

## Made For Mission – Renewing Your Parish Culture by Tim Glemkowski

### Introduction

- It is no accident that God has chosen us for these times. God has put us here for a reason
- Christian life in the twenty-first century – with global instability, breakdown of former superpowers and growing Christian persecution – is more like life in the early Church.
- The crisis the Church faces today is one of discipleship and that crisis extends to almost every layer of Church leadership.

### Changing Culture in a Changing Culture

- From 2007 – 2014, Catholics dropped from 24% to 21% (35% are Baby Boomers and 22% are Millennials).
- According to CARA – U.S. peaked in 1990 at 19,620 parishes. 2018 – 17,007 parishes.
- Today – In the U.S. “nones” surpass Catholics and evangelicals as the largest religious group.
- Parishes can no longer view themselves as gathering places for the faithful. Rather, they must see themselves as missionary outposts in a strange and new land.
- The parish is the Church’s great missionary opportunity.
- The current parish experience could be summed up in one word: comfortable.
- The Church now operates in a “post-Christian society.” The Christian worldview is no longer the dominant form of life in Europe or North America.
- There is a rapid and significant breakdown in the family (the strength of the domestic church).
- Catholic marriages: 1970 – 420,000. 2018 – 143,000.
- Catholic baptisms: 1970 – 1,100,000 infants. 2018 – 615,000.
- Many parishes operate in “maintenance” mode. Need to transform to “mission”.
- Parishes playing “not to lose” instead of “playing to win”.
- The New Evangelization depends on the parish – the place where salvation history and people’s lives meet.
- Renew the whole Church, start with the parish. Prioritize a few things and do them very well! Over the next ten years.
- Four steps to build parishes as missionary outpost for the New Evangelization:
  - 1) The vision is clear: introduce people to a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.
  - 2) There is a clear path to discipleship: help people grow into the fullness of mature Catholicism.
  - 3) Leaders are well-formed, empowered and sent to bear fruit: form parish leaders.
  - 4) Nothing in the parish operates in maintenance mode: mission is to form disciples who can make disciples.
- Two important notes of Renewal:
  - 1) Renewal is not something we do – the Holy Spirit brings about renewal. We cooperate through what we do, but we cannot do it alone.
  - 2) Authentic renewal is always authentically Catholic – it’s not about changing the Church, but unleashing the Gospel.

### Diagnosing Your Parish

- Four Types of Parishes:
  - 1) Dying – best option combine with another parish; focus on what you can control and not what you cannot. Pray to Holy Spirit for guidance; don’t worry about huge outreach, reach out to individuals.
  - 2) Declining – (probably most parishes today). In maintenance mode, may seem like a healthy parish, but actually in decline. Not driven to form disciples. Higher average age, fewer young families.
  - 3) Swelling – huge population growth, over 5,000 families. Growth in numbers can be mistaken for good “health” or “success”. Just because offertory and Mass attendance are up doesn’t mean parish is fulfilling its mission. Don’t let growth in numbers become a substitute for growth in discipleship.
  - 4) Growing – one healthy marker for success – growth in discipleship. These parishes feel different. Adoration chapel, confession lines are full. Social justice and evangelization are active.
- Two Hallmarks of Healthy, Growing Parish:
  - 1) Everyone understands the parish mission of forming disciples in and out of parish boundaries.
  - 2) Everyone understands how this happens and in their own lives using their unique gifts.
- The mission of a parish is to form disciples.

### Addressing the Real Crisis

- Priest shortage, low Sunday Mass attendance, declining donations are symptoms – real issue is lack failure of forming disciples over many generations.
- Overhaul the Culture of Church – newcomers feel culture before anyone says a word about it.
- Too many parishes focus inward – offertory and attendance as benchmarks.
- To renew the Church we need to form disciples that can make disciples.
- This will take time and the issue is urgent.
- First goal – renewal of the parishioners as intentional disciples – crisis of the lack of intentional disciples in our parish.

