

# *DIVINE RENOVATION* BOOK READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

**Resource for Individuals and Parish Teams in  
Preparation for the *Renew My Church* Process**



“AS WE MOVE FORWARD, IT WILL BE OUR THREE IMPERATIVES THAT WILL STEADY OUR STEPS ON THIS NEW PATH. OUR AIM IS TO MAKE DISCIPLES, BUILD COMMUNITIES AND INSPIRE WITNESS. AMID ALL THE TWISTS AND TURNS IN THE ROAD AHEAD, IT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO KEEP OUR EYES FOCUSED ON THESE THREE PRIORITIES.

WE ARE GOING OUT ON A LIMB WITH *RENEW MY CHURCH*, NOT AS RECKLESS THRILL-SEEKERS, BUT AS THOSE WHO SEE THE GREAT POTENTIAL AHEAD OF US AS THE SPIRIT LEADS US FORWARD. IT IS, AS PAPA WOJTYŁA, OBSERVED, OUT OF A FAITH THAT A VAST OCEAN IS OPENING BEFORE US, THAT WE TAKE UP THIS VENTURE TOGETHER, EVER RELYING ON THE GUIDANCE OF CHRIST.”

— *Cardinal Blase J. Cupich*



Photo: Alexander Gouletas

# INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

*Renew My Church* is a process of both spiritual and structural renewal with the goals of making disciples, building communities, and inspiring witness. As each of us, along with our parishes, enters this process it will be beneficial to have a common language, a broader vision, and an action-oriented mindset.

Reading and discussing the book *Divine Renovation*, written by Fr. James Mallon, is a great starting point. The objective of the book is to share the story of a parish and its spiritual and structural transformation, which led to improved communal and personal engagement of its faith community. The book speaks about universal principles of renewal applicable to all (such as a strong leadership team, clear plan for evangelization, inspiring liturgies, and focus on lay leadership), while at the same time providing examples specific to Fr. Mallon and his team's parish. This guide can serve as a resource for individuals and parish teams to better understand the opportunity for renewal and prepare for the *Renew My Church* process.

Based on the perspectives and input of many groups and individuals (e.g., bishops, priests, religious orders, deacons, parish staff, laity and many others), the Archdiocese of Chicago has identified seven signs of parish vitality. In reading and discussing the content of *Divine Renovation*, reflect on the seven signs and how they are manifested in your personal life and in the life of your parish community. The seven signs of parish vitality are:

- Culture of evangelization
- Ongoing formation and discipleship
- Vibrant worship
- Meaningful community life
- Commitment to service
- Passion for vocations
- Faithful stewardship

This reading and discussion guide is based on some of the emotions we feel during the process of change. Each of the eight modules in this guide is tied to a chapter (or part of a chapter) of the *Divine Renovation* book and has a set of key takeaways, discussion questions, and reflection exercises. These are shared as a resource for parish conversation, planning, and community engagement in preparation for the process of renewal.

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*Divine Renovation* Chapter 7 and Conclusion (pages 233 to 286)

# USER GUIDE

## **FORM A SMALL GROUP**

Bring together a small group of people from your parish (e.g., representatives from your staff, parish council, finance council, school board, school parents' organization, lay and ministry leadership) and commit, as a group, to read and discuss the *Divine Renovation* book together.

## **SESSIONS**

Complete the eight modules which are developed to facilitate reading and discussion of *Divine Renovation* over weekly or bi-weekly sessions.

## **READ AND REFLECT**

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

## **GATHER**

Every week (or if your small group prefers every other week) gather together 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.

# HOPE

**GOSPEL READING:** Luke 1:26–38 (The Annunciation and Visitation)

**DIVINE RENOVATION BOOK READING:** Introduction: House of Cards and Chapter 1: House of Prayer, Remembering Our Identity and Purpose (p. 9–25)

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## KEY 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)
- “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)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If you had only one word to describe the purpose of your parish, what would it be?
- 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.)
- At present, what types of activities take up most of the time, talent, and treasure of your parish?
- How does your parish live out the command to make disciples? How do you personally live it out?
- How do people in your parish speak about Jesus? Do they speak about a **relationship** with Jesus, or is it simply an intellectual knowledge **about** Jesus that is shared?
- How have you encountered Jesus in your life (e.g., through sacraments, prayer, people, ministry, devotion)?

