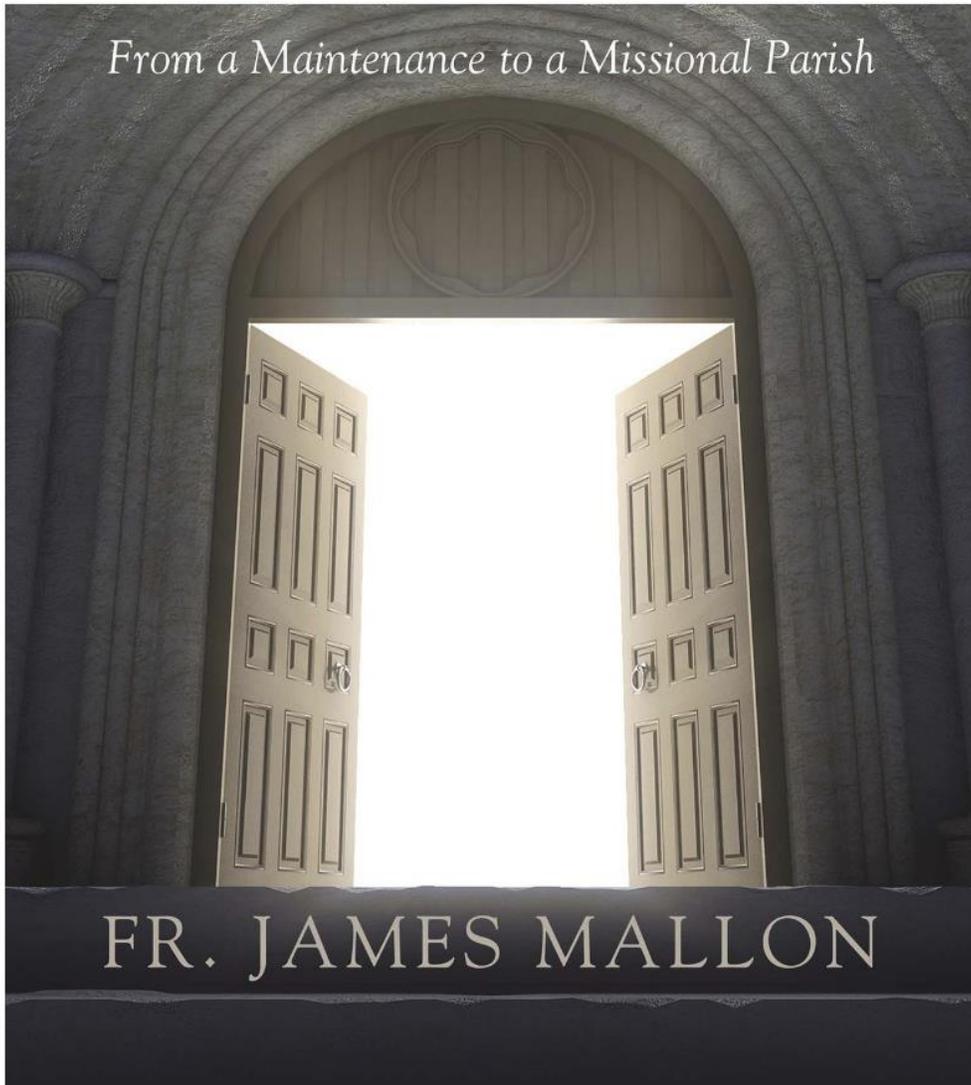


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# DIVINE RENOVATION

*From a Maintenance to a Missional Parish*



FR. JAMES MALLON

# READING GUIDE

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## Preface

The purpose of this guide is to lead you through Father James Mallon's book, *Divine Renovation: Bringing your parish from maintenance to mission*. Through this chapter by chapter Reading Guide, you will come to understand the inspiration behind this book, and how Father James proposes we can renew our churches and reclaim our missionary identity. This book does not propose a one-size-fits-all approach, but instead equips you with the questions and principles necessary to begin the process of renewal in your parish.

