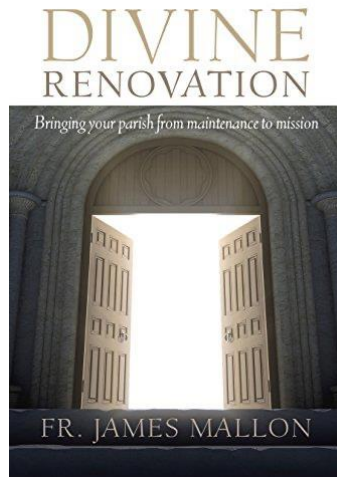


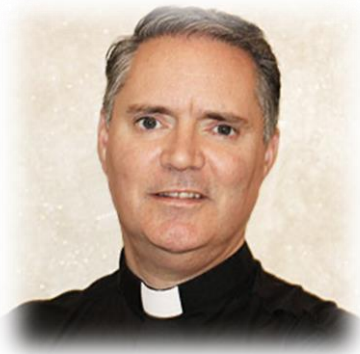
ST PATRICK'S PARISH DOWNPATRICK

love God, love others, make disciples

SHARING VISION



Book Review



In this book Father Mallon contends that our deepest crisis is an identity crisis, and that other crises in the church are but symptoms of this deepest crisis of all: we have forgotten who we are and what we are called to do as a Church. Being a Church of disciples is just part of our calling. The Church of disciples must 'go' and 'make disciples' of all nations and all peoples. We are mandated by the Lord to proclaim this Good News not just to lukewarm or fallen-away Catholics, but all who do not know Christ and his Church. We are called to go out to the fringes of society, to the poor, the rich, the vulnerable, and those who are hurting or afraid. We are called to *evangelise*.

Fr. Mallon writes that there may be parish structures or attitudes, ideas or theological perspectives that hinder our ability to fulfil the missionary mandate given to us by Jesus. He goes on to identify three things we need to grasp and understand. First, to have an authentic faith there needs to be a '*spiritual awakening*' in a person's life coming out of a real encounter with Christ Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit.



#thisisgoodnews

Second, individuals need to know that they are not justified by their own actions or niceness but by God's mercy. Thirdly, only those who have received the Good News as good news can proclaim it to others.

The author says that in our parishes today most Catholics remain unawaken, passive consumers of '*religion lite*'. Most Catholics remain hugely ignorant of the fundamentals of their faith, unable to find their way around the Bible, and with an experience of prayer that remains largely unchanged from when they were children. He believes that many have not been effectively evangelised.

Fr. Mallon has been fascinated by the question of what makes some churches strong and healthy as opposed to others that are weak and unhealthy. He identifies ten common values that are shared by healthy, growing parishes - giving priority to the weekend, hospitality, uplifting excellent music, homilies that are well prepared, meaningful community, clear expectations of parishioners, strength-based ministry, formation of small communities, experience of the Holy Spirit, and finally becoming an inviting church.

MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

He strongly believes that our starting point must be that we never said no to any request for a sacrament. To do so is to cut off at the heels even the possibility of conversion and transformation. However, this begs the question of what it means to say 'yes'. 'Yes' cannot simply mean fixing a date, doing some paperwork, and a quick preparation class. Our 'yes' must be an invitation to a process, a journey. Fr. Mallon believes that if we are to make disciples, we must have models that move away from sacraments as an age-based reward system to being moments of celebration of authentic faith in the heart of the Christian community. He writes that this will take real courage



on behalf of the whole congregation if this is to be achieved. Fr. Mallon holds that most families requesting sacraments for their children are not active members of the parish and writes that no matter how good a programme is, its value will be limited unless we work with the parents of the children. Involving parents cannot be an add-on to the classroom model but must involve the faith formation of adults in the parish itself. The author also writes that we must welcome unchurched, unevangelised, non-attending couples contacting parishes and asking to be married and help them to become part of parish life.



Finally, Fr. Mallon writes that we must have real hope that the vision of a renewed, missionary Church is possible. It must be a vision shared by both priests and the *whole parish*. There needs to be a shared vision of where people want to see the church going in the next five and ten years.