

MAKING DISCIPLES

RESOURCE SUMMARIES

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SUMMARY 2

Book: [Rebuilt](#)

Authors: **Michael J. White & Tom Corcoran**

Associated Website: rebuiltparish.com

Follow-up book: [Tools for Rebuilding](#)

This series of summaries is intended to help busy pastoral professionals and church volunteers know whether a resource is going to be helpful to them. If a resource looks useful – PLEASE BUY IT! I do not wish to take away the livelihood of any author by summarising their key points online!

Overview

Of all the books currently available on church growth and discipleship, this one is the key strategic book for anyone serious about guiding a Catholic Parish. It is borne of the experience of an American parish priest and his lay associate, who successfully grew their parish from 1500 to 4000 regular worshippers. They offer principles which are readily transferable, and they have extracted those from their first book as 75 "Tools for Rebuilding" given in the sequel. They have also published much of their wisdom on-line.

The Rebuilt parish's key strategy was a relentless focus on reaching the lost – helping a key sector of non-practising Catholics (in their case, typically 40-something husbands) reconnect with the community. This may make their ideas more easily transferrable to other parishes where the clear target is the lapsed rather than places still requiring a first proclamation of the Gospel.

PART ONE - BACKGROUND

The CULTURE of a parish is key. Unless deliberately reshaped, it reflects the way people 'tend to do things'.

Our current Catholic culture is one of consumerism, not discipleship.

Historically: 19th Century Catholics were DEPENDENT on the social services provided by religious orders, parishes and Catholic charities.

In the 20th Century, pre-Vatican II, there was less dependency but comfortable compliance with Church expectations

Post-Vatican-II: pick-and-choose mentality (cafeteria Catholics)

They next identify ten traps in a consumer culture:

If the leadership team works harder, and delivers higher quantity or quality, this WON'T result in (1), deeper commitment by participants; nor (2) greater financial giving; nor (3) more volunteers.

4. The parish stalwarts will NOT be natural allies in driving change; they are consumers who fulfil obligations in return for "church made easy".

5. Younger generations mainly demand rites of passage for children and ceremonies for Christmas and Easter. In return the parish coerces reluctant involvement and giving.

6. Faith is so marginal in most Catholics' lives that church-going is mentally an "optional extra" - and church doesn't have the pulling power of sport or advertising

7. Often a parish has nothing attractive to offer its youth.

8. Local non-Catholics may be so cynical about religion, any outreach would be automatically distrusted.

9. Church leaders may not be seeking God's will or keeping an eye out to see what God is blessing.

10. Growing a church is NOT EASY!

Pastors should beware of:

- Needing to control everything
- Perfectionism
- Too much attention to detail
- Fixing problems rather than systems
- Putting projects before people
- Hiring too quickly and firing too slowly
- Wasting time or money
- Failing to take a lead
- Lacking humility

Faithfulness naturally results in fruitfulness.

If fruit is not seen, ask whether a church is being faithful!

What **MUST** a Catholic community do? **MAKE DISCIPLES!**

How can we do this? By reaching the lost – those who feel the hunger which God can fill, but turn to money, sex, power, sports... who try to control life rather than letting God be God.

Jesus spent time getting to know people's fears, worries, sorrows and sins. People quite unlike him thus became like him and brought others to him!

A church serious about welcoming the lost will not -

- have procedures which are difficult to follow
- implicitly or explicitly criticise dress code etc (so deal with respect issues in small groups?)
- make cynical comments at Christmas and Easter about part-timers

Sunday service can easily become stuck in a niche of being

- minimalist
- performance
- personality-centric
- child/school-centric
- a celebration of the local community/building
- reaffirmation of social identity
- single-issue focus

The parish adopted a CLEAR STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

“Welcome the Lost & Grow Disciples”

When you introduce this concept to a typical congregation, there will be angry emotional reactions as you burst self-satisfied bubbles. People will leave.