While this Reading Guide can be reviewed on your own, we encourage priests and parishioners to go through this together, taking time to review the principles discussed in the book and the present realities within their parish.

Divine Renovation is a global ministry which seeks to inspire, equip, and connect parishes to become centers of renewal, forming missionary disciples. In *Divine Renovation: Bringing your parish from maintenance to mission*, Father James will share stories, passages from Scripture, and Magisterial Documents. We hope this Reading Guide will inspire in you a hope for renewal and equip you with the guiding principles necessary to begin the process. Divine Renovation Ministries has many tools and resources to accompany parishes and Dioceses on the path from maintenance to mission. Your journey with us can begin right here. Are you ready?

*A special thanks is owed to the Archdiocese of Chicago, Illinois, United States. Their Diocesan Reading Guide was very helpful and used, with permission, in the creation of Divine Renovation's Reading Guide.*



# User Guide

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## **Form A Small Group**

Bring together a small group of people from your parish (e.g., representatives from your staff, people of influence, enthusiastic volunteers, finance council, lay and ministry leadership) and commit, as a group, to read and discuss the Divine Renovation book together.

## **Read And Reflect**

Ask each participant to complete the corresponding reading and the personal reflection exercises for each module before the group session.

## **Gather**

Plan to meet at regular intervals (could be weekly, or more or less frequently) to pray, discuss, and reflect on the reading.

## **Pray**

At the start of each session, open with prayer and a short reflection on the suggested Gospel passage. At the end of each group session close with prayer.

## **Discuss**

As a group, use the discussion questions to facilitate conversation and share reactions and perspectives. Make sure everyone is engaged and has an opportunity to provide their own point of view.

## **Recommendations On Ways to Read Through**

### **Seven Sessions**

Read and discuss one chapter at a time. While this route forward may be quick, please note the length of chapter 5, before committing to this strategy.

### **Nine Sessions**

Read and discuss one chapter at a time, apart from chapter 5, which may be broken into three sessions based on the themes listed in the chapter 5 portion of the Reading Guide.

### **Seven Sessions**

Read and discuss the chapters 1 and 2 together, focusing on mission and evangelization. Next read chapters 3 and 4 together, focusing on the pain of losing our missionary identity. Split chapter 5 into three sessions based on the recommendations listed. Read and discuss chapter 6 on its own. Conclude by reading and discussing chapter 7 on leaderships.

# Introduction and Chapter One

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*House of Prayer: Remembering Our Identity and Purpose*

## Key Theme

*Reclaiming An Awareness of Our Missionary Identity*

## Corresponding Videos

Divine Renovation: An Interview with Fr Mallon Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C18V0I28-2U&t=192s>

## Takeaways

- Of all the crises that we can name in the Church today, “our deepest crisis is an identity crisis...we have forgotten who we are and what we are called to do as a Church.” (p. 13)
- If we exist for mission, what is the mission of the Church? Jesus gave four tasks: go, make, baptize and teach. The task of making disciples is central. (p. 19-20)
- A disciple of Jesus is “engaged in a lifelong process of learning from and about Jesus.” (p. 20) We are, “not to just make believers, or ‘practicing Catholics,’ but to make disciples.” (p. 22)
- “To receive this Good News, to be evangelised, is not only to hear these wonderful truths, to know about them, but to come to know Him – to not just believe in Him, but love Him and be in love with Him.” (p. 22)
- “We must labour to create spaces for people to come to know Jesus as the living Lord, awaken that hunger and then begin to form them, to make them disciples. We must rediscover our identity and place the Lord’s mandate for his Church at the heart of everything we do, so that at the heart of every parish there will be a community of growing, maturing believers who are committed to a lifelong process of disciplined learning, who are discovering their talents, who are prepared to serve and eventually become apostles” (one who is sent). (p. 23-24)
- “Being a Church of disciples...is just part of our calling.” We must also go outward and fulfill our missionary nature to share Jesus with others and to evangelize. (p. 24)

