

FORWARD TOGETHER  
IN  
**HOPE**

# Some Food for Thought

**Starting to share our Ideas across  
the Diocese**



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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## Some Food for Thought

There is an enormous range of excellent ideas and innovative practice taking place in parishes all across our diocese. We sometimes take this for granted and assume that ‘everyone else is doing it’ so just keep it to ourselves. Or we might recognise that we are doing something quite special but don’t really know how best to spread the news to other areas.



The starting point for this guide was the invitation to all parishes to provide examples of good practice as part of the process of completing their detailed *Forward Together in Hope* Parish Questionnaire. We asked the question:

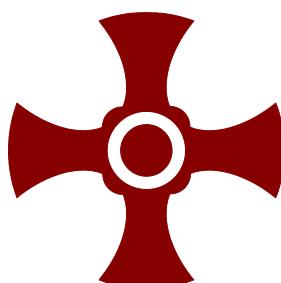
***'Is there something that your community is involved in  
which will be of interest to others in the diocese?'***

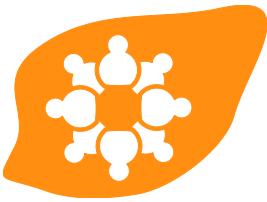
This document draws upon the responses parishes gave us, grouping these into a number of themes and indicating which parish or parishes presented each example. When producing the guide we were very conscious that this was very much a ‘snapshot in time’ of just some of the things that were in place when questionnaires were completed. It is in no way comprehensive or fully representative; some parishes haven’t offered any examples and some have offered many. However, this is just the beginning of the process of sharing such ideas across the diocese - a process that we feel would be good to continue and build upon.

After all, why reinvent the wheel when you can learn from other people’s ideas and refine them for your own circumstances? So please keep your ideas flowing and provide them to us using the e-mail address below. We will periodically update this document and make it available via the *Forward Together in Hope* website at [www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk](http://www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk)

We are very grateful to every parish for the excellent work that all of you do – and to those who were able to share some of their interesting practice with us. We are also grateful to Gerard Murphy who carried out the task of organising and editing all your contributions.

We hope that you find this resource of value as we work even more closely with neighbouring communities as part of a strong diocesan family. If you wish to follow up any of the examples please get in touch directly with the parishes concerned. Contact details are provided on the Diocesan Website or the Northern Catholic Calendar.





## 1. Active Involvement of People/The Christian Faithful

### Parish Groups

**Anchors and Anchorites** are commissioned in their homes. They are given a holding cross by parishioners at St Joseph's, Stanley.

St Thomas of Canterbury, Billingham, has a strong and continuing band of **altar servers** held together by their commitment and by **socials** and **outings**. At English Martyrs, Newcastle, children are invited to become **altar servers** after completing their First Holy Communion. They have large numbers and they now also **read the Bidding Prayers** at weekend Masses.

An **Art Group**, of mainly parishioners, has worked in the Parish Centre at Our Lady Immaculate and St Cuthbert in Crook to prepare art works such as **tiles, banners and murals** depicting both the religious and secular.

St Mary's, Hexham runs a **Parish Walking Group** "a great way to fitness and fellowship". The **Walking Group** at St Joseph's in Stockton was established over 20 years ago and is still going strong. The group welcomes all-comers both Catholic and non-Catholic and attracts people from outside the parish. "**Stella Strollers**" a monthly walking group provides "a social atmosphere, some exercise and a real bonding experience" at SS Mary and Thomas Aquinas, Stella.

The organisation of **Drama, Youth Club** and **Choral Concerts** is an important aspect at St Bede's, Jarrow.

The **Drama Group** at St Augustine's in Darlington has for many years provided an **open activity** which continues to draw people into the parish community.

*"My parish, (St Teresa, Darlington) provides an acting and drama group. I have been a member for as long as I can remember. It is a brilliant community of people who have fun and come together annually to provide entertainment for the church. A brilliant way for me to stay involved in the church and my parish".*

**A Creative Church** - seasonal **craft activities** and **prayer** for younger children, parents and carers takes place at St Joseph's, Stanley.

St Matthew's, Jarrow, has a **thriving playgroup**, operating 2 mornings a week, which caters for some 30+ young children and their carers, mums and dads, grandparents and child-minders, thereby supporting the local community.

**SVP** is a particular strength at St Mary Magdalen, Seaham Harbour. At St William's in Trimdon the **SVP group**:

*"...although small, is vital to the continued success of the parish by way of visiting the sick, housebound and bereaved, in preparing the church for services, leading the daily rosary, completing maintenance work, organising charitable giving and volunteering at the foodbank and in many more ways."*

### Parish Activities

**Parish Pilgrimages/Tours** - Over the past few years the Holy Family, Darlington has travelled to Rome, Assisi, Santiago de Compostela, Fatima, Paris, Lisieux, San Giovanni and Northern and Southern Ireland. The pilgrimages usually take place in May. A priest has travelled with them on all but one occasion. The pilgrimage is now called "a tour". It is open to all the churches in Darlington and is advertised in every church in Darlington in their bulletin. The organiser is available after Mass in the other churches. The tour is open to everyone including friends and family. There have been members of the Anglican Church and on one occasion a person of the Hindu faith.

**Regular parish pilgrimages** feature at Durham Martyrs and All Saints, Ferryhill.

**Parish 'Away Days'**, which give parishioners of all ages the opportunity to get to know each other are a regular feature at SS Mary and Thomas Aquinas, Stella.



## Regular Events

The bringing together of *all volunteers for the annual May 1st Mass* at St Thomas of Canterbury, Billingham, has boosted the parish community.

At St Gregory, South Shields, on Easter Saturday the young families of the parish meet to make ***flower arrangements*** to be given to the older members of the parish on Easter Sunday. Young children make ***Mother and Father's Day gifts*** on the run-up to the day. These are distributed by the children after Mass.

St Patrick's in Dipton organises an ***Annual Flower Festival***; there is a ***Children's Choir*** and ***local choir concerts*** are held in church.

Sacred Heart and English Martyrs, Thornley, have a ***Parade of the Saints at All Saints Bar-B-Que.*** They also run ***Family Days*** with ***Garden Parties*** and ***Cream Teas.***

***Goodnight stories*** in church with hot chocolate for very young children and their families, leading into Christmas take place at St Joseph's, Stanley.

There is a very successful ***Annual Mass and Buffet for the Sick*** at St William's, Trimdon, which helps ensure the whole community feels involved in the life of the parish.

