be all too aware that the first person who needs to change is likely yourself. If you haven’t yet made that discovery, you will inevitably be hit with it sooner or later. The best leaders are those who are self-aware. We invite you to join us on this journey of growing in self-awareness, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the health and missional impact of your parish.

1. Five Foundations for Growth in Self-Leadership

St John Henry Newman famously said that, “To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” Growing in self-leadership certainly means changing often, but change is hard – it is easier not to pursue it – which is why growth in self-leadership is the road less travelled. Do you have what it takes to set off down this “narrow path”?!

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We've identified five foundations for growth in self-leadership: Intimacy, Self-Awareness, Courageous Character, Curiosity, and Compassion. Do not set off without these foundations in place!

a. Intimacy¹⁸

*“In God alone is my soul at rest; my salvation comes from him.
He alone is my rock, my salvation, my fortress; never shall I falter.”*
(Psalm 62:2-3)

In part 2, our focus on identity as beloved son or daughter supplied the foundation of all leadership. Living in our new, redeemed life means living every day as beloved son or beloved daughter. In practice, this means embedding a daily spiritual routine. This looks different depending on our state of life: where a pastor may commit to a daily Holy Hour, a mother of many children may struggle to build this into her life. But what is essential is we build a framework for our lives in which we can experience daily our belovedness and allow the voice of One who loves us to ring out clearly amid the cacophony of our daily lives. The reality is that parish leadership – and self-leadership, in particular – is tough. We are entering into battle. We need to know, loud and clear, who we are, and whose we are. This conviction is sustained only in a non-negotiable habit of daily intimacy with God.

Your prayer routine is personal and will be subject to all kinds of realities: your state in life, profession, family limitations, personal spiritualities or preferences. Here, we suggest two pointers for the life of prayer of an apostolic leader:

- **Silent prayer:** If you are ordained, a religious or consecrated, you will have an obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. This unsurprisingly takes precedence in your daily spiritual routine. Yet, there is a risk when the Liturgy of the Hours exhausts all our prayer life. Bold mission is built on a foundation of deep contemplation. Deep contemplation is daily silent prayer leaning on the breast of Christ (John 13:23) and allowing him to speak, often wordlessly, into our deepest being. It is often the form of prayer we find most difficult and most dry, and therefore avoid it, or find any excuse to fill it with activity (homily preparation?!).

Etty Hillesum, the Dutch Jew who was killed in Auschwitz summarised it beautifully when she said, “There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then he must be dug out again.”¹⁹ We suggest that daily dwelling in the deep well with God is indispensable for parish renewal and self-leadership.

- **Scripture:** In Parts 1 and 2, we considered the lies we often believe about ourselves and our reality that are fed to us through the worldly culture we are immersed in, our own human brokenness, and the demonic forces at play (see

¹⁸ You might also want to return to your Day 1 notes, where we explored how personal prayer is the foundation for missional prayer.

¹⁹ Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), August 25, 1941.

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Ephesians 2:2-3 and 1 John 2:12-17). A daily habit of reading Scripture allows us frequently to renew our minds in the truth (Romans 12:2). This is why we have such a strong emphasis on *lectio divina* throughout the Genesis Compass.

The word of God is true spiritual food and the Father provides a banquet for us in the Bible to feast on every day (see Jeremiah 15:16 and Matthew 4:4).

Daily intimacy with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the first foundation stone because it also paves the way for the others.

b. Self-Awareness

“How can you draw close to God when you are far from your own self?” (St Augustine)

Understanding that grace perfects nature, we separate our consideration of self-awareness under two headings: first, natural and then supernatural self-awareness.

Natural Self-Awareness

Psychologist and author Daniel Goleman wrote the classic article, ‘What makes a leader?’ in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1996. Having researched the best performing leaders in over 200 companies, he concluded, “when I calculated the ratio of technical skills, IQ, and emotional intelligence as ingredients of excellent performance, emotional intelligence proved to be twice as important as the others for jobs at all levels.”

He defined five skills of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill.²⁰ (Importantly, Goleman concluded that emotional intelligence *could* be learned, where there was sufficient desire, motivation, and effort.)



Psychology often identifies the four stages of competence, sometimes depicted on a matrix like this one. If you are “unconsciously incompetent” in leadership, there is a need to recognise, first, the value of the skill of leadership, and second, your current incompetence in it. This helps you move into “conscious incompetence”: a good place to be as a leader. We are aware of our

weaknesses and blind spots, and desire to improve.

‘Consciousness’ is the critical factor, then, and this is where we come to the first skill identified by Goleman: self-awareness. He defines self-awareness as “having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives. ... People who have a high-degree of self-awareness recognise how their feelings affect them, other

²⁰ Goleman’s 1996 book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*, was ground-breaking at the time and introduced the topic of emotional intelligence into the business world.

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people, and their job performance.” Here are two examples of how self-awareness positively influences our behaviour.

Imagine a pastor who knows that tight deadlines bring out the worst in him. They cause him stress which he tends to take out on the people around him. Looking over his calendar for the coming month, he realises that a crunch point is looming where several deadlines – events, a diocesan commitment, and a building project – converge all at once. Knowing the stress this crunch point will cause him and not wanting to be the cause of distress for his team members and parishioners, he decides to plan the month ahead carefully. He does as much work as he can well in advance, so that when the crunch point arrives, the demands do not hit him all at once.

Or imagine a leadership team member who needs to engage regularly with a demanding parishioner. She has learnt from experience that the parishioner’s seemingly trivial complaints affect her mood considerably. She feels frustrated at the time this lady takes from her which could be spent on the real mission of the parish. However, she cannot avoid these regular encounters, so she takes time to prepare herself intentionally beforehand to limit the impact of the parishioner’s attitude on her mood. Afterwards, she ensures she has a breather to help her re-regulate her emotions.

Supernatural Self-Awareness

What about self-awareness of my supernatural identity, that we began to uncover in part 2? Growing in intimacy with God paradoxically leads us into greater intimacy with ourselves. St Augustine famously discovered that God is “more intimate to me than I am to myself”.²¹ Catherine Doherty, the founder of the Madonna House Apostolate, writes about her realisation that her prayer involved a simultaneous listening to the Lord and to herself.

“I don’t know how I got the grace to listen to myself, but I did. It was as if all the corners of my person were illuminated, and I clearly saw much in me that wanted to talk to me and that I wanted to talk to. As the dialogue took place I discovered that it was really the grace of loving myself!

“You cannot really love your neighbor unless you love yourself first. The Lord said, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ In a strange luminosity of the Trinity I realized that I had to love myself more than I did, because God loved me. I found this out by listening to myself. I grew in reverence, love, and adoration of the God who created me and dwelt within me.

“I realized too that loving one’s self included also loving God who dwells within me. It becomes interwoven, this love affair, like a piece of weaving. The warp and woof blend in some strange and uncanny way. Then I realized in depth that I was an icon of Christ.

²¹ St Augustine, *Confessions*, Book III

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“But I saw more, and with a clarity that was incredible. I saw that I was an heir to my Father's love and to all his goods.

“I saw that I was a sister to Christ, and that I indeed always walked in the shadow of the wings of the Holy Spirit. These realities apply to all of us who know how to listen.”²²

Listening to God and to oneself in prayer leads us to deeper self-awareness, the second foundation stone for growth in self-leadership.

