



Parish Leadership Teams

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together".

Ancient Proverb

What do we mean by Leadership

The typical church model is one in which the Parish Priest is responsible for everything. With the possible exception of Safeguarding, this very clerical model is generally confirmed by the expectations of diocesan Curia: the Parish Priest is responsible for finances, health and safety legislation, building maintenance, and all manner of things for which he received no formation.

In some parishes priests have been able to delegate tasks to individuals, committees or teams. However, the delegation of tasks is not the same as the delegation of leadership. It can also reinforce a view of the lay apostolate which sees it in terms of taking on activities that in former times had been traditionally reserved to the ordained priest. We should not be using lay people to shore up the church. We should be using the church to build up lay people so that they can transform society.

Leadership means assuming responsibility rather than completing tasks. We can understand it in terms of a co-responsibility for the mission of the church that is rooted in our baptismal vocation. Pope Benedict XVI expressed it in this way:

*"Co-responsibility demands a change in mindset especially concerning the role of lay people in the Church. They should not be regarded as "collaborators" of the clergy, but, rather, as people who are really "co-responsible" for the Church's being and acting. It is therefore important that a mature and committed laity be consolidated, which can make its own specific contribution to the ecclesial mission with respect for the ministries and tasks that each one has in the life of the Church and always in cordial communion with the bishops"**

*Pope Benedict XVI, Message to the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action, 10/08/2012.



This is the foundation for the idea of lay 'leadership' within the Church. Priests and laity have complementary roles and co-dependent roles so that, "Strengthened by all her members, the Church can thus more effectively fulfil her mission for the life of the world" (Lumen Gentium n. 37). We could say that people who have tasks delegated to them usually are managed from without. People who have responsibility delegated to them will set goals and lead others to achieve.

What is a Parish Leadership Team?

A Parish Leadership Team is a group of people who complement the skills of the parish priest to ensure the parish is led effectively. They are not part of a team led by the parish priest but leaders through whom he can lead more effectively. In that way it is very different to any other parish group or team. It is important to understand this point. A Parish Leadership Team has both an internal and an external dynamic. Internally the members come around the parish priest to support him and to help him make better decisions by contributing their own specific insights, experience and understanding. This requires a willingness to express contrary points of view within a context of trust and shared responsibility. The external dynamic is most effective when the members of the team complement each other in ways that ensure the discussions and decisions lead to action. There may be no such thing as a 'balanced' individual but you can have a balanced team. So instead of the parish priest leading a team, we can genuinely say that the parish priest is 'leading out of a team'.

Does a Priest need a Leadership Team?

Obviously a Parish Leadership Team is not mandated in Canon Law but it can transform a priest's effectiveness and experience of ministry.

The truth is that unless we share the responsibility of leadership with others everything has to come through us and we rapidly become a bottleneck. This gives rise to personal frustration, stress and even burnout. The joy of ministry rapidly evaporates when we are overwhelmed by our inability to meet other people's expectations. Frustration is also experienced by the laity who, rather



than taking on responsibility themselves, operate out of a clerical mindset expecting the priest to do everything.

As we move a parish from maintenance to mission there can be pushback and opposition. Dominant individuals can be forceful and even aggressive and the parish priest has to put up with behaviour that in other settings would be deemed abusive. So shared leadership helps with the pain, pushback, isolation and self-doubt that can arise. It means the priest knows he has people who support him.

A leadership team allows for different opinions to be considered and helps ensure the best decisions are made. It helps fill the gaps caused by any blind-spots and so ensures that through the collective effort of the team the vision becomes a reality. Because the team members are themselves supporting other teams in the parish, it helps ensure a unity of vision and purpose. All of this leads to a greater fruitfulness, joy and fulfilment on the part of the priest.

Why work out of a team?

Simply put, because we are all hard-wired differently and have different skill sets and insights. Clifton StrengthsFinder identifies four 'domains' that are needed in order to perform well and achieve: Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking:

Executing

When teams need to implement a solution, you need people with Executing strengths who will work tirelessly to accomplish the goal.

Influencing

When teams need to sell their ideas inside and outside the organisation, you need people with Influencing themes to convince others.

Relationship Building

When teams need to be greater than the sum of their parts, you need people with Relationship Building themes to strengthen their bonds.

Strategic Thinking

When teams need to focus on what could be, you need people with Strategic Thinking themes to stretch the team's thinking for the future.



Often we get on best with people like ourselves: strategists love discussing strategy but to move from strategy to implementation you need Executing Strengths. A team composed of Relationship Builders will relax chilling out over a coffee all day. Without Influencers you won't bring other people on board.

Four Non-Negotiables of a Parish Leadership Team:

1. Unity of Vision
2. Balance of Strengths
3. Vulnerability & Trust
4. Healthy Conflict

The first two get you on board. The second two keep you there!

Stages:

1. Forming - coming together as something new
2. Storming - the ability to disagree respectfully and come to the best decisions
3. Norming - developing habits and rhythms
4. Performing - fruitfulness
5. Adjourning - people will move on and new people come on board.

Person Spec:

FACT - Faithful, Available, Contagious & Teachable

Further Reading:

- Pat Lencioni - The Five Dysfunctions of a Team
- Kerry Patterson - Crucial Conversations