

Update – October/November 2016

Preparing for Partnership



Although it seemed to last a little longer than usual, Summer does now seem to be behind us; schools are back with a vengeance and Christmas cards have appeared in the shops.

In 'Hopeland' we're turning our attention towards the five Vicariate Meetings taking place in September and October and then beyond to the key date of 27th November – the First Sunday of Advent. By mid-day that day (before then would be even better) we need to have received proposals for partnerships from all parts of the diocese. Between now and then we are expecting parish communities to work together and to come up with a completed 'Our Partnership Proposals' document, setting out ideas for an extended partnership across a particular area. We expect one agreed proposal for the whole partnership – not one per parish – to be with us electronically by the deadline.

All of this is explained in some detail in two key documents that were issued recently. These, and lots of other items, can be found on the website www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk The first, *From Parish to Partnership*, sets out the benefits of partnerships and what these could be like – as well as presenting some of the key areas for consideration. The second, *Our Partnership Proposals*, is the actual document that will be completed and submitted by the partnership and asks you to give thought to a range of aspects from leadership through to premises.

We know that this isn't a straightforward process – particularly for some areas where much of this is very new. Indeed every parishioner and every parish is being invited to step a little further into the unknown by exploring these new partnership arrangements with a number of neighbouring communities. So how can we make it as smooth a process as possible? The following 'principles' might be worth taking on board:

Pray and be open to the Holy Spirit

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. Praying together and being fully open to the grace, guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit is the foundation for all that we are being called to do within *Forward Together in Hope*. Once again we have provided some suggestions to get you started. *Our Partnership Proposals – Prayer Resources*, available from the website, presents customisable ideas for use both within, and outside of, meetings.

Communication is Key

To get to where we need to go with this stage, careful communication will be required at all levels. Someone will need to take the initiative to contact neighbouring parishes to start to explore the potential for collaboration and arrange meetings. Deans have a particular role as they have a wider geographic coverage and they may initiate the communication.



Whether or not they do so, it is important for them to be kept 'in the loop' of what's happening. The priests, deacons and *Forward Together in Hope* lay representatives across a geographical area need to be kept informed too. The *Forward Together in Hope* Team is being approached for contact details of lay reps. While we are not in a position to provide these directly (due to commitments we have given to safeguard personal information) we are more than happy to contact parish representatives and ask them to contact you.

Sharing Information – and Gifts

Parish communities have recently received 'Observations on your Parish Questionnaire' and 'A Profile of Your Parish in Numbers'. They provide a concise insight into key aspects of parish life and sharing these between potential partner parishes can provide a good starting point for better conversations about what each parish can gain and contribute from closer collaboration. The whole idea of partnership is that we can share the gifts and talents given to each individual and each community for the greater benefit of everyone.

Think Big

Partnerships need to be viable groupings well into the future – and so they need to be sufficiently large to continue to work when the number of priests is such that there may be only one priest in a partnership area. But 'thinking big' is more than thinking about the size of the partnership; it is about daring to imagine very different ways of doing things and being Church. Thinking about partnership is an opportunity to think beyond the current boundaries and to think 'out of the box'. Allow the Spirit to move us and guide us to consider new possibilities.

And please don't forget, if you need any advice about how to go about this within your own area we are only an e-mail or telephone call away. Contact the *Forward Together in Hope* Team on 0191 243 3304 or hope@diocesehn.org.uk

Vicariate Meetings

Responses are coming in thick and fast for the forthcoming *Forward Together in Hope* Vicariate Meetings. Details of dates, times and venues are set out below.

Date and Time	Area	Venue
29 September 2016, 7-9pm	South Tyneside and Gateshead	St Joseph's Parish Hall, High West St, Gateshead NE8 1LX
6 October 2016, 7-9pm	Northumberland	St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy, Ridge Terrace, Bedlington, NE22 6ED
12 October 2016, 7-9pm	Cleveland and South Durham	St Augustine's Parish Centre, Larchfield St, Darlington DL3 7TG
19 October 2016 7-9pm	Newcastle and North Tyneside	St Mary's Catholic School, Benton Park Road, Newcastle, NE7 7PE
20 October 2016, 7-9pm	Sunderland and East Durham	St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and 6 th Form College, Biddick Lane, Washington NE38 9AF

The meetings are open to everyone but if you haven't already replied and wish to attend it is important to register *as soon as possible*. Full details and the reply slip are available at www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk. If you can't attend the session for your own Vicariate, please feel free to attend another.

The meetings aim to:

- Provide participants with a brief update on where we are on the *Forward Together in Hope* journey.
- Present a vision of what new partnerships could be like.
- Confirm expectations about the next stages of the process – and the development of partnership proposals.
- Provide the opportunity for participants to discuss and clarify any specific issues.

As they are at Vicariate level we hope that they will also help us all to see ourselves as part of the wider Diocesan family. The whole *Forward Together in Hope* Team will be at each meeting.

Please feel free to encourage parishioners to come and join us, and encourage them to let Nancy know that they are attending. If you cannot make the meeting in your own area, you will be welcome at another – again, just let us know that you are coming.

Bishop Séamus is very keen that as many people as possible are able to be part of the consultation. Bishop Séamus may not be able to attend all of the meetings, but we have a brief Introduction from him on DVD. This DVD will also be available on the *Forward Together in Hope* YouTube Channel. At the beginning of his statement the Bishop quotes something he said at the launch of *Forward Together in Hope* on 16 July 2014:

'I am very much aware of what is happening in our Diocese. I'm also becoming aware that parish communities might indeed flourish if we become less 'parochial', if we become more aware of our neighbours, more willing to work together to explore new possibilities'.

