

Pastoral Area Council Reflection Process



Purpose of the Reflection Process

1. For Pastoral Areas and parishes to reflect prayerfully on the needs and opportunities for outreach within their local communities, and commit to a number of local projects.
2. To discover where the new Mandated Pastoral Ministry roles could bring new life and energy.
3. To grow the confidence of local people as they undertake new projects and learn new skills.

Principles for our Process

In his final document to the Synod on Young People, Pope Francis writes:

For the sake of mission, too, the Church is called to adopt a relational manner that places emphasis on listening, welcoming, dialogue and common discernment in a process that transforms the lives of those taking part. "A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening 'is more than simply hearing'. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. (122)

Bishop Peter echoed this call at our Diocesan Day on 9th March. Therefore our diocesan reflection process must have at its heart this mutual listening and common discernment. How can we do this?

1. We are people of prayer. We begin, end, and continue in prayer, in the strength of the Holy Spirit. **Our time together is a mutual seeking of the will of God**, not the forwarding of our own agenda. Our calling is that of our baptism: we are all sharers in the mission of the Church (Catechism 1213).
2. We are people in community. We are the Body of Christ. Our process of change and growth is **fundamentally about building relationships**: with one another, with people we don't know, with our neighbours, with those we don't like. As we meet new people, we share in their stories and grow ourselves.
3. We are people of hope – the Easter hope of the Resurrection. We start by recognising the strengths and capabilities that are represented by local individuals, groups, institutions, places and connections. **What is already good about your community?** What is the essence of your community that makes it unique and strong?
4. We are listening people. It is important that we can have good conversations about the needs that go unmet, and our dreams for the future. **Let us agree to talk about what is possible** within the boundaries of Church teaching, but also to remain curious about each other's perspectives.
5. We are people with a mission. What is God calling you to do? The motivation for getting involved is the opportunity to be part of something bigger than myself – **the excitement of making a real difference**. It is living out our vocation.
6. We are people who call others. **Don't keep your enthusiasm to yourself**. Talk about your faith, your church, your project and the excitement you feel. If people are interested, ask them to get involved – they love to be invited to something worthwhile.
7. We are change-making people. The change we want can come about by **harnessing local people working together** rather than waiting for external factors. We have to be the change we crave. Everyone has a gift – do you know what it is?

Proposed Running Order for Pastoral Area Reflection Days

	What?	Who?
9.30-10	Coffee and Registrations	Hospitality Team
10am	Welcome, introductions Purpose of the day, founding principles and ground rules. Prayer	Dean and Facilitators
10.30	Vision for the Diocese	Bishop Peter on video
10.40	Mapping exercise in parish groups: What are we proud of? What can we build on for the future?	Facilitators
11.15	Groups to share 1 thing they are proud of	
11.45	The need for mission	Input on video/slides
12.00	Mapping exercise 2: Where are the needs? What are the small practical steps we could take? (This doesn't necessarily mean starting from scratch – there are many excellent local projects that could benefit from Catholic participants bringing their expertise.) Tell the group that they will be asked to share 1-2 ideas after lunch.	
12.45	Shared Lunch	Hospitality team
1.30	Feedback from groups: 1-2 ideas each	
1.50	New Mandated Ministry roles	Fr Francis + slides on video
2.00	Group discussion How could these roles help grow the local church? How could they make outreach more possible?	Facilitators
2.30	Support from the diocese: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering workshop • Small group leader training • Pastoral Leadership 	Input on video/slides
2.40	Look back at the practical steps that came out of the 2 nd mapping exercise. Each group decides on one practical step/project to take forward (suggest 1 per parish). For each proposed project, fill in the "Building the Kingdom" sheets up to no. 5. Then complete the "Get involved" sheet.	Facilitators
3.10	Each group pitches their idea to the room (2 minutes!). There should also be a working group to look at the Mandated Ministry roles. At the end, give people 5 mins to think about what they'd like to be involved in and to sign up to be part of working groups.	Facilitators + Dean
3.40	Lay out next steps, eg next PAC meeting, Bishop Peter coming etc Final prayer	Local clergy/members of PAC?
4pm	Goodbyes	Dean

Tips on Facilitating our Reflection Days

Skills of a facilitator – taken from <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/facilitationmeeting#large>

Respect for all participants and genuine interest in what each individual has to offer.

