

Chapter Five

Laying the Foundation: How to Transform the Culture of the Parish Community

Key Theme

Change the culture through a conversion of values.

Corresponding Videos

Divine Renovation: An Interview with Fr Mallon Part 4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNw5xvTfe0s>

Chapter Recommendation

Due to the length of chapter 5, and the significant amount of material to cover, we recommend splitting this chapter into two or three sessions. For your convenience, we have broken the chapter into three themes. The first theme covers culture in general, the second covers the 3Hs (Hospitality, Hymns, and Homilies), and the third covers the community of believers.

Takeaways

Theme 1 – Culture - pages 87 – 95

- “If the human foundation of the Church is not healthy, then no matter how intense or sincere our spiritual commitment is, the foundation will be a fragile blend of clay and iron.” (p. 89)
- To start the rebuilding process, one must start with a foundation. Culture is what is truly valued, not only in words but more so in action and inaction. (p. 89)
- “The culture of any organization is reflected in what is truly valued... If we wish to identify the values of a particular parish, we must look at how it spends its time and money.” (p. 89)
- “An honest evaluation of a parish budget will remove any doubts about the true values of any parish, regardless of what statement may be framed on the wall. The sum of what a parish values will constitute its culture.” (p. 90)
- “It’s not about changing our theology, but about how we already live out an already rich theology of the Christian life. This cultural change means a deep, deep change. It means changing what we consider normative for the Christian life.” (p. 92)

Chapter Five (continued)

Laying the Foundation: How to Transform the Culture of the Parish Community

Theme 2 – 3Hs - pages 95 - 135

Giving Priority to the Weekend

- We must be intentional about every aspect of our Sunday celebration. This is when we see 80% of our people, yet only spend 20% of our time in a given week investing in planning, preparing, and executing.
- The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith – this is a sacred ritual that must be at the core of our ministerial efforts and we must not capitulate to minimalism and convenience. (p. 95–100)

Hospitality

- As pastor, my role was to “lead an army of missionaries to reach those who were not yet part of our church.”
- “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Mt 25:35
- Create an intentional process to welcome, invite, and encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to experience, learn, live, and share their faith. (p. 101–110)

Hymns (Uplifting Music)

- “When it is beautiful, it mediates the divine...” (p. 113)
- Music is an integral part of the liturgy. Love for beautiful music is universal – having diverse types of powerful music enhances the liturgical experience for all. (p. 110–122)

Homilies

- “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17)
- Always preach in love.
- Homilies are to be “intentional about speaking to the entire person – mind, heart, conscience and will.” (p. 125)

Chapter Five (continued)

Laying the Foundation: How to Transform the Culture of the Parish Community

Theme 3 – Community of Believers - pages 136 – 195

Meaningful Community

- “Authentic community is a place where we are known and loved. It is a place where we find others to whom we are accountable and who are accountable to us. This is the heart of Christian community, of koinonia, the Greek word can be translated as fellowship.” (p. 137)
- Belonging is central to building a strong community. “The old model of behaving-believing-belonging has been reversed...beliefs are changed not by preaching and teaching, but by building trust through relationships, through caring, through belonging.” (p. 139)
- A key indicator of a healthy community is engagement. This is “a sense of belonging, a psychological connection to the local church and its mission, and a sense of ownership of what is happening and of where the Church is headed.” (p. 150)

Clear Expectations

- Healthy and growing churches “have clear expectations of members and are not afraid to communicate them in a way that builds community and encourages participation.” (p. 153)
- “We believe that God will work in you and work through you; we expect it, and you should too.” (p. 154)
- What parishioners can expect from the parish and what the parish expects of parishioners should be clearly communicated. (p. 156–162)

Strength-based Ministry

- “... having the opportunity to do what we do best is the leading contributor to engagement. Remember, engagement is what drives spiritual commitment, which in turn drives changed beliefs and changed behavior.” (p. 166)
- Seek to find and invest in people’s God-given talents. When people lead and serve with their strengths they have great impact. (p. 166–167)

Chapter Five (continued)