# Introduction and Chapter One (continued)

*House of Prayer: Remembering Our Identity and Purpose*

## Discussion Questions

- 1 If you had only one word or phrase to describe the purpose of your parish, what would it be?
- 2 If your parishioners had only one word to describe the purpose of your parish, what would it be? (You may want to ask ten people after Mass.)
- 3 At present, what types of activities take up most of the time, talent, and treasure of your parish?
- 4 What does the Titanic story (p.18) suggest to us about the consequences of our own identity crisis?
- 5 How does your parish live out the command to make disciples? How do you personally live it out?
- 6 How do people in your parish speak about Jesus? Do they speak about a relationship with Jesus, or is it an intellectual knowledge about Jesus that is shared?
- 7 How have you encountered Jesus in your life (e.g., through Sacraments, prayer, people, ministry, devotion)?
- 8 What is the hope for the future of your parish, as you begin to dream of renewal in your Church?

## Notes:

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# Chapter Two

*Rebuild My House: From Vatican II to Pope Francis*

## Key Theme

*The primacy of evangelization.*

## Corresponding Videos

Divine Renovation: An Interview with Fr Mallon Part 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRbAuzhaA9Q>

## Takeaways

- The roots of our modern focus on evangelization are found in the Second Vatican Council. With each successive pope, from St. Pope Paul VI who wrote “Evangelization in the Modern World” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*), to St. Pope John Paul II, who coined the phrase “New Evangelization,” to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI who emphasized a “personal encounter and personal relationship with Jesus” to Pope Francis, a deeper understanding of evangelization has developed. (p. 27–41)
- We are called to holiness because we are baptized. (p. 28)
- Pope Paul VI defines evangelization: “It has been possible to define evangelization in the terms of proclaiming Christ to those who do not know Him, of preaching, of catechesis, of conferring Baptism and the Sacraments.” (EN. no 17) (p. 29)
- “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection” (EN. No 14).
- “... the proclamation of Christ is not only the summit of all evangelising activity, but is the supreme duty of the Church and every individual believer.” (p. 31)
- “In our pastoral experience, often sincere people who leave our church do not do so because of what “non-Catholic” groups believe, but fundamentally for what they live; not for doctrinal but for vivential reasons; not due to theological problems, but to methodological problems of our Church.” (p. 39)



# Chapter Three

*House of Pain: The Experience of a Maintenance Church*

## Key Theme

*We have forgotten who we are, and we are in pain. We must pray that the Lord restores us, so that culture within our churches might be free of abuse and full of missionary zeal.*

## Corresponding Videos

There is no corresponding video for this chapter.

## Takeaways

- Yet, despite the conversation on evangelization since the Council, “our Church is sick. The root of this sickness is our deep forgetfulness of our deepest identity: that we are missionary, that we are a Church ‘called to come out from itself.’” (p. 43)
- To heal, we must first acknowledge the pain, understand it, learn from it, and finally offer it to God. (p. 44)
- “Our pain within the Church is present as a result of the loss of so many of our institutions that framed our identity and were a source of pride...” These institutions, many of which remain Catholic today in name only “decorate our city like the ruins of some ancient civilization. As we walk or drive past them, they are a constant reminder of the decline of the Church as an international force for social good...” (p. 46)
- “Victims [of sexual abuse] and their families who still bear the imprint of such a dreadful breach of trust are still members of the household of God. They continue to carry a deep pain within themselves and experience it anew every time a new crime from the past is brought to light... the loss of credibility of the Church and the shame that rests upon the head of every priest because of the misdeeds of a few translates into a dull, chronic ache.” (p. 48)
- The question “is it true?” is not the primary question of the post-modern culture. (p. 52)

## Chapter Three (continued)

*House of Pain: The Experience of a Maintenance Church*

### Takeaways (continued)

- “A preferred option is to stay and fight, to hold on to the vision, zeal and passion that enticed you to get into it to begin with.” (p. 56)
- Often our churches today exist as though their sole purpose, like a club, is to serve the needs of those who claim membership. This was not the kind of ministry that inspired [men] to seek to be priests.” (p. 53)
- There is much pain in the Church but “our pain can become suffering...and suffering can be redeemed.” (p. 57)
- We must not stop at the acknowledgment of pain – “Redemption from our suffering... [calls us] to action, to make changes and reforms.” (p. 58)

