

“*A Pastor’s Toolbox 2* is an invaluable resource and a welcome addition to any parish library!”

—Most Rev. Bernard Hebda
Archbishop of Minneapolis-St. Paul

“Once again the National Leadership Roundtable has produced a resource guide for those involved in church/parish management. Like the first volume, this work continues to build upon the foundation of that workshop. Offering guidance and direction that benefits a priest administrator daily in his ministry, it is a book that should be gifted to every new pastor—if not every newly ordained priest.”

—Rev. John M. McCrone
Director, Continuing Formation and Sabbaticals
Archdiocese of Newark

“The first volume of *A Pastor’s Toolbox* was received with gratitude and enthusiasm by priests and bishops across the country. This second can, indeed, help any new pastor as he approaches the management of his parish. As a companion to the first, new and seasoned pastors have the answers to so many questions regarding parochial leadership. I have seen firsthand the positive difference the first edition has made and can heartily recommend both volumes!”

—Cardinal Joseph Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Newark

A Pastor's Toolbox 2

*More Management Skills
for Parish Leadership*

Edited by Paul A. Holmes



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Foreword

Archbishop Bernard Hebda
Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis

It is no secret that Catholic pastors everywhere enjoy one of the most rewarding ministries in the church. It is equally well known that they face many challenges whether they are shepherding a large urban parish or a small rural one; whether they minister with a paid, professional management team or a staff of lay volunteers; whether stewardship efforts have created a deep pool of resources that can fund a complex set of programs and ministerial experiences, or the parish is struggling mightily to meet its financial obligations. Leading and managing a Catholic parish in the twenty-first century asks a great deal from its pastor. That is why *A Pastor's Toolbox 2* is an invaluable resource and a welcome addition to any parish library!

I had the pleasure of attending a weeklong Toolbox for Pastoral Management experience in January 2016, led by Fr. Paul Holmes, the insightful editor of this volume. Thirty pastors from the Archdiocese of Newark spent six days together getting acquainted with one another, yes, but also with the management tools needed to meet many of the challenges pastors face. A few months later, I invited the Leadership Roundtable to bring the Toolbox to the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis as well. Those two privileged opportunities have given me firsthand knowledge of just how helpful the Toolbox can be for both new and seasoned pastors, and I know that my experience was not unique. I remember seeing a photo that accompanied a *New York Times* article about the Toolbox: the priest-participants were obviously enjoying the experience of listening to leadership and management specialists share their expertise. Volume 2 of *A Pastor's Toolbox* provides a glimpse into that experience.

There are many books out there that address organizational leadership and management. Very few, however, speak directly to the Catholic pastor, and in a language that respects his theological, spiritual, and pastoral training. It is one thing to advise a leader to be consultative; it is quite another to root that advice in the notion that we Christians are the Body of Christ: “If we look at Jesus’ methodology of calling apostles to share in leadership, it becomes clear that a collaborative style of leadership is pivotal to Christian management” (chap. 4: Molding Your Staff into a Pastoral Leadership Team).

While all effective leaders may seek wisdom, the Catholic pastor does so for a reason that would not occur to a secular leader: “Council members want to be consulted so they can express and unfold the wisdom of Christ. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit unifies pastor and council members when they develop plans that the pastor wants to implement” (chap. 6: The Pastoral Council and Consultative Leadership).

Indeed, while many nonprofit leaders are engaged in raising money, the pastor needs to remember that “living a stewardship life is a manifestation of mature discipleship. It is a conscious decision to follow Christ no matter what the cost” (chap. 8: Ten Essential Building Blocks for Developing a Stewardship Parish). It is not enough, we are reminded, to ensure that parish communications be well written; pastors have to give it their very best: “Our desire for communion should compel us to be not just good communicators, but *Gospel-good* communicators” (chap. 9: Communications: Vitamins or Dessert?).

Only a book that speaks directly to Catholic pastors (and not just *any* leader) would make the following observation: “We need to develop reflective leaders. Priests are particularly good at this. It’s part of the formation that we go through as Catholic ministry leaders—where solutions emerge from prayer, discernment, and dialogue. Solutions emerge over time with reflection” (chap. 10: Tools for Leadership Development). And the pastor should not be the only one praying: “Finance council members are also expected to invest in developing a robust prayer life that includes asking guidance of the Holy Spirit, and participation in the liturgical life of the parish” (chap. 5: Frameworks and Tools That Drive the Parish Finance Council). The entire parish, in fact, should be basing their decisions on what they have learned in prayer: “Intentionally inviting the Holy Spirit into our minds and hearts changes us and has the power to change our conversations. We are able to do more and do it based on the will of God (instead of our own will) when we spend

time listening to what God has to say to us first instead of us speaking first or, perhaps even worse, not listening at all” (chap. 7: Effective Parish Meetings).

