

FORWARD TOGETHER
IN
HOPE

Our Partnership Proposals



DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**



Partnership in the Gospel

Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,
always in every prayer of mine for you all
making my prayer with joy,
thankful for your partnership in the gospel
from the first day until now.

And I am sure that he who began a good work in you
will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:2-6

Prayer resources have been developed to accompany this stage of our *Forward Together in Hope* journey.
They are available from the resources section of the website and are designed to be customised for use
within parishes and emerging partnerships.

Our Partnership Proposals

For almost two years we have all been exploring what it means to be a disciple of Jesus within a viable and flourishing community. In the short time between now and the beginning of Advent we need to draw upon our exploration and look very practically at how resources can be shared and leadership developed to enable our communities to flourish into the future. Every parishioner has been asked to contribute to this by thinking and praying about partnership and offering their practical suggestions through the tear-off slip from the *Imagine new ways...* leaflet.

This document, *Our Partnership Proposals*, requests information from a **group of parishes** about their initial proposals for developing new partnership arrangements. Please read this in conjunction with the booklet *From Parish to Partnership* published in June this year which sets out detailed information about these partnerships and their benefits. In it we are reminded that Pope Francis speaks of 'parish' as '*not an outdated institution precisely because it possesses great flexibility; it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and community*'. We now have a real opportunity to follow this call to be flexible, open, creative and missionary as we travel together on the next stage of our journey.

Electronic versions of both of these documents are available within the resources section of the *Forward Together in Hope* website at www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk.

One completed document for each proposed partnership should be returned electronically to hope@diocesehn.org.uk by mid-day on the First Sunday of Advent (27th November) at the latest. It is essential that all areas adhere to this deadline to ensure that their proposals are taken into account within the diocesan-wide proposals that will be developed as a next stage.

We welcome completed documents ahead of this date. Please copy your proposals to the Dean(s) with responsibility for the parishes in the proposed partnership.

All information received by 27th November will be worked with during December to produce the first draft of a 'Flexible Plan' for consideration by Bishop Séamus and the Diocesan Board of Directors at their residential meeting. Prior to that meeting we may need to communicate with the contact person for the proposed partnership (usually the Dean or his nominee) to clarify particular issues or to ask for further details.

We are conscious that in parts of the diocese all of this is very new and that some proposals presented will be very much an outline. Other areas may well be able to go into a lot more detail. In all cases it is important to remember that the documents submitted at the end of November represent *initial proposals*. Once they are all received, these proposals have to be brought together to arrive at a position that works well across the diocese as a whole. While this is likely to mean that some proposals may not be accepted in their entirety, all thoughts and ideas received by the deadline will be brought to bear on the recommendations put forward to Bishop Séamus and the Diocesan Board.

When Bishop Séamus has considered everything, his decisions will be communicated widely across the diocese. Partnership arrangements will then be firmed up and each area asked to commence detailed planning and implementation.

For advice about completing this document, or for any other queries, please feel free to contact the *Forward Together in Hope* team by e-mail at hope@diocesehn.org.uk or by telephone on 0191 243 3304.

Thank you for everything that you are doing to make *Forward Together in Hope* a success.

Section 1: Details of the Proposed Partnership

(Please refer to Section 2.1 on Page 6 of 'From Parish to Partnership')

The parish is not an outdated institution precisely because it possesses great flexibility; it can assume quite different contours...

Pope Francis - Evangelii Gaudium

1.1 Please list the parishes that you envisage being involved in the proposed partnership.

(Please extend this table if necessary)

Our deanery proposes the whole deanery as the best workable partnership:

Parish Name	Location	Priest(s)	Deacon(s)	Mass Attendance*
St Mary & St Wilfrid	Bishop Auckland	Fr Dennis Tindall		286
Our Lady & St Cuthbert	Crook	Fr Gordon Ryan (Sr Mary Jane & Sr Joy – Parish Sisters)	Michael Rowell	130
St Joseph's	Tow Law	Fr Gordon Ryan		61
St Thomas of Canterbury	Wolsingham	Fr Gordon Ryan		87
St Charles	Tudhoe	Fr Harry O'Reilly		255
The Holy Family	Newton Aycliffe & Shildon	Fr Michael Whalen		424
All Saints	Ferryhill	Fr Simon Weymes		144
St Joseph's	Coundon	Fr Simon Weymes (Sr Anna Ryan – Parish Sister)		135
Sacred Heart	Windlestone	Fr Simon Weymes		61
Our Lady & St Thomas	Willington	Fr Brian Murphy		133
TOTAL MASS ATTENDANCE				1716

* Please include the average Mass attendance figure for each parish as reported in October 2015. (We are aware that there are sometimes seasonal variations in Mass attendance).

1.2 Why is this grouping seen as the most appropriate for your area?

Please provide as much information as you can in presenting a rationale for the proposed partnership arrangement. You may wish to consider, for example, complementary skills/experience, historical connections, distances, existing joint activity, finances, numbers attending Mass etc.

The priests and lay Forward Together in Hope parish representatives of the present deanery are very much aware of the difficulty in meeting the pastoral needs of our area and are looking ahead to when the deanery will be served by fewer priests than at present. We currently have six priests in the deanery. Two of the priests are now 75 years old, one is 70, two are in their late sixties and we have one at the fifty mark.

This deanery has a number of smaller worshipping communities than one would expect to find in town parishes. We feel very strongly that the needs of people living in rural areas must be met as fully as the needs of people in greater conurbation areas. We currently have 12 churches but they are not equal-sized parishes. To see ourselves as one partnership combining rural and more populated areas is a flexible and more manageable way of meeting the needs of the areas we serve. In addition the transport hubs for the deanery area are such that the parishes so far can be served by keeping all our communities under one partnership with fewer priests.