## Social Events

The parish of Our Lady and St Joseph in New Hartley has a very active ***Social Committee*** which is excellent at organising regular social and fund-raising events throughout the year and in so doing brings people of all denominations together in a very happy, welcoming atmosphere in the Parish House.

St Bede's, South Shields, highlight their social events throughout the year.

St Dominic's Priory, Newcastle makes **no charge** for ***tea and coffee*** and this encourages many more people to come in after Mass.

Parishioners at Our Lady and St Oswin's, Tynemouth and Cullercoats, are invited to a ***Wimbledon Strawberry and Cream Party.***

St Teresa's in Darlington run a ***drop-in coffee morning*** during the week for older people and young parents with children.

St Joseph's, Ushaw Moor, has an established 2:00pm to 4:00pm **Social Group** on Tuesdays and

more recently has set up a Thursday group from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. Both are open to Catholic and non-Catholic members and provide a social environment for local people with no age or gender restrictions.

At St John Vianney, West Denton, there is a ***thriving Wednesday Mass and Coffee Morning*** when many elderly parishioners meet socially.

*At Our Lady and St Cuthbert, Prudhoe “We build and sustain our community spirit through our social events”.*

St Dominic's Priory, Newcastle, say that a ***Beetle Drive*** is a good way of involving all age groups. A ***magician*** at the ***Parish Fayre*** makes the occasion more memorable.

St John the Baptist, Annitsford, use Emails and mobile texts to communicate effectively, accurately and quickly. They recommend using feedback forms at events to capture contact information and create distribution lists to inform people about similar events. Using ***social media*** such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and parish websites allows information to be quickly distributed and shared along with comments and feedback from people. Social media also is a great way to communicate with a wider audience that would not normally be accessible. They also hand out flyers in A5 form to promote future events which are also sent out electronically.



## Welcome!

St Bede's, Sacriston is a very **welcoming community**, a feature mentioned by both visitors and weekly attendees.

*"Our community works well together and we have helped each other through some difficult times. We utilise the skills of our parishioners, who are hardworking people and contribute unstintingly in every way that they can to making sure we maintain a thriving community".*

The growth and development of Our Lady and St Aidan's Parish Community in Wallsend since 2004 has come about through an "emphasis on our lives as community - in the broadest sense". Many of the gains have been the result of **social activities** where the parish has actively sought to involve as many people as possible of any faith or none. This work has been at times slow. It is in this way that the work of **Mission and Evangelisation** is being carried out, not through large initiatives but through "*the growth and inclusiveness of our groups*".

At Our Lady and St Columba, Wallsend, we feel we are particularly good at welcoming young families to the Church. Our "*celebration of Baptism, the programme of opportunities we offer and the support of the congregation*" all make up a **welcoming package** to young families.

St John the Baptist Annitsford, sends out **Baptism Anniversary cards** to children (and adults) across their parish. They use the parish baptism registry to send a personal card. They intend on using this idea for children celebrating the anniversary of their First Holy Communion.

St Cuthbert and St Joseph, North Shields say:

*"We believe that we offer a sense of welcome and care to those who are part of our parish community and those who come to visit. We do not always get this right and, inevitably, there are those who have had not so positive experiences due to an unkind word or action - but we feel that we are reflective and compassionate. We want people to feel cared for and loved not only by Our Lord, but by His Church in North Shields too".*



## 2. Leadership

### Leadership and Management

At St Augustine's, Darlington, there are "**clear systems of leadership and management** which enable effective communication".

St Robert's, Fenham and English Martyrs, Fenham, have both developed **seven Parish Spiritual and Pastoral Teams** focused on the key areas of parish life, each led by a team of around four parishioners and co-ordinated by the parish priest, supported by a lay co-ordinator. Each team meets and works independently and there are termly co-ordinating meetings when team leaders meet with each other, the parish priest and the lay co-ordinator to review progress and plan future activities. "**Away days**" are used for prayer, strategic planning and spiritual nourishment. The seven teams are: Spiritual and Personal Growth, Liturgy, Communication, Outreach, Youth, Social Activities and Resources.

The parish of St Teresa of the Infant Jesus in Newcastle have a **strong Pastoral Council and Finance Committee**.

The primary and secondary school head teachers linked to St Anne's and St Joseph's in Sunderland **meet with the priests of the Deanery every half-term**. This is proving beneficial to the life of the various communities and could be further developed.

St John Vianney, West Denton, has **paid administrative support**, which enables the parish priest to dedicate more of his time to his ministry.

Our Lady and St Oswin's in Tynemouth and Cullercoats have a **Parish Directory** which details all the activities which go on in the parish. This offers an opportunity to invite people to become involved:

*"Ask not what your parish can do for you but what you can do for your parish".*



St Elizabeth, Minsteracres, reviewed their ***Parish Vision and Mission*** as part of the *Forward Together in Hope* process. It now reads:

*Through the inspiration of the Gospel we will journey together towards the Kingdom of God.*

- 👉 *We will offer a warm and united welcome to all.*
- 👉 *Sharing our gifts we will grow in our love of God and each other through our celebration of the Eucharist.*
- 👉 *By our example we will provide support and encouragement in our faith to all.*
- 👉 *We will work in harmony with the Minsteracres Retreat Centre Trust and wider Minsteracres' community in our shared mission, recognising a joint responsibility for the continuity of this unique facility.*
- 👉 *We have a single purpose: to carry on Christ's work on Earth under the guidance of the Spirit. Christ, who came into this world to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve, not to be served.*

The **welcome and time** afforded by our priest to families of all ages attending church or not has been seen as strength of St Joseph's, Stanley.

### Lay Leadership

**Lay leadership and involvement** is a feature of St Joseph's in Birtley.

Holy Name, Newcastle has **transferred many responsibilities to parishioners**.

*"We have not had our own parish priest for over 20 years and so have developed our own way of surviving as an active parish. We have a priest for two masses a week and through a motivated and active community we are self-financing".*

(Ss William and Francis de Sales, Darlington)

There is a good level of **lay involvement in most aspects of parish life** at St Cuthbert and St Joseph, North Shields. Lay people take an active and positive role in making sure the **church building** is maintained, the **liturgy** is prepared and the needs of the people are met. We think we have something to offer other communities, who may rely heavily on the parish priest for leadership, a sounding board and support in developing a **distinct lay leadership**.

St John Vianney, West Denton "can be proud of its **lay involvement in parish life**".

### Leading and Managing Change

The Parish of the Durham Martyrs "has successfully merged 2 parishes (3 centres) into one". It has a very active **Parish Council** and we have **Parish Meetings** to impart information and gain a wider range of opinions.

