

EVANGELISATION

ChristLife: A Parish Renewal Process



Albert Galea writes about ChristLife, a video-based process of bringing renewal to parishes

Formation of the Laity and their active participation in Parishes is becoming increasingly more urgent in the Catholic Church if the faith is to become more meaningful to the present and future generations. The laity are called to be disciples and missionaries in the Church and in the world but without formation and training this is not going to happen. Parish Renewal depends to a large extent on renewed laity. Change is needed but expecting different results without implementing new methods and new ways of doing things will continue to lead us into deeper decline. In the Joy of the Gospel Pope Francis states that “the first proclamation calls for ongoing formation

and maturation” (EG160). We all feel the urgent need of implementing the New Evangelization on an ongoing basis and ChristLife, a Catholic evangelisation process, is one of the answers that can enable a Parish to be renewed.

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The unique characteristic of ChristLife is that it is a Process. It caters for an ongoing systematic formation that can be repeated from year to year in a Parish. It incorporates 3 courses of 7 weeks each called DISCOVERING CHRIST, FOLLOWING CHRIST and SHARING CHRIST. It is Christ-centred, enables Catholics to start or deepen a personal encounter with Jesus, helping them to become missionary disciples. ChristLife helps Parish transformation in a practical, easy and friendly way over a Pastoral Year and is an effective resource for a Parish to become truly a missionary parish because it trains and equips parishioners to adopt Christianity as a lifestyle, becoming evangelisers in



their everyday life and also as part of Parish Ministry.

ChristLife

ChristLife does much more than impart knowledge of the faith. The content is Catholic, drawing from Scripture and Magisterium Teachings, but other dynamics are employed to make the courses interactive and attractive: the video teachings are given by lay persons and priests; the participants share in small groups; there is fellowship during a small meal; a 1 day retreat is part of each course; there is opportunity for prayer ministry and testimonies; all these dynamics help to build up a Community spirit that will last beyond the courses themselves. Priests and lay people who have gone through the ChristLife experience share that their faith has been strengthened, their hope refreshed and new collaboration of committed lay people has enabled the

creation of new ministries in parishes such as weekly small Christian Communities. To avoid putting new burdens to the already busy schedule of the Parish Priest, ChristLife is geared to train lay people to involve themselves in running the course in a collaboration with the Priest and a full 1-day pre-course training is given in Parishes on how to run the course.

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ChristLife was founded in 1995 in Baltimore USA and since then has spread to several hundred parishes in over 41 dioceses in the US besides

being also implemented in several European countries. ChristLife was introduced in Ireland by TINE, The Irish Network of Evangelization, in 2015 when the ChristLife USA Founder, Dave Nodar and his team were brought over for a Training Conference in Maynooth. Since then TINE has been active in promoting and training for Parishes in Ireland and a number of parishes have conducted the ChristLife courses fruitfully. Downpatrick Parish

very recently ran the first Discovering Christ Course with 36 Parishioners. Fr John Murray, PP, was very positive about the whole experience: the turnout was very consistent and the talks were very good and easy to follow. “I could not attend all the sessions but the fact that the course was coordinated and lay-led was very encouraging. We are already planning to run a second course.”

More information may be obtained by visiting the website www.christlife.ie. ChristLife will also be present at the Transformed Parish conferences in Maynooth and Clonmel on the 28th and 29th November.

For more information visit www.transformedparish.ie.

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Resources

Divine Renovation: the book

This book gives a theological and practical background into how – and why – a parish can be turned from a focus on maintenance to mission. Father James Mallon was given a golden opportunity – appointed parish priest of three merged parishes whose brand-new building had opened only months earlier, he was as close to having a ‘blank canvas’ as any parish priest could hope for. Applying all he learned to his new merged parish of St Benedict, he has in four years successfully fostered a parish culture with high levels of engagement by practicing Catholics. Volunteering and financial giving has doubled, participation in courses has tripled, and more than 40% of parishioners are actively engaged with the life of

the parish. Mallon is now developing the best ways to draw in those who approach the Church seeking sacraments – ways which deeply challenge our current culture of applying the sacrament and waiting with forlorn hope for the grace to manifest!

Divine Renovation gives an overview of how, in August 2010, Mallon became pastor of St Benedict's, Halifax, Nova Scotia, three months after the opening of a new building which replaced the three churches now amalgamated into this new parish. He had enough pastoral experience to know that just buying good catechetical textbooks or making applicants jump through hoops to demonstrate “Mass attendance” before receiving the sacraments would not be enough.

In his opening sermon, he warned the parish that if they did not stop the rot which had forced them into this situation, the same thing would happen again in 20 years. He challenged them to take part in an Alpha Course, and had an overwhelmingly positive response – 160 members out of a congregation of 2000 responded immediately. Since then, Mallon's church has been transformed by a tight focus on running the Alpha Course; it is an integral part of the parish vision.

Stopping the rot requires a change in culture of the whole parish, not just running one or two programmes. It's not enough to run an Alpha Course with excellent hospitality, great music, amazing and relevant talks, and a transformative experience of com-

munity in small groups, if these are not reflected in the wider life of the Church. So this was his vision – to expect these values to be part of the way St Benedict's ‘does church’.

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The entire process at Saint Benedict Parish, from identifying Mallon's own vision, refining it with the community, and writing a formal parish vision statement, took

about two and a half years. The statement they arrived at was this: Saint Benedict Parish is a healthy and growing faith community that brings people to Christ, forms disciples and sends them out to transform the world. Every member is committed to worship, to grow, to serve, to connect and to give.

It was also necessary to draft quite a lengthy document about the Staff Culture Ethos and work hard on building up trust, good communication, and mutual care among staff. In the four years since becoming Parish Priest, Mallon has successfully embedded ten core values into the life of the parish. He is now working on renewing the sacramental programmes to help applicants who are not yet church members become drawn into the life of the parish, but this is still very much a work-in-progress.