We appreciate that this preference for one partnership for the whole deanery may give the impression that we are reluctant to change. This is not the case. Given the rural nature of the deanery where, for instance, the collective responsibilities of Crook, Tow Law and Wolsingham take its parish priest well out into the dales, similarly the three parishes of Ferryhill, Windlestone and Coundon are, in a sense, almost a partnership in itself. Likewise, the area covered by the Bishop Auckland parish includes two former parishes of St Chad at Witton Park and St Paulinus at St Helen Auckland in addition to the two town churches in Bishop Auckland itself. The proposed partnership area contains many small and medium villages and other rural settlements over which we still need to provide pastoral care.

In our deanery partnership we have some well-established arrangements for working together so that emergencies and specific pastoral requirements can be covered should a priest be on holiday or otherwise unavailable. Bishop Auckland and Newton Aycliffe look after one another, Ferryhill and Tudhoe look after one another. Within the partnership as envisaged, some parishes have more affinity between them than others – arising from geographical proximity, their history or school links, for example.

The area is already working collaboratively to look at the needs of our young people and we hope to explore further the connections and practice we already have across the parishes so that in partnership with our schools we can develop more relevant ways of being the Church for our younger members. The primary schools in the proposed partnership area feed into St John's Academy in Bishop Auckland and from the Newton Aycliffe area student choice is divided between St John's and Carmel School in Darlington. We are currently trying to establish greater youth participation with the Darlington deanery.

1.3 What issues might get in the way of effective joint working in this partnership area and how might these be minimised?

Issue	Minimising the impact
Transport issues, bus times & availability	We need to establish a system of keeping in touch with people unable to get to Mass and making arrangements by having Masses at times when buses are running or through car sharing schemes or minibus provision so that we meet the needs of the greatest number.
Poor communication between parishioners-church-parish-Partnership council. Lack of time /ICT skills	Effective networking structure set up between the Parish-Partnership-Diocese. Basic ICT skills or training given, at local level. Each church sub group has at least one computer literate member to relay information. Inter-deanery bulletins, advertising, web page
Email/communication issues	Most but not everyone uses email and even fewer use social media like Facebook or Twitter. A separate, dedicated website and email address may well be needed.
Timing of Masses	Greater need to establish Mass times to enable a reduced number of priests to serve the various churches at the weekend. Probably needs to be deanery wide to allow flexibility for priests' holidays.
Transport between churches	Transport between churches remained a concern for some and we mentioned again making possible use of community transport schemes such as Dene Valley Community Transport or Shildon Community Bus Scheme.

1.4 Were there any alternative partnership combinations that were seriously considered as part of your deliberations?

Yes

If 'Yes', please describe these arrangements, their advantages and disadvantages and why they are less appropriate than your preferred option.

In the time of Bishop Ambrose, pastoral areas were established in the diocese as suggested combinations of parishes which were geographically close who might work together. In this partnership area there were three pastoral areas:

- a) Crook, Wolsingham, Tow Law and Willington
- b) Bishop Auckland, West Auckland, Shildon and Coundon
- c) Newton Aycliffe, Chilton (Windlestone), Ferryhill and Tudhoe

Feedback from Ferryhill indicated that there appeared little evidence that the above system actually operated.

There was also a suggestion about splitting the existing deanery into two partnerships. However, it was decided that the collective strengths of the deanery as a whole are superior to smaller combinations of parishes as they are at the moment. The western end (Wolsingham/Tow Law) would have been extremely rural and isolated if not linked with the wider partnership.

Section 2: New Ways of Working Together

(Please refer to Sections 2.2 and 2.3 on Page 6 of 'From Parish to Partnership')

*There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit;
there are all sorts of service to be done,
but always to the same Lord,
working in all sorts of different ways
in all sorts of people.*

1 Cor. 12:4-5

2.1 What leadership/co-ordination arrangements are proposed for the partnership area?

Please think about possible leadership structures, roles and responsibilities and associated training and development etc.

We envisage sharing skills/providing training for baptism preparation, marriage preparation, the conducting of non-Eucharistic funerals (we have 1 person currently trained in the deanery) and we also recognise the need to train more leaders for Services of the Word and Eucharist.

The priests of the proposed partnership area raised a question of individual parishes contributing to a central fund for some costs and suggested that this should be a discussion item for the Partnership Council. They also proposed that a discussion about having a maintenance officer who could deal with repairs, renewals and other building matters could be explored.

We can explore greater sharing of secretarial help. We have suitably qualified people in place looking after finances. We would value any lay training programmes that the diocese would organise but this part of the diocese suffers from many courses being based on Tyneside. We would like to explore what we can do amongst ourselves in our partnership area but we recognise that in smaller worshipping communities it is more difficult to find volunteers to take on new roles or even well-established ones.

One person from the Tudhoe parish is about to complete training in Celebration of Services of the Word and Holy Communion.

It is worthwhile noting that there is an ideal facility at Ferryhill – the Catholic Club – that is already used by the diocese for training programmes, i.e., Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. It is considered ideal by Fr A Dixon because of car parking facilities, plenty capacity, catering, and especially the close proximity to the Church. At the last course there were people there from parishes in Stockton, Wolsingham and even as far as Alnwick.

Priests need to identify the tasks that they wish to release to the laity. The forum for deciding the tasks to be shared with the laity, we feel, would ideally be the Partnership Council. It is recognised that the priests will still have ultimate responsibility but discussion about collaborative working practices should take place so that we work towards the most achievable sharing of tasks and visions. It was recognised that a priest is not given a parish but is given to a parish and that lay people are not here to help the priest but the priest is here to help the laity be the Church.

2.2 What initial areas of joint working are proposed for the partnership area?

Please identify the main areas that are seen as initial priorities for joint working across the proposed partnership. It is important to share the 'Observations on Parish Questionnaires' and draw upon these.

We propose to establish very soon a Partnership Council representing the communities currently in our partnership in order that we can realistically address issues of concern or need and work towards making our best response from the skills we have amongst us. We recognise the benefit of drawing up some kind of skills audit so that we can be aware of what strengths we carry in the people of our area.

