

# Three Keys to Parish Renewal

Are you ready to unlock your parish and see it renewed and come alive? These Three Keys have proven to unleash radical change in hundreds of parishes around the world.

# To begin, renewal is possible. There is a God-sized hope in our church waiting to be unlocked.

Have you ever looked around your parish and thought, are we called to be more? Have you experienced declining attendance, participation, and engagement, fewer vocations, or a sense that the old ways of doing things just don't bear fruit anymore? Maybe your church is full — but not full of life — or it's missing the mark of making disciples. If we remain as we are, our parishes risk becoming places of life preservation instead of life celebration, an existence of maintenance over mission.



The reality we face is sobering. But it is not the end of the story. This reality sparked the need — and the hope — for parish renewal, leading to the identification of three key principles that make it possible.



# WHERE DID THESE THREE KEYS TO PARISH RENEWAL COME FROM?



The *Three Keys* began take shape in the lived experience of Fr. James Mallon and the community of Saint Benedict Parish in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where the vision behind the Divine Renovation movement first took root. They began to experiment with what it meant to become a truly missionary parish, taking bold steps outward — inviting, welcoming, and helping people encounter Jesus in a personal way — all while keeping the Eucharist and prayer at the heart of the parish. Out of this lived pastoral experience, and from what they learned while accompanying other parishes, the Three Keys emerged as essential principles for any parish seeking to move from maintenance into mission.

To be clear, Divine Renovation is a model of parish renewal, not a one-size-fits-all program. It is about taking key principles and living them out in your context. Whether large or small, rural or urban, and in diverse cultural settings across the globe, we have seen missional renewal become a reality in parishes that embrace these three keys.



### PARISH RENEWAL CONVERSATION STARTERS:

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- When was the last time you experienced your parish as truly life-giving?
- If you embrace this mission, what do you think your parish will look like in five years?
- If God is calling you to more, what do you think "more" looks like?





# Key 1 - The Power of the Holy Spirit



Through the power of the Holy Spirit, transformative renewal happens, and parishes come to life. This isn't just about relying on the Holy Spirit or waiting passively—it's about expecting Him to work in ways far beyond what human effort alone can achieve.

It is not by your own strength that your parish will be transformed. This is God's work. You are not enough...but He is.

At Pentecost, the apostles were driven from the upper room, empowered for mission through the Holy Spirit. Like the first disciples, you cannot go it alone as the hero of the story.

First, you pray. Then, you wait to be clothed with power from on high. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that makes your work fruitful. Call on Him and expect Him to show up — because the Father has promised Him to us. Surrender your work, surrender your leadership, surrender your parish, and surrender your whole self to Him.



SOME WAYS TO UNLOCK THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOUR PARISH:

### Start every meeting, gathering, and conversation in prayer.

Make it a habit! Not simply rote prayers, either — call upon the Holy Spirit, pray for those present, and intentionally invite God to be a part of your specific work. At Divine Renovation we start every meeting with prayer, and most prayers with 3 simple words: "Come Holy Spirit..."



### Align your existing prayer ministries.

Your parish may have rosary groups, or regular adoration, or some other form of prayer gatherings. What a gift! Meet with the leaders of these groups. Ask them to align their prayer efforts with the renewal of the parish. Prayer is the engine of a parish, and your people are your engineers: invite them into this holy work!

"And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Luke 24:49





## Key 1 - The Power of the Holy Spirit

(cont.)

### Ensure your team members, volunteers, and staff are equipped to lead prayer spontaneously.

Encourage them to practice and offer training if comfort level or knowledge is lacking.

We ALL need to lead prayer – not just priests!





### Pray WITH each other, not just for each other.

If someone asks for prayer or shares a struggle, offer to pray with them right then and there. Model prayer with your community and team at every instance. Do not tell parishioners or team that you'll pray for them. Instead, pray immediately - if someone is asking for prayer, the best time is RIGHT NOW. Whether it's after mass, in a meeting, or on a call, now is the time to pray. Call upon the Holy Spirit.

### Expect spiritual warfare as transformation occurs; pray for guidance and peace.

When conflict and disagreement arise, bring it to prayer and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance.

#### Prioritize the Sabbath

Honor the cadence that God designed into the world and prioritize your day of Sabbath for rest and prayer. This will allow you to be present to the Holy Spirit and the people around you. A rested leader makes wise decisions.

#### FOR REFLECTION:

- What would it look like if the Holy Spirit came in power?
- Describe your vision of what change would be seen.
- What would it look like if all your parishioners were radically reliant on the Holy Spirit?
- How might your parish continually be filled with the Holy Spirit?



Be filled with the Holy Spirit addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father." Ephesians 5:18-20





## **Key 2 - The Primacy of Evangelization**



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When evangelization is the focus and people truly encounter Jesus, parishes grow.

Evangelization must come first—both in principle and in practice.