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

What do you **hope** to achieve through this process of renewal?

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**In your personal life**

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**In your parish**

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**In your neighborhood or grouping**

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## SIGN OF PARISH VITALITY #1: CULTURE OF EVANGELIZATION

**Description:** Bringing people into an encounter with Jesus Christ that leads them to trust Him, follow Him, and become His disciples.

**Reflection:** As it relates to this sign of parish vitality, think about and note your personal and parish's vision, reality, opportunity, and challenges below.

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**VISION**

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**REALITY**

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**OPPORTUNITY**

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**CHALLENGES**

# FRUSTRATION

**GOSPEL READING:** Luke 4:1–13 (Temptation of Jesus in the Desert)

**DIVINE RENOVATION BOOK READING:** Chapter 2: Rebuild My House, From Vatican II to Pope Francis and Chapter 3: House of Pain, Experience of a Maintenance Church (p. 27–58)

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The roots of our modern focus on evangelization are found in the Second Vatican Council. With each successive pope, from 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)
- 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)
- 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

- To what extent is your parish enabling “the universal call to holiness” and “the universal call to mission” from the Second Vatican Council? Does your parish’s mission field go beyond registered parishioners? Why or why not?
- 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?
- How did the clergy sexual abuse scandal affect your commitment to the Church?
- How has your trust in priests, religious, and the Church changed over time?
- How have you experienced ethnic and cultural conflicts? What impact has conflict had on the community?
- 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?
- Are you proud to be Catholic? Why or why not?



## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

What **frustration** will you address through this process of renewal?

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**In your personal life**

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**In your parish**

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**In your neighborhood or grouping**

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## SIGN OF PARISH VITALITY #2: ONGOING FORMATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

**Description:** Compelling offerings to foster the lifelong process of growing, maturing, and learning as Christian faithful.

**Reflection:** As it relates to this sign of parish vitality, think about and note your personal and parish's vision, reality, opportunity, and challenges below.

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**VISION**

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**REALITY**

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**OPPORTUNITY**

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**CHALLENGES**

# ANGST

**GOSPEL READING:** Luke 2:40–50 (Finding of Jesus in the Temple)

**DIVINE RENOVATION BOOK READING:** Chapter 4: Clearing Out the Junk, What We Need to Jettison if We Are Going to Rebuild (p. 59–86)

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Today, Pelagianism (discussed in Chapter Four starting on page 62) can be defined in two ways: a “Catholic who sees Christian life as a kind of scorecard for salvation” or a “Catholic who bases his or her understanding of grace and salvation not on Scripture or the teaching of the Church, but on his or her sense of absolute autonomy and fundamental niceness.” (p. 70–71)
- “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)
- “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)
- 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)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Did the explanations of Pelagianism and Jansenism make sense to you? Where have you seen the residual impact of these false teachings within the Catholic Church?
- How do the false teachings of Pelagianism and Jansenism get in the way of the proclamation of the Good News in your parish and ministries?
- Where have you seen the impact of clericalism within the Catholic Church?
- How would you describe the relationship between the clergy, religious, and the laity in your parish?
- How have complacency, passivity, and inactivity affected your parish and your ministries?
- Why is it important for us to empower the laity to live their baptismal call?

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

What gives you **angst** about this process of renewal?

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**In your personal life**

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**In your parish**

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**In your neighborhood or grouping**

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## **SIGN OF PARISH VITALITY #3: VIBRANT WORSHIP**

**Description:** Vibrant sacramental liturgies with strong hospitality, uplifting music, great homilies, and well-formed and trained ministers.

