

## Unit 4 Intensive: Leadership for Parish Renewal

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### Overview

- Applying principles of missionary leadership to [parish renewal](#)
- [Identifying theological principles](#) for thinking about renewal and concrete realities
- [Developing strategies](#) (e.g. *Go Make Disciples*)
- [Critical thinking](#) for pastoral conversion

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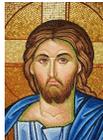
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### The Parish

- The ever-present danger of introducing a 'gap' between us and that to which we attend
- Cardinal Henri de Lubac SJ and Joseph Ratzinger: the Church is a living reality and indeed a mystery that forms us and includes us from within



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"Some people find themselves tempted to say there is altogether too much talk [about the Church] . . . Would it not be better perhaps to try, quite simply, to live the Church, as so many have done before us? It seems that by considering her from outside in order to discuss her, we run the risk of growing apart from her, in our heart of hearts . . . And in addition to this . . . the Church is a mystery of faith and 'surpasses the capacities and powers of our intellect no less than any other.' More than this, she is, as far as we are concerned, the meeting place of all mysteries; and mystery is something that is fitly believed in obscurity, something to be meditated in silence . . ."

- Henri de Lubac, *Splendour of the Church*, 18-19.

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### The Situation Today

- The mystery and reality of the Church can no longer be taken for granted
- "The appeal of the church is puzzling. Indeed, were the existence of the church to depend on the outcome of a cost-benefit analysis, it is unlikely that there would be a church. After all, are not the disincentives obvious? What about the focus on Jesus Christ, which gives the church an aura of sectarianism in an age suspicious of divisive religion? What about the doctrines, which appear to be narrow and arbitrary, even incomprehensible? What about the structures, which seem remote from the priorities of the Gospel, disconnected from the members of the church, and beyond the possibility of reform? ... All the more remarkable, then, that people commit themselves to such a faith even though the imperfections of the church, present not simply past, are no secret"

- Richard Lennan, *Risking the Church*, 1.

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"How do we renew our parishes?"

"How do we renew our people?"

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## Personal conversion

- When people encounter the Lord, surrender and make the decision to follow our parishes come alive as Christ calls them to be:

*"The presence of a significant number of disciples changes everything: a parish's spiritual tone, energy level, attendance, bottom line, and what parishioners ask of their leaders. Disciples pray with passion. Disciples worship. Disciples give lavishly. Disciples love the Church and serve her with energy and joy. Disciples hunger to learn more about their faith. Disciples fill every formation class in a parish or diocese. Disciples manifest charisms and discern vocations. They clamour to discern God's call because they long to live it. Disciples evangelise because they have really good news to share. Disciples share their faith with their children. Disciples care about the poor and about issues of justice. Disciples take risks for the Kingdom of God"* (Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples*, 80-81).

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## Implications

- Programs, courses and events are only proxies or the *means* for **the evangelising relationships** by which people come to faith
- Consider the ministry of St Paul which precedes the formation of the four canonical Gospels
- If you build the Church you rarely get disciples; if you make disciples you always get the Church

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## Catholics in Australia

- Median age of a Catholic in Australia is 43, while **the median age of a Mass attender is approximately 51 years**.
- Between 2016 and 2021, **the number of Catholics decreased by 215,924 people (or 4.0%)**, the second time in Australia's 112-year Census history there has been a decrease
- In 1996, one in nine Catholics (10.9%) were aged 65 and over. **In 2021, one in five Catholics (19.9%) were aged 65 and over**. 9% of all Catholics are now aged 75 and over.

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### Catholic adults in Australia

- Between 2016 and 2021, the number of Filipino-born Catholics continued to increase, from around 175,000 to 217,000. In contrast, the number of Italian-born Catholics declined from 150,000 in 2016 to 134,000 in 2021. Three of the four countries with the highest proportion of recent arrivals (arriving in the three years prior to the Census) were South American countries: Colombia, Brazil and Argentina.
- The national attendance rate for 2021 was 8.2%. It was 11.8% in 2016. Catholics of migrant background account for around 37% of all Mass attenders; and anecdotal evidence indicates this will only rise.

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### Catholic adults in Australia

- 'Builders' (1925-1945) are 80-100 year olds of whom 63% in Australia identify as Christian
- 'Baby boomers' (1946-1964) are 61-79 year olds, some nearing retirement and constituting a majority of our Mass attenders
- 'Gen X' (1965-1983) are 42-60 year olds and represent most highly educated generation. 42% of these identify as Christian
- 'Gen Y/Millennials' (1984-1998) are 27-41 year olds. 32% of these identify as Christian
- 'Gen Z' (1999-) are 26 years of age or younger, and are the most comfortable talking about religion

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### The Rise of the 'Nones'

- In the 2016 Census, for the first time in our history, there were more 'nones' than Catholics in our nation, with 'nones' accounting for 30.1% of the population in 2016, while 22.6% of Australians self-identified as Catholic.
- In 2021, 38.9% of Australians (almost 10 million) did not identify with any religious group, while one in five (20%) identified as Catholic.
- Our parish outreach programs and initiatives are typically geared towards Mass attending Catholics or those still identifying as Catholic even if they are not practicing

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## The Faith of the Parish

- If personal discipleship is critical to parish renewal then we have to consider the Catholics who are currently engaged with the Church as they are the bridge between the world and the Gospel
- [Three forms of evangelisation \(EG 14\):](#)
  - Beyond the parish with those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have refused him
  - An outreach to infrequent church attenders, encouraging them anew to a deeper relationship and fresh engagement with Jesus and with life of his body, the Church
  - We share the good news in the ordinary pastoral ministry to inflame the hearts of the faithful

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## The Discipleship Dilemma

- Currently a pastoral approach that assumes the sacraments will simply 'take care of it'
- "Baptisms, confessions, weddings, funerals, daily devotions, anointing, and adoration. It's all good stuff, it's how some Catholics grow spiritually. [For others, it's what they do instead of grow](#) . . . For certain, the sacraments give us grace to put us in right relationship to God and his life in our soul, nourishing and strengthening us for our discipleship walk. [But they're not mean to replace it](#)" (Fr Michael White and Tom Corcoran, *Rebuilt*, 77).