It is evident that the wisdom of our Holy Fathers is an integral part of the book as well. Catholic pastors cannot help but benefit from the insights of Pope Francis (chaps. 1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15) as well as those of his immediate predecessors, St. John Paul (chaps. 5, 6, 14) and Pope Benedict (chaps. 8, 9, 14).

I hope it is clear, even from this brief outline, that *A Pastor's Toolbox* does not forget its audience. It doesn't simply provide those who lead parishes, whether ordained or lay, with management tools that would work just *anywhere*. Instead, we are uniquely addressed as true *ecclesial* ministers. Grounded in our baptismal identity and mission, we lead and manage our parishes in service to Christ's identity and mission. I can, therefore, wholeheartedly recommend this volume's sixteen essays to all who hope to equip themselves with the tools that Catholic parish management needs to ensure the vibrant parish life our parishioners deserve.

Introduction

Paul A. Holmes

Welcome to the second volume of *A Pastor's Toolbox*!

None of us involved with the Toolbox for Pastoral Management could have imagined the success of the first volume of *A Pastor's Toolbox: Management Skills for Parish Leadership*, published by Liturgical Press in 2014. And we couldn't have been more grateful when the Catholic Press Association awarded it First Prize in its Pastoral Ministry category. A collaborative effort of Seton Hall University and the Leadership Roundtable (formerly, the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management), the weeklong, face-to-face Toolbox for Pastoral Management continues to be offered all around the country and will have soon reached five hundred priests and deacons ministering in over seventy-five dioceses in the United States and Canada.

Since 2009, a member of the Leadership Roundtable's board of directors, Thomas Healey, has been both the inspiration for the Toolbox and its most generous supporter. It was he who encouraged us to publish the seminar's presentations in book form. In this way, he said, we would be able to reach the more than thirty-five thousand active priests in the US, as well as the nearly forty thousand lay ecclesial ministers who might benefit from the Toolbox's presentations on the many facets of parish temporal management.¹ And over the years, we have been grateful to Lilly Endowment's generosity in support of the mission and goals of the Toolbox experience.

New pastors, especially, have told us that they received enough "theory" in the seminary; now, they say, they want practical "tools" that will help them hit the ground running as they set about managing their parishes—tools that are grounded in sound Catholic theology and that

truly help pastors bring Christ to the faithful in their care. In the first volume of *A Pastor's Toolbox*, we offered tools of temporal management, including subjects as diverse as how to manage the parish business office, how to handle the hiring and nurturing of parish staff, and what to do about risk management, internal financial controls, stewardship, and strategic planning, among others. We've continued to listen to the feedback we've received from those who have attended the Toolbox seminars and, here in the second volume, we offer essays replete with tools that pastors say they would like to have in their "toolbox" as they go about their management responsibilities in a twenty-first-century Catholic parish.

We begin with Dominic Perri, who tries to answer the question a lot of pastors are asked: What is your vision for our parish? He tells pastors that "mission" is about identity, but "vision" is about where you want to go in the future (chap. 1). Barbara Anne Cusack then helps us to understand that undergirding the pastor's vision should be an appreciation for what the church's own law might be able to tell us, especially if we seek inspiration from the Holy Spirit and view the law as a bridge instead of a burden (chap. 2).

Pastors have told us how much effort goes into the management of a parish's human resources, so Carol Fowler helps pastors to "get a handle" on some of the pastor's most important and time-consuming tasks, giving advice on hiring (and firing), benefits and compensation, avoiding the various forms of discrimination, and the benefits of having a personnel handbook (chap. 3). Dovetailing with those insights are Dennis Corcoran's view of "molding" the parish staff into a real leadership team whose members need to be relational, open to change, and working to achieve the "right chemistry" with their pastor, with one another, and with their fellow parishioners (chap. 4).