**Reflection:** As it relates to this sign of parish vitality, think about and note your personal and parish's vision, reality, opportunity, and challenges below.

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**VISION**

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**REALITY**

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**OPPORTUNITY**

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**CHALLENGES**

# CURIOSITY

**GOSPEL READING:** John 1:35–42 (Calling of the Disciples)

**DIVINE RENOVATION BOOK READING:** Chapter 5: Laying the Foundation, How to Transform the Culture of the Parish Community (section one, p. 87–122)

Note: The following three sections will focus on Chapter 5. As you read and reflect upon the actions that Fr. Mallon and his team took in their parish, it is most helpful to focus on the principles behind what they did, not just the practices. Look beyond trying to “copy and paste” their process and find the intentions behind what they chose to do.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 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 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)
- 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)
- 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)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How would the current allocation of time, talent, and treasure describe the culture and values of your parish?
- **Giving priority to the weekend:** Where does the weekend Mass rank on the list of your parish’s overall priorities? How does this differ in your own life? How do you make the weekend liturgy celebration special?
- **Hospitality:** What would it feel like for a new person to walk into your parish for the first time? Who would welcome them and how would it feel? How might this differ based on the age, race, or ethnicity of the person?
- **Uplifting music:** 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?

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

What **curiosity** do you have about this process of renewal?

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**In your personal life**

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**In your parish**

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**In your neighborhood or grouping**

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## SIGN OF PARISH VITALITY #4: MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY LIFE

**Description:** Community of believers where people are known, loved, and supported in their call to holiness.

**Reflection:** As it relates to this sign of parish vitality, think about and note your personal and parish's vision, reality, opportunity, and challenges below.

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**VISION**

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**REALITY**

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**OPPORTUNITY**

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**CHALLENGES**

# GRATITUDE

**GOSPEL READING:** John 2:1–11 (Wedding at Cana)

**DIVINE RENOVATION BOOK READING:** Chapter 5: Laying the Foundation, How to Transform the Culture of the Parish Community (section two, p. 123–164)

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Homilies are to be “intentional about speaking to the entire person — mind, heart, conscience and will.” (p. 125)
- 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)
- 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)
- What parishioners can expect from the parish and what the parish expects of parishioners should be clearly communicated. (p. 156–162)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Homilies:** 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?
- **Meaningful community:** What attracts people to your 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?
- **Clear expectations:** 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?

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

What **gratitude** do you have about this process of renewal?

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**In your personal life**

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**In your parish**

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**In your neighborhood or grouping**

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## SIGN OF PARISH VITALITY #5: COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

**Description:** Serving those in need, particularly those on the peripheries, through a commitment to missionary outreach.

**Reflection:** As it relates to this sign of parish vitality, think about and note your personal and parish's vision, reality, opportunity, and challenges below.

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**VISION**

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**REALITY**

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**OPPORTUNITY**

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**CHALLENGES**

# TRUST

**GOSPEL READING:** Mark 4:35–41 (Jesus in the Boat)

**DIVINE RENOVATION BOOK READING:** Chapter 5: Laying the Foundation, How to Transform the Culture of the Parish Community (section three, p. 164–195)

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 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)
- 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)
- 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)
- 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)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Strengths-based ministry:** 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?
- **Small community groups:** Are small, faith-sharing community groups present in your parish? How do you see these as valuable? Are your leaders well-trained?
- **Holy Spirit:** 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?
- **Becoming an inviting church:** If you were inviting a guest to your parish to what 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?



## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

How will you build **trust** during this process of renewal?

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**In your personal life**

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**In your parish**

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**In your neighborhood or grouping**

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## **SIGN OF PARISH VITALITY #6: PASSION FOR VOCATIONS**

**Description:** Responding to the call and journeying with others to foster and nurture it.

**Reflection:** As it relates to this sign of parish vitality, think about and note your personal and parish's vision, reality, opportunity, and challenges below.

