

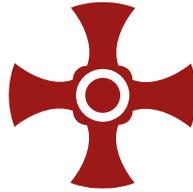
FORWARD TOGETHER
IN
HOPE

Pointing the Way

*Partnership Guidelines
First Steps*



DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**



God of all Creation,
You have constantly poured out your Spirit upon our Diocese
and kindled here a light which has spread throughout the world.

Lord Jesus, you gathered disciples to yourself
to learn from you
and to model their lives on you.

Your Holy Spirit empowered them to continue your work in the world.

Come upon us, Holy Spirit,
deepen the faith you invite us to share
and inspire us to become faithful witnesses.

As we begin to develop our partnerships,
help each one of us to use the gifts you give us
to nurture one another,
to serve the world
and to live in harmony with the whole of creation.

All of this we ask in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Partnership Guidelines - First Steps

‘A partnership is a group of parishes agreeing to work together, to share resources, both human and material, to become stronger and better equipped for furthering the Kingdom of God’

+ Bishop Séamus, 9 February 2017

A few words of introduction

As a result of the decisions taken by Bishop Séamus in January this year we have now arrived at the geographical coverage of 18 new partnerships across the diocese. Of course this does not mean that we actually *have* 18 new partnerships.

Developing our new arrangements will take time and energy on lots of different levels. Any new group, team or partnership needs careful nurturing, particularly in the early stages, to ensure that foundations are put in place that are strong enough to weather any future storms.

Over time we will be providing further practical guidelines on a variety of topics to help ensure that each of the partnerships can develop in its own unique way – yet within the context of a coherent diocesan framework. We are very mindful that partnerships are already at different stages of development; some are exactly as proposed while others have turned out quite differently. Some might be ‘raring to go’ while others are having to think again about how they start working with partners who didn’t feature in their original proposals.

This ‘*First Steps*’ guide offers some initial ideas and direction that we hope will be helpful to partnerships regardless of their starting point. The contents have been endorsed by Bishop Séamus, Episcopal Vicars and the Diocesan Board of Trustees.

Before we launch headlong into the document it might be worth pausing for a moment to think and pray about the opportunities that working in partnership can actually offer us. The titles of our recent leaflets, ‘*Imagine New Ways*’ and ‘*One Diocese, 18 Partnerships, Unlimited Potential*’ act as prompts. This is a real opportunity to think differently about how we do things and how we access and share the wealth of untapped potential available within our diocese. Let’s grasp the opportunity and who knows where the Holy Spirit might lead us.



Prayer and Spirituality

One of the most encouraging and exciting things to come through from the work that went into the Parish Questionnaires and Partnership Proposals was that it was so often accompanied by considerable prayer and reflection. Praying and reflecting together has to be one of the most powerful things people in our emerging partnerships can do to ensure that we continue to build up confidence and trust in each other. More ideas will follow as partnerships are established but, as starting points, here are a few things to consider.

Spirituality Network

- It is strongly recommended that Partnerships develop a 'spirituality network' with representation from each of the communities.
- It is envisaged that the local network will become aware of what is already happening and, with support, initiate ideas to help people deepen their relationship with Christ and their sense of discipleship.
- The local network will link into and enrich the existing diocesan network by keeping the Department for Spirituality aware of the needs of local communities and offering a conduit to share ideas and good practice.
- A meeting will be held in early summer to explore ways forward and each partnership is asked to ensure that someone from their area comes along. Details of those people who are currently members of the diocesan network are available from Episcopal Vicars.

The following thoughts are offered as initial areas to consider; your partnership will have its own ideas about what will work best for you.

Anchors

- A ministry for your housebound parishioners and others whose home is their prayer space. They can provide an invaluable repository of prayer for your partnership.

- Offer a symbol (e.g. candle, holding cross) to emphasise their link with the wider partnership.

Pilgrimage

- Keep it simple! Choose one of the many holy places in the diocese and arrange a trip there.