Young people are a major concern. We have established a meeting of people from the deanery to address what we can do for our young people and this group has met on several occasions. We did try to make it a double deanery group by attempting to link with Darlington but this has not had the success that we had hoped. One person in the deanery is currently participating in the Youth Ministry module provided by the diocesan Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS). We are continuing to develop the John Paul II Award for the young people in our schools and across the broader area.

We also need to target those in the 20 – 50 years of age group. In the 1980s the success of Renewal weekends at St Mary's, Newton Aycliffe with Fr Johnny Docherty, Fr Michael Hickey and Fr Harry Ryan (Newton Aycliffe's parish priest at that time) gave that parish, and Ferryhill, many willing servants.

We need to look more closely at current arrangements for maintaining properties to see if we can use the economies of scale to provide such support across multiple sites. It might be possible to adopt a system used by other organisations to encourage and simplify the matter of reporting church building repairs. A template form – on a central website – could take the details required and send this to an identified contact by email to enable the issue to be addressed.

As we discussed, each parish has several people who are expert in buildings work. These people should come together to form one buildings committee. With currently 12 Churches within the area, it could be agreed for them to visit two churches on a rolling schedule to conduct an annual inspection of each building. One of them could monitor the email reporting of faults & progress accordingly.

Committees such as finance & Parish Council should become centralised groups – or feed in or report back to the Partnership Council.

Each church could be tasked with arranging a particular service/event to encourage parishioners to move around the proposed partnership area. In the summer, something like a car rally calling in at some of the churches could be organised with either a short service and/or social event in each church. Special Masses such as the recent Mothers' Mass at Bishop Auckland could become regular features with attendance from other parishioners encouraged.

A lot of the ideas and strategies for joint working will address issues identified from the parish questionnaires and observations. Windlestone, linked with Ferryhill, provided some statistics from their questionnaire results that were reflected across other parishes, e.g. issues with engaging younger members and encouraging lapsed Catholics to return.

2.3 What approaches will you use to ensure plans and developments are communicated well across the proposed partnership area?

Taking into account the expected decline in the number of priests and people over time you may wish to think about this in relation to the short term (1-2 years), medium term (3-5 years) and long term (up to 2030).

a) Short term:

We envisage that the Partnership Council will identify and create necessary communication links and means of promulgating information across each of our worshipping communities. This may well involve establishing a website and identifying individuals as reliable contacts to feed in and to disseminate information.

For instance, St Charles' parish at Tudhoe have introduced spiritual and pastoral teams from *Some food for thought* and have been exploring a mission statement from St Roberts and English Martyrs in Fenham to see if this would suggest a working structure for use within that parish and perhaps across the partnership area.

b) Medium term:

We foresee that through the Partnership Council we will have formed some practical links and simple training modules to advance sacramental preparation and other resources for the partnership.

c) Long term:

Our collective view would be to learn from experience as we work together more regularly over the years. We would be reluctant to particularise for the long term but we are open and ready to learn about what our experience of working more effectively together will bring to the surface for us.

2.4 We are seeking to ensure that our worshipping communities nurture disciples to witness to Jesus in our world. What resources will be necessary to ensure this takes place and is co-ordinated across the proposed partnership?

Note: People often think about administrative support – but please think more widely about how the various facets of the partnership (e.g. Young People, Outreach, Lay Leadership, Spiritual Development etc.) could benefit from co-ordinated voluntary or paid support and what training might be required.

We felt strongly that training and resources should ideally be done at deanery level so that the uptake of whatever we provide will include more people than would be able to attend should training and resources be based in the north of the diocese.

Tudhoe are piloting and considering areas for localised continuing spiritual formation initiatives. Reading *"Divine Renovation"* (Fr. James Mallon) began this journey at St Charles and provided a comprehensive blueprint for parish evangelisation. We saw a model of what could be and this drove us along the journey.

At St Charles, Tudhoe, the Forward Together in Hope members became aware of the need for a progression in parishioners' faith development and in them becoming disciples. Tudhoe are attempting the following:

- Step 1 – ALPHA (being looked at but not piloted yet)

- Step 2 – Journey of Faith / RCIA (annually from October to Easter)
- Step 3 – The Gift
- Step 4a – The Big Picture (being looked at but not piloted yet)
- Step 4b – ALPHA 201 (being looked at but not piloted yet)

To support the above, Tudhoe have considered the resources that would be required. They also have additional ideas from Divine Renovation that they feel are worth exploring, including mentoring, development of leadership roles and links to projects with other organisations. There would be scope to expand this and develop the work across the partnership as a whole.

Ferryhill identified a considerable list of activities categorised under outreach, lay leadership and spiritual development that are reflected across many of the parishes in the proposed partnership. If these are not currently in place then with the additional numbers and resources available to us we could introduce these into all areas of the partnership.

Outreach

- Food bank, collections and volunteers to help administer, with other churches in the wider community. Based at the St Luke's church centre.
- Asylum seekers – contact with Newcastle (Justice & Peace) for many years – clothes and food collected.
- Justice and Peace group. CAFOD.
- Shoe boxes and sending off services.
- Ladder Centre
- Churches Together and Women's world day of Prayer.
- Caring Group
- Ecumenical Carol Service with Durham Constabulary Band
- Lenten devotions - Stations of the Cross led by parish groups, e.g., Liturgy Group, Justice and Peace, Women's Guild.
- Good Friday Stations of the Cross (attended by other denominations)

Lay Leadership

- Pastoral Parish Council, Finance Group, Liturgy Group, Justice and Peace.
- Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist (29 ministers). Taking communion to the sick and housebound.
- Readers (21 parishioners).
- Team of Welcomers.
- Sacristans (5 parishioners).
- Rosary Group
- Catechists for Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation.
- Childrens' Liturgy – now approaching 20 years old.
- Maintenance of Church facilities and grounds - Northumbria in Bloom Silver awards.
- Church cleaning teams.
- Music – Choir and Organist.
- Women's Guild – organisation of Church Fayres.
- Catholic Club.
- Organising the use of the Catholic Club after funerals.
- Organising of the coffee morning after Sunday mass.