- Many Church insiders tend to let buzzwords get in the way of clear and simple communication.
- Pope St. Paul VI – “the Church exists in order to evangelize.” (God-given mission to make disciples).
- It’s not the Church has a mission, it is the mission.
- To evangelize is to meet someone where they are and invite them into Divine Adventure.
- Without compassionate recognition of where someone is, the message of repentance becomes shrill and preachy, unable to transform hearts.
- A disciple is someone who has made a personal and conscious decision to give their entire life to God.
- Discipleship is always in the context of relationship – with God and each other.
- Our life is a gift of self to God and others.
- Parishes move from maintenance to mission mode – allow the Holy Spirit to breathe a new culture in our parishes.
- The First Key:
  - 1) Have a clear vision based on God’s vision for your parish. (Don’t have to re-invent the vision, allow the Lord to guide us).
  - 2) Communicate that vision to the whole parish. (“Why” is more powerful than “what”. People buy why you do it, not what you do.)
  - 3) Let your vision lead the way in decision-making process.
- The missionary nature of the Church has to be the Why behind everything we do. Parishes should be outward-focused, not inward-focused, otherwise it’s only a social club.
- “Mission Drift” – parish moving away from its core mission and begin to chase all seemingly “good” ideas.
- Making disciples is hard. Our parish is not ours, it’s God’s.
- Reverse engineer from vision (Why) to strategy (How) to tactics (What). People tend to jump to tactics too soon. Too much time spent on tactics and not enough on vision and strategy.

### The Second Key – Craft a Clear Path to Discipleship

- Forming disciples is a process: Pre-Evangelization, Evangelization, (Conversion Occurs), Discipleship, Apostolate
- If not intentional, the process will be individual efforts that are “siloes” from each other.
- It is better to have a parish with five impactful ministries and fifty that are burning out volunteers.
- Discipleship is not defined by involvement in parish life, engagement or volunteering, it is characterized by relationship with God and with each other.
- Need a simplified, clear approach to discipleship. Conversion is ongoing.
- Facilitate the accompaniment of every person on their faith journey.
- Clarity to the path to discipleship begins by saying “no” – church “busyness” can drown out discipleship and evangelization.
- Hyperactivity is the enemy of bearing good fruit – every parish initiative should have a particular audience in mind on their faith journey; every initiative should part of an overarching parish strategy to move people to the next stage of their relationship with God.
  - 1) Build trust with those who are not religious.
  - 2) Provide occasion for someone to encounter Jesus personally.
  - 3) Mature those who have had a conversion moment to full disciples.
  - 4) Send disciples on mission.
- St. Ignatius said
  - 1) For beginners – the Devil will tempt people away from following God by keeping them comfortable in sin or by making it seem too hard to follow God and they give up.
  - 2) For devout – the Devil will tempt them with something good that is not the best thing (i.e. keep them busy so they don’t have time to pray).
- Don’t turn people in to projects, it’s not about numbers, it’s about relationship – the key is accompaniment along the way.

### Win/Build/Send Process

- 1) Win – prepare for and encounter Jesus
 

Pre-Evangelization – preparation, removing the obstacles, to make way for the receptivity to the Gospel message.

  - Cannot begin with catechesis or evangelization.
  - Utilize truth, beauty and goodness to prepare people for discipleship. These three attributes attract the human heart and open the soul to receive Divine Revelation.
  - This phase accounts for more people than we realize – includes visitors and many of our parish “regulars”.
  - Does the parish culture arouse curiosity and build trust to those without faith?
    - 1) Appeal to the Heart – each person possesses a longing for happiness and true fulfillment which points to God.
    - 2) Appeal to the Intellect – discrepancy between faith and science can be an obstacle; appeal to both the heart and intellect can arouse curiosity.
    - 3) Address wounds – deep hurts and unresolved suffering can cause lack of trust in God, unbelief is actually pain.
    - 4) Always build the relationship first – build friendship, get to know the person, build trust.

Evangelization – the proclamation of the Gospel, preaching the kerygma (core message) and invitation to follow Jesus. The Kerygma:

  - 1) God loves you and has a plan for your life.
  - 2) Sin separates us from God.

- 3) Jesus, in His life, death and resurrection, saved us from sin.
  - 4) Turning away from sin and toward God and His Church, we live the life God intended for us.
  - The homily is not the centerpiece of Mass, the Eucharist is.
  - Everyone should be aware of the “first step” into parish life – it is not Sunday Mass. Program like Alpha is a start.
  - Pray and get out of the way – follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance.
  - 2) Build – become a follower of Jesus
- Discipleship – the decision to follow Jesus with a hunger to grow in knowledge and relationship.
- When healthy growth not supported:
    - 1) Becomes unhealthy – individuals develop their own initiatives.
    - 2) Stalls – loneliness or frustration happens.
    - 3) The disciples find somewhere else to grow – Catholic parish becomes uninspiring and people go to other churches.
  - The wrong mentality of holiness of priests is more important than the holiness of the lay people – let’s put the same kind of intentionality of forming all baptized Catholics as we do for our priests.
  - Growing in holiness is a balance of four pillars (same as priest formation):
    - 1) Human – develop community and friendship
    - 2) Intellectual – heritage of our faith
    - 3) Spiritual – learn how to pray with our hearts
    - 4) Pastoral – do our lay people “bear fruit?”
  - Move the parish from “events-based” or “media-based” to “groups-based” (people learn to rely on each other, not about the gathering but the growing).
  - Mid-sized and small groups are best.
  - Vulnerability is the key to small group ministry – everyone is broken, everyone is wounded – leaders need to model it for members.
  - Interior healing is import in this step. Grow more in the image and likeness of God.
  - According to the Catechism, the first stage of sin is loss of trust in God.
  - 3) Send – pouring yourself out into the lives of others; we are called to multiply our discipleship.
    - Creates a cycle of fruitfulness that impacts the local community and the whole world.
    - Allowing the Holy Spirit space in your heart to use your particular gift.
    - Too often clergy have become administrators and business managers while lay people have been pulled into roles around the altar instead of being pushed into the world (it is more comfortable to be an altar server than protagonist of a lay path).
    - Disciples are called to become apostolic and let their relationship with Jesus bear fruit in the lives of others.

