



Vision

"The journey of parish renewal isn't easy or quick but it is possible".

Matt Regitz

Introduction

Divine Renovation isn't a step-by-step, one size fits all, programme of parish renewal. It is better to think of it as a set of principles that can be applied in different ways according to the particular gifts and strengths of the parish priest as well as the different circumstances of each individual parish.

Some people have reservations about the expression "maintenance to mission" because, as they rightly point out, every parish needs both. However, the experience in many parishes is one of a fairly steady decline. Sometimes we can feel as if the words of the Red Queen to Alice in *Through the Looking Glass* apply to us: "It takes all the running you can do to stay in the same place. If you want to get somewhere you must run at least twice as fast as that!" In the DR context 'maintenance to mission' means recognising that we don't have to live with decline being normal, and stepping off the treadmill so that we can begin to work on and not just in our parish and begin to see different results. In fact the experience of parishes that begin to shift their focus from maintenance to mission is one of renewal at every level of parish life including administration, financial health, and other typically 'maintenance' requirements.



Three Keys

The Divine Renovation model has three key elements that every parish needs to embrace:

1. Evangelisation: Evangelisation is the Church's response to the Great Commission, Christ's parting command to "go and make disciples". In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Pope St Paul VI wrote, "Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise". In many places today, however, it is probably where we are weakest and so we need to invest a disproportionate amount of time, energy, and financial resources into evangelisation.

Questions for Consideration:

- How many new people is your parish reaching year by year with a presentation of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ?
- What does it mean to say that evangelisation is not just one programme among many in your parish?
- What are your expectations of evangelisation?

2. Leadership: The priest cannot do everything especially when it comes to parish renewal. Part of the baptismal vocation is a 'co-responsibility' for the mission of the Church. Leadership has been described as the gift that releases all the other gifts in the church. It is the ability to raise up others to take on roles and responsibilities within the church according to the gifts God has given them. Individuals can achieve a lot but together they can do much more.

Questions for Consideration:

- How many people currently serve in internal ministries and how many serve in external ministries in your parish?
- When people volunteer are they asked to do a task or entrusted with a responsibility?
- Does your parish use 'leadership pipelines' or some other method of raising up new leaders?



3. Reliance on the Holy Spirit: Parish renewal depends on God's grace because while one can sow and another can water, it is always God who gives the increase. In Divine Renovation this is experienced as an intentional, sustained, daily reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Consideration:

- Who do you have praying for the renewal of your parish?
- Who else could you have praying for yourself and for your parish?

The Divine Renovation Pyramid

Sometimes people visit a DR parish and they are amazed by the fruits they see there: engaged parishioners, young people, adult baptism and conversions, volunteers, improving finances, etc. Often they ask are about the courses and programmes the parish employs to get those results. While it is true that changing what we do, or the courses we use, will certainly bring about different results, the truth is the impact will be limited. You will see some fruits but they won't necessarily be scalable or sustainable. The DR Pyramid is a visual representation of the work of transformation that needs to be undergone to produce lasting change. Working on Vision, Leadership, Structure, and Culture are all necessary if the Strategy and Tools we employ are really going to yield maximum fruit. And it begins with discerning where God wants us to be, what fruit looks like. We have to do that before we work out how to get there. It begins with Vision.



Vision

Vision is a God-given picture of the future that produces hope and passion in people.

Vision is about clarifying where God is calling us to be. When we have a clear vision it can create unity in a parish. When there is no over-riding vision you will get 'di-vision'. Vision can also help us differentiate between the urgent and the important. In that way it helps us prioritise and identify where we have to focus our time, effort and resources.

Vision is not the same as a 'vision statement'. The latter can be a helpful summary enabling us to communicate what is on our heart, but it can also become a mere slogan that no longer produces passion. Nor is a vision the same as a Mission Statement. The Vision describes where we are heading, the Mission Statement can express what we are doing to get there.



The process of discerning a Vision has to begin in the heart of the pastor because it is the role of the shepherd to lead the people. Sometimes priests try to get the people to come up with a vision for their parish. Mostly this results in people describing what they do not where they need to go. Henry Ford once said, "If I had asked my customers what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse". Steve Jobs put it another way: "A lot of people don't know what they want until you show it to them". Most people haven't experienced a mission oriented parish or the fruits of joyful, invitational discipleship and so it is hard for them to imagine what it might look like. The vision therefore has to begin in the heart of the priest. It will undergo a process of honing and crafting as he begins to talk about it with others, so that it can then be shared with and engage the passion of the wider community.

Vision needs to begin in the heart of the pastor and be written in the hearts of the people.

Ingredients of a Vision

1. Vision has to come from God - it begins in prayer;
2. A vision is future orientated: don't allow yourself to be limited by past experiences;
3. Identify the positive change that it will bring about, what will the fruits look like?
4. A clear picture of where you are going will make it communicable and quantifiable;
5. It needs to be challenging but achievable. People must believe it can be done.



Activity

Allow God to shape your vision:

Spend some time in prayer over a period of days or on retreat, asking the Lord where he wants your parish to be. Be attentive to the things that you find most frustrating about your parish: what is the root of this 'supernatural discontent'? What is it saying to you about where you need to lead your parish? Be attentive to the things that most excite you about your parish. What is the Lord saying to you through these? Slowly allow God to formulate in your heart and mind a picture of the parish that gets you excited for the future. It doesn't matter that it may still be a bit fuzzy. Clarity can come later.

Begin to Refine your vision:

It is important to begin in prayer because it needs to be your vision not someone else's. Once you have begun to discern it, you may find books and talks and "what if? conversations" can help you clarify it and flesh it out. This enables you to begin articulating it so that it becomes something you can communicate with others. Be attentive to the need to express your vision in a way that produces hope and passion in other people.

Start Communicating your Vision:

Who are the key influencers in your parish? Begin having one on one conversations sharing your vision with them. Be passionate but also open to things you may have missed. Do they get it? Will they be able to share it with others? Recognise that some people won't want to buy-in but don't be put off by that.

What are the other means of communication in your parish? How can you use these to further share your vision more widely?



Sharing your vision is a key leadership role so bear in mind:

- You have to own the vision yourself and be passionate about it
- You have to capture not only people's minds but also their hearts
- You need to communicate the change it is going to make: how will it make a real difference? What tangible, positive results will come from it?
- You can't do it alone so ask and invite other people to own it and make it happen with you
- Things won't change overnight: you can't change the direction of a tanker in an instant; some people will buy-in immediately, others will take time, and there will be some who never get onboard
- 8% of people are considered 'innovators' and a further 8% 'early adopters'. In most institutions 16% of people are considered 'laggards' or people who resist all change.
- Communicate strategically: vision leaks. What are the key people, key environments, key groups where you need to communicate - every thirty days or so!