

**2025-
2028**

DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE

Sharing Prayer & Learning

**Deanery Development
Planning Resources
Season Two**

Published November 2025

 **Seeking**  **Sharing**  **Sending**



In this second season of Deanery Planning (2025-2028) we remain committed to developing mission and ministry in our diocese that rooted in our shared praying. Our praying together, as many members of one Body, is one way of expressing our shared calling as those summoned “to God’s love and to work for the coming of his kingdom”. The resources for prayer and study that follow are intended as invitation and encouragement to see shared prayer as a basis for:

Patience: to learn that God wants our trust more than our help (Mark 4:26-29)

Enabling: that all our siblings in Christ are enabled to see each step made in faith as valuable (Luke 24:13-35)

Discernment: to pay attention more closely to where God’s life and love is prompting humble, prophetic and imaginative witness

In these ways, our shared prayer - as individuals and groups - invites us to use our diocesan emphases of Seeking, Sharing, Sending to prayerfully locate ourselves, our stories, within God’s story with our diocese of “turning outward in mission, growing younger and more diverse”. We encourage every Deanery gathering to include prayerful engagement and reflection.

The passages that follow echo and amplify these emphases, and encourage us to reflect on how hearing and holding together a greater diversity of voices might enable us over the next three years.

1. Waiting in patient prayer together (Acts 1)
2. (Seeking) a God who holds many faithful stories (Matthew 9)
3. (Sharing) our deep connection with God and one another (Luke 16)
4. (Being Sent) as we are (Exodus 4)

The Lectio Divina approach that follows encourages us to read scripture together. There is also some suggested passages later in this document for use across the seasons of the Church’s year. You could also use the Dwelling in the Word practice (via churchmissionsociety.org/dwelling-in-the-word). You can also use the [Year of Seeking discerning prayer exercises](#) (published in 2024).

PRAYER & Discernment

You are invited to read the following passage through twice with 2 different voices and silence / space between each reading then consider the 'wonderings'.

They are not questions needing an answer but promptings for your own reflections together. These may lead you to respond artistically as well as verbally or in writing – how would you draw your response? Is there a song or hymn that would help you to express how you are feeling? You may like to read the passage again at the end of your discussion.

ACTS 1:8-14

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' ⁷He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of* James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

MY STORY

What feelings do you notice in the disciples as they wait together and pray? Do you have an experience of waiting that echoes what you read here?

OUR STORY

Is there something we can do to place waiting in prayer together more centrally in our parishes, chaplaincies, and deaneries?

GOD'S STORY

There are lots of stories of waiting on God and for God in our scriptures. What do you notice about the way God's people wait in these other contexts?

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MATTHEW 9:9-13

9 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

10 And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax-collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' ¹²But when he heard this, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'

MY STORY

I wonder how Matthew experienced the day following this interaction with Jesus. How do you imagine Matthew went about living with his new freedom?

OUR STORY

Our experience of faith isn't always of stark contrasts and dramatic change: what helps us tell our stories honestly and faithfully?

GOD'S STORY

Matthew is being liberated from his position as a tax collector for Rome system to serve as part of Christ's Body (Mat 25:40) - how do we imagine change and conversion?

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LUKE 16:19-32

19 There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." ²⁵But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." ²⁷He said, "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment." ²⁹Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." ³⁰He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." ³¹He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." '

MY STORY

This is a story of closeness and separation between two kinds of people: wealth and status as well as time and space. Which one speaks to you in your present circumstances? Are you able to identify why?

OUR STORY

Are there privileges we know we would rather not be challenged by our faith? How do we experience this discomfort? Could we share how we deal with it? Do we know what can help us ignore or engage with discomfort?

GOD'S STORY

The refusal of relationship is at the heart of the disease in this parable. What parts of the Bible or our Christian tradition might we use to begin responding to God's invitation to see people as places where God is working, as sisters and brothers?

PRAYER & Discernment

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EXODUS 4:1-13

19 Then Moses answered, 'But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, "The Lord did not appear to you." ' ²The Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' He said, 'A staff.' ³And he said, 'Throw it on the ground.' So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. ⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail'—so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand— ⁵so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.'

6 Again, the Lord said to him, 'Put your hand inside your cloak.' He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous,* as white as snow. ⁷Then God said, 'Put your hand back into your cloak'—so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body— ⁸'If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. ⁹If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.'