### The Third Key – Mobilize Leaders

- There are 75 million U.S. Catholics and 17,500 parishes (2019). Average attendance is 40% (seems high to me).
- Mega-church defined as more than 2,000 people in attendance weekly.
- Conclusion – many parishes are huge organizations – accounts for dysfunction and burn-out.
- Parish leaders need to spend more time in small groups training them to carry on the mission.
- Real culture change takes at least ten years.
- Greatest strategy – Jesus trained 12 guys to carry the torch. We must train “torch-bearers”.
- Jesus organized His leadership this way: Jesus/Peter, James, John/The Twelve Apostles/The Seventy-Two (Luke 10):
  - 1) Vision – Pastor: he is the key vision-caster, people look to pastor for leadership and spiritual father. Pastor must push for change otherwise cultural renewal is not possible. Don’t need pastors that are business leaders, need visionary leaders. Pray for new outpouring of the Holy Spirit on your pastor and go and make disciples in your own home.
  - 2) Strategy – Senior Parish Leadership Team: driving culture change requires many different gifts working in concert with the pastor. Not responsible for running ministries but for overseeing strategy, glue holding the clear path to discipleship together.
  - 3) Tactics – mix of key staff, parishioners and disciples. “Tip of the spear” of parish culture change. Concentrate on these “72” in the first year (remember that Jesus spent three years with His apostles). Intentionally mentor people to do a specific thing. Push them beyond their capacity for real growth.
- “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” John 12:24
- Before we build an evangelizing parish we have to lay our vision before God and make sure it is a God-given one.
- Spiritual multiplication was Jesus’ strategy, it should be ours also.

### The Fourth Key – Align Everything

- Many parish initiatives operate in silos.
- Four Areas That Must Be Aligned:
  - 1) Sacramental Preparation – sacraments only bear fruit if we let them; key area of focus (Marriage Prep, RCIA welcome people back to or to parish life).
  - 2) Religious Education – currently ineffective for children; must provide ongoing for adults. (Parents primary educators of Faith to their children).

- 3) Communications – must seek to reach the disengaged, the fallen away and the non-believer as primary audience. Most parish communication is more functional than inspirational. Not all communication is an invitation to a parish event, should engage the heart and mind.
- 4) Major Liturgical Holy Days – crucial evangelization opportunities. Share the Joy of a life with Jesus.

#### Responding to Our Cultural Moment

- Phyllis Tickle (religious historian) – Christianity has undergone a crisis every 500 hundred years in its 2000 year history:
  - 1) 476 A.D. – Fall of the Roman Empire. The Church became too comfortable as the “official” religion of the Roman Empire. Sts. Benedict and Scholastica formed men and women monastic communities that became centers of learning.
  - 2) 1076 A.D. – the Great Schism. Monasteries had become corrupt and comfortable. The Schism divided the Church of the West from the Church of the East (the first large scale splintering of Christianity). 12<sup>th</sup> Century – Sts. Francis and Clare of Assisi and St. Dominic founded some of the greatest religious orders.
  - 3) 1517 A.D. – Martin Luther wrote the “Ninety-Five Issues” in frustration over Church doctrine and practices. Continued splintering of the Church into Protestant and Catholic. Sts. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross reformed the Carmelite order. Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared.
  - 4) Today – we officially live in a post-Christian culture; largest growing religious designation as “none”. Each new crisis has brought about a new creative, dynamic expression of Christian holiness.

#### Appendix I – Resources for Cultural Change

#### Appendix II - Simple Ideas For Implementing the Four Keys

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