Spiritual Development

- First Holy Communion preparation. Celebration Masses.
- Confirmation preparation.
- Youth Sunday.

- Mothering Sunday celebration led by young people
- Parish pilgrimages to Rome and Assisi

In addition to the above the partnership also has Scripture study and groups to promote different types of prayer (intercessory/contemplative). Ministeracres retreat centre provides a number of courses attended by people from the area. Newton Aycliffe and Bishop Auckland run an annual pilgrimage to Walsingham.

2.5 What proposals / initial thoughts are there for new ways of working within the proposed partnership area?

Please remember that these new partnerships are not simply groupings of a number of current parishes with their existing arrangements and structures - they offer the opportunity to look at things differently and innovatively to ensure viable and flourishing communities. You may wish to consider, for example, bringing together existing groups/creating new groups, committees and Councils and strengthening links with schools. In some areas it may be desirable for the parishes within a partnership area to merge over time. Once again, conscious of the gradually reducing number of priests and people, you may wish to think about this in relation to the short term (1-2 years), medium term (3-5 years) and long term (up to 2030).

a) Short term:

The proposed Partnership Council will be the vehicle through which we explore, identify and provide for the needs of our partnership area. Clearly, this particular forum will be a way of us getting to know one another better, appreciating our strengths and recognising what gaps there may be in necessary provision for us to be a healthy partnership. As a consequence, individual projects and/or sub-committees will be established in order to share or enhance good practice and create new initiatives.

Fr Michael Whalen is providing a one-page paper on the diaconate and we saw the need to explore and encourage possible vocations to the diaconate from individuals in our area. Currently we only have one deacon.

b) Medium term:

It will be important for the Partnership Council to be well-led and to keep itself focused on real issues so it does not become a talking shop or a comfortable arena for riding personal hobby horses.

c) Long term:

We resisted the temptation to detail any long term projections but feel confident that these will emerge naturally as we explore together how we can best serve the people of our area and help in their formation as followers of the Gospel today.

We discussed the location of priests in our partnership area and where they may reside as numbers of priests reduce. Whilst not going into detail on this question it was clear and unanimous that it would be better for priests to be spread across the area rather than be living under the same roof (an exception to this may be if we are reduced to only two priests for the area, it may be helpful for them to share accommodation and support).

Section 3: Facilities

(Please refer to Section 2.4 on Page 7 of 'From Parish to Partnership')

I will be looking carefully and seriously at any necessary restructuring, including: the closure of some of our church buildings; use of our building for other purposes and the need to reduce the number of Masses being celebrated.

Bishop Séamus - July 2014

3.1 Please list each of the churches in your proposed partnership along with their maximum capacity and details of any existing issues/future plans that might have a bearing on their use.

Church Name	Location	Max. Capacity	Existing Issues/Future Plans
All Saints	Ferryhill	350	Not known
St Charles	Tudhoe	400	Grade 2 listed building
Our Lady & St Thomas	Willington	150	No known plans
St Thomas	Wolsingham	220	Grade 2 listed building
Sacred Heart	Windlestone	150	
St Joseph	Coundon	400	
All Saints	Ferryhill	350	
St Mary	Newton Aycliffe	300	
St Thomas	Shildon	140	
St Mary	Bishop Auckland	300	
St Wilfrid	Bishop Auckland	235	
Our Lady & St Cuthbert	Crook	250	Grade 2 listed building
St Joseph	Tow Law	150	

We carry a clear concern to continue to use our church buildings for as long as we can and to envisage closure if there is no viable worshipping community or if maintenance costs become excessive. It has been our experience that to close a church means that we lose a number of people who are unable or unwilling to go elsewhere. This has had the effect of splitting communities; the elderly and the poor are the very ones who miss out. We require a new mind-set about communities and buildings. Experience of the worldwide church would indicate that keeping communities together has been the custom of the Church when no Mass has been possible because a priest has been unable to be present each weekend. We note

that we have much yet to be explored and discovered about the use of a variety of non-Eucharistic Services for significant numbers of people. We felt strongly in our meetings that serving and preserving the community is a first requirement and in so far as church buildings serve this purpose we would only suggest closure as a matter of necessity.

During discussions we raised the question of the importance of a visible church building in a community. Many people come to church when they need what we can provide, e.g. baptism, wedding, etc. but do not see themselves as participating members of a living Church community. However if the church building were to close, we envisage that many of the non-attending people would be vocal in their dismay because they regard themselves as part of the church family and the church building has a significance as that family's gathering place. In our discussions the value of a sacramental presence, a kindred item to the one mentioned above, was raised as an important feature of how we visibly express the part we play in our community.

We did raise the question of ecumenical cooperation (and Shildon was mentioned as an example) since the Church of England and some other religious communities also struggle with falling numbers. We are not averse to examining further the possibility of more than one denomination sharing a place of worship.

3.2 Please list any other buildings (e.g. schools) that are currently used, or which could be used, for worship. Please feel free to add any notes to explain your thinking.

Venue	Parish/Location	Max. Capacity	Used Now (N) /Could Use (C) Include any notes here
St Cuthbert's Centre	Crook	150	(N)
St Cuthbert's School Hall	Crook	200	(N)
Catholic Club	Tudhoe	200	(N) Mass is being restarted here Open Deanery meeting held here including evangelising and prayer as part of this. Portable screen projector here
St Charles Primary	Spennymoor	200	(N) The Gift Prayer ministry Already used for 1 st Friday Family Mass. Excellent sound screen kitchen facilities
Catholic Club	Ferryhill	120	(N) The church hall/Catholic Club has been used in times of church repairs.
Meeting Room, St Mary's	Newton Aycliffe	60	(N) Used for Parish Council meetings, finance meetings, various courses, SVP meetings, refreshments after Mass, toddler groups, lunch club. Also rented out monthly to ward Councillor.
St Joseph's School	Newton Aycliffe		(N) Mass in school chapel. The school hall can also be used for functions if needed.
Meeting Room, St Thomas'	Shildon	48	(N) Serve refreshments after Mass, funeral teas, meetings and Lenten lunch. Provides additional seating for people during Mass.