Our Lady Queen of Martyrs, Newhouse states:

*"The way our community is evolving as one distinct parish in a wider community of parishes could be of interest. We share one priest, but still maintain our own community. If we can find a way forward in which we can flourish as a family of parishes, sharing resources, facilities and expertise, but maintaining individual places of worship specific and special to local communities, then that would be of interest to the wider diocese. Models of soft federation found in other institutions might be a good way forward for clusters of village churches".*

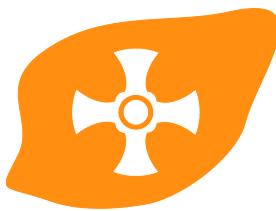
St Cuthbert and St Joseph, North Shields have undergone the merging of two distinct parishes into one, with two distinct traditions and ways of doing things. Naturally, this process presented them all with challenges and some level of anxiety, *"but generally the merger has brought far more benefits and opportunities. We feel that we can offer support and prayer for other communities facing this process and who may not know what lies ahead".*

At St Bede's, Sacriston;

*"We are well organised, especially with our Masses, with rotas established for key roles such as Reading and Ministering which work effectively. We can, and are more than willing to, give help and guidance to other parishes on how to sustain the community after the removal of a resident priest. From our experiences we are also in a position to warn against some potential problems which can be encountered in this situation".*



Although the Parish of St John Fisher & St Thomas More, Sedgefield lost its resident priest in recent years, they reaped the benefits of **advance planning of lay involvement**. Many systems were set in place years ago and through this transition, parish life simply carried on.



### 3. Worship and Spiritual Life

#### Holy Mass

**Latin and African Masses** are celebrated at St Joseph's, Gateshead.

There is an **International Mass** at St Teresa of the Infant Jesus, Newcastle, which contributes to the sense that the parish welcomes people of all nationalities and faiths.

At St Michael's, Houghton le Spring, the **Prayers of the Faithful** are written by **eighteen Bidding Prayer composers**. The great virtue of this system is that, apart from the high level of lay involvement and responsibility entailed, the prayers are always different in their style as well as relevant and highly current in content. An additional factor is that the reader is drawn from a totally separate **Bidding Prayer Readers rota** of 23 people. With each individual reader having their own personal reading style, this is also conducive to securing the listeners' attention and engagement. By convention, the composer does not read their own composition, which additionally subtly alters the final listening experience. The respondent comments;

*"It may not sound like a major practice but it means that the laity is involved in contributing directly to part of the Mass, which confirms their value and Common Priesthood. It is taken seriously, done conscientiously and produces a high quality result".*

St Michael's, Houghton le Spring also stresses the value of lay involvement as **Readers**. There are 28 Readers. They receive training and even well-established ones are provided with refresher sessions from time to time.

*"The scale of the lay involvement in the Reading Ministry is impressive, as is the serious and conscientious preparation that it is evident all our Readers make in the week leading up to their turn to read".*

#### Seasonal Liturgies

St Robert of Newminster, Morpeth has an **Ecumenical Advent Service** led by the Catholic Women's League.

At Sacred Heart, South Shields, an **Advent Carol Service** has proved very attractive to other denominations and people with little involvement in any formal religious practice.

*"It seems to be a non-threatening way to welcome people into our church. Followed by mulled-wine and mince pies, it offers a relaxed and enjoyable social occasion too".*

St John the Baptist, Annitsford, engage local schools in an **Advent Campaign for Schools** where each child takes home a **Christmas Invitation Card** along with a covering letter which invites parents/guardians to attend Christmas Masses and Carol Services. They also take home a **"Come home for Christmas"** leaflet and an **Advent lapel pin**.

In Holy Week, St Joseph's in Stockton holds a **service for the sick and housebound** so that they can share in the celebrations of the Paschal Triduum.

A **Remembrance of the Burial of Our Lord** on **Good Friday** is another service which engages the parish community of Sacred Heart, South Shields. It offers a setting in which to grieve for friends and relatives while reflecting upon the meaning of the death of Jesus.

*"It is a service full of meaning and pathos that expresses the essence of loss and hope, a fitting way to end Good Friday".*

At St Thomas Aquinas, Darlington, on **Remembrance Sunday**, the names of those parishioners or family members who have died during the previous twelve months are read out and a family member places a lighted candle and name card on the altar steps where they remain and are lit each Sunday during November.



At SS Mary and Thomas Aquinas, Stella, in November, ***the month of the Holy Souls*** - a **Bereavement Service** takes place one evening in the month and an extra Mass is celebrated each day, enabling those at work to offer Mass for family, friends and members of our community.

St Mary's Hexham holds a ***Procession for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception*** each December which has attendance from other parishes in the diocese, and they would welcome wider participation.

### **Other Liturgies**

The ***Children's Liturgy*** is highlighted at St Aidan's in Benton, St Thomas of Canterbury in Billingham, at St Bede's, South Shields and at St Mary's and Our Lady & St Oswin's in Tynemouth and Cullercoats; the "**bright, welcoming room**" is mentioned at St Agnes in Crawcrook; and a ***Children's Liturgy for toddlers*** is referred to at the Parish of the Durham Martyrs.

At Our Lady Immaculate and St Cuthbert, Crook they hold their ***Garden Fete*** on the last Saturday of June every year; it attracts a large number of parishioners, past and present. It has now become customary to hold a ***Blessing of the Graves ceremony*** in our cemetery, which adjoins the Church, after Sunday Mass the next day. "Parishioners find that this ceremony brings them solace and comfort".

At St Bede's, Bedlington, their ***24 hours of Prayer*** in October 2015 "was a great example of bridging with other neighbouring parish communities - it was well received and was widely supported with groups from the Deanery".

***Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament*** is ***lay-led*** at St Joseph's, Stockton.

St Mary's, Hexham, say that "***daily morning prayer*** is a wonderful way of connecting spiritually with the global church". Encouragement of parish use of the ***Liturgy of the Hours***, particularly ***morning and evening prayer*** is "one of the best kept secrets of Vatican II and should be more widely promoted".

At St Bede's, South Shields, they pray the ***Divine Office*** before weekday Masses.

The ***Prayer Group*** is a feature of Holy Rosary, South Shields.

***Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament*** before weekly Mass and the silence created has been much appreciated. There is also an opportunity for ***quiet, reflective prayer and adoration each Wednesday afternoon*** at St Joseph's, Stanley.

The ***Healing Ministry*** at St Joseph's in Stockton attracts people from a very wide area - not only from within the diocese but nationally too.