The Church exists to evangelize. Your parish exists to evangelize. It's right there in the Great Commission.

But is your parish doing things in the right order? Read it again: Jesus commands us to first go and make disciples, second baptize, and third teach. Too often, most parishes get this out of order.

We are quick to teach those who don't yet believe, or to administer sacraments to people whose faith hasn't yet taken root. What would your parish look like if you put these things in the right order?

Imagine if the people in your pews — if the people in your parish — truly knew deep in their hearts that Jesus is Lord.

Now imagine they love Him. They love Him with all their being. Your community would be hungry for the Sacraments and eager to follow Jesus. That's the way it should be. That's the kind of community Jesus envisioned. It starts with making disciples: inviting people to encounter Jesus, not just teaching about Him.

Through evangelization, you reach both the unchurched and the de-churched. But to do it well, evangelization must be prioritized. That may mean putting other initiatives on hold — or stopping them altogether. The Great Commission comes with a cost, but it is a cost worth paying to save souls.

The goal of evangelization is conversion. As Pope Saint John Paul II affirms in *Redemptoris Missio*: "Conversion means accepting by personal decision the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple." Each parish must embrace the task of "adopting clear and comprehensible means of communication that announce the Lord Jesus according to the ever new witness of the kerygma".

(The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church)

"We must avoid the temptation of thinking that the witness of our lives alone is sufficient to evangelize." Fr. James Mallon, Divine Renovation p. 29







## Key 2 - The Primacy of Evangelization

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SOME WAYS TO UNLOCK THE PRIMACY OF EVANGELIZATION IN YOUR PARISH:

### Have at least one dedicated evangelization ministry.

Divine Renovation continues to see the most powerful fruit grow from Alpha. Alpha is an evangelization program that is run in Catholic and non-Catholic churches around the world.

# **Ensure your evangelization ministry is friendly and welcoming to the unchurched.**

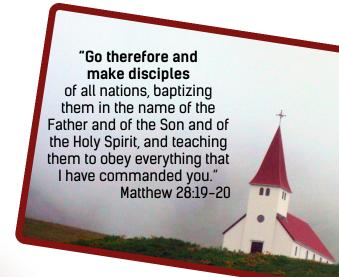
THEY are your target audience! You must track your reach. Count the number of unchurched people showing up.

### Preach about evangelization.

Help your community understand it. Catholics often confuse "evangelization" with "catechetics."

### Foster a culture of invitation at your parish

Model invitation and challenge parishioners to invite. Invite your parishioners to Alpha (or whatever your evangelization program might be). Then invite them again. And again. Then invite them to invite their friends and family. Repetition is key!





### Expect new visitors at Mass every single week.

Create the expectation in your parishioners that we are a parish that reaches and welcomes new people. Stop and say: "A special welcome to any visitors who may be with us today..." Make sure new people know they aren't crashing a secret club meeting, but are being welcomed into the home of a friend who is happy to have them there.

# Ensure you have a hospitality ministry to welcome new people at the front doors.

Pick those people carefully, out of giftedness as much as availability! Nobody wants to be greeted with a frown. You want highly happy and energetic people as your greeters.

#### FOR REFLECTION:

- What is bearing most fruit in your parish right now in terms of evangelization?
- What's the biggest evangelization opportunity that you see?
- How much of the resources of your parish do they take up?





# Key 3 - The Best of Leadership

### When parish leaders lead according to sound, Christ-centered principles, parishes thrive.



Leadership based solely on office or position of authority doesn't truly work. Jesus taught — and lived —servant leadership: leading through serving, loving, and lifting others. You cannot do this alone. Even with the power of the Holy Spirit, no single person has all the gifts or strengths needed to guide— and transform — a parish. You need to partner with holy men and women, both lay and ordained, to accomplish God's Kingdom here on earth.

The secular world has discovered that leadership is a science. It's a multi-billion-dollar industry, full of books, assessments, coaches, and training programs designed to help leaders do their best work. If leadership excellence matters for a company that sells widgets or sneakers, how much more does it matter for priests, shepherds of souls, who guide people toward God and wrestle with eternal questions? God has made you a leader. Now it is time to embrace your calling and lead well.



"And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task."

Acts 6:2-3

#### SOME WAYS TO UNLOCK THE BEST OF LEADERSHIP IN YOUR PARISH:

### To be a truly great leader, you first need to understand yourself - so take it to prayer.

Ask God what strengths and weaknesses he made you with. Write them down. Are you more of a shepherd-teacher? Or maybe more of an apostle-evangelist? How has God made you? Pray with Ephesians 4. Then build a leadership team that complements your strengths and weaknesses. Don't build one that mirrors you, build one that balances you.



### **Share Leadership - You can't do everything.**

Take the time to choose your priorities as a pastor and let others take the lead on important ministries that might bless your parish but don't move your priorities forward. Keep the "main thing" the main thing by focusing on what you do best and your parish's vision.





