

**Towards  
New Horizons**

Discerning ways forward  
for our Communities

Preliminary Meeting

**This is a suggested outline for the Meeting, feel free to adapt to suit your particular circumstances.**

* **Create a prayer focus**

This helps to remind people that this is not a business meeting. The focus should be simple – a cloth, candle, Bible and a cross.

* **Arrivals and welcome**
* **Opening Prayer**

Use these or your own prayer.

Reader We light a light

**All And pray that the Light of Christ**

**might enlighten and guide us.** *(candle is lit)*

Reader We give thanks for the Word of God –

**All God speaking to his People generation by generation –**

**a message ever ancient – ever new:**

**words of challenge and encouragement –**

**words for us here today.** *(Bible placed on stand/ table)*

Reader We gather as disciples of Jesus Christ

**All Who has called us to follow him –**

**to bring his message of love and mercy to the world**

**and who faced the worst of humanity**

**in order to lead it to the best.** *(cross placed on table)*

* **Scripture Reading**

Check the Readings (especially the Gospel) for the Day or for the previous/following Sundays. Quite often they will offer a useful source for reflection. (It also avoids the look of having been “set up”!) Occasionally, the Readings will not work in which case try:

* Deuteronomy 30: 11-20 (perhaps extracts from)
* Jeremiah 29: 11-14
* Acts 2: 1-4

Before reading the passage, say a short prayer asking for the grace of the Holy Spirit to hear what God is saying to the individuals and to the group through the Word.

Invite people to listen to the passage first – and to identify and words or phrases that seem to speak to them.

Then give them to time to read it for themselves – again, trying to “hear” what God is saying to them through this Word.

In a time of stillness, invite people to say the word or phrase that has struck them – at this point without comment.

When everyone who wishes to speak has done so, read the passage again and then invite people to share their insights – why might their particular word or phrase have seemed to stand out?What was it saying to them? And to the group?

When everyone has spoken, invite the group to reflect on what they have heard –from the Word of God and from each other. Allow 5 or more minutes for this – perhaps, with quiet music playing.

* **Reflecting on our current situation**

The questions you pose for this part of the meeting will vary according to your needs but in principle, give people at least 10 minutes of quiet to think about the them. Invite them to move around or find a space.

Ideas for questions include:

* Where has God’s presence been clearly felt in our parish/ community? (In events, people, pilgrimages, etc…)
* Where has our community faced challenges before? And how did God work through them?
* Where do I sense God at work in our present situation?
* Where do I feel God’s absence?

It can help to suggest that people jot down what they want to say when they return to the group. (This can enable them to really listen to the others without formulating what they are going to say!)

* **Sharing our Reflections**

Invite people to share what they have written – insofar as they feel able (do remind them that their insights are valuable and may help others in moving forward). Encourage them at this stage to stick to what they have written (maybe with a little elaboration/ clarification – but not much). Emphasise the importance of really listening to what each person has to say. Where is it echoing what I have felt/ thought? Where does it clash?

When everyone has shared initial reflections, open the session up to more general discussion – focusing as far as possible on what has emerged during the reflection time rather than well-worn arguments. This can take as long as you need – honouring the time agreed for the meeting to finish.

* **What do we want to take to the Day of Reflection?**

Allow people another few minutes of quiet to think about – what one thing do I want to take to this Day? A question? An affirmation? A struggle?

Again, invite them to jot it down – or draw it and then to bring it back to the group. Emphasis that everyone needs to put something in and that it needs to be legible/ discernible to A.N Other!

Give people a chance to talk about the hope/ question they want to take with them and then put the writings/ drawings into a large envelope – bring this with you.

* **Closing Prayer**

Lord God, we thank you for this time of meeting.

We thank you for your unending care of your people

and for your assurance that you are with us always.

Bless our work

and grace us with your Holy Spirit as we continue to pray

and discern your will for ourselves

and for our parish/ community.

We ask this in Jesus’ name

**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**.

And may God bless us and keep us

and, until we meet again,

may God hold us in the palm of his hand.

**Amen**