### Discussion Questions

- 1 What pain and suffering have you experienced in recent years? What has caused this pain and suffering? How has it impacted your commitment to the Church?
- 2 How has the clergy sexual abuse scandal affected your commitment to the Church?
- 3 How has your trust in priests, religious, and the Church changed over time?
- 4 How have you seen healing take shape in your personal life, in your parish, or the broader Church to address pain and suffering? What can be done to continue the healing process? What gets in the way of healing?
- 5 Are you proud to be Catholic? Why or why not?



# Chapter Four

*Clearing out the Junk: What We Need to Jettison if We Are Going to Rebuild*

## Key Theme

*Rediscover and reclaim the Good News that we are saved by Jesus and are called to holiness.*

## Corresponding Videos

Divine Renovation: An Interview with Fr Mallon Part 3

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d\\_Q3Vnrgshg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_Q3Vnrgshg)

## Takeaways

- “Grace, manifested in faith and love in the life of the believer, is what saves us.” (p. 65)
- “Pope Francis has repeatedly described the Church as a hospital for sinners and not as a kind of club for the perfect. It is clear that the Good News of Salvation resounds and is received as Good News only if we have truly grasped the bad news of our fallen condition.” (p. 67)
- “Sometimes even Catholics have lost or never had the chance to experience Christ personally; not Christ as a mere paradigm or value, but the Living Lord: the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6). This hints at the very human tendency to reduce the Christian faith to some form of moral rigorism, or mere ethics. (p. 69)
- It is the kerygma that opens hearts; it is the kerygma of the Good News of salvation that needs to be articulated clearly for people to hear and understand.” (p. 71)
- “I am a sinner who the Lord has looked upon... [this] is our fundamental identity.” (p. 72)
- “Clericalism is ultimately a suppression of baptismal identity,” bestowing on only the ordained or professional lay ministers the call to holiness, mission, witnessing, evangelizing, and maturing in faith, which is the responsibility of all the baptized. (p. 73–74)

## Chapter Four (continued)

*Clearing out the Junk: What We Need to Jettison if We Are Going to Rebuild*

### Takeaways (continued)

- “Saint Paul explicitly tells us that these charisms (spiritual gifts) exist “to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Thus the primary task of the Pastor is not to do all the work of ministry himself, but to equip the saints to do the work of ministry.” (p. 82)
- “As a pastor, I constantly seek to focus on the three fundamental tasks of the priest: to preach the Word of God, to celebrate the sacraments and to lead the Church. All other ministry not only can be pushed out, but ought to be pushed out to others.” (p. 83)
- The goal of the ministry team, lay and ordained, is “to call forth and equip others to do the work of ministry so that the Church may be built up.” (p. 83)
- “Only a Church filled with an army of missionary disciples can change the world.” (p. 83)

### Discussion Questions

- 1 How do the false teachings of Pelagianism (God’s grace is not necessary for salvation – it is achieved through our good works) and Jansenism (extreme moral rigorism emphasizing God’s grace and our inherent depravity) get in the way of the proclamation of the Good News in your parish and ministries?
- 2 Where have you seen the impact of clericalism within the Catholic Church?
- 3 How would you describe the relationship between the clergy, religious, and the laity in your parish?
- 4 How have complacency, passivity, and inactivity affected your parish and your ministries?
- 5 Why is it important for us to empower the laity to live their baptismal call?



