What is the Lord Calling us to Be and Do?

ENGAGING WITH THE SYNODAL VISION
FOR THE DIOCESE OF HEXHAM & NEWCASTLE

Discerning God's vision together: Pastoral Councils

We need to encourage "increased participation of laymen and laywomen in Church discernment processes and all phases of decision-making processes" the Synod calls for Pastoral Councils to be "mandatory", effective, accountable and evaluative. *104. XV1 Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops the Final Document 2024*

'How needed Pastoral Councils are! A bishop cannot guide a diocese without Pastoral Councils. A parish priest cannot guide the parish without the Parish Council. This is fundamental' *Pope Francis, Pastoral Visit to Assisi, 4th October 2013*

Preparatory reflection

"*Mission, Mission, Mission…For effective mission, I invite and encourage us all to breathe new life into parish and partnership councils. There is no one size fits all on offer. Our parishes and partnerships are diverse. However, I trust we can all agree on some basic principles for mission. We are all co-responsible for the mission of the Church. Yes, our responsibilities in so many lay ministries, as deacons, priests and as Bishop are different, but we are all involved. Parishioners and clergy must work together, affirming one another, encouraging one another, caring for one another and lovingly challenging one another to listen to the Lord and carry out his will.*"

Bishop Stephen Pastoral letter d. 16 March 2025

It is suggested that ahead of meeting together participants spend some time in prayer reflecting on the following questions:

1. What has been your experience of Pastoral councils (Parish or Partnership)?
2. How does this Community listen to the Holy Spirit and Act?
3. How can we foster a more inclusive, Mission-focused Pastoral Council and increase participation?

Opening prayer

We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name. With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts; teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it. We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path nor partiality influence our actions. Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life and not stray from the way of truth and what is right. All this we ask of You, who is at work in every place and time, in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever. Amen.

Lectio Divina

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour..

Romans 12: 3-11

- Allow time for people to repeat the word, phrase or line that resonates for them. Conclude this prayer time by reading the text once more.

Conversations in the Spirit

Begin with a few moments of silence to allow ourselves to ponder the question.

1 First round of conversation:
Each person has a chance to speak for up to 1 minute.
There is no discussion in this round.
There is a time of silence to allow for reflection.

2 Second round of conversation:
Each person has a chance to speak for up to 1 minute.
Share what struck you most or resonated for you in the first round, including in the time of silence.
There is a time of silence to allow for reflection.

3 Third round of conversation:
Each person has a chance to speak for up to 1 minute.
Reflect and share what have been common themes or fruits? What might be the prompting of the Holy Spirit for the next step? Where do you feel the Holy Spirit may be leading us here?

Each person is to speak in turn for 2 minutes from their own experience.

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In the third round of sharing – What might be the next concrete step to move this forward

Closing prayer

Father, pour out your Spirit upon your people,
and grant us a new vision of your glory,
a new experience of your power,
a new faithfulness to your Word,
and a new consecration to your service;
that your love may grow among us; and your Kingdom come;
through Crist our Lord. Amen