24 Hour Prayer

- This does not mean people staying for the whole 24 Hours but ensuring that prayer is ongoing in your partnership for a full 24 hours.
- Decide whether it is best to have one church as a base for the prayer or a time of prayer in several churches – like a relay.
- Try to involve local schools, youth groups, SVP and other parish organisations.
- Think about doing it at Pentecost – echoing the prayer of the disciples in the Upper Room awaiting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Partnership Litany of Saints

- Make a list of the patron saints of your partnership churches and schools.
- Use it at the end of Mass and at meetings and prayer groups.

Information about many of the activities mentioned above is available at www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk in the resources section.

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Outreach

- When exploring our way forward as partnerships and as Church it is important that we don't lose sight of our identity and mission. As the people of God and the body of Christ it is through the lens of our true mission that good decisions and plans are made.
- There is likely to be a range of 'outreach' activities already in place within the individual parishes that make up a partnership. It seems appropriate that an important new focus would be an outward-facing project across the whole partnership – or across groups of parishes within the partnership.



- The project would be grounded in the teaching that the Church is to be a witness and must '*go out into the world to love and to serve*'. The fundamental aim is to make a difference in the community and to emphasise our mission to live as disciples in the world.

- It builds on the quote from Pope Benedict: '*The programme of Jesus is a heart which sees - sees where love is needed and acts accordingly*'. Pope Francis is also very clear about our priorities: '*I prefer a Church that is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been on the streets rather than a Church that is unhealthy from clinging to its own security.*'
- The partnership would work through a process that asks it to explore and describe where the need is in their community (outside of the church walls) praying the words of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, '*Open the eyes of my heart Lord*' - then putting into action a project that tries to address a particular local need.
- As well as making a tangible difference in the community, the focus on outward-facing, practical activity is likely to:
 - Help people to form as a new community, getting to know each other in a new environment.
 - Encourage people to reflect on what they enjoy doing and to develop their skills.
- If you would like to organise such a project you can gain ideas and an outline process from:

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Structures

- The move towards new partnerships requires a detailed review of the other structures that we have in place across the diocese. A working group of the Diocesan Board of Trustees is currently taking a close look at all of this. Its work will review many of the existing structures and groups and their relationship to each other and to partnerships. It is envisaged that this will lead to new structures.
- A Diocesan Implementation Group is being established to ensure a smooth transition from the work of the Diocesan Development Group which steered *Forward Together in Hope* on behalf of the Bishop and the Diocesan Board of Trustees. Its membership will include clergy and lay people and its main focus will be to ensure that the many important issues highlighted by parishes and individuals as part of the wide-ranging consultation process are taken forward.
- The five Vicariates remain in place across the areas of Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Gateshead, Sunderland and East Durham, and Cleveland and South Durham. There are minor changes to the geographical coverage affecting the Vicariates of Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside and South Tyneside and Gateshead - where parishes have been included in partnerships that are predominantly within a different Vicariate.
- The existing clergy deanery meetings will be replaced by Vicariate area meetings.
- The current deanery arrangements will be replaced by the new partnership structure at Pentecost – Sunday 4th June. At each Mass that weekend a liturgy will be celebrated to launch the new partnerships. Names for the partnerships will have been agreed by this stage.
- Priests to lead the partnerships will be appointed at Easter by Bishop Séamus and they will attend meetings to discuss their roles and responsibilities.
- Each partnership will establish a Partnership Development Group (PDG) which will be asked to meet officially before Pentecost. PDGs will be interim arrangements with a remit for planning and establishing the more formal partnership arrangement in each area. They will have a two-year lifespan.
- Guidelines for Partnership Development Groups are presented on pages 13 and 14. These are designed to provide a coherent diocesan-wide framework to assist Partnership Development Groups to carry out their work effectively. They are deliberately not overly detailed or constraining as developing our partnerships is fundamentally about the creative sharing of the different gifts we are given and becoming more committed disciples of Jesus.

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Planning

'Always plan ahead.

It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark'.

