

Divine Renovation in Edinburgh and Glasgow

Monica Thompson and Gerry Mulvenna shared their experience of using Divine Renovation (DR) in their South Edinburgh cluster of three parishes, which have shared two priests for nearly 20 years.

Divine Renovation – bringing your parish from maintenance to mission is a book written by Fr James Mallon. It offers a long-term process of renewal for faith communities, with steps set out in the *Divine Renovation Guidebook – a step by step guide*

One of its main themes is the primacy of evangelisation, which is set in the context of the great commission in Matt 28: 'Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations...'

It uses the Alpha course, which explores the Christian faith over a period of eleven weeks, with a retreat towards the end.

The Edinburgh parishes are on their fifth Alpha cycle. People have spoken of a deeper relationship with Jesus, more confidence in their faith, and stronger connections to the community.

Last year the priests of the Edinburgh cluster entered a process of prayer and discernment before inviting six parishioners to form a DR team with them. The team meets for two and a half hours every fortnight and is a real experience of clergy and laity collaborating and sharing responsibility.

Parish pastoral councils work with the leadership team, whose primary role is to lead the faith communities on their journey from maintenance to mission.

Divine Renovation in Maryhill

The Immaculate Conception parish is a well-established community, bordering the city of Glasgow and East Dunbartonshire. It is a growing community with three schools and lots of young families.

We opted to use *Divine Renovation* (DR) in response to the situation our church finds itself in, locally and globally. The current vacuum in ecclesiastical leadership means there is no common pastoral strategy. DR gave us a focus, using a 'reading group' model, with 100 people on average gathering each month to reflect and discern how we could become a community more concerned with reaching the wider community rather than just maintaining the status quo around the parish buildings and liturgy.

A significant difference between our experience and that of our friends in Edinburgh is that they are using DR to create a whole new reality from a multi-parish cluster. We used the book as a tool to re-energise one single parish community.

Since one of the factors that motivated taking up DR was to find good news in the midst of the sexual abuse scandals, it was no surprise to find a chapter that invites us, head on, to discuss and share how this tragedy has made us all feel. The meeting around that chapter was facilitated by our Diocesan safeguarding officer and proved an uncomfortable but very open and frank, even a healing, event. It helped us move towards a liturgy of shame and sorrow to co-incide with Pope Francis' invitation at the start of lent.

The fundamental premise of the book and the DR project acknowledges that every Catholic needs to be rooted in an encounter with Jesus. This echoes Pope Francis' frequent call to renew the church not in its structures but in our faith-relationship and in our prayer.

For DR, the experience of Sunday is key; it is to be the main event of the week in which all are moved and energised and given the opportunity to have that encounter together.

As well as examining how well we prepare and celebrate Sunday Eucharist, DR invites us to look at where our priorities are and how this is reflected even in our parish budget! Do we put our money where our priorities are? Key among these priorities, we are asked how 'missionary' our parish attitude and outlook are. This is a difficult part of the reading, as the word *missionary* sounds foreign to our tradition. We think it is for evangelicals or those in Religious orders who go away from home. Over some weeks of teasing this out, we understood that *missionary* is much more about finding ways to make ourselves known in the wider community, of engaging with other agencies. Above all, being *missionary* is being prepared to be beside others – in our neighbourhood, our workplace, even in our own families, wherever they may be on the journey. Missionary is always having an eye on the opportunities in real time, to be of service or of helping someone to share in what we have ourselves found. It is not proselytising but accompanying!

Our parish is in the very early days of seeing how this DR process will help shape our pastoral strategy. We are exploring creating a central team that will share responsibility for parish leadership and there are other initiatives emerging around how we celebrate funeral, how we optimise other moments of contact with people not regularly part of us. Above all, we are talking and listening to each other.

Renewal, responsibility, shared leadership, reach out, encounter, mission; this a new challenging vocabulary but one we now recognise as important for us into the future. That surely can't be bad?

Jim Lawlor, Parish priest