Meeting Room, St Wilfrid's	Bishop Auckland	50	(N) Weekday Masses are held in the meeting room and another area that is used for refreshments. Several parish groups use it for different activities.
Meeting Room, St Mary's	Bishop Auckland	80	(N) Used for weekday worship and for social events. Different parish activities take place, including film club, bingo & quiz nights, social events and meetings.

Class Masses and whole school Masses celebrated for the students in our schools is a common experience across the proposed partnership and family members of pupils and students along with parishioners are usually invited to attend these occasions. Across the partnership, each parish has meeting rooms either adjoining, on-site or nearby to the church. We could make more effective use of all of our school buildings.

3.3 What thoughts are there about the use of the current places of worship in the proposed partnership area?

If we have around 50 active priests in the diocese in 2030 it is inevitable that Mass will be celebrated in fewer churches and less frequently. Please present your thoughts, however tentative, about the places of worship currently in use across the proposed partnership area and what the future arrangements might look like. In time it will be important to consider which buildings will be retained for worship (not necessarily for the celebration of Mass) and which might close or be used for other purposes.

The priority we give to maintaining and developing community and attending to the needs of the people of our area – not just Catholics – is often played out in the buildings we currently have and use for worship. As we mentioned in 3.1, the attachment that people have to buildings often translates into a focus for maintaining community links.

If we progress down to two priests to cover the deanery area then we can foresee Mass being celebrated in three hubs – Bishop Auckland, Newton Aycliffe and Crook/Tudhoe. These hubs could be the location of Mass being celebrated every weekend and through the week Mass could be celebrated in the other communities of the current deanery area.

We felt it important to mention that we need to change the mind-set of everything being based on priests. We need to be training lay people in leadership so that communities can have significant trust in individuals who can lead other services and be the focus for organisation in what we regard currently as our parish communities. Although attendances generally are diminishing we see the need and the possibility for arranging evangelisation courses and working with small groups. This requires a new approach, distinct from old established practices, and it was stressed that we should be more imaginative about providing things for young parents to include some faith input.

3.4 Are there any thoughts about where the priest(s) would reside in the partnership area?

We wanted to say “get lost!” However, a point was made that it may be more important for the priests in the partnership to live in smaller places with the proviso that the bigger places can look after themselves. An alternative suggestion was that if priests lived in the places we regard as hubs, it may enable them to get to other places more easily.

It is possible that priests would be better spread across the area. There is an obvious push that a priest should reside in a larger parish, that is the easy answer, however there is also an argument that affluent, middle class parishes should have the ability to look after themselves and the priest reside in the weaker, poorer, parish to give it strength and stability so that it does not decline further.

Section 4: Next Steps

(Please refer to Section 2.5 on Page 7 of 'From Parish to Partnership')

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God.

2 Pet. 9

4.1 Should your partnership proposals be accepted, please indicate what the key next steps would be for your area. Please add timescales where possible.

The first step that we foresee would be the establishment of a Partnership Council which we are discussing currently and we feel could begin to be established now. We need further discussion about how representatives should be identified/selected/appointed. We place a high value on everyone having a say as to who should represent them. Since our people by and large only have one model of Church, we carry a concern that people currently in positions for various parish activities may be proposed because they are seen as a safe pair of hands, whereas the qualities needed for a Partnership Council member may require more than this. Parishes will need to ensure that those appointed to represent them have the necessary leadership qualities for this role.

It was suggested by the priests of the deanery and agreed by the Forward Together in Hope lay representatives that each of the 12 current churches should have a representative on the Partnership Council so that no community should feel left out. It is envisaged that the council be composed of lay people and the priests of the area would be in attendance.

4.2 What support would be most useful to you from other parishes/partnerships/the diocese in achieving the next stages of your proposed partnership?

We strongly recommend and would appreciate a course in leadership for the people of the diocese and would ask that this course be provided at a location in the south of the diocese in addition to the usual Tyneside venues.

We are grateful for the work done by the FTH office in producing the document '*Some Food for Thought*'. We have found this to be a useful resource and one which will be helpful in stirring the imagination of our current group and the parish communities in our Partnership.

From the diocese, it would be useful if guidelines were produced to set out how a partnership could be expected to run. This would cover areas such as its constitution, expectations for conduct and the decisions that can be made if there is less than unanimous agreement. It may also look at how the partnership would be expected to feedback to the individual parishes, in terms of structure and communication.

It is likely that a proposed partnership will benefit from resources such as training and suitable facilities. To develop opportunities for our parishes and the wider area, we will need to look at the support available in terms of people, available funds and effective networking, advertising and presentation. These elements can be worked on as the partnership grows and progresses.

4.3 Please provide any additional information you feel we should be aware of when considering your proposals.

Discussions to respond to this question tended to repeat with emphasis the rural nature of this part of the diocese and the need for whatever developmental programmes may be initiated by the diocese to be portable to the southern part of County Durham. We were heartened by the comments of Amy Cameron at the vicariate meeting in Darlington on the 12th October and look forward to whatever she is able to develop to assist a range of leadership skills and expressions as we move into living out new models of organisation.

4.4 What questions/concerns do you have about the next stages of the process of moving to partnership arrangements across the diocese?