### **Enhancing Worship**

Parishioners at St Joseph, Birtley, appreciate the ***differing styles of the three weekend Masses*** (traditional music on Saturday evening, a quiet Mass early on Sunday morning and a family orientated Mass with more contemporary music at the 10.00am Mass on Sunday).

***Planning and preparing the liturgy:*** The Liturgy and Music group at St Cuthbert's and at the University Chaplaincy in Durham lead on the selection of music which is appropriate to the liturgy of the day. The children's liturgy group produce a simple rota, which gives information on the readings of the day, to give group leaders confidence in their planning

The ***bidding prayers*** which are written for St. Cuthbert's, Durham, are already shared with 20 other contacts, including eight parishes within the diocese.

***The standard of the liturgy:*** The Liturgy Team at St Cuthbert's Durham would be happy to help anyone looking for support to develop the liturgy in their own parish. In addition to the regular liturgy, they have a lot of experience in preparing liturgies for major feasts, occasional services (such as carol services) and ecumenical services.

***Creative Liturgies*** are a feature of St Joseph's, Stanley.

At All Saints, Ferryhill, there is "***very good music***" for the liturgical celebrations and everyone is encouraged to join in.

St Mary's Hexham, say, "***We have a great music programme spanning a wide range of styles.***"



St Anne's, Gateshead say ***music*** plays a very important role in their Masses/Services. The ***Music Group*** is a highlight at St Mary Magdalen, Seaham Harbour.

The inclusion of **live music** in the liturgy at St Cuthbert and St Joseph, North Shields;

*"Lifts the worship to a level which encourages devotion and stimulates people to deepen their faith in Our Lord".*

St Gregory, South Shields has a **very strong choir and music group** "who spiritually enhance the liturgies which they take part in". - There is a **strong music background** with **choir** and **music group** at St John Vianney, West Denton.

St Osmund's, Gainford Ordinariate are:

*"Very active and involved in the community. We use the village hall for our social events (and indeed are their biggest user!), we are at the heart of the '**Gainford Big Weekend**', we are involved strongly in Churches Together, we take part in and organise village musical events, and we contribute to the Village newsletter, and so on".*



#### 4. Education and Continuing Formation

##### Sacramental Preparation

St Patrick's, Dipton held a **Youth Alpha for Confirmation Programme**, led by teachers and young adults from St Bede's school, Lanchester.

The **Confirmation / Rome pilgrimage** from St Thomas of Canterbury, Billingham "is a great experience". A respondent from All Saints, Ferryhill, describes **First Confession and First Communion preparation** as "first class". St Bede's, Jarrow have **Sacramental preparation** and there is a **Confirmation Programme**, led by young adult leaders supported by young people already confirmed at St Joseph's, Stanley.

There is a **Scripture study** with the **Lynx Group** at the Holy Family, Darlington and a **Scripture Group** at St Bede's South Shields.

Durham Martyrs has **regular parish retreats** which strengthen their community as well as a very active **Faith and Light Group** - Holy Family, Hartlepool, has a **Family Retreat**. They say, "Everyone should have one!"

**The Journey in Faith** at St Teresa's in Newcastle and what they do in **Confirmation and First Communion Classes for Adults with children** were highlighted.

The Parish **Journey in Faith Programme** at St Joseph's in Stockton (Norton) is well attended from the deanery and elsewhere and is generally recognised as being very good.

The **Galilee Talks Project** at St Mary's Hexham has been enthusiastically received, providing as it does an opportunity to find out more about the Catholic faith and how it is applied in situations around us in society.

*"It seems to have tapped an unmet need for better knowledge and understanding of our faith, and we hope to continue and extend its scope in the coming months and years".*

St Robert of Newminster, Morpeth has **Ecumenical Dialogue and Study groups**.

St Dominic's Priory, Newcastle, has started a small **parish lending library** - which they hope will grow and become a resource that people can use to build their knowledge of the faith and find spiritual nourishment. They say that CTS pamphlets are too expensive for many people so this is a much more user-friendly option.

St Charles', Tudhoe used the **PowerPoint presentation and readings** on The Immaculate Conception with reflections and music provided by the Diocesan Spirituality Department. They also presented '**Come to the Well and Drink**' - three sessions during Advent provided by Kathryn Turner of the Diocesan Spirituality Department.



#### 5. Outreach

##### Local Outreach

**Lunch Clubs** are mentioned at St Teresa's, Annfield Plain (monthly); St Joseph's in Blackhall; St Wilfrid and St Cuthbert in Blyth; St Robert's in Fenham (weekly).

**Parish Sunday Lunch** at English Martyrs and Saints Peter and Paul in Stockton may be of interest to some other parishes. As a result of a

news item which stated that Sundays are the loneliest day of the week for people who live alone, they decided to offer a ***free Sunday lunch*** to anyone, whether they attend church or not, regardless of faith or lack of it. They say that the first few were a little awkward as no-one knew anyone else; most were widows.

*"Soon however, they got to know each other and now they all look forward to their **monthly get-together**. Some were sceptical at first but once they realised it was a completely honest and open attempt to cheer up their Sundays, they really opened up. One resource every parish has is a wealth of mums, dads and grandparents who know how to make the perfect Sunday lunch. If your church has a hall with an oven and a sink, try it, invite the community, invite non-church goers, and invite the lonely. You'll get more out of it than you'd expect to".*

The Parish also has an ***annual meal for senior parishioners*** and this is "one of the highlights of the Parish year".

An idea for the future St John the Baptist, Annitsford has to help bridge the gap between young and old is ***Adopt a Grannie***. A school class invites an older parishioner to visit the classroom at least once a week to do such things as "***Gospel Story Time***".

St Mary's in Barnard Castle mentions its involvement in the ***Prison Fellowship***.

Our Lady and St Cuthbert at Berwick upon Tweed say. "As our area is popular with ***holidaymakers*** we ***advertise widely*** to them and enjoy their presence at Mass, inviting them to make use of ***other resources*** within the parish".

The ***Choir*** at St Joseph's in Birtley provides ***music*** at ***every funeral*** that take place in the parish and for many funerals that take place in other churches in the area as well as for a number of funerals where there is no church liturgy but instead a "service" at the crematorium. They also provide music at many of the ***weddings*** in St Joseph's Church, in neighbouring parishes and other churches in the area. In the period leading up to Christmas the choir is very heavily involved in ensuring the real meaning of Christmas is taken into nursing homes, care homes and sheltered accommodation in the parish and beyond.

