



Better Together
Catholic School Advisory Bodies

Engaging, Learning,
Knowing, Responding

[MEETING MATTERS]

Collaborative Ministry

Collaborative Ministry is a particular way of relating and working together. It is an ongoing process that involves bringing forth people's talents and interests to meet the needs of the community through collaborative decision-making. This reflection tool provides an opportunity for advisory body members to reflect on how they relate and work together.

1. Read the following elements of Collaborative Ministry
2. Undertake one or more of reflection exercises at the end of the document:
 - Describe And Explore
 - Act Differently
 - Prayer And Celebration

Some essential elements of collaborative ministry:

Building mutual trust and recognition

Collaborative ministry is built upon good personal relationships. People who want to work collaboratively need a strong sense of their own identity and a desire for mutual trust and commitment. They must also be willing to move beyond fixed roles and stereotypes, to explore new horizons and to acknowledge their limitations and areas of vulnerability.

Developing common vision and accountability

Collaborative teams place a high priority on developing a shared vision, often expressed in a mission statement, or in regularly reviewed aims and objectives for their work together. This gives a strong sense of identity and assists them in being purposeful and disciplined in their use of time and resources.

Development of persons and skills

Formation and personal development are obviously important for those involved in collaborative ministry. Collaborative teams in particular need formation planned to meet their particular requirements as a team. In addition, individuals should be encouraged to pursue their own personal and professional development, insofar as it is practical to do so.

Collaborative ministry needs particular skills. Some of the skills used are relational skills, others are practical and work-related. Among the skills needed are evaluation, self-appraisal, listening, consulting, discerning, consensus decision-making, planning, group facilitation, and handling conflict.

Learning to deal with conflict

It seems to be almost inevitable that conflict arises within collaborative teams. If collaboration is to grow, conflict must be brought into the open. The courage to face and work through conflict, negotiating until a compromise is found, and even seeking help in order to resolve it, are not weaknesses but signs of maturity and commitment. Collaborative partners can also agree to disagree, or to set aside areas where agreement or compromise cannot be found.

Shared decision-making

The desire for shared decision-making is a natural outcome of working collaboratively. It is effective because it arises out of shared responsibility and vision, and mutual trust and recognition. This form of decision-making brings wider resources to a decision than would be available to an individual alone.

The more challenging option is aiming for consensus decision-making, in which the whole group or community works towards a consensus which becomes the decision. This may not be the decision that everyone wants, but will be one that everyone can accept, including those who may disagree.



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The conditions which are needed for effective consensus decision-making to work include:

- a shared vision;
- explicit and clearly agreed goals and parameters;
- an understanding of the process being used;
- a thorough understanding of what is at stake, including awareness of the Church's disciplines and teaching;
- skilled leadership;
- a consistent and limited number of participants, and adequate time for real dialogue.
- an awareness of voices that are unintentionally marginalised, or even missing altogether.

It is unrealistic to think that all decisions can or should be made in this way. But some decisions, especially those that set policy or touch on matters of critical importance to the community, can be shared widely or arrived at through consensus.

Styles of meeting

Working collaboratively will involve learning and using different styles of meeting in order to express in action the values and vision of collaborative ministry. Collaborative ministry combines the elements of two styles of meeting: a business style of meeting, with agenda items, discussion and decision-making; and a formative style of meeting, in which there is dialogue and reflection.

There are two other elements which are important:

- The first is giving time to discernment and prayer.
- The second is recognition and use of people's expertise and energies.

Creating a culture of collaboration

Creating this culture is not, in general, an activity which is planned. Usually it begins to show itself in a gentle shift in atmosphere and sensitivity, expressed in attitudes and in many small signs. By following the above practices, however, a new culture and possibly new structures, will emerge.

Spirituality

Collaborative ministry draws deeply upon faith in the Trinity. It is not simply a way of re-organising work or structures. It is a way of expressing in our life together what God asks of us and calls us to be. It asks us to reflect what God is like in the ways we live and work together. Above all, members will need to let their prayer challenge them not to become inward-looking. The purpose of collaborative ministry is to enable the Church in its mission. Collaborative Ministry looks outwards because God's life is for the whole world and all of creation.

Different attitudes to prayer and varying experience and formation need to be explored with sensitivity. Teams and partners need to work out together a pattern of prayer and shared worship with which all are comfortable.

Reflection:

DESCRIBE AND EXPLORE

Ways to invite people to identify and explore their own experience and understanding.

1. Write up some expressions for collaborative ministry eg:

- Collaborative ministry
- Working in partnership
- Working as a team
- Shared responsibility
- Communion in mission

Invite people to say which they like, and why. Are there any differences between these? If so, what?





And/or:

2. Ask the group either individually or in twos or threes to discuss the following question:

- *What is distinctive about collaborative ministry that makes it an important way of working together?*

Write up responses on a flipchart.

And/or:

3. Ask the group to spend a few minutes reflecting individually on these questions:

- *In what ways have you changed through your experience of collaboration? What barriers to collaboration have you experienced in others, or in yourself?*
- *What causes conflict between collaborating partners, and what helps growth to happen?*

Then spend some time taking each question in turn, and listening to people's answers.

ACT DIFFERENTLY

Ways to invite people to think about the implications of what they have discussed for the way we relate and work together.

1. Invite the group to discuss what kinds of support or formation would help those involved in collaboration to grow through the experience.

- *What are we doing well? What can we do differently or better?*
- *What kinds of skills do we need to learn? Identify two or three ways that the advisory body or team can grow, to become more collaborative.*
- *What kind of opportunities/tools would help us?*

Plan one further formation opportunity and/or action based on what has emerged in these discussions.

PRAY AND CELEBRATE

Some suggestions for scriptural reflection, prayer and celebration.

1. Read aloud the following two passages:

[Isaiah 43:18-21]

*Do not remember the former things
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
how it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
The wild animals will honour me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.*

[Isaiah 54:1-3]

*Sing, O barren one who did not bear:
burst into song and shout,
you who have not been in labour!
For the children of the desolate woman will be more
than the children of her that is married, says the Lord.*





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*Enlarge the site of your tent,
and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
do not hold back; lengthen your cords
and strengthen your stakes.
For you will spread out to the right and to the left,
and your descendants will possess the nations
and will settle the desolate towns.*

Invite the group to share their reflections; what light do these passages shed on collaborative ministry? What images do people find powerful?

2. Finish by reading the prayer below:

*Holy God
whose presence is known
in the structures we build
and in their collapse;
establish in us a community of hope,
not to contain your mystery,
but to be led beyond security
into your sacred space,
through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

[From All Desires Known by Janet Morley].

Acknowledgement: Material adapted from *The Sign We Give* (1995). Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.



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