Chapter 5, ‘Laying the Foundation’, is a bit long and so is being divided into three parts for our discussion. Part 1 covers pages 87-122 and includes an introductory discussion of parish culture and values followed by the first three of ten values Fr. Mallon considers common among healthy, growing churches.

“A building, no matter how grand and beautiful, is only as good as its foundation”. Fr. Mallon goes on to say, “The foundation of any human organization is the culture of that organization. The church is no exception.” (88) The Church, both human and divine, can benefit from those things that create health in any human organization. What Fr. Mallon sees as the necessary change to establish a strong foundation is nothing short of the transformation of the culture of the parish community.

We see the culture of any organization reflected in what is truly valued. These values are communicated by what is done (or left undone), by what is celebrated, what is tolerated and what is presumed. These values are communicated in how we allot resources; time, money, facilities, labor. “An honest evaluation of parish budget will remove any doubts about the true values of any parish, regardless of what statement may be framed on the wall. The sum of what a parish values will constitute its culture.” (90).

An example of the importance of parish culture can be seen in efforts to implement the ‘new evangelization’ in parishes. Looking for a ‘quick fix’, a new program or course to do the trick, we find that in the end our efforts fizzle out and die. “Any course run in a parish will only be as good as the culture of that parish”. If evangelization is to take root there must be a parish culture that values it.

Healthy, growing churches have in common particular values that provide strong foundations. Our part one discussion will include the first three of ten Fr. Mallon discusses.

1. **Giving Priority to the Weekend**

“The priority of any parish, and any priest, ought to be about preparing for and celebrating the Sunday Eucharist to make it the best possible experience for the maximum number of people.” (96) Fr. Mallon explains that every aspect of the Sunday celebration should be intentional, our best efforts. “The days of the 50-minute get-it-over-and-done-with Mass must end”. The expectation of the amount of time we spend at Mass, he says, is formed simply through habit. We are schooled by experience. In the Western world, serving the unspoken value of ‘convenience’, we are habituated to the hour Mass. We have developed a culture of minimalism; what is the least we have to do to make it count. “Minimalism and convenience cannot be the primary values of a healthy church. Minimalism and convenience have no place in the life of the disciple who is called to save his or her life by losing it.” (100).

2. **Hospitality**

“Someone once said that the church is the only organization that exists mainly for the sake of those who do not belong. This is the difference between a church and club. Clubs exists for the sake of their members.” . . . “Hospitality, therefor, does not mean being friendly with our friends and all the people who look, think and talk like us, but reaching out to the stranger.” (100)

Describing hospitality from the point of view of the outsider, in contrast to the member, we are challenged to realistically look at how we welcome the stranger in our parishes. Details like who is on the hospitality team (do they have the gift of hospitality?), how clean and welcoming is the facility, and do parishioners practice ‘pew hospitality’ (create room, smile), are part of what we need to consider. Hospitality also includes an awareness and intentionally in how we welcome and invite the unchurched into Liturgy and extends to how we make ‘registering’ a relation-based process instead of just a name on a list. Hospitality is presented as the heart of relationship and belonging, a mark of a healthy church.
3. **Uplifting Music**
Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy called for a renewal of all aspects of liturgy to encourage “full, conscious, and active participation.” (SC#14). In the years following Vatican II the role of music was seen as a way to effect this change. Often though, the old and the new of music style did not benefit from the both/and approach and music choice became divisive. Fr. Mallon makes a case for diversity over uniformity embracing both the old and the new with “distinct flavours and experiences of liturgy at each of the weekend masses”. (113) The pastor comments on the need to reflect more intentionally on the genres and types of hymns we choose so as to help us enter more fully into the liturgy and advocates giving the song of praise a preferential place. Attending to the quality of music is important including installing, maintaining and updating a quality sound system. A discussion of the use, placement, quality and operation of screen technology follows.

In reading this section of the chapter what stood out for you? Surprised you? Challenged you? With what did you agree? Disagree? What did you underline or highlight? What notes did you make?

**Questions for discussion:**

1) Do you agree or disagree with Fr. Mallon’s assessment of parish culture and values? Why? Be specific.

2) Reflecting on your own parish community, how high of a priority would you say is given to the celebration of Sunday Liturgy? What evidence do you see to support your answer?

3) What evidence do you see of the culture of minimalism and convenience in your parish?

4) Consider your experience of the various ministries in your parish. Would an outsider (or someone in another ministry for that matter) describe them as a church or a club? Why? What are some steps that could be taken to prevent ‘clubs’ forming in ministries?

5) What does the Sunday morning experience look like through the eyes of the person who does not yet belong? An unbiased assessment of how we welcome the stranger is difficult. We often think we are parishes of hospitality (it’s in our mission statement) but the reality can be different. How can we make an honest assessment of how we are doing in this regard?

6) How would you describe the role of music in Liturgy in your parish? Is there a variety of styles represented? What steps could make it more ‘uplifting’?

7) “If we wish to identify the values of a particular parish, we must look at how it spends its time and money. . . . If a parish says that evangelization is a priority, what is the budget for evangelization? . . . If a parish says that formation of adult disciples is of high value, why then is there no budget and no staff member who oversees this process?” (89)

What clues to your parish culture can be gleaned by reviewing its schedules and budget? Do the values revealed by schedules and budget reflect the parish vision? Its mission statement? How open are parish leaders to doing such a review?