At St Joseph's in Blaydon, together with St Anne's, Gateshead, they have a ***Bereavement Group*** which is held every week at St Joseph's House. It is an ***ecumenical*** group which was started a number of years ago and is very successful.

*"It is a time for chat, tea, coffee sharing tears but also laughter for anyone who wishes to be there. Any passers-by can drop in and they will receive the warmest of welcomes. Privacy is always given to anyone who wishes to talk one to one".*

The ***ecumenical food bank*** at St Wilfrid and St Cuthbert in Blyth is very well organised; it "has lots of volunteers and support and gives the Christian community a good name - especially with social services". The parish also supports the ***Newcastle asylum seekers*** with food and other help each week. This is advertised each week in the bulletin to maintain support.

There is a ***Monthly Foodbank Collection*** at St Thomas Aquinas in Darlington. Parishioners place donated food items in baskets at the back of church during the month. On the last Sunday of the month the children carry the food gifts in the ***Offertory Procession*** and place them on the altar steps.

A major strength of St Gregory, South Shields is its ***support for people in need in their community*** through ***food banks***, supporting the homeless or those seeking asylum.

At St Mary's, Stockton, the Parish's ***welcome to temporary visitors*** such as refugees, asylum seekers and the travelling community and their outreach to prisoners and their families "are aspects of St. Mary's life of which we can be justifiably proud". They add, "We sometimes describe ourselves jokingly as the 'Church of the Misfits' as we provide a ***warm welcome to a very diverse range of people*** who look on St. Mary's as their spiritual home".



***'It's a time for chat, tea, coffee and sharing tears, but for also laughter for anyone who wishes to be there.'***

St Joseph's, Gateshead runs a ***drop-in centre for the homeless*** in the Parish Hall called ***Joe's Place***. This is also mentioned by St Peter's Gateshead.

There is a ***Refugee Drop in Centre*** at St Mary's in Sunderland and All Saints, Newcastle is involved in an ***asylum seekers project***.

Some parishioners at Our Lady and St Oswin's in Tynemouth and Cullercoats are involved in an initiative called ***Walking with Asylum Seekers*** where parishioners donate goods to assist the needy. This is linked to the ***selling of Fair Trade goods*** where people are encouraged to buy for themselves and for needy asylum seekers.

The Parish of the Holy Family, Darlington, is involved with the local ***Credit Union*** to help those who require loans to avoid resorting to finance companies with high interest rates.

The ***Drop-in Centre every Friday*** at St Cuthbert's in Stockton is a real help to poor people in the area. It provides not only food but also friendship with parishioners and this goes on to help in so many ways. The Church is seen to be doing something very positive in a deprived district.

Parishioners from Our Lady and St Oswin's in Tynemouth and Cullercoats contribute to and assist in the ***People's Kitchen***.

There are ***Joint Polish and English services*** at St Teresa's in Darlington.

In the Parish of the Durham Martyrs the ***Ministrandum*** at St Joseph's provides the opportunity for the sick and housebound to attend - with the help of SVP with transport - and to participate in a shorter service, better suited to their needs. It also provides the opportunity for the Mini-Vinnies to participate in supporting the event with welcoming and refreshments.

St Joseph's in Highfield offers ***Crossroads Respite*** for carers

***Care/visits to the elderly, to homes and hospitals*** from St Bede's, Jarrow.

Holy Name, Newcastle, refers to their ***message of inclusivity*** that accompanies all their publications, announcements and activities:

***"Young or old, married single or divorced and whatever your sexuality there is a place for you in our parish".*** The church ***"is strongly engaged in the life of the local community"***.

St Cuthbert and St Joseph, North Shields have a very active and engaged parish community who, individually, are doing ***excellent social outreach work*** in our area. They comment, "We need to co-ordinate this better and focus our efforts slightly more to be as effective as possible, yet this area of our parish life offers a 'real presence' to other communities and we like to think we do it quite well".

St John Vianney, West Denton demonstrates concern and makes a significant contribution to that in need, especially through the ***'Chain of Peace.'*** - A formal link between the various faith communities across the city of Newcastle.

***Mass cards*** are sent to the recently bereaved and for anniversaries by the SVP at St Joseph's, Stanley.

St Anne's and St Joseph's in Sunderland are ***"blessed with many young Indian, Filipino and African families"*** who have much to offer the wider parish community. They are ***hugely involved*** in the life of the parish and local community.

### **International Outreach**

***Justice and Peace Groups*** are mentioned at Sacred Heart and St Cuthbert in Amble, St Aidan's (Benton) and at St Mary of the Rosary, Forest Hall.

St Mary's at Barnard Castle has supported ***a project in Africa caring for aids orphans*** for a number of years. They comment that;

***"... having a close and direct link makes it more personal and we know our donations are going straight to the source".***

St Joseph's, Birtley ***"is very active and very generous in supporting charities and other good causes".***

There is ***CAFOD, third world group*** that - as well as organising fund raising activities - arranges informative educational meetings in the parish. There is a group that raises funds to support ***"Let the Children Live"*** - a charity that provides support to street children in Columbia. The parish also has a ***twinning arrangement*** with the parish of Our Lady of Sorrows in Kongge in Uganda.



St Bede's, Jarrow is strongly committed to **CAFOD** and **Connect 2 Brazil** and All Saints, Newcastle has gained **CAFOD "Live Simply"** status.

Holy Family, Newton Aycliffe say, "*Our Parish Project "Balamma Satram" could be adopted by other Parishes*".

One of the strengths of St Gregory's, South Shields is how it responds and can pull together in an emergency at home or abroad. Each year they respond to the **Samaritans' Purse Shoe Box Appeal**. They send over 100 Christmas boxes to children throughout the world who would otherwise not receive anything.

There is a very strong link with **Fr. Vincent Lubega of the White Fathers** because of the personal contact the Parish of St Joseph's, Stockton has developed with him through him visiting the parish and subsequently telephoning a parishioner to keep them up to date with what is happening in his parish in Uganda. St Joseph's maintains a permanent photographic display of current activities in his parish which are also reported in the weekly bulletin.

St Cuthbert's in Throckley supports **overseas missions** particularly in *Mulhoroni* and St John Vianney, West Denton currently supports and aids a **project in Kenya** which involves:

- 👉 Exchange visits.
- 👉 Money raising projects and social events.
- 👉 Craft Group.
- 👉 Interest and support from the school.