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## The Discipleship Dilemma

- *Sacrosanctum Concilium* affirms that the sacraments presume [a living faith](#) amidst its people (SC 59).
- *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church: [it must be preceded by evangelisation, faith, and conversion](#)" (CCC #1072)
- The Council and Catechism affirm the Eucharist as "the source and summit of [the Christian life](#)" (CCC #1324)

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## The Discipleship Dilemma

- The International Theological Commission warns of a “**sacramental automatism**”, a purely 'outward faith' which lacks understanding and prayer (cf. *The Reciprocity Between Faith and Sacraments in the Sacramental Economy* 69).
- To attribute the efficacy of prayers or of sacramental signs to their mere external performance, apart from the interior dispositions that they demand, is **to fall into superstition**” (CCC #2111).

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## The Necessity of Faith for Fruit

- Unless people come to faith, the likelihood that the sacraments will bear the fruit they are intended to bear is severely diminished
- “It is more necessary than ever for all the faithful to move from a faith of habit, sustained perhaps by social context alone, to **a faith which is conscious and personally lived**. The renewal of faith will always be the best way to lead others to the Truth that is Christ” (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America* 73)

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## Reflection

- What have been one or two insights that have stood out for you?
- How have these insights affirmed your own perspective on parish renewal or challenged this understanding?
- How might your pastoral practice be informed by these insights or challenges?

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## Developing Strategies

- Christ calls us to “go and bear fruit, fruit that will last” (Jn 15:16)
- Forging a path through complexity, assessing options, sorts through clutter, to realise the vision
  - Where are we (the environment in which we are operating)
  - What do we bring to this landscape (where can we make a difference)
  - How will we choose to take this forwards (a process or pathway)
  - What are the gifts, resources and capabilities for this (e.g. our people, programs, temporal resources).

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## Pathways for Discipleship

- A pathway differs from disconnected priorities (merely hoping for the best)
- It demands a vision or destination (e.g. *Go Make Disciples* on ‘failed’ twinning of parishes)
- Making explicit what people can do to grow in relationship to Jesus and the journey in the parish that will support them to grow in this relationship

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## Pathways for Discipleship

"Imagine a ladder with all the lower rungs removed. It wouldn't be very useful for climbing. Sometimes churchworld can seem like that. The churchpeople are on the top of the ladder. With the lower rungs removed, the unchurched are left with no chance of climbing up. **We churchpeople can make it difficult for the unchurched to come to church, even when they want to**"

- Fr Michael White and Tom Corcoran, *ChurchMoney*, 105.

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## Pathways for Discipleship

- Starting to design a pathway within your parish or ministry strategy:
  - If you had to identify three steps or moments in your own journey of discipleship, what would they be?
  - What was essential to each step that you took? Example, where did it start? By invitation or relationship? What then helped you grow and make a decision to live as a Christian?

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## The Story of *Go Make Disciples*

- The vision of *Go Make Disciples* is grounded in discipleship and all renewal is grounded in mission
- Foundations as strategies (not special interest groups as priorities and ideally functioning as a pathway)
- Structures and resources to support the mission
- Describing the reality (community engagement, temporal resources and personnel)
- Resources to support implementation
- Measurement of mission

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## Critical Thinking for Pastoral Conversion

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You inherit a suburban parish, St Francis Xavier, as the new pastoral leader of the community in an area undergoing rapid development. It is a parish community with around 2,000 attenders spread over four weekend Masses.

The parish struggles to attract attenders from the local Catholic schools and the relationship between the former priest and principal was apparently tense due to differences in liturgical styles, or so it's been rumoured.

Being a relatively wealthy area populated with professionals and young families and with financial contributions remaining fairly steady over the past five years, there are questions about how the parish might best respond to the growing families in the area which are likely to increase given the new train station being built nearby.

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There is a full-time secretary in the parish who seems (frankly) angry most of the time, a parish pastoral council chairman who has been in place for the last six years who presides over a group of eighteen. He also chairs the local SVDP conference and coordinates the acolytes.

The finance council chairman resigned a couple of months ago as the council was bitterly divided over the spending of money on a new youth ministry position which didn't seem worthwhile to him as there were no young people coming to Mass anyway.

There is a part-time bookkeeper also on staff who is the parish secretary's brother. There is a part-time sacramental coordinator who struggles to keep up with the queries due to the demand for sacraments of initiation from the local schools in particular, though she seems passionate about the faith and eager for change in the parish.

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At the first gathering of parishioners you meet, many who are elderly, are urging you to move the tabernacle from a side Eucharistic chapel into the centre of the sanctuary though this is expected to cost more than \$235,000 given the architectural changes that would need to be made.

There are some sixty parish groups listed on the parish calendar but many of the contacts seem to be out of date or missing altogether.

**Question:** How will you go about leading this parish to renewal? What are the key questions or considerations you would seek to address in the first months of your leadership of the parish?

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