- There are lots of 'clever quotations' about the importance of planning but ultimately they all come back to the same issue – without some kind of plan we don't really know where we are trying to get to or how we are progressing. A clear plan can be really helpful in explaining the route and taking others with us on our journey.
- Partnership Development Groups* are asked to draw up a written plan for developing their partnership. This can give a really helpful focus to the initial meetings and provides a way of everyone contributing to the thinking. Given the 'lifespan' of the group the plan would have a two-year horizon and set out the key priorities that the partnership would need to address over that period. It is also a helpful tool for periodically reviewing how the PDG is progressing in achieving what it has set out to do.
- As anyone familiar with the process of action planning will know, there are various formats that can be used to set out such plans. It is very much up to each individual partnership to decide how best to go about the task. We will be providing example templates and additional thoughts on planning. Please get in touch if you need further advice at present.
- The important thing is that the key areas of activity are clearly described, have an 'owner' and a realistic timescale associated with them. Some partnerships are seeing their planning covering many of the areas we are using as section headings in this document, namely:



Prayer and Spirituality, Outreach, Structures, Planning, Finances, Property and Facilities, Human Resources, Formation, Team Building and Communications.

- Others are talking about adding a focus on specific areas such as Young People, Sacramental Preparation etc. Again, individual partnerships will know best what their planning priorities should be.
- Episcopal Vicars will offer help and support in the development of partnership plans and would need sight of your plan.
- A final thought here is don't 'over-plan'. Take a few risks and make sure that the Holy Spirit is a member of the team – He has his own ideas for your partnership!

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Finances

- While individual Parish Finance committees remain in place it will be important to start to plan for the increased joint activity between parishes across the partnership.
- To this end each partnership is required to set up a 'Partnership Account' to enable individual parishes to contribute easily to jointly funded activity.
- Chairs of the existing Parish Finance Committees and clergy within a partnership area are asked to meet together to:
 - look at the resources available to the partnership;
 - consult, as necessary, over any major building projects (over £10,000) within the partnership;
 - consult, as necessary, over any future employment of staff.

This aims to ensure that resources are targeted effectively so that the whole of the partnership can benefit.

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Property and Facilities

- One of the medium-term tasks for all partnerships will be to undertake a full review of the property that exists within the partnership area and to arrive at proposals for how it might be used to best effect in fulfilling the mission of the Church. The review will cover all churches, presbyteries, halls and other property and land within the partnership area.

- Reviews will include a prayerful and reflective exploration of the needs of the local community and how the property within the partnership might help to meet these needs.
- It is recommended that this is *not* seen as an early priority for partnerships as it is important to build strong relationships first. Property issues can be emotive and introducing such issues too early in the life of a partnership could undermine efforts to establish greater co-operation.
- Support will be available to assist partnerships when the time is right for the review to be undertaken. This will include a detailed 'toolkit' and advice and support from the newly appointed Property Outreach Advisor.
- Before any major building projects are approved a partnership would need to provide evidence that a full property review has been carried out.
- Where emergency repairs and renewals are required these should continue to follow existing procedures.
- Think Partnership.** Even before a full review of property takes place it is important to consider the potential implications of any property decisions - not just for the parish it involves - but for neighbouring communities and the partnership as a whole.

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Formation

- Developing the leadership of lay people will be a critical part in the development of partnerships. Work is well underway to explore the wealth of possibilities and then implement a coherent leadership development programme across the diocese.
- It is important that we do not limit our thinking about leadership to the 'formal roles'. Leadership flows through every facet of the life of a worshipping community and, as baptised members of our community, we are all called to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ and are invited to a life of mission and holiness. While some are called to more formalised positions, these roles will ideally be co-ordinators - with other members of the community acting on their own unique calling to lead specific ministries.
- So, if lay leadership and formation are such high priorities for partnerships, what aspects can we start on now? Perhaps the following thoughts will spark ideas that you can build upon:
 - A 'menu of learning opportunities' will be offered to each partnership so that communities can shape and tailor-make a programme that suits their particular locality and circumstances. The menu will cover a wide range of leadership and formation topics and programmes and involves expertise from across the Diocese and beyond. We are currently working collaboratively with key leaders to work towards an implementation date of September 2017.
 - A community that knows each other well will be able to identify the gifts of its members. Taking time to meet together is a crucial part of building a worshipping community and empowering all members to find their calling.
 - Getting more people involved and widening the net of those prepared to take a lead requires a spirit of genuine welcome and openness to new people. Taking time to look at how the whole community welcomes its members and noticing who is on the fringes of the community can be an illuminating exercise.
 - Simple acts of acknowledging people, thanking them for their involvement and celebrating their contribution can make a huge difference and encourages them and others to pursue their gifts and their calling.
 - Placing 'Formation' on the agenda of the *Partnership Development Group* and identifying one or two people from the partnership to take a lead on this will help ensure a strong profile and lead to practical action. Linking with the work taking place centrally in the diocese will also become increasingly important.