St John Vianney comment;

*"Our community's effort to meet global needs, not only forges links with other communities, but brings the people of our own community closer together through prayer and money raising social events."*

St Joseph, Stanley's has contacts with the **Kenyan Township and Mission of Muhoroni**. SVP provided swings and slides in the school grounds. Y3/4 St Mary's children made greetings cards for Kenyan children and new mothers. The children at St Joseph's are given feedback with slides, showing response from Kenya.

St Mary's at Whickham "*is particularly strong in the area of outreach*". Their involvement with a community in Kenya began with a **British Council**

**grant** allowing the Primary School to forge links with a school in Kenya. **Visits from school staff** to one another led to parish getting to know the Sisters in Kenya and to taking them into their hearts. Even when the British Council grants ran out after three years, links were maintained through **Gift for Life donations** and other members of the parish visited Kenya and ascertained the need for clean water. The parish funded a project to provide a water source for the village as well as continuing to support the school.



## 6. Finance

There is an "*excellent financial set-up and accounting system*" at St Thomas of Canterbury in Billingham.

**Fundraising:** At St Cuthbert's and the University Chaplaincy in Durham they have successfully applied for grants from **English Heritage and other bodies** and have already supported other parishes in bidding for grants.

St John Vianney, West Denton is good at **fundraising**; they could assist other parishes.

Our Blessed Lady Immaculate in Blackhill say "*We are very good at fundraising and looking after our own finances*".

At St Anne's in Darlington they are **using the empty presbytery to support other charities** and help pay its way.



## 7. Facilities

### Buildings

St Dominic's Priory, Newcastle tries to make good use of the space it has for **artistic and cultural events of a religious nature**. They have been attracting a good many visitors who appear to be of no faith and they encourage them to ask questions about the church, allowing them to

explain the religious art and the symbols in their “*fine church*”.

The use of the **Parish Hall** is a strength at St Mary Magdalen, Seaham Harbour. A **Mercy Chapel** has been developed at St Mary’s, Sunderland.

Our Lady Immaculate and St Cuthbert in Crook say;

*“Our Parish Centre, based in part of our former school and refurbished and brought back to life about 6 years ago, and since lovingly managed and maintained, by a group of enthusiastic parishioners has proved an invaluable asset to our parish community. It is used for a variety of social, cultural and educational events by people of all ages, parishioners and non-parishioners alike. It has acted as a bridge between parishioners who regularly attend church and those who don’t who find it a safe environment to re-engage with the parish. It is self-financing and now that it is well established it expects to be able to provide some input to parish funds on an annual basis.”*

The **facilities available to the parish** at St Augustine’s in Darlington enable them to come together in groups and as a whole community. The relatively new group overseeing these facilities has harnessed and encouraged a renewed feeling of community, leading to:

- 👉 The refurbishment of facilities being largely completed by volunteers.
- 👉 New and popular events such as the outdoor **Nativity Play**, **Parish Centre ‘clean up’ days**, encouraging participation by all age-groups, a **Saturday Parent and Toddler Group**.
- 👉 An increased feeling of shared ownership and inclusiveness.
- 👉 Clear plans for the further development of the facilities.

The **Heritage Lottery Project** at St Aloysius and St James, Hebburn, attracted many people to the Church. They put on an **art exhibition/war memorial project** that generated visitors from around South Tyneside. The theme of the exhibition was “**Mercy**” for the Holy Year.

St Joseph’s community in Highfield celebrate mass in the church of St Barnabas (Church of England), Rowlands Gill.

It is considered important at St Mary’s, Whickham, to **maintain parish properties** in good order for **catechesis, spiritual and social activities** for the benefit of the parish, the deanery and the wider diocese. This vision is shared with the parishioners and is regularly discussed by the **Hall Committee** made up of lay people and attended by the parish priest.

The **management of the church facilities** is a positive feature at St Aidan’s, Benton.

### Accessibility

St Joseph’s church in Birtley **is open from early morning until nightfall 365 days every year**. They comment;

*“The visibly open door at the heart of the community is regarded as very important by our parish priest and the whole parish community. There is a regular stream of visitors to the church to spend time in quiet prayer and these visitors are not confined to members of the Catholic community”.*

St Mary’s in Sunderland operates an “**Open House**” policy.

**Make buildings accessible:** The introduction of **swipe card** access has made the parish chaplaincy room at St Cuthbert’s and Durham University a place where people can call in to use the library and the kitchen and students can find a place to revise. This may be an option worth exploring for any parish which would like to provide access during the week without the need to have someone in attendance at all times.

**Keeping the church open:** A **rota of stewards** at St Cuthbert’s, Durham and the University Chaplaincy means the church is open for prayer and for visitors on Thursday, Friday and Saturday every week.

St Bede’s in Jarrow is **open during the day** in the summer months and the church of SS Mary & Thomas Aquinas, Stella, is **open daily** from before school until 5.30 p.m.

**Church Watch** is especially appreciated by the community of St Joseph’s, Stanley.

*“The dedication of those keeping an hourly watch so that others have time to reflect and pray is an invaluable service”.*

In the Parish of the Durham Martyrs a ***rota of lay people*** has enabled them to open St Godric's church daily for ***Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament***.

### Other Facilities

Holy Name, Newcastle has a ***high quality website*** which receives many favourable comments.

The ***church minibus*** at Our Lady and St. Columba, Wallsend, expands their capacity for activity.

"*Elderly parishioners are regularly taken out for a meal after Mass on Sunday morning*". Having a minibus provides the freedom to help people get around.

"*We were able to make a Pilgrimage to Iona because we were able to minimise transport costs. Family outings can support those who would not normally be able to get very far without the bus. We intend to use the bus to support immigrant families in showing them the locality and region*".



## 8. Geographic Distance / Local Collaboration

### Parish/Deanery-based collaboration

The ***Northumberland Deanery Evangelisation Team***, which began with a practical Easter-based activity and was followed up by regular (termly/quarterly) meetings across the deanery, is highlighted by St Aidan's, Ashington and St Mary's, Newbiggin by the Sea. Each meeting includes prayer, reflection and a presentation with a number of practical evangelising ideas/activities to be carried out by parishes. The thinking behind the formation of a ***Deanery Evangelisation Team*** was to help bring the many different parishes in this part of Northumberland together, to reach out to some of the more remote parishes in the deanery and help in the process of ***sharing ideas and resources*** and thinking beyond 'parish'.