The main concern that we carry is not an unusual one and we feel is probably common across the diocese. It is that the mind-set and beliefs of our parish communities may be reluctant or resistant to change and that individuals may seek to repeat the status quo. It has been our experience that over the months and years since the beginning of Forward Together in Hope that our people generally have become familiar with the likelihood of change but not all people see themselves as being the agents of change. We all need to do more individual work in identifying skills and capabilities in people and involving them more in how our communities function. At present many people are happy to be served by others and are slow to see themselves as more involved participants.

Section 5: The Consultation Process

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Philippians 1:5

a) Partnership View

5.1 Please describe the process undertaken to arrive at your outline partnership proposals.

Contact was made with priests of the deanery and the Forward Together in Hope lay representatives for the parishes in early October inviting them to provide their availability to attend meetings to discuss the proposals. An initial conversation took place between those who had attended the vicariate meeting on 12th October in Darlington.

We have held three consultation meetings that were attended by the clergy and by the Forward Together in Hope lay representatives from the parishes. The dates were selected based on the availability provided by each person and also where we could at least hope to achieve a majority attendance (out of 18 – for 12x churches, 6 priests) for both clergy and lay representatives for each parish. These meetings were to decide on moving ahead in a partnership and also to discuss how this would happen.

- 19th October 2016 (12 attended)
- 2nd November 2016 (15 attended)
- 11th November 2016 (12 attended)

The meetings were not always attended by both the priest and the lay representative for each parish but in most cases at least one representative was present. In the first meeting, Crook, Wolsingham and Tow Law were not represented. All parishes were represented in the second meeting. In the final meeting, Coundon and Willington were not represented.

Feedback from the Crook FTH Lay Representative indicated that the decision was “led by (dictated by?) deanery decisions”. Across the proposed partnership, the communities involved have experienced a number of changes in the past, such as Shildon when its parish boundaries were changed to merge it with Newton Aycliffe. Concerns were raised that positive links have been developed with parishes that are outside of the partnership, e.g. Willington and Langley Moor. These links will continue to exist as good neighbouring communities who can share resources and benefits with each other.

Change often happens as a result of crisis. The steps made during the planning process to decide on a partnership – which is still at the preliminary stage – have been about making the necessary plans that will develop initiatives that will reduce the impact of changes when they are at a necessity. Drawing the communities together now will strengthen our links for the future. Our existence as a partnership may not affect the day to day life of each of the individual communities but will provide additional support and guidance that may be relied upon should future circumstances ever require it.

5.2 Were the individual Parish Observations and Profiles shared with all parishes in the proposed partnership as part of this process?

Yes / Mostly

Comments:

The parishes of the deanery exchanged their individual documents with each other. These were discussed where appropriate and we saw this as a necessary way of appreciating the collective profiles of our area. This was an informative step in helping us to have a wider and more comprehensive understanding of our local communities.

5.3 Please list any key meetings/activities that have taken place along with numbers attending.

Date	Venue	Purpose of meeting/activity	Numbers attending/participating
31.01.16	Bishop Auckland	FTH Meeting	24
01.02.16	Ferryhill	Liturgy Group – FTH on meeting agenda	12
23.02.16	Bishop Auckland	FTH Meeting	15
06.04.16	Bishop Auckland	Parish Council – FTH main agenda item.	9
20.04.16	Ferryhill	Parish Council – FTH main agenda item. Information posted at back of churches.	23
26.04.16	Bishop Auckland	FTH Meeting	18
24.05.16	Bishop Auckland	FTH Meeting	7
08.06.16	Bishop Auckland	Parish Council – FTH discussed in meeting	9
28.06.16	Bishop Auckland	FTH Meeting	15
10.07.16	Crook	Talk to congregation at end of Mass	130
17.07.16	Crook	FTH Meeting	30
23 and 24.7.16	St Charles Church	Talk Observations Profile given to all as came in	174
26.07.16	Bishop Auckland	FTH Meeting	18
03.08.16	St Charles' Catholic Club	Open Parish meeting 1 to discuss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we need to do to become a community that witnesses to Jesus in our world today? • What areas of parish life can be developed with the help of trained lay people? 	30
03.08.16	Bishop Auckland	Parish Council – FTH discussed in meeting	10
13 and 14.08.16	St Charles' Church	Church homily - Report back to parish on Open Parish meeting results. Outreach to wider community. Adapting present practice.	200+
10.09.16	Crook	Parish Away Day at Ushaw College to discuss our future and who we would hope to form a Partnership with	20

14.09.16	Ferryhill	Parish Council – FTH main agenda item. Information posted at back of churches. Action point: to contact proposed partnerships	23
14.09.16	Crook	Parish Council	10
20.09.16	Bishop Auckland	FTH Meeting	23
21.09.16	Bishop Auckland	Parish Council – FTH discussed in meeting	10
05.10.16	Ferryhill	Parish Council – FTH main agenda item. Feedback on partnership and start of exchanges. Action point: update to be given to all three churches.	
05.10.16	St Charles' Catholic Club	Open Parish meeting 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Info given on parishes in deanery • Shared vision given from Exploring the way • Q: With which local communities can we see ourselves developing a closer relationship in the future? • Introduction of draft Spiritual and Pastoral teams structure • Vision of Partnership 	19
09.10.16	St Charles' Presbytery	FTH team meeting-analysis and update. Discussion of main strengths	3
12.10.16	St Augustine's, Darlington	Vicariate meeting – most (all?) parishes were represented from our area	-
19.10.16	Ferryhill	Liturgy Group – FTH on meeting agenda	
19.10.16	St Mary's, Bishop Auckland	Deanery meeting #1 – age profiles and to prepare what each parish wishes to offer the partnership	12
25.10.16	St Charles' Presbytery, Tudhoe	feedback from meeting and planning for meeting	2
25.10.16	Bishop Auckland	FTH Meeting	9
28 and 29.10.16	St Charles' Church	Church homily – Share results of Open parish meeting 2. Report back on vicariate meeting. Reflection on partnership. Reading materials for back up.	200+
30.10.16	Green Tree, Tudhoe	FTIH deanery reps met to share observations and profiles on their parishes	4
02.11.16	St Mary's, Bishop Auckland	Deanery meeting #2 – consultation meeting	15
02.11.16	Crook	Parish Council	9
03.11.16	St Charles' Presbytery, Tudhoe	FTH team meeting	5
11.11.16	St Mary's, Bishop Auckland	Deanery meeting #3 – consultation meeting	12

