

Our Partnership Proposals

Prayer Resources

In this booklet you will find prayer resources to use at your meetings about possible parish partnerships – and also for the prayer outside those meetings which will support them.

Like many groups or organisations, the Diocese is looking towards the future and planning for change and development. As Christians, we have the very great advantage of having our reflections and discussions overseen and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Over the next few months, we are likely to be faced with some difficult decisions within a tight deadline and it will be tempting to want to ‘get down to business' quickly. This is often how we deal with things in daily life.

We know that for the foreseeable future, there are going to be fewer priests and people, so our fundamental purpose is to look at our current situation and to start working together to ensure that our communities can be viable centres for faith development, worship and outreach now and in the years to come. As part of this, we will, of course, have to discuss all of the implications associated with our partnerships including what happens with finance and property, but always with our key aim in mind – the building up of our communities as places where people can learn how to be disciples of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century.

If you come up with ideas that others might find useful, please get in touch and share them. They will be available on the *Forward Together in Hope* website so that parishes and groups can create personalised materials.



**Prayer Outside Meetings**

Not all our parishioners will be involved directly in meetings but this process involves – and needs – everyone. Think about ways in which people might be able to contribute through prayer and other activities during this period. Below are some suggestions – but there are many more that you might come up with yourself.

**Anchors**

Several parishes have commissioned “Anchors” – people who have a special ministry of praying at home. Call upon them to pray for this part of the process. Tell them when meetings are happening so that they can be with you in spirit. Let them know which churches are being represented so that they can open their prayer out to the members of the prospective partnership.

**Daily prayer focus**

Suggest to your community that each day is dedicated to a different group/ individual engaged in this stage of the process and remind them weekly in the newsletter. For example:

* **Sunday** – Everyone!
* **Monday** – Clergy (name them – don’t assume everyone will know)
* **Tuesday** – Parish Pastoral Councils or equivalent
* **Wednesday** – Finance Committees
* **Thursday** – Catechists, teachers and students
* **Friday** – Those involved in cleaning / flowers / administration and upkeep of the churches
* **Saturday** – For Bishop Séamus and those who will be responsible for assisting him in decision-making.

Once your partnership begins to take shape, you might set a day to pray for each of the communities in turn.

**Adoration**

Arrange to have periods of Adoration at times when people can pop in. For some places, this will be during the day – in others, the evening might be better.

You might coincide these periods of prayer with key meetings – letting people know so that they can focus their prayer on the reflections and discussions. You might also think about having a rota of Adoration between the proposed partnership churches. These can, of course, continue beyond this stage of the process.

**Feasts of All Saints and All Souls**

All our parishes have people who have died and who are our saints – or, hopefully, on the way to sainthood. These are the parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents (and beyond) of current parishioners. It is often their connection with local churches that people feel most concerned about when they feel under threat: ‘my grandad did the outdoor collection that helped build my church’ – ‘my nan did the flowers here for years.’ Baptisms, weddings and funerals are all events that mark the significance of our churches in the stories of people’s lives.

Think about some kind of celebration of your ‘All Saints’ and ‘All Souls’ this November. This might be as simple as an invitation for people to bring photographs (or, preferably, copies) linked to the story of individual churches with a note about what they represent.

Create a display of the photos and stories to exhibit over the feast days (and the weekend before and after). This could be compiled into a ‘snapshot of our story’ that can be kept in the parish archive. (If this feels unmanageable at this stage, you could ask someone to remember to do it next year).

Also, where a church is likely to close, this can be an important part of the grieving process; acknowledging the legacy of our saints and asking their intercession for the changes of our time, just as they faced changes in theirs.

**Prayer at Meetings**

As well as the support of the prayers of people in our parishes, there will be meetings to look at the formation of our proposed Partnerships– and these will take all sorts of forms. There are likely to be Pastoral Council and Finance Committee meetings, small group meetings and meetings of representatives from the different parishes involved. There might also be more “open” meetings at parish or proposed partnership area level. It is not possible to provide a one-size fits all liturgy or prayer so we have opted for offering a selection of ways to open a meeting – some readings (Scriptural and other) – and some thoughts for the close of the meeting. You do not need to use them all and may have better suggestions!

The online version of this booklet allows you to copy and paste your choices into a new document to print and use at your meeting. Think about adding pictures – some people find these aid reflection. Also consider having music to help people to focus.

**Opening Prayers / Reflections**

**Forward Together in Hope prayer**

*This prayer has become very familiar to many of us over the last couple of years and we have probably stopped thinking too much about its meaning! As part of your opening prayer, you might like to invite people to use the prayer as a kind of Lectio Divina – noting which words or phrases speak most to them that day and why.*

*Or ask people in the group what each section means to them in the light of where our Journey has brought us and the way that lies ahead.*

Glory be to the Father –  
in whom we live and move and have our being.

Glory be to the Son –   
whose name we bear  
and who calls each of us to be his disciples;  
to build his Kingdom   
and to go out into the world and bear its fruit.

