

**Towards  
New Horizons**

Discerning ways forward  
for our Communities

Introduction

The Church has always been in a state of change and growth – though some would say that we are in a time of faster change and slower growth. Parishes and communities are facing challenges unknown to previous generations – but also have opportunities which would have astounded them.

The three sessions offered here provide an opportunity to move away from focusing on the practical – essential though that is – to a time of more intense prayer and discernment as individuals and as a group. This will complement the “head” decisions and may offer insights or provide ways through when discussions seem stuck. As parishes/ groups will have their own particular concerns and issues, the material is broad-based so that those needs can be brought in as appropriate.

This material offers ideas for:

* Preliminary meeting – which can be held locally
* Day of Reflection away from the parish (Holy Island/ Minsteracres/ Ushaw, etc)
* Follow-up meeting – locally-based (and likely to lead into further meetings…)

It is loosely based on an Ignatian style of prayer for discernment. There is a document on the *Exploring the Way* CD which looks at this method of group decision-making. Another useful resource for background reading on the process or to follow up from these sessions is *Spiritual Intimacy and Community* by John English SJ (Darton, Longman and Todd)

It is likely that these meetings will follow on from many other meetings – of pastoral councils – finance committees – school governors, etc. The focus of these meeting is prayer and reflection. If a short business session is essential, set time aside before the meeting and use the Opening Prayer as the point at which the dynamic changes. Although the concerns of the group will obviously be part of the meeting, this is not the time for *discussion about* them but *reflection on* them.

**Tips…**

* Allow about an hour and a half for the local meetings..
* Be aware that this may be a completely new way of working for some of those present.
* Confidentiality – what is said in this meeting is completely confidential – not to be minuted or even referred to unless the speaker is happy for that to happen.
* Ensure that everyone has time to contribute – but also recognise that some might take the reflections away and come back with thoughts at a future meeting.
* Encourage people to be honest – to speak ‘their’ truth – but to respect the honesty of others. The Holy Spirit is at work through everyone present – the task is to listen to to hear what the Spirit is saying.
* Include others in reading and leading prayers.