Praying at Meetings

Ideas for Leaders

We have all been meetings which have begun and ended with a quick prayer. This is not a bad thing but is a little like seeing prayer as the bread in a sandwich—it certainly holds the contents in safely but is not really seen as important as the filling in the middle.

We believe that the Holy Spirit is present throughout our meetings. Jesus himself said that where two or three of us are gathered together he is present in our midst. This means that he is there at the beginning and the end—but also in the middle… when our attention begins to drift - when we are angry - when we cannot see what someone is getting at - when things suddenly fall into place—when a consensus is reached that we had begun to think was impossible.

In *Forward Together in Hope*, Bishop Séamus has encouraged us to place a high priority on prayer and the meetings we hold to review life in our communities are important places for this to happen. If we do not centre them on prayer, there is a real danger that they will become exercises in looking at our finances and properties in isolation from who we are and what these things enable us to do.

How might we do this? Here are ideas that other parishes and communities have found useful. Some will suit your community more readily than others but do not be afraid to try something new. It may help people to see things differently—or shift a blockage—or open up a new way of drawing closer to God—or simply send you back to your usual way of praying with a renewed sense of how right it is for you!

* Invite your *Anchors* (see the Anchors leaflet) to pray at the same time as your meeting. You might like to give them an overview of what is to be prayed/ discussed.
* Begin your meeting with a time of Adoration… or give a brief introduction as to what is to be covered or dealt with at the meeting and then invite people to spend time before the Lord sharing their thoughts and concerns with him and being open to his guidance for the meeting to follow.
* Invite people to spend time before the Blessed Sacrament during the meeting… Depending on your parish’s buildings, you could start the meeting with everyone together – perhaps for tea/ coffee and a shared time of prayer. If you can, give those who will be holding the meeting in prayer a rough idea of the timetable for your meeting so that they can “tune in” at various points. Bring everyone together again at the end if possible to close the meeting.
* Use an extract from scripture (ideally), church document or other inspiring words that relate to the things you will be reflecting on together.
* Call on your parish, deanery and diocesan patron saints at the beginning or end of the meeting.

Possible format of a meeting

Begin by reminding people what you are there to discuss/ reflect on during this session, hand out the Reading (but propose that people might like to keep it face down for now) then invite everyone to become still in the presence of God and of each other and make the Sign of the Cross.

Pray a short prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open everyone’s minds and hearts to what the Word of God – or chosen reading – might be saying to them for the meeting… (See the *Group Decision Making* document on the *Preparing the Way* CD for more information).

Read the Reading slowly and prayerfully – inviting people to notice if anything strikes them or evokes a deep feeling or emotion – particularly in the light of the meeting’s concerns.

After a pause, invite people to hear the Reading again but this time to follow along with the text – but, again, being alert to anything that seems to be being prompted by the Holy Spirit.

Allow time for people to reflect on what stood out – and why it was given at this time. This should be a substantial time – around 10 minutes.

*If you have started with prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, invite those attending the discussion/ reflection part of the meeting to leave quietly*.

Depending on the size of the group, people could speak briefly to their neighbour or share thoughts with the wider group.

A few tips

* If your group is unfamiliar with this style of prayer, it may take a few goes before people are comfortable with it.
* Ensure people realise that this is holy ground and what they say is for the group and this time and place only.
* Leaders – it is important that you give others permission to say things that they don’t think you will like or agree with!
* It can help people to jot down what they want to say first and then put it to one side until they are ready to speak. This helps them to listen and focus on what others are saying.
* Remind them that the Holy Spirit speaks through everyone and that what they have sensed –or thought – is important… even if, at first sight or hearing, it seems strange or at odds with what they would like to be saying.)

Allow a short time for people to ponder what they have heard – to notice any deep thoughts – feelings – emotions – that have emerged as they listened and to be aware of them but not overwhelmed by them.

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Enter into the next stage of the meeting – looking at documents/ discussion, etc… but with half a mind and heart on what has come up in the prayer.

It can be helpful to pause about halfway through and ask people to review what has happened so far.

They might like to consider things such as:

* How is what we are saying here reflecting what was given in the prayer?
* Do we seem to be going in the same direction as the prayer or are we heading somewhere else?
* Is something jarring?
* Where are things feeling “right”?
* Is there something deep within me that needs to be said? And how am I going to say it in a way that takes things forward?
* Am I being challenged?
* Are we building the Kingdom of God – or are we focusing on ourselves and what makes us comfortable?

Give people a few minutes and then ask for any thoughts/ reflections.

Once satisfied that people have said what they need to, continue with the meeting.

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Towards the end, allow another time of silence and invite people to gather up the meeting – things that have been said or done or decided that speak of being in harmony with God’s will – and, perhaps, things that seem to be about disharmony.

Invite comments or thoughts but not discussion at this stage (you want to get home before midnight!). Is there anything pressing that the group needs to take away and pray with and, if appropriate, ask your *Anchors* to pray about before the next meeting?

Re-join the Adoration or prepare to welcome those who continued the prayer into the meeting.

In your own words (or using those below) give thanks for the graces received during the meeting… (you might invite people offer their own thoughts here) to acknowledge where things seemed to move away from seeking God’s will… and then pray for the grace to continue the work of the parish and for God’s blessing on yourself and those whom you serve.

Loving and all-powerful God,

We thank you for the grace of this time –
 for our companionship
and your presence among us.

We thank you particularly for….

We acknowledge that we have at times disagreed or caused hurt
which has led us away

from seeking your will for us
and for the community we serve.
For this, we ask your pardon…

We know that you are our God
and we are your people.

We thank you for entrusting us with the care of N…. (name of parish or community)

and pray that we will be worthy of this trust,

sharing the gifts that you have given to us with others

and helping them to grow
in knowledge and love of you.

We ask this in the name of our Lord,
Jesus Christ,

Amen.

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

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