Knowing Ourselves by Nature and by Grace

Self-awareness means thinking of ourselves with “sober judgment”, in St Paul’s words. *“For by the grace given to me I say to every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned”* (Romans 12:3). “Sober judgment” and accurate self-awareness are very close to humility. Humility is a groundedness about ourselves, neither thinking too much or too little of ourselves. Accurate self-awareness brings us many benefits:

- Knowing and owning our strengths means we can lean into them for greater impact.
- We can be less concerned with others’ expectations of us, knowing both the strengths we can bring to others as well as our limitations – what we can’t bring.
- We can be at peace with God, ourselves, and with others, experiencing true communion with others as they, too, develop an accurate understanding of our abilities.
- We can experience freedom in our interior emotional world, understanding how our emotions and energy levels work, a healthy sense of our limits, and how we are able to self-regulate.
- We experience the joy seeing incremental change in areas of weakness and incompetency as we intentionally invest in our own growth.
- We can experience the freedom of vulnerability with our team members as we grow in honesty about our own and each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

If you want to grow in self-awareness, identify one or two people who you deeply trust and who know you well. It can be scary to ask for honest feedback, but the freedom and clarity you will likely receive from it will be more than worth it, for yourself, and for those you lead. Here are two possible questions you could ask:

- Can you share with me a blind spot you see in my life?
- Can you share with me an area in my life where I am not fully understanding my impact on others?

c. Courageous Character

²² Catherine Doherty. 2000. *Poustina: Encountering God in Silence, Solitude and Prayer*, p. 137.

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“If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach...” (1 Timothy: 3:3)

Asking for feedback, facing our blind spots, and having a “sober judgment” about our strengths and weaknesses requires courageous character.

Nicky Gumbel, pioneer of Alpha, is quoted as saying, “If wealth is lost, nothing is lost. If health is lost, something is lost. If character is lost, everything is lost.”

In John C Maxwell’s words, character is the “foundation” of all leadership. Courageous character is a foundation stone for growth in self-leadership because it implies we are not driven by a concern for how others see us: rather, we desire to live an integrated and moral life; in other words, we desire holiness.

Perhaps it might seem too obvious to state, that a parish leader will want to lead an integrated and moral life, but let’s recall the Pharisee mentalities we explored in part 1. At the heart of these mentalities is the state of being divided: of portraying a different reality externally from the one internally in our hearts. To a certain extent, as we all live between our fallen and redeemed states, we all live out of a certain dividedness or brokenness. One definition of integrity is “the state of being whole and undivided,” and our sanctification as Christian leaders is the journey of a growing harmony between our external and internal realities.

Parker J. Palmer puts it well when he describes what is like to be divided:

“I pay a steep price when I lived a divided life – feeling fraudulent, anxious about being found out, and depressed by the fact that I am denying my own selfhood. The people around me pay a price as well, for now they walk on ground made unstable by my dividedness. How can I affirm another’s identity when I deny my own? A fault line runs down the middle of my life, and whenever it cracks open – divorcing my words and actions from the truth I hold within – things around me get shaky and start to fall apart.”²³

Acting and behaving with integrity, even when we don’t feel like it, can heal the divided realities in our hearts. Maxwell invites us to ask ourselves three questions about our behaviour as leaders:

“Consistency: Am I the same person no matter who I am with?

Choices: Do I make decisions that are best for others even when another choice would benefit me?

Credit: Am I quick to recognise others for their efforts and contributions to my success?”²⁴

²³ Parker J. Palmer. 2004. *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, p. 5.

²⁴ John C Maxwell. 2018. *Developing the Leader within You*, p. 62.

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Further pointers are given by Brené Brown in her book, *Dare to Lead*, where she describes integrity as, “Choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy; and choosing to practise our values rather than simply professing them.”

A strong dose of courage is required to live “above reproach” as a leader. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that, “*Fortitude* or courage is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life” (CCC 1808).

Courage means facing broken realities in ourselves that we would rather run away from but facing them steadily for the sake of ourselves and those we lead. Courage is tackling tough decisions we would rather avoid. Courage is developing areas of ourselves that are weaker or under-developed. Courage is addressing tasks that are heavy-lifting for us before those that are light.

Author of *Strengthening the Soul of your Leadership*, Ruth Haley Barton, shares a striking image. She recounts how, as she swam one day in the ocean in Florida, a fisherman ran down to the shore, shouting at her to get out of the water. Back on the beach, having swam out as fast as she could, she looked back to where she had been swimming, only to see a long, black shadow, six to eight feet long, gliding beneath the surface of the water: a saltwater crocodile! For Barton, a strong leadership message lay in her experience: “what lies beneath the surface – of the ocean or our lives – really matters.”²⁵

What is the “long, black shadow” lurking beneath the surface of our lives? Our Catholic faith traditionally identifies seven deadly sins – pride, avarice, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth (CCC 1866). In our fallen state, we are affected by all of these, however, most of us tend to ‘major’ in one or two of them. Perhaps you recognise even now the area(s) of sin you tend to fall into when you are stressed, upset, tired or lonely. Behind each of these sins is likely an area of woundedness. Dr Bob Schuchts, in his book, *Be Healed*, identifies seven wounds: Rejection, Abandonment, Powerlessness, Confusion, Fear, Shame and Hopelessness. These wounds “bear fruit” in the sins in our lives (see Matthew 7:17-18).

The beauty of life in Christ is that the “long, black shadows” in our souls have no victory over us. Jesus has come to heal us of the wounds that trigger certain sins. With sustained intimacy, healing, and intentional work with the Holy Spirit, over time, we can grow in freedom from the sins that threaten to torpedo our leadership.

This is the great gift of sacramental Confession – one of the most precious treasures a parish leader will return to again and again: “It is called the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus’ call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin” (CCC 1423). What is so consoling about Confession is that, “it does not simply heal the one restored to ecclesial communion, but has also a revitalizing effect on the life of the Church which

²⁵ Ruth Haley Barton. 2008. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, p. 39.

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suffered from the sin of one of her members” (CCC 1469). If you desire God’s healing not only for your own divided self, but also for your parish, go to Confession!

In St Paul’s words, “Never grow tired of doing what is right” (2 Thessalonians 3:13).

d. Curiosity

What is your immediate reaction to becoming aware of “long, black shadows” lurking beneath the surface of your life? Instinctively, many of us may experience disgust or shame – we want to look away – we might even experience emotions of self-hatred or rejection.

But, this is not Jesus’ reaction. He sees even clearer than we do the broken places of our hearts, and he is not disgusted. He tenderly loves us there. In fact, so much does he love us there that, “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

An essential foundation for our growth in self-leadership is to see ourselves as Jesus does, and to do that, we need to *become students of ourselves*.

When you began this Genesis Compass journey, you imagined you would become a student of parish renewal – which you are! – but this module leads you deeper into becoming a student of yourself. This might not feel too comfortable right now, but one of the most effective disciplines we can foster in our growth as leaders is *curiosity about ourselves*.

St Teresa of Avila was adamant about the role of self-knowledge in the spiritual life:

“I do not know if I have explained this clearly: self-knowledge is so important that, even if you were raised right up to the heavens, I should like you never to relax your cultivation of it.”²⁶

Think about curiosity for a moment. Think back to the time you became curious about parish renewal. You recognised a gap in your knowledge that sparked an interest in you. Perhaps you were mildly interested at the start. Through learning and exploring you became more emotionally and cognitively involved. You wanted to close the gaps in your knowledge and curiosity drove you to do that.

Brené Brown writes,

“Choosing to be curious is choosing to be vulnerable because it requires us to surrender to uncertainty. We have to ask questions, admit to not knowing, risk being told that we shouldn’t be asking, and, sometimes, make discoveries that lead us to discomfort.”²⁷

²⁶ St Teresa of Avila: *Interior Castle*, First Mansions, Chapter 1.

²⁷ Brené Brown. 2021. *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*, p. 65.

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What does it look like to be curious about ourselves? Maybe you feel like you always react in a particular way, however hard you try. Maybe you see a pattern of behaviour in your life that causes your team members or family pain, but you have no idea how to change it. Maybe there's an area of sin that you feel trapped in, you bring it to confession every time you go, and it causes you tremendous shame.

Shame and judgement tend to be our natural reactions. But neither shame or judgement help us to find restoration for this behaviour pattern, or to heal the wound behind our sin.

Curiosity, however, is the circuit-breaker of shame and judgment. What would it look like if my inner voice changed?