5.4 Please list any specific groups or committees that have been consulted.

Priests have taken the time and trouble to explain to their congregations by means of the spoken and written word so that people can keep pace with how local deliberations have been progressing. Considerable preparation and encouragement was given to the completion of questions in the leaflet '*Imagine New Ways...*'

The Forward Together in Hope project has been a feature of discussions in parish council and finance committee meetings in the individual parishes. In Bishop Auckland a Forward Together in Hope group has been meeting on a monthly basis to discuss relevant features of the process since January 2016. Since February 2016 Ferryhill/Windlestone have also included Forward Together in Hope as an agenda item for the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), Finance and Liturgy meetings. There has been three PPC meetings where Forward Together in Hope has been the primary agenda item.

In Crook, the FTIH representatives spoke to all attendees (about 130) at Sunday Mass following the receipt of Observations etc. and a Parish meeting (about 30 attended) was held the next Sunday in the St Cuthbert Centre to further explain the Observations and process. There was a Parish Away Day at Ushaw College on 10 September (about 20 attended) to discuss our future and who we would hope to form a Partnership with. Two Parish Council meetings (one in September and one in November) discussed the way forward in some detail.

In some of our parishes the Forward Together in Hope prayer has been said by all who have attended Sunday and daily Masses.

5.5 How widely has this *completed document* been circulated prior to submission? Please provide details.

This document has been completed during early November and returned to each of the parishes involved in the partnership for sharing with parishioners. Updates may have been given to people in summary form or through sharing of the full document. Feedback has been taken from individuals and parish groups where appropriate. The completed document might have been made available in church and could also be added to parish websites so parishioners can access it in their own time.

b) Parish View

We are keen to understand the level of awareness and consensus within individual parish communities in relation to the proposed partnership arrangements. To this end, please ensure that **each parish** in the proposed partnership completes the questions below. If parishes wish to, they can provide a short (maximum of 250 words) perspective on the proposed partnership. Please enter the name and role of the person completing this on behalf of the parish.

Note: Please copy and paste this section for each parish in the proposed partnership.

Parish	Name of Person	Role
Holy Family, Aycliffe & Shildon	Joanne Wardell	FTH Lay Representative
<p>Level of knowledge of proposals - High</p> <p>Any comment: I have attended several meetings with Forward Together in Hope Reps and Clergy within our Deanery area to discuss the proposed partnership.</p>		
<p>Level of consensus with proposals - High</p> <p>Any Comment: Those in attendance at the meetings have been allowed to express their views frankly. Those in attendance have kept our own Parishioners updated throughout.</p>		
<p>Parish perspective (250 Words or less)</p> <p>Newton Aycliffe & Shildon have good transport links to the neighbouring areas within our Deanery area. The towns are of a similar size, population & urban/rural ratio as those others within the Deanery. Shildon has experience of working with the Parishioners of Coundon, Ferryhill and Chilton, when it merged with those Parishes several years ago. When the Parish boundaries were changed to merge Shildon with Aycliffe, the transition was smooth & we continue to work well between the two Churches in our Parish. Shildon gained many Parishioners when St Paulinus (St Helen Auckland) closed & although for a while it seemed that Shildon was a Church of convenience, those people are now fully supporting our Parish, financially as well as spiritually.</p>		

Parish	Name of Person	Role
All Saints, Ferryhill	Mary Wood	FTH Lay Representative
<p>Level of knowledge of proposals – High/Medium – depends on willingness to engage with new ideas.</p> <p>Any comment: Fr Simon communicated the Partnership proposals to the congregations at Ferryhill and Windlestone during Mass over the weekend of October 15th/16th. Minutes of the Parish Pastoral Council discussions about Partnership proposals made available to all and posted on the Church notice board.</p>		
<p>Level of consensus with proposals – Medium</p> <p>Any Comment: No adverse response from parishioners following the presentation of the proposals for a broad partnership involving all deanery parishes. There is an expectation of an increasingly closer partnership between the existing three parishes in our group and Tudhoe St Charles' which will broaden to be deanery wide. Some questions have been asked of why Coxhoe and Sedgfield are not included.</p>		
<p>Parish perspective (250 Words or less)</p> <p>Ferryhill/Windlestone have experienced change before with reduction in the number of Masses, change of Mass times and sharing a priest. Parishioners have understood the need for change and appreciated the efforts of the priest to balance the needs of the various parishes including availability of daily Mass.</p> <p>There is a general feeling that changes have already been formulated and are worried that churches will close with significant adverse effects on the Catholic community, particularly the old and disadvantaged.</p>		

Parish	Name of Person	Role
Our Lady & St Cuthbert's, Crook	Patrick Timothy	FTH Lay Representative
<p>Level of knowledge of proposals - Medium</p> <p>Any comment: Time constraints have prevented detailed briefing of and consultation with parishioners. The Parish Council has been fully briefed and consulted.</p>		
<p>Level of consensus with proposals - Low</p> <p>Any Comment: See parish perspective below</p>		
<p>Parish perspective (250 Words or less)</p> <p>The Parish Council, and those parishioners with whom the proposal to form a partnership of all 12 parishes in our deanery has been discussed, believe that a partnership of this size is not going to work effectively. If our deanery parishes alone are to be included in our proposals our preference would be for a split into two partnerships.</p> <p>The reasons for this include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The geographical spread of parishes, the difficulties in travel within the partnership and the lack of any current bonds between one end of the proposed partnership and the other will prevent us developing the close working relationships across communities which will be essential if we are to form an effective and dynamic partnership 2. The likely size of a "partnership council" necessary to ensure that all parishes in the partnership are represented would be likely to inhibit decision making and action 3. The sense that the proposals currently being discussed are not radical enough and that the parishes in the deanery will carry on much as before but with the deanery priests sharing their pastoral duties more effectively <p>This is a profound moment of change for our diocese and we need to develop a proposal which is going to make a visible and significant difference rather than leave us in our comfort zones.</p> <p>We feel that the time scale and method adopted have not allowed a full exploration of what partnership means and helped us to identify and mix the ingredients of a successful partnership.</p>		