Glory be to the Holy Spirit –  
pouring out grace and guidance,  
forming us and renewing us.

Inspire us all  
in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle  
to live the Gospel,  
to be open to change  
and to move forward together in hope.  
Amen

**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful…**

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful,

and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created,

and you will renew the face of the earth.

O God who has taught the hearts of the faithful

by the light of the Holy Spirit

grant that, by the gift of that same Holy Spirit,

we may be always truly wise

and ever rejoice in his consolation.

Amen

**Opening Responses based on the Sign of the Cross**

*The Sign of the Cross is hugely important to Catholics but, we have to admit, it is sometimes skipped over without really being prayed. The Responses below remind us that each Person of the Trinity is with us – and that we aim to hold this meeting (or simply say this prayer) in their name and under the sign of the Cross which offers us both hope and challenge to follow Jesus as disciples.*

Leader We gather in the name of the Father

**All Who has guided his people**

**from generation to generation;**

**leading them along paths**

**that may not be smooth**

**but which lead to a future**

**of promise and of hope.**

Leader We gather in the name of the Son.

**All Who entrusted his Church to disciples –**

**ordinary people**

**called to do extraordinary work;**

**and who entrusts his Church in our day to us,**

**ordinary people called**

**to continue his mission**

**of bringing his love and Good News**

**to people in our own time**

**and our own places.**

Leader We gather in the name of the Holy Spirit.

**All Who we trust**

**will guide our reflections and discussions;**

**helping us to discern God’s will**

**for his people in our area;**

**and gifting us with what we will need**

**to bring our part of God’s plan**

**to fulfilment.**

Leader We gather

**All In the name of the Father,**

**and of the Son**

**and of the Holy Spirit.**

**Amen.**

**Trasna – Crossing Place**

*A poetic reflection on the moments of choice we each make on our pilgrimage through life – to go on into the unknown with all its risks – or to try to go back to the ashes of yesterday’s campfire. It may speak to the group of where we as communities are at the moment.*

The pilgrims paused on the ancient stones

In the mountain gap.

Behind them stretched the roadway they had travelled.

Ahead, mist hid the track.

Unspoken the question hovered:

‘Why go on? Is life not short enough?

Why seek to pierce its mystery?

Why venture further on strange paths, risking all?’

Surely that is a gamble for fools – or lovers.

Why not return quietly to the known road?

Why be a pilgrim still?

A voice they knew called to them, saying:

This is Trasna, the crossing place.

Choose! Go back if you must,

You will find your way easily by yesterday’s fires,

There may be life in the embers yet.

If that is not your deep desire,

Stand still. Lay down your load.

Take your life firmly in your two hands,

(Gently… you are trusted with something precious)

While you search your heart’s yearnings:

What am I seeking? What is my quest?

When your star rises deep within,

Trust yourself to its leading.

You will have the light for first steps.

This is Trasna, the crossing place.

Choose!

This is Trasna, the crossing place

Come!

*Raphael Consedine*

**This short reflection from Thomas Merton might also strike a chord with some…**

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

*Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude*

**Scripture and Other Readings**

The Scriptures offer us a rich resource to draw on. Throughout his dealings with human beings, God has constantly called them on to new and bigger things. Few of them wanted to make the changes that went with that – but always God calls his people forward. As St Augustine reminds us – there is a restlessness in most of us which is God-given and helps us to look at the signs of the times around us and be willing (albeit sometimes reluctantly) to move towards the future he is laying before us.

We have suggested uses for a selection of Readings – but feel free to choose others – or to use the suggestions differently. They are given in full to make the job of copy and pasting easier – in the online version.

Prompts for reflection are also offered – again, use them if they look helpful or make up your own.

**Facing challenges ahead**

**Using suggestions offered by the group…**

Invite people to think about and share examples of times when Jesus took his disciples out of their “comfort zone.” Reflect together briefly on how the incidents helped to prepare the disciples for what lay ahead.

Jot down – or lodge firmly in memories – any that seem particularly relevant to you and your communities at this time.

**Put out into the deep…**

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

*Luke 5: 1-11*

***Prompts for shared reflection***

* Where do we feel that we have been working hard to help people face change and been getting nowhere?
* What does “putting out into the deep” mean for us? And for our communities?
* How do we deal with the feelings of unworthiness or fear as we tackle the issues facing us? How can we hear more deeply Jesus’ words “Do not be afraid – you will be catching people”?

**Working Together**

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’

*Matthew 9: 35-38*

***Prompts for shared reflection***

* If Jesus was to walk about our areas – and teach in our churches – what might he highlight as something for us to consider?
* Where are people feeling harassed and helpless – either in our areas (unemployment/ refugees, etc) or because of concerns around *Forward Together in Hope*? What we are doing to help them? – or might we do in the future?
* How do we help our people see that they are all called to share in the work of the “harvest”?

