**Preparing the Way: a liturgy outline for parishes, deaneries and groups**

**Leaders’ notes**

This outline is destined to be flexible. You may like to us it in the context of a Holy Hour – or as part of a parish meeting – or in small groups. It is possible to have one leader but there is scope to involve more people in reading the responses, scripture and reflections. There are ideas for a short ritual/ use of symbol towards the end of the liturgy – you might ask someone with an artistic flair to create a focal point using whichever of these you choose.

**Introduction**

Reader (*use these or own words*)

Our diocese has embarked on a three year period of reflection and renewal and Bishop Séamus has asked that we underpin it with prayer. Today/ tonight gives us an opportunity to focus our own minds and hearts on what *Forward Together in Hope* might mean for us individually – for our communities – and for our diocese. Our reflections will remind us that, when Jesus asks disciples to follow him, he does not always offer a clear road map of where he and the Holy Spirit will be taking them – but he does promise that he will be in it with us – wherever it takes us.

And so, let us tune into the presence of God with us here – and now… *(pause for a moment of quiet)*

**Opening Responses**

Reader We gather in the name of the Father:

**All Who created us his sons and his daughters,**

**and placed us on the earth**

**to live the journey of a lifetime**

**and gave us companions to share the way.**

Reader We gather in the name of the Son:

**All Who calls disciples and friends to follow him –**

 **along old paths and new ways –**

 **to new encounters and to relived memories –**

 **walking with us on the way to the Kingdom.**

Reader We gather in the name of the Holy Spirit:

All **Who inspires and cajoles,**

 **who reassures and challenges**

**all whom the Lord calls –**

**encouraging them along the path that leads into a future**

**they may not yet be able to imagine –**

**or believe in.**

**Scripture Reading** – Jesus calls the first disciples (Mark 1: 16-20) – as in Year B but other versions possible)

**Sung Response** (optional) E.g. Lord, you have come to the seashore , Follow me…

**Reflection**

Reader *using these or own words.*

*(A PowerPoint is available to accompany this where facilities exist to show it – it simply illustrates some of the places and events referred to in the text. It will pay to practise running through this section so the reader and slide changer are confident!)*

When Peter, Andrew, James and John – and later on, all the other disciples, left everything to follow Jesus, they did not know where he would be taking them…

They ended up travelling on desert roads – into wild places…

He had them going up mountains –

distributing bread and fish by lakesides –

crossing the Lake of Galilee in terrifying storms.

He took them to quiet villages and the firesides of friends –

and in amongst the hustle and bustle of big cities.

He took them to the holiest place in the Jewish religion –

and to areas where the Roman occupiers lived.

Sometimes he travelled with a small group –

and sent others off in pairs –

at other times they could not move because of the crowds.

They found themselves in debates with religious leaders – who often get a bad press – but who were trying to work out how what Jesus said tied in with the Law at the heart of their lives…

Jesus had them mixing with lepers – unclean women – blind people – messy and noisy children – and foreigners.

Jesus sent them on errands involving donkeys and buying food for meals.

He had them walking through the dirt (and worse) of first century Palestine – and then got down before them and washed their feet.

He took them into a garden – that became filled with soldiers… and there most of them stopped following him…

But those who could followed him in disgrace and humiliation to the foot of a cross until he went where they could not follow – into death and into a tomb.

And a few women did come back to that tomb – to anoint a decaying body… as they thought… only to be told that he was no longer there – that their journey continued… a journey to tell the others that he had risen and would be with them in Galilee.

And now Jesus did not just lead them – he came to them where they were – in an upper room – by the lakeside – on a hillside –

until the day came when he was again to go where they could not follow – but this time, his going was not to be an abandonment but an opening of a new way that they would follow in this life and on into the next…

a way that would be illuminated and fuelled by the power of the Holy Spirit..

**Scripture Reading** – Matthew 28: 16-20

**“Behold I am with you until the end of time…”**

*This could the way into a time of Exposition/ Adoration or simply silence, reflecting on the promise of Christ to be with us – that the invitation to go forward together in hope includes him!*

*You could use the following words if necessary:*

Jesus promised to be with us until the end of time. He is present to us today in the Blessed Sacrament. In a time of stillness, we can call to mind the places Jesus led his disciples into – and what those places might represent to us personally – and to our communities. We might ask the Lord where we find ourselves now… and open our hearts and minds to reflect on where he might be leading us next.

**Going Forward Together in Hope**

*If appropriate, people might like to look at some simple ritual/ symbol at this point*

*Options*

One symbol used in *Forward Together in Hope* is the mustard seed. You might like to have packets of easy-to-grow seeds and invite people to sow them into pots or into a piece of prepared ground in hopes that, over the coming months, they grow and blossom.

Another possibility might be to cut out footprints. Lay out a path – either of cloth or paper… deciding whether it leads further into the church or out of it! You could use this or a similar image at the front (A larger version of this picture is on the CD)



Invite people to lay their footprint on the path following Jesus.

**Bidding Prayers**

Reader We pray for our parish:

 may we reflect wisely on the strengths and weaknesses –

 looking at where God is at work among us

and where Christ might be calling us to go forward together.

Reader We pray for Bishop Séamus, the priests and deacons –

 for Fr Jim O’Keefe and Tony Sacco who are heading up the process –

 and for all who are taking a lead –

 helping our diocese to discern how we can follow Christ more closely

and move forward together in hope.

Add more to suit your own circumstances…

**Closing Prayer**

Reader Lord Jesus, you honour all that is part of our past and our heritage

 but from the beginning, have called men and women to travel –

to journey –

to follow you into places filled with fun and laughter

and to darker and more frightening places.

But always, you were with them –

leading them forward –

leading them together

leading them in hope.

**All Bless us as we embark upon this journey –**

 **our leaders and our companions**

 **as we take our place in this great procession through history**

**joining those in our past and our future**

**travelling forward together –
with you –
in hope:
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.**

**Closing Song** The Summons… (*or other option*)