- From, *“Ugh! You always react in that way!”* to, *“Huh... I wonder where that reaction came from? What happened to trigger it?”*
- From, *“I’ve done it again... My team should give up on me, I’ll never change”* to, *“What can I do to understand more about why this happens? It will give my team encouragement to know I am working on it.”*
- From, *“I can’t believe I fell into that sin yet again...”* to, *“Hmm... What emotions led me to fall? How did these emotions originate? What was going on in my environment?”*

e. Compassion

Curiosity helps us grow in self-understanding and thus seeing ourselves as Jesus does. There is a final important foundation to growth in self-leadership that follows on closely from curiosity: compassion.

An important corollary of growing in understanding of our reactions, behaviours, and sins is our compassion towards ourselves. Shame is healed through kindness to ourselves. Researcher Kristen Neff identifies that self-compassion “entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate...” The experience of shame tends to isolate us – we feel like, “I am the only one.” Yet, self-compassion recognises that personal failing, inadequacy, and sin are the common experience of humanity. Finally, a self-compassionate person is able to observe and accept their thoughts and feelings in a non-judgmental and receptive state. We know that we are not identified with our thoughts and feelings – they do not define us.

Leadership is tough: it involves failing and falling. It involves criticism and brutal challenges. Self-compassion is critical to our resilience as a leader: it will help us get up, and get back in the race, time and time again.

The beautiful side-effect of fostering compassion for ourselves is that we naturally become more compassionate towards others too. It frees us up to consider what we want *for* the people we lead, rather than what we want *from* them. Brené Brown writes,

“Compassion is fueled by understanding and accepting that we’re all made of strength and struggle – no one is immune to pain or suffering. Compassion is not a

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practice of ‘better than’ or ‘I can fix you’ – it’s a practice based in the beauty and pain of shared humanity.”²⁸

Imagine your team growing in curiosity about and compassion towards each other. Imagine if, instead of mentally defaulting to judgment or blame, we displayed curiosity about each other. “*X seems upset in her reaction; I wonder why she feels that way?*” “*I wonder if X is stressed today; what’s going on for him?*” “*I know there’s something tricky going on in X’s life right now... I will cut him some slack.*” What difference would this make to your team?

2. Self-Leadership: Archaeology

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’” (Matthew 22:37)

“A real leader doesn’t just blaze the trail into the future, he or she courageously blazes the trail into his or her own heart.” (Henry Nouwen)

All we have seen so far about growth in self-leadership can be categorised under two headings: *archaeology* and *architecture*.

Archaeology involves the deep work beneath the surface, in our heart, mind and soul. *Architecture* involves the learned competencies and skills that we can develop and grow in. Both work together in a leader who is growing in health and holiness.

Our “archaeology”-work happens in prayer, through intentional healing work, in relationship with those we share most intimacy in our lives, in spiritual direction, in therapy, in coaching. It helps us grow in freedom, increasing our capacity as leaders.

Our “architecture”-work happens through coaching, receiving feedback from our team, learning more from leadership literature, intentionally working on skills, developing our strengths.

Here, we dip our toes into the “archaeology” area, knowing that this is just the surface. We recommend other ministries and resources that can take you deeper.²⁹

a. The Heart

We first considered the heart in the Day 2 module on Vision. Change in the parish starts with vision, and vision is birthed in the heart of the pastor: *the inspired conviction that*

²⁸ Brené Brown. 2021. *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*, p. 117.

²⁹ We recommend the following ministries: the John Paul II Healing Center (<https://jpiihealingcenter.org>); the Human Formation Coalition (<https://humanformationcoalition.org>); Internal Family Systems therapy and coaching work (a good Catholic introduction is found in the book, *Litanies of the Heart*, see here: <https://www.soulsandhearts.com/content/lit/>).

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change is necessary, possible, and worth the suffering. (You might want to go back and review your Day 2 notes.)

Once the journey of the renewal of the parish begins, it does not stop flowing from the pastor's (and each parish leader's) heart. This is the fount, if you like, of the renewal of the parish since it is our "hidden centre" where the Spirit of God dwells (CCC 2563).

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life." (Proverbs 4:23)

If your heart stopped pumping blood around your body, you'd know about it pretty quickly. And if your spiritual "hidden centre" stopped pumping vision around your parish, sooner or later, passion and hope will dry up.

This is why the author of Proverbs advises us to "keep your heart with all vigilance." Keeping our hearts with vigilance allows passion to stay alive in us. It means knowing how to keep our 'passion bucket' topped up and fixing the holes! Staying 'full' of vision and passion allows us to lead and inspire others, infecting them with contagious passion. If we are low on passion or demotivated, it's a sign I need a 'heart check': people sooner or later will perceive that I am not able to win over hearts through sharing contagious vision.

Think back to the parish scenarios in Part 1 of fictional parish leaders who were unaware of how to engage with their inner worlds, and the impact it had on their leadership. We all have areas of woundedness and pain. What distinguishes a great leader is someone who is *aware of* and *able to influence* these areas of their inner world.

b. The Mind

Much of what we considered in Part 2 invites us on the same journey that St. Paul invited the Christian community in Rome into: we are called to be renewed in the transformation of our minds (Romans 12:2). We are called to develop new mindsets in accord with the truth of who we are. Increasingly, we lead from our identity as redeemed, beloved children, heirs of the Kingdom, and less and less from our broken identity as orphans and slaves. We are called away from 'performance leadership' towards 'beloved son/daughter leadership'.

We can read these statements and say, "yes, I know that." But the work of knowing these statements notionally – to knowing them in a way that transforms our interior world, shaping our daily thoughts, emotions, and behaviour – is the work of a lifetime. This is the work of "archaeology", and the Holy Spirit is the agent of this work – with our cooperation.

How can we start to be aware of the renewal of the mind the Holy Spirit wants to work in us?

- **Examine our thinking:** We start to take note of thoughts that are contrary to what is true for us in Christ. Part of this journey is to develop the practice of "taking every thought captive" as St Paul teaches, "For the weapons of our warfare are

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not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). We take authority of our thought-world by rebuking lies and rejecting what is not true.

- **Notice where our behaviour reveals false thinking:** As we deepen on the journey of the renewal of the mind, we grow in familiarity with the actions that flow from unredeemed thinking. I notice how busy and frantic my activity is and realise this flows from my unredeemed belief that my worth depends on my activity. I notice that my expectations of a particular event or programme are low and realise that these low expectations flow from my doubt that God will act in big ways in people’s lives. I am hesitant about calling myself a “leader”, or my team a “leadership team”, and realise this flows from a false humility.

c. Parish Leadership as a Way of Holiness

As we allow the Holy Spirit to do the deep work of renewing our hearts and minds, we discover that parish leadership will result not only in the transformation of our parishes, but that, precisely through our daily leadership, Jesus will transform us in holiness too. What does this look like practically?

If you are called into parish leadership, God has made this into a way of holiness for you. We can be dismayed by the wounds, negative emotions, or false beliefs we perceive in ourselves, because we see them getting in the way of our leadership.

But, what if leadership became the royal road on which you discover that God is reforming, redeeming, and healing your inner brokenness and sins?

If we allow God to work in us, our sins and wounds can be transformed – not in spite of – but precisely *through* our leadership of the parish.

St Bernard of Clairvaux, in his Sermons on the Song of Songs, uses a powerful image. He perceives that the Lord’s work of redemption in us is the transformation of those “nails”, our sins, that pierce the Lord. He exclaims, “the nail that pierced became for me the key that opened the door”.

Do we dare to believe that, in parish leadership, our wounds, weaknesses, and sins – the “nails” that pierce ourselves, others, and the Lord – can in fact be transformed through the Lord’s mercy into “**keys**”? That precisely our wounds can unlock new channels of grace, for ourselves and those we lead?

St Bernard goes on to say,

“The nail cries out, the wound opens its mouth to cry that truly God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The iron passed through his soul and drew near to his heart that he might know how to feel for my weaknesses.”