**Chosen to love and to bear fruit of the Kingdom**

‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

*John 15: 12-17*

***Prompts for shared reflection***

* What does Jesus’ commandment about loving one another mean in terms of what we are discussing today?
* How can people develop a sense of Jesus calling them a friend and entrusting his mission to the world (or their bit of it) to them?
* What difference does Jesus saying that *he* chose *us* rather than the other way round make to how we approach our conversation and proposal making? And how do we pass this on to people in our communities?

**Acts 15 – People coming together to discuss an issue of importance to the early Church**

*This is probably too long to use in its entirety but you could select phrases to show how the disciples learned to tackle issues that threatened to divide the community.*

*For example:*

‘Certain individuals came down… and, after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders…’

***Prompt for shared reflection***

* What issues might get in the way of our communities working together?

‘The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter.

‘The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.’

***Prompt for reflection***

* What can we learn from the way these early disciples addressed the issue facing them?

‘Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.’

***Prompt for reflection***

* How do we arrive at ‘the consent of the whole church’ – or consensus – and feed this back to our individual communities?

**Chosen to be living stones with Christ as our cornerstone**

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

…you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

*1 Peter: 2*

***Prompts for shared reflection***

* What are the similarities and the differences between a “spiritual house” made of “living stones” and buildings made of bricks and mortar?
* Do we – and our people – believe that we are a chosen race – a royal priesthood – a holy nation – God’s own people? And what are the implications of it?
* If we are “living stones” what are we being called to build in our locality?

**From *Christifideles Laici* (Christ’s Faithful People)**

*This is not scriptural but a document written by St John Paul that addresses the role of lay people and parishes in the building up of God’s kingdom and serving the world.*

The parish is the Church placed in the neighbourhoods of humanity, it lives and is at work through being deeply inserted in human society and intimately bound up with its aspirations and its dramatic events.

Oftentimes the social context, especially in certain countries and environments, is violently shaken by elements of disintegration and de-humanization. The individual is lost and disoriented, but there always remains in the human heart the desire to experience and cultivate caring and personal relationships.

The response to such a desire can come from the parish, when, with the lay faithful's participation, it adheres to its fundamental vocation and mission, that is, to be a "place" in the world for the community of believers to gather together as a "sign" and "instrument" of the vocation of all to communion, in a word, to be a house of welcome to all and a place of service to all, or, as Pope John XXIII was fond of saying, to be the "village fountain" to which all would have recourse in their thirst.

***Prompts for shared reflection***

* What does this vision of “parish” offer us – as inspiration or challenge – as we reflect on developing a partnership?
* How does the idea of a parish being a ‘village fountain’ help or hinder what we are trying to do?
* How might we start thinking about helping parishioners to see that this is what they are called to be – for themselves and for others?



**Closing Prayers**

At the end of the meeting, it is good to allow a time of quiet to help people to absorb what has happened and, where appropriate, what has been decided. It can be helpful to give a reflective résumé of what has happened and the conclusions reached.

Another possibility is to invite people to share (very briefly!) what has been most significant for them.

The simplest ending prayer is a Glory be… reminding ourselves that all we do is for the greater glory of God.

It might be appropriate to use the reflection written in honour of Blessed Oscar Romero (available in the *Preparing the Way* resources) or one of the suggestions below.

**You could use this prayer of St Teresa of Avila as it stands or change the “you” to “we”.**

May today there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you be content knowing you are a child of God.

Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.

It is there for each and every one of us.

*Teresa of Ávila*

**The following is very well known but would bear using in the adapted form below where we have simply changed ‘I’ and ‘me’ – to ‘we’ and ‘us’.**

God knows us and calls each of us by our name.…

God has created us to do Him some definite service;

He has committed some work to us

which He has not committed to another.

We have our mission—we may never know it in this life, but we shall be told it in the next.

Somehow we are necessary for His purposes…

We have a part in this great work;

We are links in a chain, bonds of connection

between persons.

God has not created us for naught.

We shall do good,

We shall do His work;

We shall be angels of peace, preachers of truth

in our own place, while not intending it,

if we do but keep His commandments

and serve Him in our calling.

Therefore we will trust Him.

Whatever, wherever we are,

we can never be thrown away.

In perplexity, our perplexity may serve Him;

If we are in sorrow, our sorrow may serve Him.

Our perplexity, or sorrow may be

necessary causes of some great end,

which is quite beyond us.

God does nothing in vain.

*Bl John Henry Newman*

**These verses also offer words to take on our way**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,

and do not rely on your own insight.

In all your ways acknowledge him,

and He will make straight your paths.

*Proverbs 3:5-6*

**Other Ideas**

* Do not lose sight of the value of time away together for reflection and to get to know others – either during this phase or begin to plan something for next year as the Partnerships begin to take shape.
* Advent resources will be available shortly and will have ideas and prayers that might be useful as the Team work through your proposals and Bishop Séamus and his advisers begin to see what is coming from people around the Diocese and make decisions as to how the Faith can be promoted and sustained into the future.