We then zero in on the tools needed to manage the important work a pastor does in consultation with his parishioners on the parish's finance and pastoral councils. Jim Lundholm-Eades offers an incisive perspective: " 'Best practice' finance councils use consistent frames of reference to guide what they do, and a pragmatic set of tools to get the work done" (chap. 5). Mark Fischer and Fr. Paul Spellman then offer best practices when it comes to the pastoral council, inviting us to view the council as the " 'eyes and ears' of the parish" and emphasizing how pastors need to be "consultative leaders" (chap. 6). And since consultation most often occurs at meetings, Peter Denio presents tools for making all parish

meetings as effective as possible, adapting the perspective of business management consultant Patrick Lencioni to parish life (chap. 7).

In addition to meetings, pastors find themselves involved in strategies for managing parish stewardship. Chuck Zech, of Villanova's Center for Church Management and Business Ethics, offers ten essential building blocks for developing a "stewardship parish" (chap. 8). Helen Osman then suggests that "parishes (and dioceses) should think of communications as essential an element to the church's ministry as vitamins are to a healthy person's daily diet." How we communicate "who we are" and "what we do" as members of Christ's Body is critical as the church tries to offer a "clear vision" of our ecclesial identity and mission to the communities we serve (chap. 9).

All pastors can benefit from considering how they are developing as leaders, managing their time, and attending to both their emotional and physical well-being. Michael Brough provides tools for leadership development, focusing on identifying a pastor's leadership competencies, gathering feedback, creating a development plan, and engaging the support that is needed to be a truly effective leader (chap. 10). Jim Dubik offers insights about how to manage one's time, reminding us that management is about efficiency and that all leaders need to develop a "time management system" and do their best to stick to it (chap. 11). And as pastors go about their management tasks, they mustn't forget about their health. Dr. Andrew Kelly discusses the many ways our physical and emotional lives might get lost in the flurry of pastoral activity. He offers a "wellness checklist" that reminds pastors to take care of themselves so that they can take care of others (chap. 12).

Many parishes find themselves in special circumstances. Those that have a Catholic school, for example, often need to consider various strategies that will help ensure that the religious education of our children has the pastor's care-filled attention. John Eriksen offers strategies like advocacy, building a skilled support network, and benchmarking to help ensure the success of the parish school (chap. 13). Increasingly, faith communities require what might be called "complex pastoring" due to the increase of multiple parishes and cultural communities in an individual pastor's care. Mark Mogilka offers strategies for building bridges among parish communities, reminding us that "change that you can see and touch—is easy; but transition—changing people's hearts, attitudes, beliefs, and values—takes a lot more time and patience" (chap. 14). Father Allan Deck notes that pastors are, more and more,

in need of “intercultural competence” and he reminds us that in order to model intercultural sensibility and competence, we may need not only a change of “mind-set” but a change of “heart-sets” and “skill-sets” as well (chap. 15).

Finally, Dennis Cheesebrow offers a word about managing change, on both individual and institutional levels (chap. 16). In every pastor’s toolbox there should be the tools that can effect the kinds of transformation to which every parish is called. As we said in the first volume of *A Pastor's Toolbox*, we say now: There are many more issues facing twenty-first-century pastors and parishioners. It is nevertheless our hope that the issues we have tackled in both volumes might be considered a road map to grace-filled moments, filled with Christ’s love and wisdom, for everyone involved in parish life.

Endnote

1. CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate), Georgetown University, “Frequently Requested Church Statistics,” <http://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/>.

1

Developing a Vision

Dominic Perri

Proverbs 29 tells us, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (v. 18, King James Version). I wouldn’t say that most parishes today are on the verge of extinction. What I would suggest, though, is that they are hungry for vision. What exactly do I mean by vision, and how is it different from mission? If you’ve asked that question yourself and are lost for an answer, you’re not alone. I hear it all the time.

Very simply, your mission is a statement of identity. It’s who you are as a parish, or any other type of ministry. We are, for example, the Parish of St. Mary’s. And we exist to preach and teach the sacraments and bring the Gospel to those in our community. As a statement of identity, it generally does not change, nor should it change, at least for decades. To relate this to the for-profit world, take a company like Nike. It’s always going to be a shoe seller and a provider of athletic goods. That’s not going to change from one year to the next. It’s a fundamental statement of corporate identity.