Parish	Name of Person	Role
St Charles, Tudhoe	Michael Weetman	FTH Lay Representative
<p>Level of knowledge of proposals – High</p> <p>Any comment: As a parish we have had a number of open parish meetings (see 5.3) although we have been unable to have one since these proposals were made.</p>		
<p>Level of consensus with proposals - Low</p> <p>Any Comment: See above: The idea of a partnership was discussed and agreed upon at a meeting on the 6th October and a summary of this meeting was given at both masses on the weekend 29th/30th October.</p>		
<p>Parish perspective (250 Words or less)</p> <p>As stated above we have had a number of Open parish meetings and alongside these have run a number of evangelising/ spiritual development courses/opportunities as we believe that without a major change in the outlook of our parishioners and a realisation of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, any reorganisation will ultimately be fruitless.</p> <p>The reason that the level of consensus is low is mainly due to time constraints. Having said that, the principle of forming a partnership with other parishes has been discussed and accepted. In initial discussion the meeting proposed a partnership with our nearest neighbours and a much larger, deanery wide, partnership was not really considered. However in discussion with clergy and FTIH reps throughout the deanery it is felt that because of the unique geographical nature of our Deanery such a partnership would be more beneficial to our more isolated parishes.</p>		

Parish	Name of Person	Role
Our Lady & St Thomas, Willington	Cath Baddeley	FTH Lay Representative
<p>Level of knowledge of proposals - High</p> <p>Any comment:</p>		
<p>Level of consensus with proposals - Medium</p> <p>Any Comment: Our parish is a united community and willing to work alongside our priest to make the partnership work whatever the option is.</p>		
<p>Parish perspective (250 Words or less)</p> <p>With the support of Fr Murphy and our lay representative and after a thorough and open process of completing the parish Questionnaire, our parish, while wanting to remain independent, is accepting of the need to address the declining number of priests and open to the concept of partnership sharing skills and experience. However some concern was expressed about sharing Finance and Administration and it was reassuring to read in the literature received that parishes will retain responsibility for this.</p> <p>After the replies to the "Imagine New Ways" leaflet were summarised at our parish meeting our first option was to partner with Crook, Tow Law, Wolsingham and Langley Moor. This may have been influenced by our recent experience of sharing our priest with Langley Moor and the links that were developed at that time.</p> <p>Our second option was to partner with Crook, Tow Law, Wolsingham, and the two Bishop Auckland parishes. At this stage it was envisaged that partnership would be 2/3 parishes at the most 6. We now know that the groups are likely to be at least 6 parishes with the probability of many more.</p> <p>As Crook, Tow Law and Wolsingham have now opted to join the partnership based on the Deanery parishes and Langley Moor are looking to partner with the surrounding Durham parishes, it makes sense for us in Willington to remain with the Deanery as geographically and historically our links are stronger.</p> <p>The size of the partnership should ensure we can plan into the future when it is anticipated the current six priests could fall to four in the medium term and two in the long term.</p>		

Parish	Name of Person	Role
St Mary & St Wilfrid, Bishop Auckland	Michael Broadbent	FTH Lay Representative
<p>Level of knowledge of proposals - High</p> <p>Any comment: A number of events and meetings have been held at Bishop Auckland (see 5.3) to keep people updated with the progress and about the plans that are being made.</p>		
<p>Level of consensus with proposals - High</p> <p>Any Comment: Our parishioners have been very open and willing to consider changes in the way our parish makes use of its leadership and involvement of lay people in Church life.</p>		
<p>Parish perspective (250 Words or less)</p> <p>The two Bishop Auckland churches are only a mile or so apart but each has a distinctive life as a community. Since they have been sharing a priest they have worked more closely together and parishioners move from one to the other for Mass as it suits them. We benefit from groups such as CAFOD and the social committee that work across both churches in the parish. Numbers at Sunday Mass seem fairly constant at St Wilfrid's while at St Mary's a decline has been more noticeable. St Wilfrid's presbytery is an under-used resource and various ideas have been floated but no decisions are possible until Bishop Seamus has made his views known next year.</p> <p>Bishop Auckland is fairly central to the proposed partnership area and will have no difficulty participating in it. As in many places, we have plenty of people who are content to attend Sunday Mass and seek no further involvement and we need to see how they can be better engaged as the inevitable change takes place. We have no concerns working with others in the partnership as long as it is reciprocated. We are happy to share good practice and to learn from what other places have done.</p>		

Contact Details

We may need to get in touch with you for additional information about your proposals. Please provide contact information for a main contact person and an alternate (should the main contact person not be available). We would recommend that the main contact is the Dean with responsibility for the majority of parishes within the proposed partnership (or his nominee).

	Main Contact	Alternate contact
Name	Fr Dennis Tindall	
Role	Parish Priest	
Address	St Mary's Presbytery Vart Road Bishop Auckland DL14 6PQ	
Telephone	01388 603431	
E-mail	office@stmaryandstwilfrid.org.uk	

Please return your proposals to hope@diocesehn.org.uk by mid-day on Sunday 27th November 2016 and copy these to the Dean(s) with responsibility for parishes in your proposed partnership.

Thank you for completing this document and for all you are doing to support *Forward Together in Hope*.



FORWARD TOGETHER
IN
HOPE

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Tel: (0191) 243 3304 E-mail: hope@diocesehn.org.uk Web: www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk

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