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**VISION**

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**REALITY**

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**OPPORTUNITY**

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**CHALLENGES**

# JOY



**GOSPEL READING:** Matthew 5:1–12 (The Beatitudes)

**DIVINE RENOVATION BOOK READING:** Chapter 6: The Front Door, The Sacraments as Our Greatest Pastoral Opportunity (p. 197–232)

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 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)
- 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 discipleship.” (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)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it look and feel like to receive a sacrament in your parish? What do the sacraments mean to the recipient of the sacrament, their loved ones, and to the parish community?
- What can you do to further the mission of the Church? What specific steps will you take to move in that direction?
- **Working with children:** How does catechesis, sacramental preparation, and youth activities form disciples and engage the whole family? If these actions are not forming disciples, what is getting in the way? How does your parish actively follow up?
- **Marriage preparation:** How does accompanying couples through marriage preparation form them for a life of discipleship? If the process is not forming disciples, what is getting in the way? How does the parish accompany couples after their marriage ceremony to live a life of discipleship?
- **RCIA:** How does your RCIA program and sacramental preparation for adults form disciples? If it is not forming disciples, what is getting in the way? How does your parish connect them to parish life?

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

What **joy** do you hope for during this process of renewal?

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**In your personal life**

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**In your parish**

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**In your neighborhood or grouping**

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## SIGN OF PARISH VITALITY #7: FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP

**Description:** Taking responsibility for the leadership and administration of the parish as good stewards of God's gifts.

**Reflection:** As it relates to this sign of parish vitality, think about and note your personal and parish's vision, reality, opportunity, and challenges below.

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**VISION**

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**REALITY**

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**OPPORTUNITY**

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**CHALLENGES**

# INSPIRATION

**GOSPEL READING:** Mark 9:1–8 (The Transfiguration)

**DIVINE RENOVATION BOOK READING:** Chapter 7: Leader of the House, The Essential Role of Leadership and Conclusion (p. 233–286)

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## KEY 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)
- Successful leaders “lean into their natural strengths and talents” and are simultaneously aware of their weaknesses and deficits. (p. 241)
- A leader must have a vision about the destination — the dream of what that destination can be. (p. 247)
- For vision to take root 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)
- 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

- What feelings or emotions did you have while reading this chapter?
- 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?
- What challenges do you foresee in moving towards renewal? How can you and your parish overcome these challenges?
- How will you bring the mission of renewal to your own life? To your family and friends? To your parish community?
- How can you be involved in encouraging people to become disciples?
- 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?
- What are some of the key insights or observations you have had from reading this book?

## **AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:**

How will you be an **inspiration** to others during this process of renewal?

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**In your personal life**

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**In your parish**

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**In your neighborhood or grouping**

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## **I AM INSPIRED TO...**

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# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



## **VIDEOS**

*Divine Renovation 101* (Five 15 min. videos) available on YouTube

Part #1: The Crisis of Identity

Part #2: Leadership and Vision

Part #3: Forming a Leadership Team

Part #4: Culture — The Key to Lasting Change

Part #5: The Role of the Holy Spirit



## **PODCASTS**

*Divine Renovation* Podcasts (60 min. segments) available on iTunes and YouTube

# RENEW MY CHURCH PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, you speak to us today,  
as you spoke to holy men and women  
who have gone before us.*

*In every age and in our own time,  
you call to us and say: Renew My Church.*

*Pour out the gift of your Holy Spirit upon us,  
and so enable us  
to hear you clearly  
to listen to each other attentively  
to imagine our future boldly  
to discern your direction wisely  
to persevere in your holy will courageously  
to stay together in charity  
to surrender our own plans readily  
to embrace the greater good  
to hand on your gifts to future generations.*

*May we remain in the holy company of  
the Blessed Virgin Mary, the apostles, and all the saints.  
May their example and presence  
inspire us with patient confidence  
in the work of your grace.*

*We ask this of you who live and reign  
with the Father  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God,  
forever and ever.*

*Amen.*



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