Vision, on the other hand, is where you want to go in the future. It’s the ability to say, “We’re at point A and want to get to point B.” It’s where you’re trying to lead people. Vision is what I call a *desired future*. To personalize that a bit, I’m the son of Italian immigrants who grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, of all places. That’s my identity. I can’t change that. But my vision of where I wanted to go has changed over my life. I was determined to go to college, so I enrolled in The Catholic University of America. After graduation, I wanted to leave my mark in the workplace, then get married and start a family. My vision involved

setting goals for myself, moving toward them, and setting new goals. Unlike mission, your vision changes over time.

How many of you have had people come up and ask, "What's your vision for the parish?" As pastors, your vision is to lead your people. But where do you want to take them? That's where your vision is crucial. The faithful are basically asking, "Where do you see yourself taking us?" It seems very simple. We start at point A and go to point B. That's what vision is. That's what leading is.

But it's not as simple as it appears. Anyone who's ever been part of drafting a vision statement for an organization knows what I'm talking about. Too often, what ultimately gets produced is tacked on the wall like the Declaration of Independence; it looks very pretty, but that's essentially the end of the story. The process is often difficult and wrenching and the toughest part is afterward when people say, "I don't know what we got out of this. I don't know how it changed our organization." So, what I want to really focus on is helping you think about and create a vision that will allow you to move your parish to where you want it to be. And hopefully without the pain and aggravation I'm sure many of you have experienced.

Knowing What Road to Take

Why is vision so important? There's no better instructor here than Lewis Carroll, who, in *Alice in Wonderland*, describes a scene where Alice encounters the Cheshire Cat. As many of you will recall, Alice asks for directions: "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" The Cheshire Cat replies, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." When Alice says she doesn't really know where she wants to go, the Cat famously replies, "Then it doesn't matter which way you go."¹

The message is clear: If you don't know where you want to go, then you drift. And as I've seen through my experiences with parishes around the country, there are many in various stages of drift. They're in maintenance mode. It's akin to treading water. And this, unfortunately, leads to a bit of a leadership and vision vacuum. So that when well-intentioned folks in the parish show up with a bright and shiny idea, the feeling is maybe we should pursue it. Since we don't know where we're going, any road will get us there. It's the polar opposite of having a vision that

allows you to say, “This is where we’re going . . . or not going.” With respect to the latter, it might be a great program. It may have worked well in another parish. You may be very excited about it. But with vision as your guide, you may also realize that it’s not appropriate for your parish. Just as importantly, though, it allows you to refocus, to move decisively in a new direction.

To give you another perspective, George Wilson, a friend and mentor of mine, is a Jesuit who did organization development work with church groups for over thirty years. He has stated that many church organizations don’t have a resource problem; they have a *vision* problem. It’s no secret that many Catholic parishes and organizations spend a lot of time lamenting how strapped they are for funds, and how hard it is to attract competent people to their ranks. But that’s hardly the end of the discussion. I believe we have to ask ourselves a very fundamental question: Are we putting out a product with a compelling enough vision to attract people and resources to us? In the end, people want to be part of something that’s going somewhere, and if it appears we’re just treading water, that we’re in perpetual maintenance mode, then they’re going to turn away from the church in droves.

What, then, should our vision be? How do we get people enthused about our “product”? Our lofty vision for our parish is typically to bring all souls to Jesus. The problem is that it doesn’t necessarily give you a direction for where you want to be tomorrow or next month or next year. In other words, it doesn’t give you a vision—a desired future—that can help you plan and make decisions for your parish.

Here’s an example from the secular world that may help. Consider film directors. They must have a very clear sense of what the final product is going to look like, even if it hasn’t been created yet. They have a *desired future*. This is the kind of product we want. Think of yourselves as directors creating a film. You may be shooting seven scenes in three cities—let’s say Los Angeles, Chicago, and Newark. But if scenes one and five are in Los Angeles, you don’t go to Los Angeles for scene one, then the other cities for scenes two, three, and four, only to return to Los Angeles for scene five. That wouldn’t make any sense. You shoot scenes one and five in Los Angeles in tandem. The point is, directors must have in mind what the final product is going to look like in order to pull off that kind of logistical exercise. Since it’s not happening in sequence, they need to see the bigger picture through the smaller component parts in each city. Indeed, if you listen to interviews with directors,

they will invariably say, “I knew what each scene had to deliver because I had the bigger picture of how they would all fit together in the end.”