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Team Building

- For any new team or organisation to work effectively there is the need to 'gel together' on a human level. This is true of the *Partnership Development Group* itself as well as the wider partnership of parish communities.
- There are very many ways of doing this – and the following are simply a few ideas that have worked well in similar contexts. You will have better ones – so please share them across the diocese. It is worth remembering that 'team building' opportunities can arise from the most unexpected places – so think creatively about every activity to see what possibilities are 'lurking' there.
- A 'Partnership Account' (see section on Finance) becomes a very useful vehicle for sharing the costs of those activities that require funding.

For the Partnership Development Group

- The PDG will have a lot to do and there may well be the temptation to launch into the 'business agenda' without much time being spent on the vital aspect of getting to know one another. Time invested in building relationships will make for a stronger team.



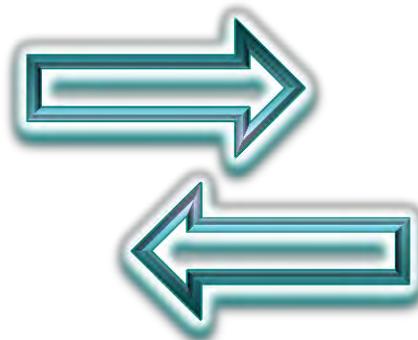
- Look at ways of knitting the team together to have a common focus; perhaps taking a half-day or a day out to reflect, pray and plan.
- Social interaction – either before or after meetings – or through specific 'business-free get-togethers' can go a long way to developing a team spirit.
- New groups can often benefit from someone 'independent' facilitating their early meetings. This allows all members to participate fully and can help to keep vested interests in check. Some partnerships may wish to go as far as having an 'independent observer' for the lifespan of the PDG.

For the wider partnership

- Again, partnerships will be best positioned to know what is likely to work well in their own situation but a mix of the spiritual, the social and the practical might not be a bad approach. Ideas you may wish to think about include:
 - Partnership-wide social events – whether trips out, family fun-days, walks, partnership picnics, youth events – the list is endless.
 - Joint worship. Perhaps a partnership-wide team could organise a range of activities in different venues across the area.
 - Joint projects. Practical activity has a way of getting people working together effectively. An 'outreach' dimension can be a good focus for getting young people involved too.
 - A partnership 'bus tour' around the churches with 'something interesting' going on in each could be a good way of broadening knowledge of the partnership area and meeting one another.

Communications

- How many times have you heard the words ‘*Nobody told me*’ or ‘*I knew nothing about it*’? However much we communicate it is never enough. Or it is too much. Or it’s in the wrong format... Of course, communication is a two-way process and involves people actually engaging with the information provided and responding in some way.
- Communication at all levels will be a critical component in establishing our partnerships and the initial attempts at presenting coherent messages across the whole of the partnership will set the tone for the future.
- Some parishes have developed very strong internal (and sometimes external) communications arrangements and we will be looking to provide some examples in the more detailed guidelines. In this initial document we offer a few immediate thoughts that you might like to consider:
 - Develop a ‘partnership page’ on parish websites setting out details of the communities in the partnership and providing links to each other’s websites.
 - Produce a partnership-wide newsletter to highlight initial plans and invite contributions.
 - Communicate the membership of your Partnership Development Group when established. Displaying ‘mug-shots’ of members helps people put names to faces and can be an endless source of amusement to family and friends alike.



