

Facilitating the discernment process locally

Briefing for Facilitators

Overview

This is designed to be a process with three key questions aimed at helping us to notice the movement of God at a time of great potential for holy discernment and deep learning (and no little change) for us as a diocesan family:

- **What are we noticing...**
of God's movement at this difficult time?
 - **What are we learning...**
as we reflect on how God seems to be moving?
 - **What might we let go of or allow to die...**
so that we may enter a new future with God?
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Noticing what God is doing

In the spirit of the [Novena](#), and other godly conversations, this is a simple process enabling local churches, and together our whole diocese, to discern God's movement at this time, using the three key questions above.

What we are asking you to do

Firstly, we would like you to open conversations using the three questions above, as widely as you can in your local context. This means involving as many people possible. The process is described fully below (see 'The method') followed by a timetable. Please stick to the timetable so that you can ensure that the feedback from your church/churches are heard and get to shape our life going forward. We especially want to hear from children (see [Briefing for Children and Families](#)). You'll see that we would like you to do all this a couple of times, in two 'loops'.

We would like your summaries of what you have heard after the first 'loop', at which point the Bishop and her team will offer us all a reflection on what is being heard.

We would then like you to repeat the process, checking out what you are noticing locally, in

order to deepen your own local discernment, and to enrich our collective discernment. We expect this second 'loop' to yield some deeper, richer insights. The Bishop will then share her impressions of what we are all noticing, learning and hearing at this time.

The following may help you personally, and may be of use in 'pitching' this process with others.

What this process is

- corporate discernment of the movement of God – a spiritual process
- a 'whole diocese' conversation in which we all listen deeply, continuing and deepening work already begun
- a process where hearing what God may be saying in your local context is vital
- a process in which simply articulating and holding the questions is valuable and permitted
- giving attention to what God is, or may be, doing
- a process which will yield significant threads belonging to God's future for us, as we identify what are we hearing and noticing
- hope at a time of seismic change

If you are interested in more, see the documents:

- [A theological note](#)
- [A 'kairos moment' for the Church](#)
- [Discernment in the New Testament](#)

What this process is not

- based on an assumption that discernment is a new thing for us all. Or that we are so good at spotting what God is up to that we need do no more
- a 'consultation' so that we can make 'decisions' about the future – listening to God is even more fundamental than 'a means to an end'
- a substitute for significant conversations looking at 'issues' – money, buildings, ministry...
- a way of collecting various 'good ideas' or a way of identifying 'good news stories' for publicity purposes – though spotting God's movement is always good news!
- a way of managing our reality, or a way of minimising anxiety, or a communications exercise

What is required of us as leaders and facilitators

- To create and hold the spaces for conversation and discernment
- To enable this discernment conversation locally because this is of real value (it therefore would be good to avoid language such as, 'the diocese has asked us to', etc.)
- To use the methods available to us presently – many (though not all) churches are more connected than previously through the newer means and traditional ones – emails, printed material, phone calls, etc.
- To use the three questions
- Please go as deep and wide in your context as you can. Feel free to be imaginative, creative, or different in how you do this. We will ask for specific summaries of what you have heard children say
- Not to feel any of us must 'answer the questions', 'fix the problems', 'resolve the pain'
- To make a summary of what is being heard and said locally so that we can all reflect on broad themes which emerge
- To wrap these discernment conversations around with prayer, making space for all of us to sense the voice and movement of the Holy Spirit both before and after discussing the three questions

There is a separate briefing on helpful [Listening and Discerning Prayer Practices](#) for this, and some input here below.

The method

1. Prayer: wondering and waiting

Spend some time in prayer before introducing the three questions. See the [Listening and Discerning Prayer Practices document](#) for 'Waiting and Wondering' prayer ideas which will help people to attune to the Holy Spirit and approach the questions with openness and curiosity.

2. Asking the questions

Ask these questions in the following form, and record responses. There is a separate [Listening and Discerning Summary Form](#) to make this easy.

Ask groups, ask individuals, ask families to look at these questions together and to pass you their responses. This can be done:

- together in real time - e.g. online in groups or as part of worship
- face to face where safe in congregations or groups - e.g. during the Eucharist
- alone, using email or other means
- conversationally without formality

...be creative! There is a separate [briefing for children and families](#) that you may find helpful.

- **What are we noticing?**
- **What are we learning?**

These are discernment questions and could be unpacked – for example, ‘What are we noticing...about God’s movement at this difficult/disrupted/pandemic time?’ ‘What are we learning...as God’s people at the moment?’ ‘What are we noticing around us in our wider community (or networks)?’

People may find it helpful to personalise the questions to start with: ‘What am I noticing?’ ‘What am I learning?’ But if you use that approach as a starting-place, it would be useful to bring the conversation back to ‘we’, so as to draw out people’s thoughts about our corporate journey as well as their personal journey.

- **What might we let go of or allow to die, so that we may enter a new future with God?**

This question may be used after attention has been given to the first two – or maybe as third question on the second loop. Discern yourself when to use this question (but resist the temptation to avoid this most deeply Christian of inquiries).

3. Prayer: receiving and responding

Spend some time in prayer after holding the three questions conversation. See the [Listening and Discerning Prayer Practices](#) document for ‘Receiving and Responding’ prayer ideas which will help make space for people to absorb the words and ideas which God has drawn their attention to throughout the conversation, and to notice where the Spirit is prompting them to respond in prayer and action. There are ideas for individuals and for groups, and you can use one or more of them, to suit your situation.

4. Your summaries

Then please send us your summary using the Listening and Discerning on the Way Summary Form. You can email this to listening@diocant.org. Or you can complete and submit the same form on our diocesan website at www.canterburydiocese.org/listening. You can use the same form for both loops. Sticking to the deadlines ([see timetable](#)) will ensure your voices are heard.

Thank you!

Thank you for your leadership in helping the local church and our whole diocese along our listening and discernment journey. We are deeply grateful for this. Please join us in praying that the people of God would hear Lord of the Church through this process.