The question I pose to you as pastors and leaders in your parishes is this: Do you have a vision of what you want your parish to look like in three years? Can you look at the smaller parts of that mosaic right now and say, “They have to be this way because here is what the final product will look like”? That’s the idea of vision. That’s the idea of desired future.

Another example from the secular world is Apple. When the computer maker was founded, its vision was to get computers into the hands of everyday people, to make the devices accessible to every home. And the company succeeded beyond its wildest dreams. It had a vision of where it wanted to be. Its iconic leader, Steve Jobs, reinforced the point. After starting the company, he left, and returned when it almost went under in the mid-nineties. At that moment, Apple had roughly eighty-five products in its repertoire. Jobs drew a two-by-two matrix and said, “We’re going to have four products—a desktop for home, a desktop for business, a laptop for home, and a laptop for business. We’re getting rid of everything else.” Not surprisingly, that sent a few shock waves through the organization. But that was the point at which Apple began to turn around and become the juggernaut it is today. Jobs had a very clear vision about where he wanted to take the company, and within a given time frame. He saw the future he wanted. And that’s a powerful lesson for the church as well.

How a Vision Can Change

Let me give you an example that hits closer to home. My own parish—Old Saint Patrick’s in downtown Chicago—dates back to the 1850s. By the early 1980s, it was on the verge of closing, a victim of the construction of the interstate highway system that tore neighborhoods apart and forced residents to flee. When Fr. Jack Wall took over as pastor in 1983, four members remained in the entire parish.

That would have sounded the death knell for most organizations, but Jack walked in and said, “I’ve got a vision for this parish. But it won’t be like most parishes that are focused on attracting families and children. After all, we’re in downtown Chicago, where nobody really lives. So we’re going to become a place for young adults. Downtown Chicago is filled with young, single Catholic professionals who are coming to the

city every day, and we can serve them in a host of ways—with programs at their lunch breaks and programs after work. We can tailor programs to them because they're now going to parishes in the suburbs, which are focused on families, and that's not who they are."

Jack had a bold vision, a desired future, for his parish. In some cases, that meant telling people, "We're not going to do this because it doesn't advance our vision." And in short order, amazing things began to happen. Young adults flocked there. One of the reasons was that Old Saint Pat's offered a Saturday night block party where people could go to eat, listen to bands, and mingle. I should note that these block parties raised money for the parish's social outreach program, so they were connected to the mission. Interestingly, what also happened at those block parties was that lots of young, single Catholic professionals started meeting each other, getting married, and having families.

And by 1989, when waves of Catholic parishes were closing their schools, Old Saint Pat's was just opening theirs. Today, it serves the needs of four thousand registered families from over sixty zip codes. And Jack will tell you that lots of people in those early years came to him and said, "How can you not have X, Y, Z—the standard way a parish serves families?" His answer was simple and direct: "That's not the future we're trying to get to."

There's no question your vision will change. It did for Apple and it did for Old Saint Pat's, once they started to grow and discovered they had different needs. Where it starts, though, is looking around and asking yourself, "Where are we now, and what will someone who shows up for Sunday Mass at our parish three years from now experience that's different?" Are you able to paint that picture? Can you talk about the desired future as the fulfillment of what you want your parish to become?

Vision brings that desired future into focus. And the other nice thing is that gifts and resources often follow in its wake. Just look at Old Saint Pat's. Each year its annual block party—now held on Friday *and* Saturday nights—attracts thousands of young people and raises several hundred thousand dollars each year. These contributions are then used to fund the church's social outreach programs. I'm not suggesting you come to the conclusion, "Oh my gosh, how do I ever come up with something like that!" What I am suggesting, though, is that when your vision, your desired future, is compelling enough, people and resources will inevitably follow.

Charting Your Course as a Parish

A clear vision also allows you to say *no* to certain things. And that's absolutely crucial. In your lives as pastors, how many times have people come up to you and said, "Father, I've got a great idea for our parish"? Or, "I just came back from this retreat and witnessed a program we have to have immediately." What's the measuring stick that allows you to say yes or no to each well-intentioned idea? Is it how much energy you have at the moment, or whether or not they caught you at the right time of the day? Absolutely not. Having a window into the future and being able to say to a member of your parish, "I appreciate your idea, but it doesn't quite line up with where we want this parish to be in another three years," should be your measuring stick.