- Make the minutes and key documents of the PDG easily accessible to everyone in the communities within the partnership.
 - Produce a ‘standard script’ to be used at the end of weekend Masses across the partnership to keep people up to date with what’s happening.
 - Ask someone on the PDG to have a particular focus on communications. They don’t have to do it all – they just have to keep thinking about how it can best be done – and getting other people to listen!
- Diocesan central services have a particular responsibility in helping to ensure effective communications across the diocese as a whole. Work is underway to look at developing much more integrated communications arrangements across the diocese including the human and IT resources necessary. This is a far-reaching medium to long-term initiative.

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Partnership Development Group

Lord, as we walk together on this journey of service let us hear your Word above the noise. Let us feel your hand upon us as you guide our path and let us open our hearts and minds to the needs of our partnership, our diocese and the world beyond.

This document is designed to provide a coherent diocesan-wide framework to assist Partnership Development Groups to carry out their work effectively. It is deliberately not overly detailed or constraining as developing our partnerships is fundamentally about the creative sharing of the different gifts we are given and becoming more committed disciples of Jesus. Let's try to ensure that rules and paperwork don't get in the way of the Holy Spirit and that every meeting is set within a context of prayer and reflection.

The overall aim is to create a forum that is genuinely representative of the clergy and laity in all of the parishes within the partnership.

Remit

To further God's Kingdom within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle through:

- Co-ordinating and supporting the development of effective partnership arrangements.
- Developing an initial action plan for the partnership.
- Communicating the work of the partnership across the area.

Timescale

The Partnership Development Group (PDG) is an interim arrangement and has a 2-year lifespan. Longer-term arrangements, informed by the work of PDGs, will then be put in place across the diocese.

Membership

Membership of the Partnership Development Group will include:

- The Chair or other delegated representative from each Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) within the partnership. In any parish where PPCs or equivalent are not in place, a lay representative from that parish should be sought through an open election process.
- Diocesan priests and permanent deacons serving parishes within the partnership area.
- One Primary School representative and one Secondary School representative from schools within the partnership area – ideally Head Teachers or senior members of staff.

Co-option

The PDG can co-opt others for an agreed period to provide advice on specific aspects of the work of the group. Any co-option should be agreed at a full meeting of the PDG. Those co-opted will be 'in attendance' rather than being members of the PDG.

President, Chair and Vice Chair

The President of the PDG will be the priest appointed to lead the partnership.

A lay Chair and lay Vice Chair will be elected at the first meeting of the PDG to work alongside the priest in serving the partnership. Where possible the Chair and Vice Chair will remain in post during the 2-year development phase. Where a Chair is not able to continue in her/his role the Vice Chair will take on the role of Chair and a new Vice Chair elected. Where a Vice Chair is unable to continue in his/her role a new Vice Chair will be elected.

Secretary

A member of the group will be appointed as Secretary to take brief action-based notes of the meeting.

Quorum

To be quorate a meeting needs to have at least one third of members present. A meeting can continue if not quorate but any proposed actions will need to be endorsed at the next meeting or individually by all members who were not present.

Decision-making

Decision-making should be by consensus.

Meetings

The PDG should initially meet at least 4 times each year to develop an action plan for the partnership.

Agendas and Minutes

- It is good practice to provide the agenda, prepared by the President and the Chair together, to members at least a week ahead of the meeting. Members should be offered the opportunity to contribute items to the agenda prior to its circulation. Fixed items may well be provided for the agenda.
- Action-based minutes should be made available to the Chair for approval within 10 days of the date of meeting and issued to members within 2 weeks of the date of the meeting.
- Arrangements should be put in place across the partnership to ensure easy access to the minutes by members of all communities within the partnership.

Communication

- Chairs of the individual Parish Pastoral Councils or other parish representatives on the PDG have the responsibility to ensure good two-way communication between their parish community and the PDG.
- Partnership Development Groups should communicate their plans and activities in a way that can be cascaded easily within each parish/local community.
- Systems of strong two-way communication between the diocesan central services and the PDG will be put in place and emerging good practice will be shared between partnerships.

April 2017

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