The ***24 hours of Prayer in October 2015*** at St Bede's in Bedlington;

"...was a great example of ***bridging*** with other neighbouring parish communities it was well

*received and was widely supported with groups from the deanery".*

St Joseph, St Patrick and St Cuthbert, Coxhoe, have operated informally as one for many years and it is felt that the way they ***rotate*** their ***Sacramental Programme of Reconciliation and Holy Communion*** around the three venues really encourages them to engage with each other. Their ***joint celebrations*** at the ***Christmas and Holy Week Masses*** including the ***Easter Vigil Mass*** involve all of them coming together in their largest church whilst ensuring readers etc. are drawn from all three parishes. There are also ***strong links*** between the ***3 parishes based around the shared primary school*** which is built on strong Catholic foundations and is flourishing.

For a number of years now the parishes of St Oswald's, South Shields and The Sacred Heart, Boldon, have ***forged a close relationship*** through a joint celebration of the ***Triduum*** at Easter. The venue is alternated each year but the ministries are shared by members of both parishes. Provision is made to ferry parishioners to these services and they culminate in a joint social gathering after the Easter Vigil. Such success over the years has led to a joint approach when it comes to hosting ***missions, retreats and supporting any notable celebrations or jubilee events***.

*"A strong sense of community has developed, with each group being made to feel welcome and we believe this has set the foundation strongly for further collaboration in the future".*

At St Anne's and St Joseph's in Sunderland they have "*a clear identity as a deanery and achieve much together*": ***Marriage Preparation, Journey in Faith, Confirmation, Advent and Lent Reconciliation services***. There was a ***Deanery Forum*** where priests and parishioners met for prayer, reflection and discussion.

The parishes of The Holy Rosary, The Holy Family and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Darlington referred jointly to the benefits of running their ***RCIA and Confirmation Programmes*** on a ***deanery-wide basis***.



There is “**growing co-operation**” between St. Paul’s, Cramlington and St. John the Baptist, Annitsford on **Youth work/Youth Masses** and **sacramental preparation**.

St Patrick’s, Dipton, is involved with the **Joint Family of Parishes’ Pilgrimage** to Holy Island.

Holy Family, Hartlepool suggests that **local collaboration between parishes** can actually be a more effective way of operating, involving more people at individual services and providing the most suitable location for a **Mass for the Sick and Housebound**, for example. Local communities can still be encouraged to flourish and develop in their own way. They say:

“*Don’t be afraid to make difficult decisions*”.

Some of the community at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs, Newhouse, are involved at Ushaw College and say:

“*The potential for that to become a beacon of Catholic lay thought is very exciting. Developing those links further could be a great opportunity*”.

For many years St Mary’s at Whittingham have built links with St Ninian’s in Wooler. There have been **joint services** at Easter, **joint parish lunches** and both parishes have supported each other’s **fundraising events**, including running the **Wooler Community Shop**.

### Local Ecumenical Initiatives

**Sharing facilities:** St Wilfrid and St Cuthbert, Blyth, report that the URC church opposite them was closing. With parishioners’ agreement, they accommodated them in their day chapel with use of their kitchen and community rooms on two other days a week. The URC congregation has prospered and it has given St Wilfrid’s and St Cuthbert’s a good name in the town.

Holy Family, Darlington has **Lenten lunches** which they share with two churches of other Christian denominations. They are “*very successful ecumenical occasions*”.

For many years Holy Family, Darlington, has had a **Good Friday walk** around the village green starting at 6pm during which a life size cross is carried between three local churches.

St Mary’s, Hexham has **good contacts with their fellow Christian churches** in the town, and this enables many town-wide activities that it is not easy to arrange as a single church.



At All Saints in Lanchester, their **Churches Together** group is focussing on an extended **Stations of the Cross in Holy Week** involving the 3 churches, the 3 schools and the Village Green. This is intended to take some Holy Week activities outside the churches. Each section of the group is looking to lead a number of stations, culminating in a big Easter Sunday celebration.

All Saints, Newcastle is participating in an **ecumenical initiative on a new housing development** regarding churches, times of services etc.

The **Heaton Festival**, supported by the Parish of St Teresa of the Infant Jesus, Newcastle, has a strong ecumenical element. The parish is involved with **Churches Acting Together** in the area.

At Our Lady and St Joseph in New Hartley during Advent and Lent, “**Churches Together**” arranges services where everyone comes together by visiting each other’s places of worship. There is also an annual **ecumenical ‘Songs of Praise’** held in Seaton Delaval Hall.

St William in Trimdon describes **strong ecumenical links** built between the local faith communities with invitations to services and shared worship like the **Good Friday Walk of Witness**. The success of the **local foodbank** is also due to the shared work of the faith communities.





## 9. Young People

### General

Holy Family Hartlepool runs **Family Fun Clubs** and has a **Youth Ministry Co-ordinator**.

The **Evangelisation Group** has been instrumental in engaging young people at Our Lady and St Cuthbert, Prudhoe.

SS William and Francis de Sales in Darlington say: “*For the size of parish we attract many younger families*” and will regularly have children making up 20 per cent of the attendance. They are attracted to the “*warmth and friendliness of the parish*” and the **liturgy group** is very successful and expanding into **Mini Vinnies** - a **children's garden - Cafod Virtual Village**.

St Peter's Gateshead mentions **parish support for young people**.

At St Bede's, Stockton, **children write invitations to parents and relations** to come to Mass.

**Children's Liturgy** (See Worship and Spiritual Life, Section 3, above)

### Young People of School Age

At St Joseph's, Birtley, the **Lourdes Youth Sponsorship** in the parish is seen as very effective. Young people in the parish are invited and encouraged to join the **Youth Section** on the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes as soon as they are eligible (16 years old). The parish supports them by subsidising their fares but they are expected to work alongside the small team of adults that co-ordinates the **fund raising** and to come forward with their own suggestions for fund raising activities and to be personally and actively involved in the fund raising. They believe that a key part of the success of this scheme is that the young people must get involved in the fund-raising and they are expected to contribute £100 each towards their fares. This creates a greater sense of personal commitment before and during the pilgrimage to Lourdes and results in the young people putting in more effort and getting greater rewards and benefits from their pilgrimage.

At St Bede's in Bedlington over the last few years their young people have taken part in a **Good Friday Passion drama** - reading the Passion of Our Lord and using drama to support this.

At St Bede's, Sacriston,

“*...young people are very involved in their community*”.

Many develop their spiritual faith, often with the financial support of the parish, through **retreats, pilgrimages and vigils** and a number are working towards the **John Paul II Award**.