Laying the Foundation: How to Transform the Culture of the Parish Community

Theme 3 – Community of Believers - pages 136 – 195 (continued)

Formation of Small Communities

- “This community must be a safe place within which the good work that has begun in them can be brought to completion.” (Philippians 1:6) (p. 169)
- To care for people and encourage their growth as disciples, there is a need for both “temporary, community-based formation and permanent groups where people truly belong and are cared for.” (p. 175)

Experience of the Holy Spirit

- Experiencing the Holy Spirit was crucial for the beginning of the Church and for the New Evangelization. The issue we have is that “we continue to be more comfortable with the idea of the Holy Spirit rather than the experience of the Spirit.” (p. 182)
- “A healthy Church is one that does not discredit or exclude experiences of the Holy Spirit that touch the affect. Rather, it encourages such experiences and values authentic diversity of expression, not a pseudo-tolerance that unconsciously demands uniformity of expression. It has robust respect for how the Spirit of Power is manifested within the community of believers and seeks to evaluate every experience according to the fruits that the experience brings with it.” (p. 186)

Becoming An Invitational Church

- We need to design opportunities outside of the liturgy through which we can personally invite those who are disengaged, disillusioned, or disconnected from the Church and offer places of welcome and engagement. (p. 191–194)
- We must create an invitational culture within the life of the parish. Parishes which embrace the values listed above, are more likely to have parishioners who naturally with joy the experience they have on Sunday, inviting others to join them.

Chapter Five (continued)

Laying the Foundation: How to Transform the Culture of the Parish Community

Discussion Questions

Theme 1 – Culture

- 1 What are three adjectives a parishioner would use to describe your parish? What are three adjectives you wish described your parish?
- 2 What are three adjectives a visitor or new member would use to describe your parish?
- 3 What does your parish celebrate? What do you tolerate?
- 4 What are the values (spoken or unspoken) that drive decision making in the parish?
- 5 What/How would the current allocation of time, talent, and treasure describe the culture and values of your parish?
- 6 What is one shift you would like to see your parish take in changing your culture?

Theme 2 – 3Hs

- 1 Where does the weekend Mass rank on the list of your parish's overall priorities? How does this differ in your personal life? How do you make the weekend liturgy celebration special?
- 2 What would it feel like for a new person to walk into your parish for the first time? Would they feel welcomed? How might this differ based on the age, race, or ethnicity religious identity, marital status of the person?
- 3 How would someone describe the mood of your parish's music? What is the level of diversity in your music ministry? Do people have "full, conscious, and active participation" in the liturgy? Why or why not?
- 4 In your opinion, what makes a good homily? How do your parish's homilies encourage personal and communal spiritual growth? How do priests and deacons seek feedback as they develop their homilies? How do they seek feedback after their homilies are given?

Chapter Five (continued)

Laying the Foundation: How to Transform the Culture of the Parish Community

Discussion Questions (continued)

Theme 3 – Community of Believers

- 1 What attracts people to your parish community? What keeps them in the community? Who would say that they feel like they belong or do not belong? Would your parish feel like an insular club or a genuine place of welcoming to a newcomer? How is your parish's mission informed by the needs of the neighborhood?
- 2 Does your parish have clear expectations for itself? Do parishioners know what is expected of them? Does your parish involve all age groups in a way where everyone knows what is expected of them at all times?
- 3 How are parishioners' strengths identified, nourished, formed, and celebrated for ministry? What are the programs or ways of assessing members' strengths and linking them to the needs of the parish and the Church at large? How can you use your own strengths and talents to bring about the mission of the Church?
- 4 Are small, faith-sharing community groups present in your parish? How do you see these as valuable? Are your leaders well-trained?
- 5 How have you encountered the Holy Spirit at work in your parish? How do others encounter the Holy Spirit in your parish? Do people talk about and share these experiences?
- 6 If you were inviting a guest to your parish, to what (social event, Alpha, Mass, ministry, etc.) would you bring them? Who was the last person you invited? When and to what? What might hold you or others back? Should Sunday Mass be the first thing to which you invite someone? Why or why not?

Notes