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Let's see how this happens.

Seven "Nails" Transformed into Seven "Keys" of Leadership

| "Nail" (Weakness or Wound from which Sin flows) | "Key" (Transformed Wound Unlocks Channel of Grace) |
|---|--|
| Scarcity | Trust |
| Insecurity | Rootedness |
| Fear | Power |
| Stress | Peace |
| Disappointment | Hope |
| Perfectionism | Boldness |
| Pride | Magnanimity |

Scarcity Transformed into Trust

We explored in Part 2 how, despite God having provided for all our needs (Genesis 1:29-30), the Fall means we doubt his provision and are tempted frequently to believe that we need to hustle for what he is already giving us. When preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus knew the transformation needed: "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26). Parish leadership can transform my doubt in the goodness of God by an ever-increasing trust:

- I experience the trust of a son or daughter, seeing that I do not need to chase the *fruits* I want to see in the parish, but rather, pursue the *culture* that produces the fruits. If I focus on doing the right things, at God's timing and pace, the fruits come.
- I learn I can trust the Father by recruiting people into leadership roles as their gifts emerge and as they are ready, rather than bestowing responsibility on them prematurely.
- I experience that it is okay to say 'no' to new ministries we do not have capacity for, or to new initiatives that do not align with our vision, confident that we are not service-providers for those who may be disappointed, but accountable only to the Father's vision for our parish.

Insecurity Transformed into Rootedness

It is unsurprising that parish leaders experience insecurity in the context of isolated leadership (see Part 1). Not only might we have few close and trusting relationships around us on a daily basis, but, in leading alone with little constructive feedback, or few people interested in our growth, we end up being overly critical of ourselves and our performance. We settle for mediocre vision and small wins.

Comparison is the close cousin of insecurity. Comparing ourselves against others is a largely unavoidable social phenomenon for human beings in relationship with each other, especially in networks of communities like the Catholic Church. Brené Brown describes comparison as, "the crush of conformity from one side and competition from

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the other – it’s trying to simultaneously fit in and stand out.”³⁰ Think of your average Catholic vicariate or deanery meeting: there are all kinds of subtle and not-so-subtle social dynamics of comparison taking place. In its negative form, comparison can rob us of our creativity as we feel crushed by the need to conform; it can make us feel shame as we perceive our parish reality as inferior; it can lead us to isolation as we dread the judgment of others.

Parish leadership can transform my insecurity (and my experience of comparison) into a true rootedness in my own identity:

- I am a saint who sometimes falls, rather than a sinner who occasionally does good. Growing in my redeemed identity means rewiring the Jansenist “false humility” mindset that God will probably not use me powerfully. On the contrary, God pronounces me “very good” (Genesis 1:31), and declares over me, “This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). I grow in a living experience of the knowledge that God sees me and is “well pleased”. This foundational experience not only transforms the way I lead others and tackle problems but also changes the way I relate and pray to God (“I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15)) and even how I relate to myself.³¹
- A small team around me, normalising the experience of giving and receiving feedback, helps me grow in freedom about who I am and what I contribute. Growing in self-knowledge allows me to grow into a greater “self-security”: “the open and nonjudgmental acceptance of one’s own weaknesses.”³² The negative impact of comparison simultaneously decreases, too.
- When we have a stronger sense of our own calling and identity, we are freer to benefit from a more inspiring “upward comparison”. We see parishes that are fruitful and multiplying, and rather than demoralising us, they inspire us. Upward comparison can be a strong motivator, as long as we are secure in our own calling.
- As networks of parishes around the world pursue mission, vast global learning communities start to develop. Parishes trade in inspiration and learning, rather than in demoralisation or proving superiority. The “conformity” element of comparison diminishes as creativity and innovation are valued and prioritised. Competition can become healthy and motivational. In short, the culture of a global Church can change.

Fear Transformed into Power

³⁰ Brené Brown. 2021. *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*, p. 20.

³¹ You might want to return the Day 1 module on Missional Prayer to recap how this truth changes the way we pray: not as beggars, but as friends.

³² Alice B. Huang and Howard Berenbaum, “Accepting our Weaknesses and Enjoying Better Relationships: An Initial Examination of Self-Security,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 106 (2017): 64-70.

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The experience of fear is unsurprising when we are sticking our head above the parapet as leaders. In a Jansenist milieu, where there is a pervading culture telling us, “*Don’t get above yourself: your parish is fine just as it is*” (see Part 1), fear can almost be programmed into us, to prevent us from stepping out of line. A certain measure of healthy fear is good: it keeps us from being reckless or overly extreme. But on the most part, this is not the problem for Catholic parishes: the real problem is timidity and reluctance to be different from others. How can parish leadership transform our fear?

- When we step out in faith, we are reminded that the *Power* within us – the Holy Spirit – is greater than the power of others’ judgments or of the possible repercussions. St Paul counselled Timothy, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:6-8).
- When we experience pushback or even persecution, this is the moment we experience the grace of weakness, of the sweet power of the Holy Spirit over us: “you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matthew 10:18-20).
- The experience of new life in the parish gives rise to joy in our hearts: joy is a force stronger than fear. St Paul teaches us in Philippians 4:4-7 to “Rejoice!” – not only when we are feeling joyful, but that we are free to choose joy. We don’t deny that we’re fearful but choose joy. Through acting with courage, faith grows stronger and takes precedence over our feelings.

Stress Transformed into Peace

When an intolerable expectation of leadership is placed on a single person, they experience this demand as something beyond their ability to cope with successfully. This is the definition of stress. A leader experiences an element of uncontrollability in the environment which makes him or her feel out of their depth. This can have a profound impact on his or her body as well as mind and emotions.

Will van der Hart, of the Mind and Soul Foundation, explains how, depending on how we are wired, we can respond differently under stress, but it is always an adrenal response, that is an instinctual response to perceived threat. We can have a “fight” response – do more work, challenge the stress. We can have a “flight” response – run away from the work we need to do. We can “freeze”, that is, just procrastinate, unable to act against the threat. We can also “fawn”, that is, we immediately act to try to please those causing us stress, to avoid conflict. We can also “flop”, that is, experience a feeling of hopelessness – “I can’t do this anymore.” Whether we respond to stress with hyper-speed – that is, a hyperarousal response where we experience a racing heart and anxiety – or whether we respond with paralysis, emotional emptiness, or by engaging in numbing

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behaviours – that is, a hypoarousal response – both responses are indications that we are not looking after ourselves well.³³

We will explore these experiences in more depth in Day 7, (on Rest), but the Good News of Jesus is that, even in parish leadership, stress might be transformed.

- Back in Day 1, we explored the elements of “chaos” in a parish situation. Gradually, the work of parish renewal brings order: aligning activity to vision, setting a direction of travel rather than reacting to whatever flies at us, experiencing the true value of “less is more.” Over time, we are aiming to create an environment that is in line with God’s plan for our parish – and where I am called to thrive – not only survive – as a leader. The uncontrollability of the environment decreases.
- Stress far more greatly impacts those who are alone. We hold stress in our bodies and over time this impacts our health. But when we have close collaborators, this impact decreases. Imagine someone asking you, “How are you doing *really*? What’s going on for you?” Even your body relaxes in that moment as someone alongside you shares the load. Surrounding oneself with a dedicated team is good for your health, as well as for the renewal of your parish.
- As we intentionally lead others, we see the impact that our stress can have on them. Stress can either be projected onto others – subconsciously wanting them to relieve or change our situation, blaming or manipulating them – or can result in the hypoarousal avoidance behaviours described above. Seeing our impact on others can cause us to step back in compassion for them, commit to working through our stress behaviours, and allow faith to transform it. “Let your gentleness be evident to all” (Philippians 4:5).

Disappointment Transformed into Hope

As leaders we have both expressed and unexpressed expectations. Maybe certain expectations of what kind of impact our calling would make, maybe expectations of what our experience leading a parish would be. Disappointment occurs when those expectations are unmet. We can underestimate the pain that unmet expectations cause us. How does a healthy approach to parish leadership transform our disappointment?