At the beginning, Nativity Church -

- appealed for the congregation to GET INVOLVED
- introduced a Sunday evening Mass, youth-focused, at which they could experiment with different approaches, including technology
- built a foyer to maximise the welcoming experience, including a cafe

Opposition comes not when you speak of change but when you try to do it.

- people who don't understand
- people who don't care
- people who don't believe you are serious
- people who think they can resist until things go "back to normal"

Often resistance is driven by emotion rather than logic; people confuse a challenge to their religious culture with an attack on their faith.

Unhappy parishioners respond with...

- Passive aggression, slander and gossip in the community.
- Letters, sometimes claiming "everyone else" agrees with them
- Threats of withdrawal of support, legal action, formal complaints...

So:

- Expect conflict
- Don't take it too personally
- Try to be pastorally sensitive to the adjustment the congregation has to make
- Remember that the real battle is a spiritual one; Satan does not want people to become Disciples of Christ - and this battle is won on both knees!

OUR TASKS

- Love God
- Love others as self, so keep margins for self!
- Make disciples

Define your mission field – probably your parish boundaries.

Define the lost within it – the main kind of person who isn't currently coming to your parish, but could be? (Noting the female dominance of a typical congregation, and the influence a father has in keeping his family worshipping, your target will probably be a man.)

Evangelisation must be a continuous recurring theme in preaching, prayer and evaluation, and once a year must be presented from scratch.

Present it as inviting the typical lost person to attend church, or to receive communion at home if housebound. Make them as welcome as possible when they turn up.

Connection takes time!

1. Nurture friendships
2. Pray for your friends
3. Share your own story of life-change
4. Invite to church

Things that DON'T make disciples

- Having the lost show up in church
- A superstitious approach to daily Mass, regular confession, or devotional practices
- Religious education – seldom leads to personal relationship with Jesus good knowledge of scripture, or even a thorough knowledge of Catholic stuff
- Keeping rules and obligations
- Taking part in church organisations
- Volunteering for selfish motives
- Donations with strings attached
- Doing the basics in a tired way with no vision
- Making your building beautiful

PART TWO - STRATEGY

Focus on the [experience of the weekend visitor](#) – from the perspective of a dechurched person who might happen to come.

Are you making the weekend service experience as good as it can be?

“It’s about the worship!”

MUSIC should carry the worshipper on an emotional, intellectual and spiritual journey to the heart of God. Will it do that for your target audience?

Think of the music as the “soundtrack” of the Mass. Urgency at arrival; soft at communion. Use music to draw people into silence and lead them out again.

“It’s about the hospitality!”

There are several kind of volunteers who can make church an especially welcoming environment... (the [website](#) lists these) – and also consider the visual impact of your facilities.

CREATE AN IRRESISTABLE ENVIRONMENT!

One of the major reasons young families choose not to attend Mass on a weekly basis is their children. Bringing toddlers to Mass can be an overwhelming and embarrassing experience, not to mention the dirty stares and under-the-breath comments from *churchpeople*. Without programs for children, families have a hard time coming to Mass. So [provide for the children!](#)

THE MESSAGE – GOOD PREACHING

[Preach](#) in the expectation of fostering change in people’s lives

Avoid these 12 traps:

1. Bible Study for Believers
2. Church Chat for Church Ladies
3. Sermons for Seminarians
4. Convincing the Convinced (Yep, “Preaching to the Choir”)
5. Nagging the Uninterested

6. Boy's Club Banter
7. Hamming It Up
8. Canned Ham
9. Dishing Leftovers
10. Let's Pretend (I Have a Message)
11. Public Confession/Public Boasting
12. Let's Just Be Friends

Instead...

- Pray
- Preach to yourself – a message you have lived, a message you need to hear
- Be authentic
- Know your base of Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium
- Make an emotional connection with your listeners
- Use laughter. Not jokes, but unexpected shared experiences, stories against oneself
- Track current local events – how will they make people feel?
- Preach the same message at every Mass – co-ordinate with associates if need be
- Preach a message series over several weeks, 4-6
 - o SEPT/OCT – back to school
 - o OCT/NOV – stewardship
 - o Adv – prep Christmas
 - o NY – Life change
 - o Lent – go deeper
 - o Easter – celebrate
 - o Summer themes – Bible, Eucharist
- Preach for life change; know where people are and where God wants them to be
- Make the expected outcome explicit in the message and perhaps reinforce it in the "endnotes", even using a lay voice
- Incorporate vision and goals into the preaching
- Use the best material available
- Prepare! And perhaps review your performance from last week
- Preach God's word! Including the difficult bits! God will provide the relevance!

