

How Facilitators Can Help Parish or Cluster Planning Groups to Pray, Listen and Plan

How a facilitator helps a group to:

Pray

When it is anticipated that a meeting will address many issues, what often gets short changed?

The Lord promises His Presence in a gathering of His People. Prayer helps to remind us of this. Prayer unites human efforts with divine guidance, as well as those who pray together. Prayer invites the Lord to be present at the meeting.

Sharing prayer helps to remind people of what they hold in common: their faith, baptism and call to holiness. It is important that parish groups pray together.

At the beginning of meetings it is good to acknowledge that everyone has put something else aside to be present at the meeting. Ask God to bless all that has been put aside and all that will take place at the meeting.

Prayer at Difficult Moments

There may be times in meetings when people will be experiencing a great deal of tension, be unable to reach consensus or express reluctance to make a difficult decision. It is often beneficial to pause and pray together. The prayer may be asking for peace of mind, courage to continue or the wisdom to know God's will for the parish community. Sharing prayer at difficult moments helps to relieve any negative feelings that may be in the room and to remind the group of God's presence with them and of all that they hold in common.

Prayer at the End of Meetings

It is important to end a meeting with prayer. Together the members can thank God for the grace present at the meeting and in all areas of their lives and pray for the courage and strength to accomplish the work that they have been given to do.

How a facilitator helps a group to:

Listen

To appreciate differences in expression, allow some quiet time to reflect and then respond
-understand that some people speak-think-speak
think-speak-think

Encourage members of the committee to listen with open minds and hearts

- to hold their own opinions lightly
- to appreciate the wisdom of the minority opinion

When members begin to dominate:

“Thanks, John, you have given us a great deal to think about. Let’s hear what others are thinking”

“This is an important issue and we need to hear from everyone tonight. Tom, I need to ask you to briefly summarize your concern”.

When things begin to get personal:

“It is important to discuss the merits of these position and put personal feelings/issues aside”

How a facilitator helps a group to:

PLAN

Visioning:

What are we called to do to live out the mission of Christ in this place and time?
Where is the Holy Spirit leading our parish?

Situation Analysis

Well meaning people can make bad plans because of faulty assumptions and inaccurate data.
Question that the facilitator may raise with the group are:

- What do we know about our present situation?
- Who do we need to hear from?
- What information do we need?

Brainstorm: (is the easiest way to generate ideas - there is no weighing (judgement) and all thoughts are considered

- ▶ solicit ideas
- ▶ write them down
- ▶ invite group to consolidate ideas (link common ideas)

Multi voting: a good way to move the group toward consensus on a list of ideas or options

- ◆ give everyone some number of votes (usually dots or post it notes)
- ◆ invite them to “vote” for the ideas or items on a list by fixing their dots to the ideas most important to them

- ◆ arrange the list in the order of the # of votes received
- ◆ confirm with the group what seems to be emerging from their votes (give people whose ideas did not emerge at the top but who feel strongly about them an opportunity to persuade the group)

Setting Goals:

What do we need to do to continue to live our mission more fully?

Establish priorities: recognize that there is limited resources (time, talent and treasure) and that all good ideas may not be able to be accomplished.

What criteria should be met by proposed options?

What are our most important priorities? (Multi voting could be used here)

Resolving conflict:

- ◆ invite participants to reverse position and see the issue from the other perspective
- ◆ encourage members to consider the consequences of each position
- ◆ ask “what is the critical difference”
- ◆ ask “what is our common ground on this issue?”

Implementing: Making the Plan a Reality

What talents and abilities are available to make this plan a reality?
How can we encourage more people to become involved?

Assessing the Plan:

What effect did implementation efforts have on the parish and its mission?

What did the group discover?
Where there any surprises?

Put it in Writing: expressing the intentions clearly, using verbs and nouns

Listing the who, what, when and with what resources