- We gradually develop a firm and deep foundational understanding that *results do not determine our worth*. When the beloved son doesn’t see the results he hoped for from his ministry, he knows it doesn’t change a thing about how much he is loved and cherished. The beloved son or daughter needs to do nothing to earn his or her worth. When Jesus sent out the seventy disciples to proclaim the Gospel and display the signs of the Kingdom through healings, miracles, and deliverances, they came back to him rejoicing at what happened through their ministry (Luke 10:17). But Jesus immediately counsels them, “do not rejoice in

³³ You can listen more to van der Hart’s comments on the webinar, [Health or Burnout: Where are your Leaders going?](#)

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this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

- As we grow in a deeper awareness of the Holy Spirit’s agency in renewing our parish (see Day 1 module), we develop a different relationship with results. Hope grows in us. We know that fruit is a sign of the Holy Spirit’s work – so we fix our attention on noticing and nurturing this fruit. Our growing hope is healthily detached from a need to generate the fruit ourselves. “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Perfectionism Transformed into Boldness

Contrary to what we might believe, perfectionism is not the same as excellence. Perfectionism is closely tied to shame, because it is driven by the question, *what will people think?* It thrives in a Pelagian environment (see Part 1), where we cultivate mentalities of “*Stay in control*” and “*There’s nothing wrong with me, I don’t need anyone*”. The perfectionist is driven by performance, is crippled by the expectations they set for themselves, and suffers under the perceived need to earn approval and acceptance. They find it very difficult to be vulnerable, and therefore, inadvertently cut themselves off from true connection with others. Perfectionism is in fact the enemy of growing in mastery as a leader. A perfectionist cannot bear the experience of mistakes or failures because they threaten how they perceive themselves. So, they take few risks and therefore limit their growth. How can parish leadership heal our perfectionism?

- Leading the renewal of the parish can in fact be the perfect healing remedy for a recovering perfectionist. Think back to the size of your vision for the parish from the Day 2 module on Vision. One of the criteria for your vision is that it is ‘destined to fail without the Holy Spirit’! A cure for perfectionism is precisely stepping beyond what we know we can achieve in our own strength, and into something that we know is impossible for us. It is what Pope Francis calls, *parrhesia*, or holy boldness.
- Such boldness is itself a gift from the Holy Spirit and it is very difficult to live alone. This is where we need the help of a small team around us, for it is impossible without personal vulnerability – to say, *I cannot do this alone*. Holy boldness, vulnerability within a team, and a deep reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit are together a cure for perfectionism.
- Giving ourselves permission to fail is also critical. Once I experience that I can make a mistake or fail, that others see it and still accept me and approve of me, it helps me grow in great freedom. I can come out of the shameful ‘hiding’ behind perfect presentation, work and behaviour. I can be healed of the need to set impossible expectations for myself. I can grow in authentic self-improvement, mastery and excellence.

Pride Transformed into Magnanimity

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There is a feeling of authentic pride by which we celebrate our accomplishments and efforts. This is important and it is not what we mean here. (It is critical for a parish on the renewal journey to celebrate their successes and be proud of what they have achieved!) Rather, we mean a kind of hubristic pride which is an inflated sense of our abilities that is geared towards dominance. When you feel this kind of pride, you feel puffed up, blustery and superior. You are generating in another person the experience of *negative comparison* described above (and you maybe subconsciously enjoy it). The person who is driven by the need to feel dominance or superiority cares little about social acceptance: what they desire most is to be recognised as on top. The inner experience, though, is lonely and riddled with chronic anxiety as you hustle to be perceived as the best. How can leading a parish on the journey to renewal heal us of our pride?

- Genuine renewal soon confronts us the reality of the uphill struggle: maybe we see many fruits in our parish, but we also experience many disappointments – perhaps more than when we were in maintenance mode. The struggle can keep our feet firmly earthed in reality: it keeps us humble.
- We have seen time and again that vulnerability is indispensable for true renewal. It is almost impossible to co-lead healthily with others without vulnerability. And it is almost impossible for vulnerability – showing up as we really are with no pretence and not controlling others’ perceptions – to coexist with pride.
- Leading renewal in a parish is a brave and daring adventure. You are on the cutting-edge of the renewal of the Church and you are path-finding into unexplored territory. In such a pioneering position, we soon realise how much we depend on the learnings of other parishes. Recognising our need – that we do not have all the answers – generates in us an experience of humility, closely coupled with magnanimity, or ‘large-heartedness’. We know that being a ‘lone ranger’, subconsciously proving our superiority, no longer makes any sense – even if that has always been our default way of operating as a leader. We need others.

“Nails” Into “Keys”: Fostering an Environment for Transformation

Thinking back to our definition of self-leadership,³⁴ we recognised at the outset of this journey that we will need to *take responsibility for fostering the environments, mentalities, and networks that I need to grow in self-knowledge, self-awareness and healing*. None of this transformation happens automatically. You will know best what environments you need, but here are some ideas.

- **Emotional Environment:** I can do a daily heart check-up. What is the condition of my heart? What is going on inside me? I am honest about the emotions I am experiencing. I do not judge the emotions, but instead, I am curious about them.

³⁴ “Self-leadership is having a developed sense of who you are, what you can do, where you are going, coupled with the ability to influence your communication, emotions, and behavior on the way to getting there.”

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- **Spiritual Environment:** What is the spiritual routine I need to build into my life each day? How do I stay in real relationship with God, not just going through the motions, but allowing him to see my heart, and to listen to his?
- **Life Environment:** What are the life-giving practices I need that build me up to stay focused, be at my best, and build my energy? Maybe it is a daily hobby, exercise, being in nature, being in a bustling community, or alternatively carving out time for solitude.
- **Community Environment:** Who are the intimate friends I need around me who encourage and also challenge me? Who do I need to check in with and stay accountable to? Who cares for me in my deepest identity, and does not see me only in terms of how I perform? Who are the other people in close circles who give me life, enable me to laugh, play, and take myself lightly?
- **Environments with Limits:** Our world tries to offer us endless choices and the promise that we can have and do it all, but this is not in line with the truth of who we are as humans: trying to have and do it all ultimately exhausts and depletes us. How do I live according to the rhythms of my natural limitedness? Our biological realities – different for every person – reveal much about our God-given mission. What are the limits I set myself around work? When do I start and stop working? What does my pattern of sleep look like? The rhythms of exercise, movement, and stillness during my day? How do I place limits around the essential activities that drain me?

Fr James Mallon, when speaking about vision, teaches that, “Vision is the fruit of healing.” As we increasingly allow Jesus to heal areas of our hearts, we discover that our vision and passion are both renewed. You may be amazed how your vision for your parish takes on new proportions and depths as your heart grows in capacity and new health! Jesus renews us interiorly, both for our own sake, and for the sake of greater renewal in our parishes.

3. Self-Leadership: Architecture

“I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit makes diligent search.” Psalm 77:6

“Almost all problems in the spiritual life stem from a lack of self-knowledge”
(St. Teresa of Avila, The Way of Perfection)

In St Thomas Aquinas’ well-known maxim, “grace perfects nature”. Both grace and nature interpenetrate as my humanity becomes increasingly free and holy. We experience our natural gifts flourishing in greater measure, thanks to the healing work going on in our soul.