Good listening skills, including using questions to be able to understand everyone's viewpoint clearly.

Confidence in the ability of the group to work together and find solutions.

Assertiveness: knowing when to intervene decisively and give some direction to the meeting.

Paying attention: paying attention to both the content of the discussion and the process. How are people feeling? What exactly are the issues?

Neutrality on the issues discussed. Trust in the facilitators is dependent on the group being sure that they are not deliberately or unconsciously manipulating the meeting towards a particular outcome.

Running the Meeting

Know the purpose of the day. During the introductions, introduce the purpose of the meeting and agree this with the group.

Agree 'ground rules' – ways of being. People are pretty good at coming up with these, but they should include:

- Listening to the views of others
- Encouraging everyone to speak
- Being aware of your own 'air-time' – keep contributions brief and to the point
- Remain curious – don't dismiss views that you don't agree with but ask why people think that. They may well have a good reason for their view.
- Keeping confidentiality. This is more difficult in a public meeting than in a small prayer group, but the meeting should feel like a safe place for people to be able to express their views.
- Being aware of time.

Running to time

You have the responsibility for keeping the meeting to time. If it seems as if it would be worth giving more time to a particular section, be aware that you'll have to cut the time for something later. It's helpful to think this through in advance.

Help everyone to participate: draw out quiet people, limit over-talking, don't let anyone dominate the discussion. Use techniques such as breaking into small groups to equalise participation and to create a safe atmosphere for expressing opinions and feelings.

Check on the overall feeling of the group throughout the meeting: energy levels, interest in the subject, whether the aims are being fulfilled, whether the structure is appropriate (e.g. large or small groups) and time.

Be positive: be appreciative of everyone's contribution and draw out points of agreement and common ground.

In tense or tiring situations try humour, affirmation, games, changing seats, silence, taking a break etc. Some groups might rebel at the suggestion of "wasting time" on a game, but will welcome a stretch break or informal hilarity.

Parking space: when something comes up that's not relevant to the discussion at hand 'park' it in the parking space (a large sheet of paper on the wall) and deal with it at an appropriate time later. This allows you to stay focused but reassures participants they will be heard. This is particularly helpful for suggestions which are outside the Church's teaching, eg married or women priests. Do recognise people's heartfelt views, but at the same time suggest that there are other practical and immediate steps that can be focussed on today.

Challenge put-downs and discriminatory remarks. The facilitator has extra responsibility for making sure that the meeting is a safe space. If one participant says or does things that are offensive or hurtful, it is important that this is challenged - even if you don't think the comment applies to anyone in the room.. A guideline is to address someone's behaviour, or the words they said, without passing judgement on them as a person. (E.g.: "You may not know this, but the word you just used has racist origins." or "Sorry Jo, you didn't let Sia finish making their point. Sia, are you up for carrying on with what you saying?")

Make sure the meeting finishes on time, or get everyone's agreement to continue.

Ensure someone has taken on writing up and circulating the minutes or notes in the next few days.

Make sure a time and place for the next meeting has been agreed and that people leave their contact details if they want to be updated or receive minutes for the meeting. Do this before people start leaving.

Provide some satisfying closure to the meeting: sum up, remind people of what they're committed to doing before the next meeting and remember to thank everyone for turning up and contributing.

Evaluating your meetings can help to constantly improve them. It's a good idea to leave a few minutes at the end of every agenda and ask the group what went well and what needs to be improved. You could also get together afterwards with the other organisers to evaluate the meeting. Remember to celebrate what you have achieved!