## Key 3 - The Best of Leadership

(cont.)

### **Study Leadership**

Divine Renovation highly recommends exploring your strengths (and the strengths of your leadership team!) through the CliftonStrengths model. Others prefer Myers-Briggs, and we've seen leaders really come alive when exploring APEST. Pick one or two and commit to using it with your community and your leaders.





### Understand your leadership pipeline.

By embracing the Three Keys, you will raise up leaders. As your evangelization program transforms lives, some will truly stand out. Invite them to come back for the next session and assist, and the next to lead. Then fire them! Once they're formed as a leader of Alpha (or equivalent), they're ready to get involved with other parish ministries.

All ministries should operate similarly – welcoming new people, then encouraging them to lead, then blessing them as they grow into their next role or ministry. Parishes that embrace the Three Keys never stop running Alpha as a tool to evangelize! If you do, your other ministries will all end up suffering. Keep reaching people for Jesus and keep raising up leaders. Alpha will fill every other ministry as new people newly on fire for Jesus become part of parish life.

God made you a leader. Now you must embrace your leadership.

#### FOR REFLECTION:

- What challenges you most when you think of leading others well?
- What does it mean to lead as Jesus did?
- How might your strengths be used in leading your parish's renewal effort?
- What other strengths are needed to complement your own?
- What might it look like to lead out of a team?

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Ephesians 4:11-13





# The Synergy of the Three Keys to Parish Renewal

Power of the Holy Spirit | Primacy of Evangelization | Best of Leadership

### Why All Three Keys Matter Together

These keys are not standalone initiatives or optional values; they are interdependent principles that shape everything a missional parish does. Here's how their connection fuels transformation:



### The Power of the Holy Spirit

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, transformative renewal happens, and parishes come to life.

Renewal is ultimately God's work. Without the Spirit, our efforts risk becoming humandriven strategies rather than Spirit-filled movements. The Holy Spirit empowers leaders to be missional, softens the hearts of the unchurched, and ignites faith in the pews. When a parish invites and depends on the Spirit, ordinary efforts bear extraordinary fruit.

### The Primacy of Evangelization

When evangelization is the focus and people encounter Jesus, parishes grow.

Evangelization is not an afterthought or a program; it is the very reason the Church exists. Making evangelization primary means everything the parish does flows from the mission of helping people encounter Jesus and become His disciples. But evangelization is only effective through the power of the Holy Spirit, not by our strength alone. We need faithful people to organize and lead our efforts to intentionally invite others to a relationship with Jesus.

### The Best of Leadership

When parish leaders serve out of the best leadership principles, parishes thrive.

As a culture of evangelization and spiritual renewal take root, change becomes inevitable—and often overwhelming. Without strong leadership, momentum stalls. Effective leaders ensure that evangelization and reliance on the Spirit don't remain abstract ideals but become lived realities. They cast God-inspired visions, form healthy teams, and empower people to live out their baptismal calling and giftedness.



Three keys. One mission. Countless lives changed.

When combined, these keys change culture, catalyzing renewal beyond the church walls. This is not about quick fixes or easy formulas. It is about trusting the Spirit, prioritizing the mission of Jesus, and leading with courage and clarity. When the Power of the Holy Spirit, the Primacy of Evangelization, and the Best of Leadership converge, parishes don't just maintain—they multiply disciples and transform culture.





## The Synergy of the Three Keys to Parish Renewal

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#### THE KEY RING:

# The Sunday Experience - Celebrating the Eucharist - Hymns, Hospitality & Homilies:

For the Three Keys to have their full effect, all efforts at missionary transformation must be grounded and rooted in prayer, the heart of which is found in the Eucharist. How we pray and celebrate the Eucharist impacts our identity, our posture and our culture. Every Sunday is a fresh opportunity to welcome newcomers with outstanding music, powerful preaching and radical hospitality.



"Nevertheless the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows." (Sacrosanctum Concilium no. 10)

#### SOME WAYS TO RELEASE THE FULL POTENTIAL OF THESE PRINCIPLES IN YOUR PARISH:

**Prayer:** Lead by example, pray and encourage others to pray expectantly for the power of the Holy Spirit to fuel your work.

**Invitation**: Disciples grow by inviting others to experience faith. Challenge yourself and your community every chance you get.

**Serving**: When people are called to serve, spiritual gifts are discovered and unleashed for mission.

**Hospitality**: It's everyone's role to look out for new comers and make sure they feel connected.

#### FOR REFLECTION:

- Where in your parish life do you see evidence of relying on our own strength rather than the power of the Holy Spirit?
- What would change in your parish if evangelization truly became our top priority?
- How can you strengthen leadership—both clergy and lay to sustain a culture of mission in our parish?
- What would be the easiest first step for you to begin living out one of the Three Keys?
- Where do you already see elements of these keys supporting one another in your parish?