10 But Moses said to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' ¹¹Then the Lord said to him, 'Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? ¹²Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.' ¹³But he said, 'O my Lord, please send someone else.'

MY STORY

Moses' staff is a symbol of authority in the book of Exodus, but in this chapter it is also a symbol of vulnerability. How might we go about responding to an invitation to see what the world might call weaknesses as strengths?

OUR STORY

Our confidence is often based on what we think we bring or have to offer. What might we need to share together to attend more closely to where God wants to be with us, irrespective of apparent scarcity?

GOD'S STORY

Do you have a favourite instance from our scriptures of where God brings joy in circumstances that the world might name otherwise?

LECTIO *Divina*

Some of us will have drawn on Lectio Divina before as a form of individual and collective prayer and reflection. The name can be literally translated as “divine reading” or reading with God. Some versions explain it as an opportunity for us to be read by God’s Word in the Scriptures. It can become a way of becoming immersed in the Scriptures very personally. The practice draws on the way Jews are encouraged to read and retell the Exodus story during the Passover. Lectio Divina encourages us engage in telling and retelling.

In the prayer invitations (above) we explore how and where our storied lives and faith journeys intersect with others in our scriptures. My story, with our stories, and God’s story, offering us insight into how differences between stories enliven our sense of being one body with many members (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). This kind of prayer with the Scriptures encourages us to think with our hearts and our minds, as individuals and in groups, about how we express and articulate our faith. In Lectio Divina we listen with our heart and allow what we might know about a text or a story mingled with our experience of dwelling on the interactions and relationships within that text.

In the prompts and passages from scripture that follow, there is an opportunity to practice Lectio Divina across the seasons of the church’s year. Different passages of scripture (or books of the Bible) are suggested. Each Lectio Divina exercise invites us to pray across four stages: **reading, repeating, responding** and **resting**.

Reading and Repeating: Begin by reading the Scripture Passage slowly until a word or a phrase resonates with you. Then stop for the moment. Dwell on the words you have noticed and chosen to attend to. Repeat them again and again as though God is saying them to you. Try not to analyse them, just let them speak to you. Savour the words.

Responding: The example of response often used in Lectio Divina is that of Mary. Her response to God’s words via the Archangel Gabriel was to “ponder these things in your heart” (Luke 2:19). Likewise our response can be to allow these words of God to speak to us through what we notice. We can ask God what the invitation might mean for us? We can share with God whatever is coming to our heart and our mind.

Resting: Rest in the embrace and love of God expressed in the passage or story you’ve read and re-read. Whether we have felt or noticed anything for ourselves, the scriptures are God’s response to all of us.

In addition to leaving space and silence to read and to listen, consider using a prayer - such as the Collect Prayer for the week or the Season you are in - to open or to close your time engaging in Lectio Divina.

Some seasonal passages for use in Lectio Divina:

- **Advent** - Luke 21:25-28, 34-36 (you might also consider a passage from Isaiah)
- **Christmas** - Matthew 1:18-24 (you might also consider a passage from Romans or Galatians)
- **Epiphany** - Luke 2:1-14 (you might also consider a passage from Corinthians or Ephesians)
- **Ordinary Time** - Philippians 2:5-11 (you might also consider a passage from Kings or Job)
- **Lent** - Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 (you might also consider a passage from Deuteronomy)
- **Passiontide** - Mark 14:32-42 (you might also consider a passage from Jeremiah)
- **Easter** - John 20:1-9 (you might also consider a passage from Acts)
- **Ascensiontide** - Matthew 28:16-20b (you might also consider a passage from Revelation)
- **Pentecost** - John 20:19-23 (you might also consider a passage from 1 Peter or 1 John)
- **Trinity Sunday** - John 16:12-15 (you might also consider a passage from Proverbs)
- **All the Saints and Friends of God** - Mark 12:28b-34

God of our journeying send your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that our Lord Jesus read them with your followers on the Road to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Scriptures, helps us to discover the presence of God in every stage of our lives.

As we read these words help us to use the spaces between words to listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in relationships, above all in the marginalised and suffering.

May our Scriptures guide us so that we too, like those on the Emmaus Road, may experience that you are alive in our midst as source of fellowship, justice and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, who revealed to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.