

“Everybody wants to belong to a fabulous parish. Fr. James Mallon is one of the most passionate people I know when it comes to helping priests and parishioners transform their parishes into dynamic communities centred on Jesus. This *Divine Renovation Guidebook* is a gem. Too often we talk about these things in theoretical ways that don’t translate into the practical reality of parish life. This guidebook is practical and insightful!”

**Matthew Kelly, founder of Dynamic Catholic and author of *Rediscover Jesus***

“When I started reading *Divine Renovation* and this new work, *Divine Renovation Guidebook*, I began to tear up. I am so moved by James Mallon’s love for the Church. More than that, I have visited his church on a Sunday and seen the evidence of what a divine renovation can do for the lives of people. This book is not only hyper-practical, it will make your heart swell with hope for the Church – the entire Church.”

**Carey Nieuwhof, author and Pastor, Connexus Church**

“I am delighted to recommend Fr. James Mallon’s *Divine Renovation Guidebook*. It is an extremely practical resource that offers many excellent tips and exercises to help plan and implement a vision for the transformation of the parish.”

**Nicky Gumbel, Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton, London, and pioneer of Alpha**

“*Divine Renovation* and this guidebook constitute a unique resource for parishes and dioceses looking into concrete ways of living an effective pastoral conversion. We have trained over 600 priests and bishops on pastoral leadership and are overjoyed that they can use the hugely relevant and practical approach that Fr. James Mallon has generously shared. We can only imagine the huge amount of work this has required and are grateful for the fruit it is already bearing in Europe.”

**Marc and Florence de Leyritz, executive coaches and co-founders of Des Pasteurs Selon Mon Coeur**

“Finally, a very practical book for parishes that feel God is calling them to effectiveness. Fr. Mallon and the team at @SaintBP will help your team walk step by step to move from vision to implementation across a broad cross-section of ministry areas in your parish. Beneficial not only for Catholics but also for Evangelical churches.”

**Dave Travis, CEO, Leadership Network, the premier network for Evangelical congregations**

“We are so grateful for the work and ministry of James Mallon. He knows how to build a growing, healthy parish and is a great guide to any parish interested in doing the same.”

**(Rev.) Michael White and Tom Corcoran, authors of *Rebuilt***

“For a long time we’ve been looking for a toolbox to help renew parish life. And now there is one. Fr. Mallon’s *Divine Renovation Guidebook* takes the step-by-step approach we need to focus on becoming intentional disciples of Jesus and moving from maintenance to mission in ministry. This workbook is easy to use, extraordinarily practical in the strategies and tips recommended, and infused with a solid Gospel vision. Because it is also chock full of timely and wise suggestions, pithy anecdotes, assessment tools and discussion questions, the *Guidebook* is a superb resource for every 21st-century parish intent on making joyful missionary disciples.”

**J. Michael Miller, CSB, Archbishop of Vancouver**

“If the church is to meet the challenge of ministry in the 21st century, there must be something truly life-giving in the parish, the community where faith is nurtured and Catholics learn to live out their Christian calling. Fr. Mallon’s *Divine Renovation Guidebook* will equip readers to transform their parishes into robustly healthy, dynamic centres of evangelization and grace. At once practical and visionary, simple and comprehensive, this guidebook is a terrific resource for all Catholics who want to see their parishes flourish in ways they never dreamed possible.”

**William E. Simon, Jr., Founder, Parish Catalyst and author of *Great Catholic Parishes: A Living Mosaic***

“In North America, there are priests who pastor parishes and others who write about how to do it. Very few do both. Fr. James Mallon is one of a handful of exceptions – and that is what makes this book so wonderful. You hold in your hand the guidebook of the hard-won insights he and his team have achieved. It is a precious treasure. Use it well and you will see lives transform – including your own!”

**Dominic Perri, Lead Consultant, Amazing Parish Movement**

“*Divine Renovation Guidebook* is an invaluable problem solver when it comes to building healthy parishes. Fr. Mallon has not only identified the key issues to be addressed, but offers sound answers that will guide parishes into a new dimension of mission. Reading this guidebook brought hope to my heart regarding the future of parishes.”

**Jeff Cavins, founder of The Great Adventure Bible Study**

“With *Divine Renovation*, Fr. Mallon has inspired thousands of pastoral leaders to seek ‘missionary conversion’ in order to be faithful to Christ’s Great Commission to ‘go, and make disciples.’ This new guidebook marks another great contribution to the New Evangelization with its practical, step-by-step guidance and indispensable tools and resources to help parishes become true centres of evangelization.”

