

Group Meeting Ideas for Set Ablaze Pastoral Planning

Above all, keep the planning for your meetings and the meetings themselves focused on prayer and asking the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God knows the particular situation of our Pastorate and the people in it. He desires to draw all people to Himself and He knows how to do it. In our planning we want to seek the face of God and hear His voice.

A key success factor for pastorate pastoral planning is engagement, engagement, engagement. The more parishioners have a chance to be heard, hear that they have been heard, see that their ideas, questions and concerns are being weighed by the Pastoral Planning Committee in their proposals the more fruitful the planning process will be.

One avenue of engagement is large group meetings. Whether Pastorate wide town-hall type meetings, or more local parish based gatherings, or with existing groups in the pastorate (Catholic Daughters, Knights of Columbus, etc), we have collected a few ideas for structuring those meetings to keep them on track, helpful and productive, and effective means of engagement.

This is intended as an aid to Pastors, Facilitators and Pastoral Planning Committee members in strategizing how to conduct large group meetings.

Some initial encouragement.

- 1) Pray and get others to intercede for your meetings. Begin meetings with prayer. Pause for prayer within meetings. We are asking God to lead the innovation and creativity that will be fruitful in building a culture of Lifelong Catholic Missionary Discipleship through His Love.
- 2) The goal of large group meetings is as one of several vehicles of engagement so the Pastoral Planning Committee can have good information and ideas to work with to formulate their proposal to Bishop by May 1, 2024.
- 3) In the meetings, Lead with the aspirational. Invite feedback that will help Identify desired outcomes. Practical and pragmatic decisions should be ordered to and informed by those aspirational outcomes.
- 4) Remember that the whole effort of Set Ablaze is to develop a Pastorate Level Strategy to build Lifelong Catholic Missionary Discipleship through God's love. This is necessary to disrupt long standing trends of decline by identifying innovative and prioritized efforts to elevate or enhance the areas of Worship, Discipleship and Evangelization, Service and Community across the parishes of our Pastorate.
- 5) Communicate and over communicate the fact that we are seeking to develop a unified Pastoral Plan for all the parishes within the Pastorate. This will take intelligent, compassionate and determined reinforcement and at times redirection in group meetings.
- 6) Have a definite plan for the meeting. You will not be well served by a brief introduction followed by an open-mic type situation.

- 7) Identify the topic and type of feedback you desire to receive. This helps set a clear tone and vision for the meeting.
- 8) Consider specific questions you would like people to engage with. The Handbook provides many possible questions that aim to elicit constructive and aspirational feedback in the key areas of Worship, Discipleship and Evangelization, Service and Community. These are by no means exhaustive, but may aid Planning Committees to plan specific points of focus for a meeting.
- 9) Below are a few possibilities for the mechanics of a meeting. If you have additional ideas from experience please pass them along to the Discipleship and Evangelization Office (discipleship@sfcatholic.org; 605-988-3714) and we will share them with the other Pastorates.

“Spiritual Conversation Method”

- Participants form small groups of no more than 6-7 persons.
 - With 6-7 participants this can take about at an hour and comprises **three rounds**.
 - Need a **“gatekeeper”** in each small group- we suggest a Planning Committee member.
 - a. Ensures each person has a chance to share.
 - b. Keeps track of time, and time limit for each person
 - c. Emphasize need to listen, not a time to “disagree” or debate
 - d. Emphasize “journey together” aim of Planning process... we are traveling down the same road, though we may have different vehicles... avoid debate.
 - Each small group needs a recorder..
 - a. No individual attribution
 - b. Simple summary of the “gist”, don't need a court reporter transcription.
1. In the **first round**, everyone takes equal turns to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to the question(s) being discussed
 - c. There is no discussion in this round and all participants simply listen deeply to each person and attend to how the Holy Spirit is moving within oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole.
 - d. This is followed by a time of silence to note one’s interior movements.
 2. In the **second round**, participants share what struck them most in the first round and what moved them during the time of silence.
 - e. Some dialogue can also occur, and the same spiritual attentiveness is maintained.
 - f. Once again this is followed by a time of silence.
 3. Finally in the **third round** participants reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what moved them most deeply.
 - g. New insights and even unresolved questions are also noted.
- Spontaneous prayers of gratitude can conclude the conversation.

“Lottery Method”

1. Present the questions or topic you would like people to engage with.
2. Begin with scripture reading and invocation of the Holy Spirit
3. Everyone who would like to speak is given a number
4. Draw Numbers from the hat and give each person drawn 2-4 minutes to speak
 - a. Do this with as many people as you have time for, leaving ½ hour or so for the processing
 - b. Encourage participants to listen as described in “Second Round (#2)” of the spiritual conversation method
5. Lead a conversation with the group about what they heard from those who shared, and what stirred in them as they listened.