Key Facilitation Skills

- **Active listening** enables us to hear what others are saying. When we really listen, we communicate that what someone is saying is important to us, and we try to get an accurate understanding of what they are actually saying.
- **Questioning** helps clarify what people are saying, or supports people to explore their needs and come up with new possibilities. You could support them with **clarifying questions**, e.g. "What I think you're saying is... Am I right?" or "When you say that we 'aren't pulling our weight', can you say more about what you'd like us to do?" Be wary of interrogating someone, or asking them to prove themselves - the aim is to support them to put their message across, not to pull it to pieces!
- **Summarising** helps remind us of the key points in the discussion and check we have the same understanding. Usually this will involve pulling out key points of a discussion to help people think about ways forward. Occasionally, summarising an individual contribution can help - for example, if someone spoke a long time, and you want to check you all had an accurate understanding of what they were trying to say. Sometimes facilitators take notes to help keep track of the views in the room.
- **Synthesising** is the skill that allows us to draw together different views and ideas to form one proposal that works for everyone. Start with whatever agreement there is and build the proposal from that. Look for ideas on how the differences can be resolved. Focus on solutions that address the fundamental needs and key concerns that people within the group have. Often people are willing to give way on some things yet not on others which affect them more closely. The solution will often be found by combining elements from different suggestions. People often argue over small details and overlook the fact that they agree on the big picture. Making this obvious to the group can help to provide ways forward.

If you haven't done anything like this before, have a go at some of these skills. Key facilitation skills are useful in daily life, and it's surprising how they can make difficult conversations much easier. You may want to buddy up with someone with some experience at facilitating and practise at a more low key meeting – or just on your work colleagues or family and friends! There are lots more excellent tips and tricks at www.seedsforchange.org.uk.

Kit List

Refreshments

It makes a huge impact to have good refreshments at a day like this. See if some parishioners would bake a cake to donate. Make lunch a “bring a plate to share” type event, or even get M+S sandwich platters and fruit. It doesn’t cost a lot and makes people feel appreciated. Decent coffee will go down well as well!

Room layout

It is helpful to have people sitting around tables. It makes it easier to have group conversation, but also to write notes, do the mapping exercise etc. It’s helpful to have several sheets of large paper, pens and pencils on each table. Make sure that everyone can see the screen if they turn their chairs around. Make sure that the room is a comfortable temperature, and that there is disabled access if necessary. Think about parking, and signage, if it’s not clear from the front of the building where the meeting room is.

Technology

You will need to be able to show video with sound on a large screen. You can have the video on DVD or can download it. You will also need to show powerpoint slides. If you anticipate lots of people coming, you may want to have a microphone so that the speaker can be heard right to the back of the room.

Mapping Exercise

If you can get hold of maps of the town/pastoral area, it helps people to see in a different way (we used a free trial subscription for the Ordnance Survey mapping service <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk>) . We can give you the pdfs for the A3 maps we produced for the Thornton Day. Large sheets of paper (eg flip chart paper), coloured pens, stickie notes all help to make this a fun exercise.

Handouts

There will be a number of handouts for the day. Eg you can print out the timetable for everyone, or you could write it on a large piece of paper and put it at the front of the room where everyone can see it. You may want to have a few copies of the “Roles and Titles for Pastoral Leadership” on each table, and you’ll need some of the “Building the Kingdom” and “Get involved” sheets for the final sessions as well. All these will be sent out via email to each facilitator well in advance.

Prayer

Work out well in advance if you’d like to have some music at your meeting. It does work wonders in terms of bringing people together and giving them a sense of collective purpose. If you are going to have music, organise musicians, and don’t forget to provide the words (either on the screen or in hymn books). We are encouraging the Pastoral Areas to think about their Patronal Saint for inspiration.

How can the Pastoral Ministry Office help?

This is a diocese-wide process of reflection leading to action. It is engaging the skills of clergy and laity to explore together new ways of working. We recognise that this is a new venture and that some support might be helpful. Therefore the Pastoral Ministry Office can offer the following:

Pastoral Area Reflection Days

If more help is needed with the Pastoral Area Reflection Days, Avril can come to clergy or Pastoral Area Council meetings to assist with the planning process or to provide an extra training session.

