PARISH LIFE CYCLE

MATURITY

Stable, Healthy Maturity
- Stability provides base for change, new ways, risk. Allows more choices about how to shape parish life
- A balance between stability and change
- Regular and reliable processes to reengage issues of formation -- "listening process."

Static Maturity
- Stuck in status quo; on a plateau
- Planning seen as way to control future (an illusion)
- Fussing over small things
- Not responding to new opportunities
- Losing sense of vision & purpose; identity is focused on the past
- If not addressed at the stage – the system will in time decline

Improvement Process might involve redefining

Improvement Process

Improvement Process

Organizational Redefining & Development Process

FORMATION

- Vision for and development of identity, purpose, mission, culture and related programs/activities
- New people – staff, members
- Increasing level of competence & commitment
- A "fit" between vision, program, resources, and culture. A sense of integration.
- Establishing relationships with external "publics" or constituencies that have a stake in the parish

DECLINE

- Denial, avoiding, stress, nostalgic climate
- Low or fragmented energy
- "Fear-blame" cycle increasing

External Intervention

DISINTEGRATION

- Rigidity, numbness, defensiveness
- All "fear-blame" cycle
- No internal leadership able to facilitate development

CREATION

- The "Idea", the "Dream"
- Founder(s)
- Initial funding

Developmental interventions need to fit where the system is in the parish life cycle. Seek the maximum degree of inclusion, open information, free choice from options, and internal commitment that can be attained at that stage (the further into decline the less this is possible). Parishes tend to have "reasons" to not engage the formation issues: In first formation – getting caught up in building projects or growth and not also spiritual formation. In Stable, Healthy Maturity – "we don't need it." In Static Maturity – embarrassment and denial. In Decline – denial, getting caught in trying to blame someone. As the system moves from Static to Decline to Disintegration there is more need for external assistance – consultants, the bishop's office.

DEATH
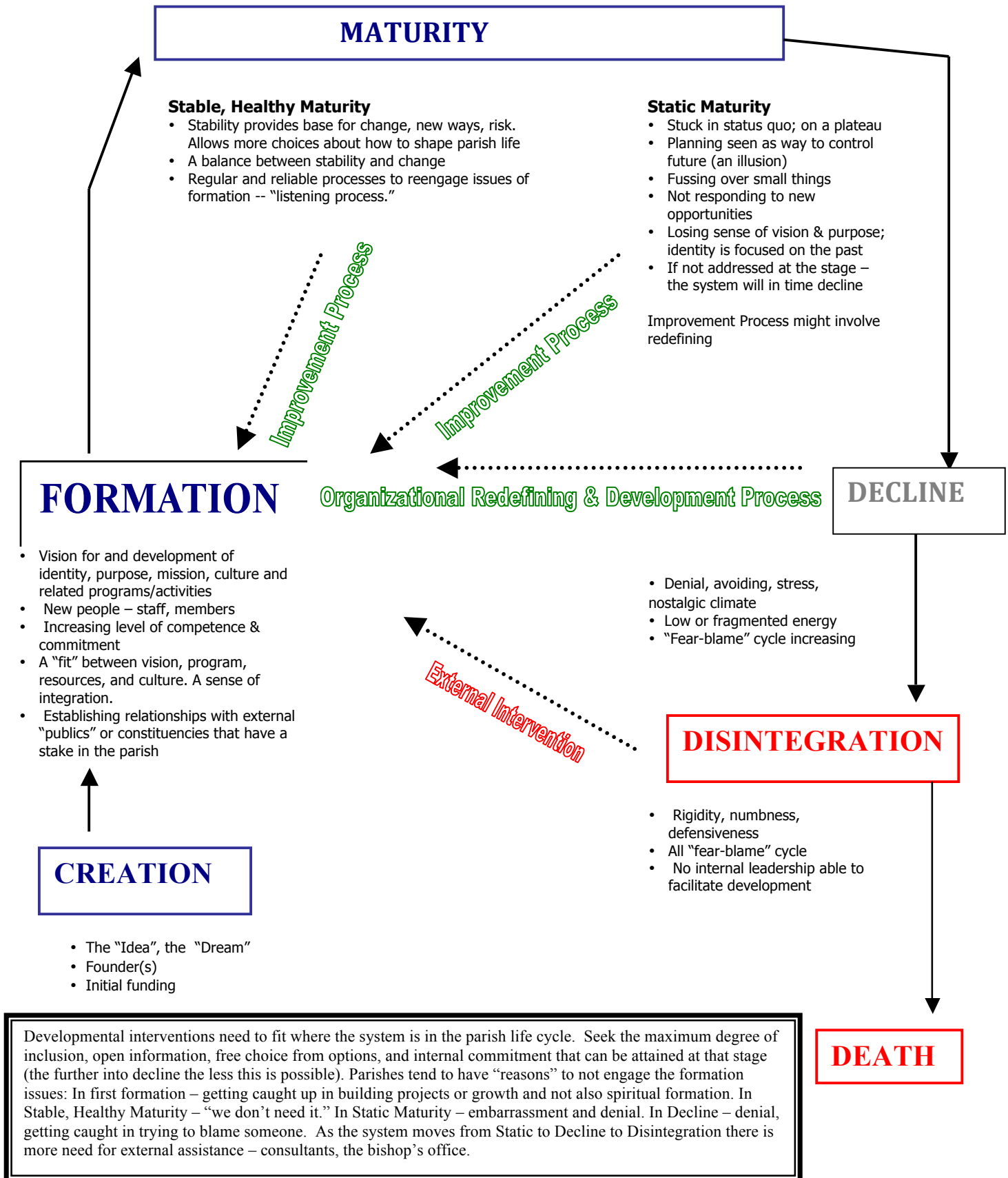
Where are we in the life cycle?

The perspective in this model is to determine the position of the parish in its life cycle by taking into account several factors:

• How well the parish focuses on the church's mission and the parish's primary task of worship and formation. For more background see *Fill All Things: The Dynamics of Spirituality in the Parish Church*; Page 10 - 14

• How healthy the parish is in terms of spiritual practice and emotional intelligence.

• How strong the parish is in terms of institutional factors such as finances and property upkeep.

These elements are all interdependent. Strength or weakness in one will feed strength or weakness in the others.

The best staring place in making this assessment is to work with the descriptors in the diagram above.

Going a bit further might include seeing a healthy and faithful parish as one that continues to develop its capacity to:

• Renew people in their baptismal identity and purpose and send them, in Christ, for an apostolate with friends and family, at work, in civic life and in the church.

• Foster a strong life and ministry of worship, doctrine, action and oversight.

• Enable people to seek the presence of Jesus Christ in the people, things and circumstances of life, through stability, conversion of life and obedience.

• Nurture the Christian life of people at all phases of maturity; give special attention to guiding and equipping those of apostolic faith; and encourage all toward a more prayerful disciplined and compassionate Christian life.

              -- From *Fill All Things* page 18.