Welcome to Amy Cameron

We are delighted that Amy has joined us to help us coordinate the development of lay people in the diocese. Her first three weeks have been extremely busy. As she says in her own words:

I am hugely privileged to have been given this opportunity to explore and develop the role of lay people in our diocese. Since beginning the role on the 1st of September I have been analysing the parish questionnaire responses on laity and leadership and using the ideas as a springboard to imagine what might be.



I have spent these very early days meeting people inside and outside of the Diocese and making links with other Christian denominations and the Catholic Church overseas. I have also begun to

look at how we move forward as a missionary Church making provision for not just maintaining our current model of 'Church' in light of the reduction of priests but how we move into a new era of mission and discipleship.

The statistics demonstrate a real need for lay people to take more of a leading role than they have in the past and this requires careful training and a thorough exploration of people's gifts. People need to be supported and encouraged to be brave and to consider how we move forward. Key to this process is looking seriously at the recruitment of volunteers at every level and encouraging a more outward facing community. I can see that this needs a holistic focus at parish level on what it means to be a mature, intentional, 21st Century Disciple and with that to imagine new possibilities for our communities on our purpose and mission. My initial thoughts at this stage are that this cannot be done in isolation - to have any real impact on our future Church we need a strategic whole-diocesan approach.

With new partnerships there comes exciting opportunities to look at how we operate as parishes and to look at what power still sits untapped in our pews. Partnerships bring possibilities for sharing of good practice, for working on joint ventures and for enhancing a communion of communities. It is an exciting time to be a lay person in our diocese.

Amy has been making contacts with people in leadership roles in other Christian communities in our diocese and is happy to hear from you about initiatives you are aware of. She can be contacted on our usual number 0191 243 3304.

Hope Conkers All

The Department for Spirituality held one of its regular meetings of a Network gradually being built up by people around the diocese who have an interest in spirituality in all its guises. We were looking at 2017 and reflecting that any ideas we came up with needed to reflect that this will be a very significant year in the life of our diocese.



The meeting took place at Minsteracres and took the form of an overnight gathering.

On the Friday evening, it became clear that members of the Network were by turns anxious or frustrated or despondent about what lay ahead. We realised that we had a microcosm of the diocese and that, just as people there felt all these things, so people in our parishes and schools were likely to be feeling them too. We decided to give some time to praying about it—to acknowledge the reality of these emotions that could so easily have got in the way of what we were there to do! The next morning, Kathryn led some thoughts linking how we felt to how the prophets felt. This seems a bit grand but when we thought about it, people like Isaiah knew just what it felt like to be overwhelmed by circumstances—and Jeremiah how it felt to point out where people were heading away from God and the fear that can go with that—and Amos, angry when he saw injustices—and so on. What we recognised was that they did not hold onto their feelings or allow them to control them. Instead, they spent time working out what God wanted and then channelled that energy into building up what we would now call the Kingdom.

On a morning prayer walk, one of the participants came across some horse-chestnuts blown down by the wind. He brought them to the Saturday morning session to share his insights which spoke deeply to the group. Here was something that is incredibly prickly—which reflected our own prickliness! But inside is something that is smooth and shiny and beautiful. And, even more powerful

was the thought that what was hidden inside the prickliness was a fruit... and planted and tended that fruit would grow into a tree that will grow and blossom and, in its turn, bear fruit.

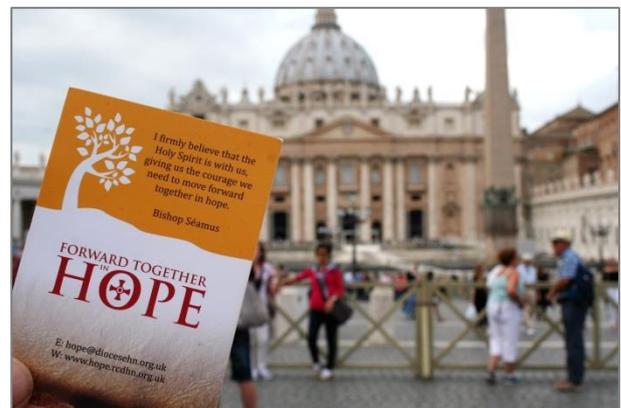
So if you feel prickly about things at the moment, perhaps think like a prophet and find how God wants you to use the energy for positive things rather than dwelling in the negative. Or think about that horse chestnut that can teach us so much about the treasure for our diocese - hidden, at the moment, beneath the prickles!

In brief:

- Prayer resources for this phase are now online.
- Advent resources, picking up the theme of “Hope on the Horizon” will be available early in October.
- We are looking at setting up more local networks to support prayer and spirituality. If you are interested, please get in touch!

‘Hope’ reaches the Vatican

It seems that *Forward Together in Hope* knows no boundaries - as evidenced by the photograph below captured recently outside St Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Where next?



Finding Out More

For the latest information about *Forward Together in Hope* and for access to the range of resources, please visit www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk.

To contact one of the *Forward Together in Hope* team (Jim O’Keefe, Nancy Gash, Amy Cameron and Tony Sacco) e-mail: hope@diocesehn.org.uk phone: 0191 243 3304.