Companionship is needed for Christian growth

Community has to be built deliberately. One way is [SMALL GROUPS](#).

- SMALL! To enable relationship. 6-10 members are workable.
- Integrated into parish, feeding people into parish projects
- Delivery system for pastoral care
- Promote life-change. Conversations leading to conversion!
- Typically 90 minutes. Input can be the Sunday theme but with a different voice and perspective
- Trust, stability, confidentiality

GIVING

Building a church before it is pastorally needed or financially viable is a common mistake.

Parish efforts then become narrowly focussed on fundraisers.

In many parishes, there is always some fundraiser going on, and the only message the congregation have heard about money is: "We need more!"

But – disciples should give, and do give.

- because the parish needs funds to operate!
- because an attitude of giving is fundamental for a follower of Jesus

Aggressive fundraising strips trees of their fruits.

A focus on raising givers rather than raising funds plants new fruit trees!

The Church of the Nativity tried numerous fundraising strategies and failed. During their transformation, they reoriented their focus from *fundraising* to raising *givers*. "Fundraising raises funds. We should be raising givers" ([*Rebuilt*](#), 178).

What do they do now? They challenge members to become:

- **Planned** givers (designating money in their budget to give)
- **Priority** givers (giving to God first before other expenses)
- **Percentage** givers (giving a percentage, not a dollar amount)
- **Progressive** givers (increasing the percentage regularly)

Everyone can take SOME step on this ladder! Preach taking a step, not jumping to 10% straightaway!

MINISTRY

Create a culture where “every member is a minister”

ALWAYS mention service (not just to fill holes), but never nag people

Offer a one-shot trial

Always start a person with low-key service, never liturgical ministries

Make the job, and the commitment, manageable: 2 hours twice a month

Volunteers are “farmed” up to greater commitment and then leadership

New applicants go through an application process

Everyone has a supervisor and an annual review

Encourage change or rest as needed

Provide volunteer facility – rest room

Thank the ministers in private, but the guests who come to big occasions in public.

RESTORATION

Changing the world and saving the world are not meant to be polar opposites. Jesus has redeemed the world, but we are called to work for its restoration. This should be an integral part of our mission.

Christian communities should be involved in ‘mission’ activities which are:

- Outside the congregation
- In partnership with others
- Expressions of love for God

The work needs a champion with the ear of the pastor. Build a team and don’t allow things to become one-person projects.

Beware of doing too much, of projects competing with each other.

Stay focussed, do a few things well, and kill those projects which are beyond their time.

Remember our mission is to the town, the nation, and in support of overseas.

Get everyone in the parish physically involved, on a few occasions. (Not just by writing cheques!)

Try an Advent Conspiracy Event – see p. 217

STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

Use 5 hiring strategies (detailed in the book):

1. **Strategy #1:** Hire people of good character.
2. **Strategy #2:** Hire people with ability. And flexibility. And passion!
3. **Strategy #3:** Hire people you like.
4. **Strategy #4:** Hire from within.
5. **Strategy #5:** Hire people who have fallen in love with your church.

Once you get your staff assembled, how do you invest in them? One way is consistent communication and effective meetings.

- Pray together weekly.
- Build respect and trust.
- Have feedback and fellowship meetings.
- The pastor doesn't need to chair everything.
- Make it enjoyable!
- Build in ongoing formation.
- Pay a decent wage if you are going to pay at all!
- Pastor must prioritise care of key personnel.

For small parishes:

- Make a list of what can be delegated
- Pray for God to bring the right person!

Develop appropriate [leadership](#) in your parish, and drive a [change of culture](#).