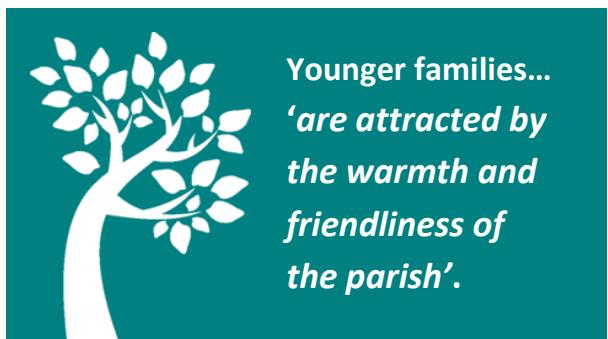
Parishioners at St John Fisher and St Thomas More, Sedgefield, felt that although the **Youth Café** had fallen through, the concept was great and had worked extremely well up to that point. Thus, having:

“*Open evenings for teenagers to drop into at a central location (not a church building) is a great way to engage and serve the local community*.”

**Lourdes Youth Group**: Each year, a group of young people from SS Mary and Thomas Aquinas in Stella commit themselves to joining the **Diocesan Pilgrimage** and **helping with the sick; fundraising** is supported by our community.

At Our Lady and St Columba's in Wallsend the **Confirmation Preparation** is led by a “*highly skilled group of catechists*”. Each session will include “*enjoyable activities, deep discussion*” and, perhaps uniquely, **a themed refreshment time**: sometimes a **French cafe**; or an **Italian ice cream parlour**; or a **New York diner** feedback from the young people is very good.

A spin-off from the above Confirmation group is the proposed “**Swot Shop**” whereby exam year students can come to the church hall, enjoy the right atmosphere for work and revision and have the support of successful parishioners.



St John the Baptist, Annitsford advise is regular **half termly meetings** with young people and **allowing the youth to speak** when they do meet for example a **FTiH Youth Mass**.

### Parish-School Links

St Augustine's in Darlington comment on the "**strong links between the Primary School and the Parish**" via termly School Masses/links with the **Parish Drama Group /joint work** between the **SVP and the Mini-Vinnies Group**. They say that the school's "**Learning to Lead**" **Programme** promotes primary-aged children's participation in appropriate church ministries.

At the Parish of the Durham Martyrs **joint celebrations** at St Leonard's School are very successful in strengthening their community and St Bede's Chapel within St Godric's Primary School provides the opportunity for children, worship together.

St Mary's, Forest Hall, says **links with schools** are good.

**Parish-school links** and **Head teacher's example** are mentioned by St Bede's, Jarrow.

St Joseph's, Murton, highlighted **good school links and children's Masses**.

Sacred Heart **Primary School leads two Sunday Masses** at St Robert's in Fenham each year - on Palm Sunday and Remembrance Sunday. These are very well attended and are vibrant celebrations, followed by **parish events** in the church hall.

St Cuthbert's, New Seaham, comment upon **good links between priest, Parish and Primary School**, especially in bringing new families to church.

St. Alban's, Pelaw say; "We are very proud of the links we have with our primary school. We feel the closeness of the community comes together in its fullness when celebrating liturgies, end of year Masses, Advent celebrations and Lenten Stations of the Cross which are led by the pupils of St Alban's Primary School."

There are **School and Parish Masses** where everyone is invited at Our Lady of the Rosary, Peterlee. St Bede's South Shields highlights **School and Youth Masses**.

Sacred Heart and St John Bosco in Sunderland have a **Little Flower Concert**, led by the Primary

and Secondary School Choirs, bringing schools and parish together.

At St John Vianney, West Denton the **Primary School is involved in Parish services**.

### Young Adults

At St Cuthbert's and the University of Chaplaincy in Durham there are various activities for young people: **Chaplaincy events** and **prayer groups** were spread throughout the week as they had assumed that people who were unable to attend on one night would find something they could come to over the course of the week. However, only small numbers were attending each event. The **main activities have now been put all together on Wednesday evening**. There is **Vespers** at 6.15pm, followed by **Exposition** and the opportunity for **Confession, Mass** at 7.00pm, then a **shared meal**, discussion or a talk, and socialising. They comment that, although concentrating activities on one evening may seem to limit the opportunity for people to attend, in fact they have found that students put Cathsoc night in their diaries and prioritise it, and "*the evening is increasingly well attended*".

St John the Baptist, Annitsford hosted a **24 Hour of Prayer**. The young people of the deanery participated in a **prayer vigil**. The local primary school began the vigil with Creation and the secondary school children performed dramas throughout the vigil on the theme of 'Sin', 'The Fall', 'Christ's Death', 'The Resurrection' and 'The Woman at the Well'.

The Catenians at Our Lady and St Oswin's (Tynemouth and Cullercoats) have a **Bursary Fund** which offers financial assistance to young people for approved projects during a Gap Year. It also "*assists young people to take part in Pilgrimages as helpers to the sick and infirm*".



## The Process and Acknowledgements

We hope that you have found some of these ideas and initiatives both stimulating and helpful. It may well be that there are new plans and projects in your community which have been put in place since the responses to the Parish Questionnaire which arrived last year. Please share with us what you have been doing so that sometime in the future we can prepare a supplement for every parish to let everyone know of new ideas and initiatives.

One particular parish community in our diocese has explored all sorts of ideas and initiatives and they are more than willing to share their ideas with others in their deanery and beyond. The suggestions they have provided focus mainly on evangelisation - they fit into the 'Outreach' heading in this booklet. We suggest that you look at all the suggestions they have on offer via their own contact address: <https://sites.google.com/site/stjohnsannitsford/home>. Those involved with these initiatives refer to them as 'Good News Ideas'. You may well want to look further at what is on offer from St John's at Annitsford.

As we noted in the Introduction to this document, there is a very wide range of very interesting ideas, and the best way of following up any of the thoughts and suggestions is to go directly to the parishes involved. You can follow them up directly via the Diocesan Website or the Northern Catholic Calendar.

A final word of thanks once again to Gerard Murphy for compiling and editing this booklet. If there are mistakes then that is our fault. Please let us know of any inaccuracies, we will endeavour to make amends in any future publications.

We hope that you find this booklet of interest and are inspired to explore ways in which your community and your neighbouring communities can witness to Jesus in our world today.

Jim O'Keefe  
Tony Sacco  
Nancy Gash

The *Forward Together in Hope* team: Jim O'Keefe, Tony Sacco and Nancy Gash can be contacted on:  
Telephone: (0191) 243 3304      E-mail: [hope@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:hope@diocesehn.org.uk)

**FORWARD TOGETHER  
IN  
HOPE**

Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, Department for Development and Renewal  
Tel: (0191) 243 3304 E-mail: [hope@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:hope@diocesehn.org.uk) Web: [www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk](http://www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk)

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