“Architecture” involves what we work on “above the surface”, so to speak. Here, we explore the importance of knowing our strengths, of the vital role of feedback, and of time

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management and prioritisation. All of these areas of growth and self-improvement give us incremental gains as a leader. But coupled with deeper spiritual healing, these gains become considerably more. “Archaeology” and “architecture” work together.

a. Knowing your Strengths

Since the early days of renewal led by Fr James Mallon at St Benedict Parish in Halifax, the role of CliftonStrengths, developed by Gallup, has been of central importance in team-building and self-leadership. You can read about this in *Divine Renovation*, pages 166-168, in addition to *Divine Renovation Apprentice* by Fr Simon Lobo, pages 156-159. Since the earliest days, knowing your strengths has continued to be central in Divine Renovation’s coaching of parishes around the world.³⁵

CliftonStrengths is a personal assessment tool that identifies an individual’s top five strengths from a list of 34 “talent themes”. It analyses the person’s natural patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving, and orients a person towards focusing on developing and utilizing their strengths rather than fixing weaknesses. The 34 strengths are categorised into four domains: Influencing, Relationship Building, Strategic Thinking, and Executing.

Why do we see CliftonStrengths as such a useful tool for self-leadership?

- 1. It offers an unparalleled tool for self-knowledge.** Recall Daniel Goleman’s insight above: emotional intelligence is the most important marker of successful leaders, and at the heart of this is self-awareness: “having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives. ... People who have a high-degree of self-awareness recognise how their feelings affect them, other people, and their job performance.” It is possible to have a surface level knowledge of your top five talents, and to know which of the four domains you typically lead out of. Even this basic knowledge can be helpful. But its psychologically rigorous approach allows you to go much deeper, peeling back more layers. You can hone and become truly masterful in what you are naturally best at. You can see how certain configurations of strengths operate together in a unique way in your behaviour and thinking. You can understand better how your blind spots (bottom 5 talents) affect you and your work. You can go deeper into your middle-range strengths to understand how to develop a “growing edge” in these. The possible insights are ongoing and immense.
- 2. It helps me know what I need to feel balanced and fulfilled.** Knowing our strengths helps us not only in our work and leadership, but in all areas of our life. If I am more engaged and productive in my daily work, I am more likely to experience a higher quality of life across the board. Knowing my strengths helps me build a holistic life, where my personal life integrates with my work. It helps me understand:

³⁵ Divine Renovation uses CliftonStrengths in conjunction with APEST, the Personal Vocational Assessment which helps you discern your charisms (see here: <https://5qcentral.com/about-5q/>) We refer first to this assessment in Day 3, (Re)Plant your Evangelization Initiative.

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- how I show up in my personal relationships and what I seek and need from those relationships,
- the leisure activities which give me a sense of rest and play,
- how I need to structure or organise my daily life,
- how I build aspirations and goals for my future.

3. My capacity to lead is proportional to my awareness of what it's like to be led by me. Do you ever ask yourself, *what is the experience of someone being led by me?* A great leader, out of compassion and care for those he or she leads, will want to grow in their understanding of this. For example, if I lead out of the Influencing domain, what is like for someone who is dominant in Executing? Or, if I lead out of the Executing domain, what can that feel like for someone who leads out of Relationship-Building? Even naming and acknowledging the difference to someone you lead can help them feel seen and understood. A leader who knows he is strong in Executing may intentionally surround him or herself with those higher in Influencing talents, who can help him win people over to the strategy. Or a leader who is strong in Strategic Thinking will intentionally ensure that the agenda item, "Who does what by when?" never gets overlooked in their meetings. Or a leader who is low in Relationship Building may write at the top of her task list or on her notice board, *who will I intentionally spend time with or invest in today?* All of these things require intentionality: and that is the gift that a focus on strengths can offer to creating healthy culture in the teams in which we work.

b. Giving and Receiving Feedback

One of the best ways of growing in self-knowledge, of deepening our understanding of what it is like to be led by me, is through feedback.

We have mentioned "blind spots" several times, and the challenge is that we are, well... *blind* to our blind spots. We only see and experience the people and the world through our eyes. We don't always see the full picture. Creating healthy models inviting feedback is critical to ongoing leadership development so that we can intentionally grow our strengths and improve on our weaknesses. The only way to see a fuller picture of the impact of our leadership is through feedback from others. Leadership author and speaker Ken Blanchard says feedback is the "breakfast of champions." Leaders should develop an appetite and even hunger for feedback!

Feedback can be hard. To be your best, you must develop a hunger for feedback and see it as one of the best gifts you can get and give. It takes character and humility, despite the human tendency to "fight or flight" from the perceived threat that comes from feedback.

The foundation of a healthy feedback culture is a commitment to a genuine relationship with the people you work with. In the context of caring for people, we can build a healthy feedback culture. We must care enough to be candid with one another.

To have the relational fabric from which to build a feedback culture, parishes need the right structure so that everyone on the parish staff and key leadership is tethered

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relationally. Does your parish have an organizational chart, showing who is supported by whom (whether volunteer or staff team members)? We encourage parishes to view their organizational chart through a different lens. Rather than a hierarchical structure determining who supervises and reports to whom, parish leaders are invited to sketch out a structure where the pastor is at the bottom of the upside-down pyramid. The question in building the structure is, “Who *supports* whom”, instead of “Who reports to whom.” From this relational structure of support, we can live out the powerful leadership maxim: “*People want to be developed and led, not managed.*”

One challenge of creating a feedback culture is implementing complicated and cumbersome feedback models. Feedback doesn’t have to include long evaluation forms. The best feedback is often offered in a timely and frequent way. Regular 1:1s are one of the best ways for leaders to invest relationally in their key leaders. There are several helpful frameworks for 1:1s, one of which we explore in Day 4 of the Genesis Compass.

Beyond feedback that should be a part of regular candid conversations, especially in weekly or bi-weekly 1:1s, it is helpful to take a more significant step back for leaders to give *and* receive feedback from the people they support. In establishing a feedback culture, it is helpful for the key leaders – pastor and leadership team – to set the tone by inviting others they support to evaluate their leadership. A common feedback model is a “360 Review” although this can become complicated, expensive, and perhaps “overkill” for the average Catholic parish. A more agile and flexible model for quarterly feedback is called “T3B3,” standing for “Top 3 and Bottom 3.” This is a simple and scalable model where a person invites or is given feedback on their top three skills, gifts, or performance along with the bottom three areas of potential growth. One CEO speaks about his use of the “T3B3” model on a quarterly basis in an excellent online conversation with Carey Nieuwhof.³⁶

c. Time Management and Margin

We do not get too far leading the renewal of our parish before realizing that time is one of the most precious resources we have. Given the urgency of our evangelistic mission, we need to make the most of it. St Paul counsels, “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:15-17). The Gospels make clear how we will be judged for stewarding our resources well, for the purposes they are intended (see Luke 16:10-11 and Matthew 25:21).

In *Divine Renovation: Beyond the Parish*, Fr James Mallon shares the following story:

“When I was growing up in Scotland, there was a commercial for Air Canada. In this commercial, a plane sat on the tarmac with its door open. Laughter emanated from inside, along with the sound of clinking glasses. Eventually, someone puts milk bottles outside the door of the plane for the milkman to pick up in the

³⁶ Carey Nieuwhof and Matt Tressider, “Where Bad Leaders Come from and Why Management is Dead”, Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast (available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37fbRiRI9Z4>)

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morning. Then the commercial simply said, Good old Canadian Hospitality. Air Canada. Implying, of course, that if you fly Air Canada, the hospitality will be so amazing you will not want to leave.

“...that is an image of the Church today. We are not going anywhere. We are stuck on the tarmac enjoying good food and having a great time in our club. In this image, priests and bishops are the captains. Although they are called to fly the plane, we have trained them simply to serve the food and mingle with passengers. Occasionally, there might be reference to something in the airplane manual, but over time no one remembers how to fly the plane. The problem is that a tsunami is coming, and the plane must move!”

Inspired by this story, Fr José A Murcia Abellán, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, met with his parishioners. He showed a photo of an airline pilot serving food to the passengers. The parishioners reacted enthusiastically saying how nice the picture was and how welcoming the pilot must be. But, Fr José continued, this is not the role of the pilot. “If the pilot starts distributing food in the airplane, it means either we are going to crash or that the airplane is parked.”³⁷ The pilot is not fulfilling his ultimate purpose, and neither is the plane.