Small Group Leader training – to build prayer and faith formation in parishes

There will be another Adult Faith Leader training weekend in the autumn: this will provide training in facilitation and group skills, how to lead prayer, access to a range of materials, and the opportunity to plan a new group.

Volunteering workshop - to enable new people to get involved and improve local structures

Avril can offer a day long workshop covering why people volunteer, getting new people involved and how to deal with tricky situations. People are able to use their new skills straight away to improve the volunteering structures in a parish, recruit new people for their projects, and make volunteering a satisfying and life-giving experience.

Pastoral Leadership Support – to give the projects the best chance of succeeding

We can offer a set of sessions helping to improve leadership skills, working to a vision, better collaboration, and tips and tricks for getting things done.

For more information about any of these, please contact Avril Baigent on avril@northamptondiocese.com or 07823 788 310.

Prayer Suggestions

Here are some suggestions for your opening and closing prayer, drawn from the readings we used at the Thornton Day. However, it is always worthwhile checking the daily readings for the date of your Reflection Day.

Opening prayer

Sing a suitable song such as "Be thou my vision"

Reflect on scripture:

"The Lord says this:

If you do away with the yoke,
the clenched fist, the wicked word,
if you give your bread to the hungry,
and relief to the oppressed,
your light will rise in the darkness,
and your shadows become like noon.

The Lord will always guide you,
giving you relief in desert places.

He will give strength to your bones
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water
whose waters will never run dry.

You will rebuild the ancient ruins,
build upon the old foundations.

You will be called 'Breach mender',
'Restorer of ruined houses.'"

Isaiah 58: 9-12

Questions for reflection:

- When did God first become more than a word to you?
- In what ways has the Lord "guided you, giving you relief in desert places?"
- Where do you see God at work in our local Church?

Concluding Prayer

Father,

Thank You for every person that is here today; for each heart and mind that fills this room. Only You truly know what we are setting out to accomplish today. We have an idea, a vision. We have talents, abilities, and this time set apart. Use all that we have to build your Kingdom. Lift our eyes to seek You first today, and always, surrendering ourselves to you. Shift our perspective to seek Your wisdom above all else.

Bless this meeting and ready us to make every moment count.

Glory be to the Father...

Closing Prayer

A time of commissioning ourselves for where God wants to take us in our Pastoral Areas and parishes.

Introduction

At the end of our day together, let us ask the Lord to bless all we have accomplished, and to go with us as we leave this place, filled with a renewed sense of God's purpose in our lives.

Responsory:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying:

Who should I send?

Who will go for Us?

All: I said: Here I am. Send me.

1st Reading

Listen again to the reading from Isaiah

Time of reflection –

- how has our perspective of this reading changed over the day?
- What has the Lord accomplished with in our time together?
- How can we be “like a spring of water, whose waters will never run dry”?

2nd reading: part of the Prayer of John Henry Newman

God has created me to do Him some definite service.

He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.

I have my mission.

I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.

I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.

He has not created me for naught.

I shall do good; I shall do His work.

I shall be an angel of peace,

a preacher of truth in my own place,

while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments.

Therefore, I will trust Him,

whatever I am, I can never be thrown away.

If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him,

in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him.

If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.

He does nothing in vain.

He knows what He is about.

He may take away my friends.

He may throw me among strangers.

He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me.

Still, He knows what He is about.

Responsory:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying:

Who should I send?

Who will go for Us?

All: I said: Here I am. Send me.

Informal Prayer Time:

It would be good to pray for each of the projects that have been decided that day and for the people that are going to undertake them.

Final prayer and blessing

Father, thank you that you have revealed Your love to us today.

We invite You to send us out from here in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fan into flame the gifts that you have given us,

And give us the perseverance to continue your work.

May the blessing of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Come down on us and be among us

Through Christ our Lord,

Amen.

Sing a suitable concluding hymn, such as "Here I am Lord".