**Archbishop William E. Lori, Archdiocese of Baltimore**

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# Foreword

A Catholic parish is nothing short of an outpost of the Great Commission. Think about that. When Jesus told his disciples before his Ascension to go to the ends of the earth to share the Gospel, the physical manifestation of that call would be a parish.

Somehow, we Catholics lose sight of that. We think that an outpost for Christ would have to be a church in the middle of the desert in a distant foreign land. That, we may think, is where real missionary work is done. But the reality of the New Evangelization is that most of our parishes, be they in suburbs or urban centres or rural countrysides, are the tip of the spear in a world where people's souls are going drier and drier.

And so, the question that must be asked is this: Is there any reason not to make our parishes the most effective outposts they can be? Or perhaps this is a better question: Is there another kind of organization in the world that is more important and more deserving of higher standards than a parish? The answer to both of these questions must be a resounding 'no'.

The question that remains, and the purpose of the book you are now reading, is "How can I make my parish the most effective outpost of the Great Commission and the New Evangelization?"

Fr. James Mallon spends a lot of his time thinking about and praying about and talking about that very question. He sees the need in the world for Jesus and his Church, and wants every parish to be the best it can be. And Fr. Mallon has tried a lot of things over the years to make the parishes he leads better. Some have worked wonderfully. Others have failed. Now he has taken all that he has learned – and it's a lot – and put it into one big guidebook.

What should you do with this guidebook? Something. Anything. Just get started. Don't get intimidated by all the ideas, and don't wait until the perfect time to take action. One option is to start at the beginning and work systematically through the chapters. Another is to read through the book's chapter titles with your co-workers, skim the sections that seem most relevant or interesting to you, and find something you can do soon. Taking action is the best way to learn, and it gives you courage to keep taking action.

I hope, and pray, that because people like you are reading books like this, more people in suburbs and cities and countrysides will come to know Jesus Christ, and will introduce others to him. That is our call, whether we lead a parish, work in one, or just worship with others there: to go and make disciples of all nations.

*Patrick Lencioni*

# Introduction

In my book *Divine Renovation*, I proposed a theology and model for how Catholic parishes could move from simply maintaining themselves to becoming missionary communities of disciples of Jesus Christ. That book is based on my own successes and failures as a parish priest, since the year 2000 when my bishop was crazy enough to put me in charge of a parish. Since 2010, this learning has intensified during my time as pastor of Saint Benedict Parish in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Since *Divine Renovation* was published, our team has been grateful to receive many, many requests from wonderful priests and lay people around the world who wanted us to help them make their parishes missional. We were overwhelmed and saddened by the fact that we could help only a small fraction of them. And that's why this guidebook came about. Its purpose is simple: to provide pastors and their teams with the tools and information to ask the right questions and put the ideas from *Divine Renovation* into practice.

Now, I don't pretend to have all the answers here, or to have a single, prescriptive plan for transforming parishes. Every parish is different, and God has a unique plan for each one. However, I humbly submit that there are a few common denominators that must exist in almost any parish that is effectively bringing people to Jesus and his Church.

If you have already thumbed through these pages, you may be a bit intimidated. Don't be alarmed. The content of this book is meant to be worked through over the course of several years by a pastor, his leadership team and pastoral council.

My goal here is to keep this guidebook as user friendly, simple and understandable as it can possibly be. You will be my judge of how successful I was. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will guide many, many parishes to use it in some way to more effectively go out into the world to make disciples of all nations.

*God bless you all.  
Fr. James Mallon*

# Do You Have to Read *Divine Renovation* to Use This Guidebook?

No, not necessarily, though it would certainly be helpful. Periodically, there are references to specific sections of *Divine Renovation*. The content and exercises in these pages presume that the reader has read those specific sections. For those who haven't read it yet, I present here a one-page summary of my experience at Saint Benedict Parish.

In 2010, I was named pastor of Saint Benedict Parish, which was the result of consolidating three previous parishes in Halifax. During my first few years at the helm, I made many decisions to help the parish become more effective in bringing people to Christ. Some of those ideas worked. Others didn't.