“The Six Hats”

Giving space for different kinds of thoughts, ideas and concerns in an organized and structured way.

Here is an approach that might be helpful after the Planning Committee has developed some initial proposals- for a second or third round of consultation, or even for meetings of the Planning Committee itself. The idea is to focus the conversation on one “Hat” at a time. This way all kinds of feedback can be gathered but in a focused and fruitful way, instead of in a mixed up and distracting way.

- **Blue hat - Present the process.** *Represents process and an overview. It is used to manage the thinking process, set objectives, and plan the next steps.*
 - What is our objective in this situation or problem?
- **White hat - Neutral and objective.** *Represents objective and neutral information-gathering. It is used to identify what is currently known about a situation or problem.*
 - What information do we currently have?
 - What information or facts do we need to gather?
 - What sources can we use to obtain that information?
- **Red hat - Gut emotions.** *Represents emotions and gut feelings. It is used to consider the emotional implications of a situation or problem and to understand how others might feel about it.*
 - How do we feel about the situation or problem?
 - How might others feel about it?
- **Black hat - Cautious.** *Represents caution and a focus on potential danger or problems. It is used to identify potential risks and drawbacks associated with a situation or problem.*
 - What are the potential risks and drawbacks?
 - What are the negative consequences that could arise?
 - What objections might others have to our proposal?
- **Yellow hat - Optimistic.** *Represents optimism and a focus on benefits. It is used to identify the benefits and positive aspects of a situation or problem.*
 - What are the benefits and positive aspects?
 - How does this solution contribute to our goals and objectives?
 - What good things might come from this?
- **Green hat - Creative thinking.** *Represents creativity and a focus on possibilities. It is used to generate new ideas and solutions to a situation or problem.*
 - What new ideas can we generate to solve this problem?
 - How can we approach the situation or problem differently?
 - What alternative solutions can we consider?

Six Thinking Hats®

Quick Summary

PROCESS



Blue Hat - Process

Thinking about thinking.
What thinking is needed?
Organizing the thinking.
Planning for action.

FACTS



White Hat - Facts

Information and data.
Neutral and objective.
What do I know?
What do I need to find out?
How will I get the information I need?

FEELINGS



Red Hat - Feelings

Intuition, hunches, gut instinct.
My feelings right now.
Feelings can change.
No reasons are given.

CREATIVITY



Green Hat - Creativity

Ideas, alternatives, possibilities.
Provocations - "PO".
Solutions to black hat problems.

BENEFITS



Yellow Hat - Benefits

Positives, plus points.
Logical reasons are given.
Why an idea is useful.

CAUTIONS



Black Hat - Cautions

Difficulties, weaknesses, dangers.
Logical reasons are given.
Spotting the risks.

“Roundtable Brainstorming”

A way of brainstorming to crowd-source innovative solutions. Useful in meetings of any size of 10 or more.

- 1) Identify a question or “problem.” i.e. “How might we get non-practicing Catholics back to Church.” Or “How might we make an effective invitation to the unchurched in our community to find a home at our Parish?”
- 2) In groups of 5-6; use large sheets of “Flip Chart” paper. 1 piece of paper for each person at the table. (Yes the table gets a bit crowded). At the top of each sheet write the Question you are brainstorming ideas for. Then draw two vertical lines down the sheet dividing it into 3 columns.
- 3) In each “round” the participant writes 3 ideas, one in each column. When the time is up they rotate to the next paper at the table, and read all the ideas on that sheet, then add 3 additional ideas, 1 in each column. They should not repeat ideas they have already written or read on previous sheets. Their 3 additions may be a refinement or additional detail of an idea on the current sheet/ column, or completely unrelated..
- 4) Give a limited time for each round- like 3-5 minutes max. Encourage people not to overthink, but read the sheet they are at and write down the 1st three ideas that come to them. This is important, they should read the sheet in front of them before adding their ideas each round
- 5) Phase 1 ends when I arrive back at the sheet of paper I began with. So if you had 15 people in a room, arranged at 3 tables of 5, you would have 15 sheets each with 15 ideas on them in the space of 15 to 25 minutes.
- 6) **In a second phase** those sheets could be posted on walls around the room and let people “circulate” to see what ideas came up from other tables
- 7) **In a third phase** you could give everyone 3-5 post it notes or stickers to place on the 3-5 ideas they like best from any of the sheets. This creates a kind of “heat map” of the ideas that resonate most with all the people at the meeting.

This is a highly engaging activity and focuses peoples thoughts and creativity on solutions rather than on fear or concerns.