

Tools for moving a diocese from maintenance to mission

Let's dream for a minute about what a diocese would look like if each of its priests was in a place of ministry that played to their strengths. Less burnout. More joy. More effectiveness.

This is possible.

It no longer has to be a 'seat of the pants, gut feel, let's hope the Holy Spirit is inspiring our choices' set of decisions. It will still require prayer, and pondering, and skill, but the chances of getting the right match of priest to place of ministry are dramatically higher with the following tools.

...However you will still have to take into account musical and artistic ability, relevant hobbies, and attempt to match priests to socio-economic areas that they can relate to.

First Tool: Clifton StrengthsFinder – [Catholic Edition](#). If you know the top 5 signature themes of your priests you will make better decisions. Think of them as transferable skill sets.

Second Tool: Strengths based Leadership. The 34 possible signature themes can be split into [4 domains](#), executing, influencing, relationship building and strategic thinking. If all 4 areas are covered by a leadership team, then the place is going to hum. If one or more domain area is missing, the blind-spot areas will reduce effectiveness and cause troubles. For example, if you have two priests in a parish and neither of them has people skills (relationship building skills) attendance at Sunday Mass will fall and complaints to the bishop will increase.

Third Tool: Knowing how parish size impacts on the gifts the pastor in leadership needs to be effective. This [gem](#) was highly recommended by Fr Mallon in Divine Renovation. It is 14.5 pages long, but its implications are huge. A small parish will thrive with a pastor in leadership who is high in relationship building skills. A medium size parish needs a pastor in leadership with administration skills, who can do a bit of everything domain-wise. A large church needs a pastor in leadership with a drive for vision and mission, who will focus on preaching and strategy and do very little individual pastoral ministry. A very large church requires more of the same, with an emphasis on articulating vision.

This will make sense if we look at some mythical examples.

I grabbed a random number generator and found 5 numbers between 1 and 34, and then matched the numbers to the 34 signature themes in alphabetical order. This produced Mythical Priests A, B, C and D.

Mythical Priest A:

Harmony/R, Analytical/S, Empathy/R, Individualization/R, Developer/R

That's 4 themes in Relationship building. If this priest had to take charge of a parish, for both to thrive it would need to be a small one.

Empathy is the number one skill needed to be effective in pastoral care.

Empathy plus Harmony means you would shine in hospital based pastoral care.

But this person has even more than that. He'd be absolutely in his element in prison ministry, and ministering to those with addictions or dealing with domestic abuse victims.

If you trained him up to spot the 34 themes, he would be brilliant at getting parishioners into the ministries that God made them for.

Mythical Priest B:

Belief/E, Responsibility/E, Strategic/S, Communication/I, Command/I

That's no people skills, but a powerful leader who could take on a large complex parish.

Sadly without the people skills he's not likely to ever get a pointy hat.

He would be a very good preacher. However dissuading him from erroneous beliefs would not be easy, so it would be important to give him good formation from people he can respect.

Belief, Command and Strategic are the building blocks for a good exorcist, so it would be worthwhile sending him to exorcist school in Rome to test whether he is called to that ministry.

Putting Priest A together with Priest B as an assistant would cover all 4 domains, and they could bond over analysis and strategy. They could make a very effective team, as long as it was explained to both of them that they were chosen to complement each other, and how they could best connect with each other.

Mythical Priest C:

Discipline/E, Connectedness/R, Learner/S, Communication/I, Maximiser/I

If this person wasn't a priest he would have the raw material to be a best-selling author.

Having a foot in all 4 domains he could lead a medium parish.

However he would shine as a faculty member of a seminary, and could write a book a year. The rhythm of seminary life would suit him, students would enjoy listening to him, he'd be the one to keep the Old Boys union going and maintain contact with past students, he'd be very good at social media, and his desire to learn would fuel the next book while the maximiser will ensure it will be full of excellence.

He has the raw material to become the next [Fr James Martin SJ](#).

Mythical Priest D:

Includer/R, Maximiser/I, Analytical/S, Activator/I, Restorative/E

Having a foot in all 4 domains, he could lead a medium parish too.

But if you really wanted him to shine, you would send him into broken parishes to get them on their feet again. He'd analyze the root causes, delight in the hard work needed to make the healing happen, get parishioners involved in the process, get started quickly and enthuse people to aim for excellence and show how possible it was to achieve. It is possible that he would be frustrated in any assistant priest role, because he needs to make things happen

Do you agree that if these priests were given places of ministry like these, that the mythical diocese they belong to would be a couple of steps down the road from maintenance to mission?

Conversely, can you imagine the disaster if you sent Mythical Priest B as parish priest of a small parish?