# 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

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# Chapter Six

*The Front Door: The Sacraments as our Greater Pastoral Opportunity*

## Key Theme

*Our Sacraments are grace filled. We must ensure that our Sacramental formation is fruit filled.*

## Takeaways

- “I strongly believe that our starting point must be that we never say “no” to any request for a sacrament. To do so is to cut off at the heels even the possibility of conversion and transformation. However, this begs the question of what it means to say “yes”. “Yes” cannot simply mean the fixing of a date, some paperwork and a quick preparation class.” (p. 198)
- Sacraments are meant to be rooted in discipleship. They are to have a connection with conversion, profession of faith, and fruitfulness, not just mere routines. (p. 199–203)
- In our contemporary experiences, there seems to be more of a pastoral concern over the validness of a sacrament, with little or no corresponding concern for the fruitfulness. (p. 202–203)
- “Saint Thomas Aquinas told us, ‘Whatsoever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver.’ Re-education of our people will be vital so that changes in pastoral practices are not perceived as punishing children and families...” (p. 206)
- When we consider those who seek sacraments, we should ask ourselves if having a true encounter with Jesus is important to us and if we are willing to change to ensure that can happen. “The mission of our Church is to make disciples, not to celebrate good liturgy or keep people happy. Sacraments are given to us to initiate and sustain believers into disciples.” (p. 208)
- There is an opportunity to review and enhance our baptismal preparation, confirmation preparation, marriage preparation and RCIA programs with the goal of helping people encounter Jesus and to help them on a path to discipleship. (p. 210–232)



# Chapter Seven

*Leader of the House: The Essential Role of Leadership*

## Key Theme

*Learn to live out and empower the best of leadership.*

## Corresponding Videos

Divine Renovation: An Interview with Fr Mallon Part 5

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfTT1d2JITY>

## Takeaways

- The Second Vatican Council identified three key functions of priestly ministry, which are “to preach the Word of God, to celebrate the sacraments of faith and to lead God’s people.” (p. 233)
- “Everyone has some degree of leadership ability – the ability to influence another person.” (p. 235)
- “I have realized that a leader must continue to grow, learn, and adapt.” (p. 236) “A weak leader will rely on his or her title or office or official authority.” (p. 235)
- “Successful leaders “lean into their natural strengths and talents” and are simultaneously aware of their weaknesses and deficits. There is no such thing as a well-rounded person. It is a myth. We are all imbalanced. But there is such thing as a well-balanced team.” (p. 241)
- “Vulnerability is not only essential between a leader and those who are led, but also among other leaders. We need this not only to maximize our own ministries and to support one another, but also because of our need to model authentically the kind of change we long to see within our churches.” (p. 243)
- “A leader must have a vision about the destination – the dream of what that destination can be.” (p. 247)
- “A vision may begin with the leader, but it cannot remain solely in the mind and head of the leader. It must be communicated and shared in a compelling way that invites others to receive it, take ownership of it, and even change and adjust it.” (p. 250)

## Chapter Seven (continued)

*Leader of the House: The Essential Role of Leadership*

### Takeaways (continued)

- “The key people in your parish are other leaders, people of influence”. Influence literally means “to flow into. “Always keep your eyes open for the influencers and flow into them so that they can flow into others.” (p. 255)
- “Someone once said vision without strategy is hallucination. Vision is fundamental to transformation. It creates a desire and enthusiasm for the necessary journey, but as in any journey, once you have decided where you are going, you must then discern how you will get there.” (p. 258)
- *From the conclusion:* To do this work, we must lean on God. “It is the Holy Spirit of God who brings us to embrace our true identity as a missionary Church.” (p. 285)

### Discussion Questions

1. What feelings or emotions did you have while reading this chapter?
2. What kind of leader are you? What kind of leader do you aspire to be? How do you wish to form leaders at your parish?
3. Are you comfortable working out of a team that shares responsibility and affects the vision for your church?
4. What values would you like your community to be visibly living out in five years? How can you make disciples, build communities, and inspire witness?
5. For the vision to be sustainable, there must be a strong team to support its implementation and continuation. How do you develop and support your team members?
6. What challenges do you foresee in moving towards renewal? How can you and your parish overcome these challenges?
7. How will you bring the mission of renewal to your own life? To your family and friends? To your parish community?