When you think of your time, what is the purpose for which God intends it? An inventory of how we spend our time may reveal how much of our days are filled with activities or tasks that do not contribute to our ultimate purpose.³⁸

If you are a priest, think of your role in terms of your threefold office as priest, prophet, and king:

- The prophetic ministry is fulfilled in the preparation of and preaching on the word of God.
- The priestly ministry of the priest is fulfilled in the celebration of the sacraments.
- The kingly office is fulfilled by leading God’s people, equipping and raising up others for the work of mission.

Many priests we coach find that they are spending less time on these essential roles, and more time and energy on tasks they are not suited, equipped, or trained for (maybe like the airline pilot serving food to passengers).

Surveying priests, Fr James Mallon reports that when asking priests to determine the time spent on preaching, sacraments, leadership, and “everything else”, the majority say they spend well upwards of 50% of their time on ‘everything else’ and little time on the activities they were ordained to do.³⁹

³⁷ Fr José A Murcia Abellán interview in the Traction Coaching Video, “Leading Through Others”.

³⁸ In Day 7, we will explore how risk of burnout increases when leaders, including pastors, are engaged in work for which they have little passion, or for which they were not ordained.

³⁹ Fr James Mallon. 2016. *Divine Renovation Guidebook: A Step – by – Step Manual for Transforming Your Parish*, p. 38.

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Fr José reflects that, “no one told me that [much of what I end up doing every day] was my vocation.”⁴⁰ Unhealthy expectations often stand in the way of parishes pursuing the authentic vision God has for them. “The most important things are often left unattended because of the most urgent things... The truth is,” Fr James Mallon says, “that to lead your parish from maintenance to mission, you will need to adjust how you minister and how you lead in your parish.”⁴¹

The Seven Hacks of Time-Maximization

- 1. Know the unique purpose of your life:** In the Day 2 module, we walked through steps for discerning God’s vision for your parish. The reality is that you can do a similar process for your own life: God’s vision for your life, or your God-given purpose. “*So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*” Colossians 3:1-2

Jordan Raynor urges us to begin in this place, by getting to “know the Author of Time” (and the Author of Life), so that we might know the “things that are above”.⁴² Matt Perman adds that, as we spend time with the Lord, the Author of Time, we get to know God’s purpose for our life.⁴³ This is closely linked to understanding our true identity as explored in Part 2. In a Divine Renovation webinar, [Health or Burnout: Where are your Leaders Going?](#), Sr Miriam James Heidland makes the point that we need to ask ‘what am I doing?’, and ‘why am I doing it?’, to discern if it is flowing out of my true identity as beloved son or daughter, as God sees me. Knowing our purpose gives us clarity to focus on the right things with the time we have.

Stephen Covey, author of *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, encourages us to keep “First things First”. When we rightly identify and schedule the priorities in our lives, we don’t get lost amid the many tasks and opportunities vying for our attention. He illustrates the impact of maintaining our priorities when, in a visual exercise, he fills a glass jars full of tiny balls representing all the things that fill up our time each day. The problem is when one tries to add larger balls to the jar: balls representing important family relationships, rest and holiday time, a big opportunity that comes along. When our time is filled with urgent but inessential things, they squeeze out the major priorities we want in our life.⁴⁴

- 2. Set Priorities:** To live in accordance with God’s unique purpose for our life it is essential to set priorities. Covey writes, “You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage—pleasantly, smilingly, non-apologetically—to say ‘no’ to other things. And the way to do that is by having a bigger ‘yes’ burning

⁴⁰ Rev. José A Murcia Abellán interview in the Traction Coaching Video, “Leading Through Others”.

⁴¹ Rev. James Mallon. 2016. *Divine Renovation Guidebook: A Step – by – Step Manual for Transforming Your Parish*, p. 38.

⁴² Jordan Raynor. 2021. *Redeeming Your Time*. In reference to the first of the “7 Principles”.

⁴³ Matt Perman. 2012. *What’s Best Next*. In reference to his section on “First Things First”.

⁴⁴ You can view Stephen Covey engaging in this exercise [here](#).

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inside.”⁴⁵ This ‘bigger yes inside’ is unapologetically saying ‘yes’ to the unique purpose of our life. It means, ‘putting first things first’ and focusing on our vision. Jordan Raynor encourages us to let our “yes be yes” (Matthew 5:37), only accepting commitments and fulfilling tasks that are aligned with our goals and that we know we can complete.⁴⁶ Matt Perman calls this an act of love: being intentional and thoughtful in this way, we can best serve God and others.⁴⁷

Laura Vanderkam points out that we all have the same 168 hours in a week. She encourages leaders to use the phrase, “it is not a priority” rather than, “I don’t have time”, as a way to highlight the importance and impact of the choices we make with our time.⁴⁸

Bestselling author Timothy Ferris writes that we ought to focus on the few essential activities that produce the most value. This is referred to as the Pareto Principle, which states that 20% of tasks produce 80% of the results.⁴⁹ Brian Tracy continues with this idea, saying we need to consider the consequences of our choices. Following the Pareto Principle, Tracy says we need to follow the “Law of Three” and determine the three tasks that will contribute most to your goals.⁵⁰

3. Use the Four Quadrants: Getting clearer about how to set priorities, we can make use of Covey’s Four Quadrants. This tool helps us to recognize the most important tasks that help us fulfil our purpose, and to execute them accordingly.⁵¹

| | Urgent | Not Urgent |
|---------------|---|---|
| Important | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Quadrant I</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crisis ● Pressing problems ● Deadline driven projects | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Quadrant II</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relationship building ● Finding new opportunities ● Long-term planning ● Preventive activities ● Personal growth ● Recreation |
| Not Important | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Quadrant III</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interruptions ● Emails, calls, meetings ● Popular activities ● Proximate, pressing matters | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Quadrant IV</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trivia, busy work ● Time wasters ● Some calls and emails ● Pleasant activities |

⁴⁵ Stephen Covey. 1989. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. p. 98.

⁴⁶ Jordan Raynor. 2021. *Redeeming Your Time*. In reference to the second of the “7 Principles”.

⁴⁷ Matt Perman. 2012. *What’s Best Next*. In reference to his section on “First Things First” and “Gospel Driven Productivity”.

⁴⁸ Lauren makes these comments in her Tad Talk, “How to Gain Control of Your Free Time”, found [here](#).

⁴⁹ Timothy Ferris. 2007. *The 4-Hour Work Week*. ch. 5.

⁵⁰ Brian Tracy. 2001. *Eat That Frog*. In reference to Key Principles “Apply the 80/20 Rule to Everything” and “The Law of Three”.

⁵¹ Stephen Covey. 1989. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. ch. 3.

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Quadrant 1: The first quadrant includes those tasks that are important and urgent. These might include crises and deadlines. If not properly managed (that is, if you are living in this fire-fighting space permanently) these can lead to burnout. While we must address these, it is important that they do not consume us. Our vision and purpose are not simply to ‘put out fires.’

Examples of Quadrant 1 Tasks might include:

- Re-configuring the weekly ministry meeting schedule to allow time and space for an upcoming Kerygmatic ministry, such as Alpha.
- Navigating unexpected staff or leader turnover.
- Managing the repair of a burst pipe.

Quadrant 2: The tasks found in this quadrant are important, but not urgent. Because of their non-urgent nature, these tasks are often neglected. But in truth, these important tasks are often aligned with your vision and aim to bolster your effectiveness.

Examples of Quadrant 2 Tasks Include:

- Investing in leadership development and coaching support.
- Learning about, and beginning to plan, an evangelization initiative, such as Alpha.
- Meeting with key leaders and staff to establish a leadership pipeline.

Quadrant 3: Covey observes that we spent most of our time responding to matters that are urgent, but unimportant. It might be that the urgency and importance of these tasks are based on the priorities and expectations of others. Focusing on quadrant three tasks is often short-sighted, can lead us to feeling out of control, and in shallow or broken relationships.