Determining what you want your parish to become, of course, is no easy task. It means spending considerable time thinking about the needs of the people around you. What's unique about who we are as a parish? What's our history? How is the community changing? Setting a direction for the future means listening—to your staff, especially those who have been there the longest, to your parish council, to your parishioners, and to the community at large. You also need to study the demographic data. It may show, for example, you're in an area where Hispanics are the fastest growing population segment, prompting you to say, "We need to become a 100 percent bicultural English-Spanish parish. That's our desired future." What, then, will people experience when they come to our parish in another three years? Well, they'll see how we've managed to smoothly integrate the two cultures. There will be bilingual liturgies, bulletins in both English and Spanish, and active community outreach. And to get to that goal, we're going to start right now to build intercultural awareness through events, programs, and trips. That's how we plan to make our vision real.

Here's another example of what I mean by vision. In the course of listening and talking to others, you might come to see there's a hunger for a fuller expression of Catholic teachings on social justice. Therefore, your vision might be to convey that theme through parish preaching, or visits to local soup kitchens, or through faith-sharing groups where members reflect on how to embed Catholic social teachings in their everyday lives. That's the kind of experience you might want to build for parishioners, and your vision is the vehicle that will get you there.

There will always be folks who say, “No, no, Father. I don’t think we should do it that way.” And there’s nothing preventing you from saying to them, “Here are my initial thoughts. Let’s now take them to the parish council for its feedback.” You can, and should, consult with others. At Old Saint Pat’s, for example, we held a summit where we brought in seventy-five parish leaders for a day-and-a-half meeting to get input. At the end of the day, though, you are the leader of the parish and have to be able to say, “Based on what I’ve seen and heard, here is the direction in which we need to be moving. Here is where the Holy Spirit is beckoning us. Let’s embark on this vision together.”

One Church’s Response

Church of the Nativity, a parish in the town of Timonium, Maryland, developed a very distinct vision of its desired future. Members looked around and realized they were in a sleepy northern suburb of Baltimore where the church really didn’t matter in the lives of many people. So, they began by asking themselves some key questions: What experience do we want people to have when they come here on the weekend? How do we transform that personal experience from just sitting in a pew for forty-five minutes to actually becoming a disciple—to getting involved in a ministry, joining a small discussion group, or playing a role in community outreach? And, if we become a church filled with disciples, what activities need to occur throughout the week?

As members detailed in a book they eventually wrote about their journey called *Rebuilt*, they decided to concentrate on creating a dynamic, irresistible weekend experience. It featured programs for children and students, lots of music, and meaningful messages crafted by the church’s ministers. In other words, they created the kind of engaging, energetic environment that would encourage newcomers to return and regular members to become even more active. To get to that level, though, they realized they’d have to really do their homework, planning the program and events for each Saturday and Sunday, weeks or even months in advance. They’d have to review the Scriptures and decide which lessons or themes to dwell on. And they’d have to thoughtfully integrate them with the weekend’s music and hospitality.

In the course of saying yes to those ideas that would advance their vision, the parish also had the foresight—and strength—to say no to

ideas that wouldn't. Bingo was one of those. So were CYO and sports. And to those people who objected to their choices, parish leaders politely suggested that Timonium might not be the right place for them, and guided them elsewhere.

Vision Takes Time and Patience

How do you know when you've arrived at a vision that can really energize your parish? Here's a simple yardstick: when you share your vision with people and they get excited about it. When they say, "Father, we want to be part of that," or "This is something we can buy into."

Be aware that developing the right vision for your parish may take some time. If you want a fully formed blueprint that fills your leaders with an unquenchable fire, one that really inspires people, it must be part of a deliberative, thoughtful, unhurried process. It must involve constant back-and-forth with those around you. In the course of that conversation you might learn, for example, there's a discernible desire to become a parish that lives and breathes the message of Pope Francis. Or to become a parish where young people feel especially welcome. Or a parish where *all* generations feel welcome. The core question then becomes, What do we need to do, or stop doing, to get us there?

Most important, don't be discouraged or sidetracked as you embark on this timely journey. As the leader of your congregation, continue to reflect on it and pray on it as you provoke a spirited discussion with the faithful. Stay focused and committed. Only then will a collective vision emerge with the energy to take your parish in a bold and exciting new direction, a desired future.

To paraphrase Proverbs 29, where there *is* a vision, the people flourish!

Endnote

1. Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* (New York: Scholastic, 2001), 74.