During that time, I met with great resistance from some staff members and parishioners, and was not able to convince them all to get on board and stay at the parish. I also overworked myself, leading to my battling lingering illnesses for long periods of time. After three years, by the grace of God, and with help from many incredible parishioners, my team and I were blessed to be

able to lead the parish to a place we could not have imagined.

As of this writing, Saint Benedict has returned to the levels of attendance we saw in the first months of the new and curious church building being opened. Yes, you heard that right (but more on that later). More importantly, more than 40% of our parishioners are now involved in our discipleship process and disciple-making ministries. The numbers of parishioners in ministry has dramatically increased to 60%, and our weekend collection has doubled in six years. Of course, we aren't done, and we don't plan on taking credit for this or resting on our laurels. But we are confident that we have identified a number of important realities about what it takes to transform a parish from maintenance to mission, and what obstacles must be addressed and overcome in order to make that happen. We believe that these realities are transferable into your unique context.

Okay, enough about us. Let's start putting some of these ideas into practice in your parish.



# The Pastor: It Starts with the Leader

**T**he fact is, the leader of a parish is critical to its success. That sounds obvious, I realize. So let me put it another way. If the pastor of a parish is not prepared to lead the effort of transforming from maintenance to mission, then it simply isn't going to happen.

Fortunately, many pastors can do it. The vast majority of them love their vocation, even if they are tired or hurt. They want desperately to bring the people in their parish, whether they come to Mass on Sunday or not, to know and love Jesus through the Church he established more than two millennia ago.

But that isn't quite enough. While every pastor may have a different leadership capacity, every pastor has the capacity to be a better leader. A pastor is going to have to look at himself and be willing to address any shortcomings that could prevent his leadership from being successful. What might those shortcomings be?

For some, it might be the unwillingness to confront people and problems in the parish, and the desire to be liked by all staff members and parishioners all of the time. For others, it might be the belief that his schedule is simply too full to make changes, because those changes are only

going to result in more work. For others still, it might be the fear of acknowledging weakness or admitting mistakes, which is often related to the difficulty of balancing the roles of being a parish's spiritual shepherd and its organizational leader.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge a pastor will face is the sense that he is doing all of this alone. We will deal with that in the following chapter on teamwork, but for now, let me make a specific recommendation. If you are not currently working with a leadership team (this is not your staff team or pastoral council), find a person in your parish to go through this guidebook with you. This could be a trusted senior staff member, or a parishioner who is a confidant, or a fellow priest. Find someone who will be your partner, your coach, because that will make it much more likely that the "aha" moments you have as you read this guidebook will become real changes.

So go ahead. Think of someone who can do this with you. Right now. We'll wait.

Okay, now write that person's name here:

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You might want to call them and have them join you before going further.



## What is Your Discontent?

Within your sphere of influence, what are the things about your ministry that drive you crazy? What is it that makes you think, “It doesn’t have to be this way; it can be better than this!” Take some time to reflect on this prayerfully and write these things below.

Twenty-Third  
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# What Does Your Parish Look Like in Ten Years?

What is your dream for your parish? If anything were possible, what would it look and feel like? Describe it. Don't write down a plan, but your dream. Use as much space as you like: don't be limited to this page.

Twenty-Third  
Publications  
Sample

## My personal purpose statement:

Create a one-sentence personal purpose statement that summarizes your ministry and calling at this time in your life.



**@SaintBP**

Throughout the guidebook I will be giving examples of what we do at Saint Benedict Parish on a particular topic.

Regarding personal purpose statements for ministry, we ask all our staff to develop one-sentence job descriptions. While this can be challenging and frustrating, it is also a great source of clarity and helps each member be mindful of their main focus.

## Charisms Reflection

As mentioned on pages 250–251 of *Divine Renovation*, charisms – the God-given passions and gifts we have received – will play a great role in shaping our vision and sense of purpose. This is okay. The key is to be aware of it.

Most people are strong in two or three of the charisms mentioned in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians (4:11). Take a few moments to reflect on this passage of Scripture, then choose and rank your top three charisms.

Now go back and reread your vision statement (see page 14) and your purpose statement (see page 15) and reflect on how your charisms have shaped what you have written.

CHARISM	DESIRE	RANK THREE
Apostle	to go outside the Church	
Prophet	to speak out, to be annoying	
Evangelist	to bring people to Jesus	
Pastor	to care for people within the Church	
Teacher	to teach/doctrine/knowledge	