Examples of Quadrant 3 Tasks Include:

- Pop in meetings with people who just wanted to say “a quick hello” or “share an idea”.
- Parish social gatherings, such as card nights, bingo, and pet blessings. While these may be enjoyable, they take a lot of time up in calendars, and are not focused on mission.
- Diocesan or school meetings that “it would be good to have you at” but are not mandatory or mission focused.

Quadrant 4: These tasks are non-urgent and unimportant. Put simply, these are a waste of time. And yet, as Covey reports, it is easy to pour our energy into these tasks.

Examples of Quadrant 4 Tasks Include:

- Meetings with sales representatives.
- Board or committee meetings for groups that “would like a priests’ perspective.” These often have little to do with the parish or mission, and the pastor may find himself there simply to check the box of having a priest present.
- Parish work that could be completed by others. For instance, reviewing new hymnals and audio systems. While the pastor’s input

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and approval is needed, often pastors find themselves in hours of meetings, discussions, and product reviews that could be completed by others in the choir of music ministry.

“Most of us spend our time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.” It is likely, however, that what is important is most closely aligned to our God-given call and purpose. Maximising our time, then, will involve working out how to invest as much of it as we can into Quadrant 2 activities.

- 4. Become a Pro at Scheduling:** To spend as much time as possible in Quadrant 2, we must take control of our schedules. David Allen encourages leaders to plan in terms of weeks, aiming towards goals on a 3–24-month scale. This allows for one to focus on vision, while not being lost in day-to-day distractions.⁵² Reviewing actions over weeks allows us to see trends: what are the time-wasting activities, and what time am I actually allocating to Quadrant 2 activities?⁵³

Maintaining a focus on vision and planning in weeks also provides the space to anticipate and prepare for tasks. This helps develop a proactive, rather than reactive, sense of urgency. A sense of urgency can be healthy and effective at driving an individual and or team towards results, for example, in response to a surprise occurrence. However, it is important to consider how frequently we work out of ‘urgency’ and how this affects us physically and psychologically.

Life in the power of the Holy Spirit means that our carefully and intentionally crafted schedules cannot be inflexible to ‘divine interruptions.’ As leaders following a vision from God, we must remain close to the Lord and in tune to his promptings. This does not mean we become careless, but that we are open and docile to the action of the Holy Spirit. Innovative leaders report that it is often in the ‘experiment’ or the ‘creative mess’ that we make discoveries and produce effectiveness previously unimagined.⁵⁴

- 5. Delegate, Batch and Select:** Our strengths-based leadership will help us realise that the tasks and activities that drain us are precisely those that energise others! What are the tasks that have fallen onto my plate that are not aligned to my

⁵² David Allen. 2001. *Getting Things Done*. ch. 2.

⁵³ For example, let’s say you plan to launch Alpha in six months. You need to cast vision, gather a team, train the team, review materials, create a welcoming environment for Alpha to take place, plan for the weekend away, encourage an invitational culture in the parish, and invite people to attend. There is a lot to do, and six months can feel like it flies by. You may also find yourself in the midst of liturgical seasons, holidays or summer vacations, parish and diocesan festivals, events, and initiatives. On top of that, you have 20-30 emails a day, phone calls, funerals, meetings, budgets to review, and a recent windstorm blew tiles off your church roof. You intend to eat, sleep, and pray every day, occasionally see friends and family, and get in your ten thousand steps a day. Not surprisingly, you are left drained of time and energy. Where and how will you fit in planning and preparation for Alpha? The likelihood is that when we are consumed by activities in quadrants 1,3, and 4, we rarely find time for quadrant 2 activities. And yet these are the most important activities! It is important to keep “first things first”, intentionally scheduling in quadrant 2 activities, and removing as much quadrant 3 and 4 activities as possible. Even though this is difficult, your priesthood and parish will thank you in the end.

⁵⁴ David Allen. 2001. *Getting Things Done*. chs. 2 and 3.

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purpose, that I am not gifted for, or that someone else on my team would do a better job at? In other words, what can I delegate?

Another helpful practice is to utilize “Batch Processing”. This method groups similar tasks together to cut down on redundancies. Imagine, for instance, you were doing your laundry. It would be inefficient to wash a single item of clothing, iron it, and then put the single item away, before returning to the second item. Instead, it is more efficient to wash all items of clothing in one stage, then iron and fold them, before finally putting all the clothing into their proper places. Ultimately, whether you launder clothing piece by piece or batch them together, you get the same result. However, one method is much more efficient. In the parish, batch processing could look like grouping tasks together, such as answering emails in two or three “batches” a day, rather than going to email several times an hour. It could also impact the way you meet with leaders. While 1:1 meetings are important with key leaders in the parish, it would take hours to meet with every ministry leader in the parish. Instead of filling your schedule with hours of ministry leader meetings each week, consider meeting with all ministry leaders at one quarterly gathering, such as a Ministry Leaders’ Summit.

Finally, selective ignorance is the practice of ignoring or eliminating unnecessary information and distractions. This is a good practice to develop around Quadrant 4 tasks.

6. **Master the ‘To Do’ List:** *“The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.”* Proverbs 21:5. David Allen is best known for his GTD method (Getting Things Done). GTD focuses on organizing tasks and projects in a way that reduces stress and increases productivity. The GTD process begins by “*Capturing*” all tasks, ideas, projects, and commitments in a trusted system outside your mind. Then, reviewing the list, “*Clarify*” what action is needed to address each item. Allen explains that some items are not truly actionable, and in these cases, they should be trashed, deferred, or filed for future reference. Items that can be acted upon are to be “*Organized*” into appropriate categories. Next, “*Reflect*” by regularly reviewing your list and ensuring your actions and choices are aligned with your vision and purpose. The last step is to “*Engage*” your list of actionable items and decide what to do first based on context, time available, energy levels, and priorities.”⁵⁵ ‘You can do anything, but not everything.’
7. **Build Margin:** Building margin – or blank space – into our schedules ensures there is space between our load and our limit. Some leaders use the Pomodoro technique (25 minutes of focused work, followed by 5 minutes of rest). Blank space is needed...
 - to stay oriented to the unique God-given purpose of our lives
 - to give us moments to pause, to reflect, to practice the presence of God

⁵⁵ David Allen. 2001. *Getting Things Done*.

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- to provide moments during the day to be attentive to the Holy Spirit's stirrings, to be open to being steered in a different direction
- to gain perspective on the work in which we have been immersed
- to limit distractions
- to take note of our energy levels, becoming familiar with people, places, and activities that drain or boost our energy
- to be aware of the spiritual movements in our soul – of desolation or of consolation
- to return to our 'why'.

The High Stakes of Self-Leadership

At the outset of this module, we indicated that you probably did not expect a self-leadership journey when you began the journey to renew your parish. By this stage, we hope you will agree that the journey of self-leadership – perhaps even more challenging than the journey of the renewal of your parish! – is worth every struggle and setback. Certainly, there will be moments of discouragement and even heartbreak as we visit some difficult places in our hearts, minds and souls. But Jesus has promised never to leave us alone, he is with us in those tender places, healing them and bringing them to life. He longs to bring to birth the fullest version of *you*.

Self-leadership not only has an impact on our own lives (resounding into eternity). It also has an extraordinary impact on those closest to us, whom we love most. Do the people in our teams deserve leaders who are healthy, growing in wholeness and holiness? Of course they do. Your growth on this journey spills over into a more life-giving and abundant experience of ministry for them, too.

Imagine the impact, not only on your parish, but on your *neighbourhood* if a healthy self-leadership culture begins to grow around you. Disciples and leaders experiencing health, purpose, and fulfilment in living out the call of Christ in their lives. Renewed lives are attractive! Hundreds more people can be attracted to Jesus.

These are the stakes. This is the potential! A renewed parish, and a renewed, healthy, and increasingly holy, global Church. Come, Holy Spirit!