

How to Run a Small Group

A group is more likely to succeed if:

- *the members share a common idea or values*
- *its members work and achieve things together*
- *its members relate well to each other.*

Group Dynamics

The ideal size for a planning group is between eight and twelve. People tend to learn more from others, plan effectively, and form friendships when they work in small groups. How a group functions is crucial to the completion of the group's tasks and the feeling of group members that time has been well spent. Look for

non-verbal expressions: apart from what they say, what indications are people giving of their feelings and reactions, e.g. gestures, tone of voice, body language, facial expressions, order of speaking etc?

feelings, attitudes and hidden agendas: these have an important effect on the life and work of a group and must be taken into account. Sensitive observation of words and non-verbal expressions can give clues about feelings, but can easily be mis-interpreted. If they seem important, they should be checked with the person concerned, e.g. 'You were frowning, Paul. Do you agree with that decision?'

The following points must be seen to before the first meeting:

- Make sure the meeting is well advertised and open to everybody.
- The venue must be organised. Refreshments are always a good idea.
- Appoint a timekeeper and clarify the reason the meeting at the beginning, so that people know what their goal is.

Leadership

Leadership should be seen as a service and should be rotated from time to time so that more people learn the skill; the leader enables the group and all group members to feel satisfied that they have achieved the goals they have set. This style of leadership make members feel that:

- They have every chance to air their views
- They have been listened to and understood
- Different ideas have been integrated to form a group plan of action
- They are responsible for their decisions and actions.

Try this – as a group

Make a list of all the reasons you can think of why meetings go wrong.

Look at that list and then draw up a list of tips for 'making meetings work'.



Behaviour in Groups

The *Training for Transformation* booklets produced in Kenya suggest that the ways we behave in groups can be understood better by looking at the characteristics of certain animals. If your group is not running smoothly it might be a good idea to have a session – ideally with an outside facilitator – using all or some of the caricatures described below to assist analysis. Act out or read the sketches below and ask each person which animal they identify most with and to think of strengths and weaknesses of each one.

The donkey is very stubborn, and will not change its point of view.

The lion gets in and fights whenever others disagree with its plans or interfere with its desires.

The rabbit runs away or quickly changes the topic as soon as it senses tension, conflict or an unpleasant job.

The ostrich buries its head in the sand and refuses to face reality or admit that there are any problems.

The monkey fools around, chatters a lot or shows off and prevents the group from making progress.

The elephant blocks the way, and stubbornly prevents the group from making progress.

The tortoise withdraws from the group, refusing to give its ideas or opinions.

The cat is always looking for sympathy: 'It is so difficult for me ...'

The rhino charges around putting its foot in everything, and upsetting people unnecessarily.

The owl looks very solemn and pretends to be very wise, always talking in long words and complicated sentences.

The hippo sleeps all the time and never puts up its head except to yawn.

The fish sits there with a cold, glassy stare, not responding to anyone or anything.

The chameleon changes colour according to the latest opinion. It will say one thing to this group and something else to another.

Decision Making

If you are trying to come to decisions by consensus, the following questions might be helpful:

- What are we trying to decide? (Be sure this is clear to everyone.)
- What are the different possibilities?
- (Consider as many as possible and discuss the pros and cons of each.)
- What suggestion, or combination of suggestions, do we choose?
- Who will do what, when, where and how?
- Factors which help decision-making are:
 - * Clear goals
 - * Clarity about who has responsibility for the decision
 - * Good means of stimulating and sharing ideas
 - * Effective ways of involving all the members of the group
 - * Effective criteria for evaluating suggestions
 - * Prior agreement on what procedures will be most appropriate, e.g. majority vote.

Further reading: *Working Together: A Handbook for Groups* CIIR

How to Set up a Display

Displays can be very useful for engaging the interest of people who don't already have an interest in the issue with which you are concerned.

You can use a display to do the following:

Inform: tell people about a situation or an event, or about an organisation.

Educate: explain the facts to people and show the causes of problems.

Politicise: show how a particular issue is related to wider political issues.

Mobilise: ask people to do something.

Advertise: tell people about an event.

Before you begin, ask the following questions:
Who is it for? (target group)
and What should it say? (the content).

Designing a Display

A display must be designed in such a way that it catches people's attention. You want people to see the display and spend some time looking at it.

Size: an eye-catching, small exhibition may be better than a large untidy one. Where you are going to locate the display will determine the size. You should tailor the size of the writing/illustrations to the space available. Do a rough design - this should show where the words, drawings, logos will be, how big they will be and the colours you will use.

Shape: the display could be flat or three dimensional.

Visuals: people will often see the picture first, so good photos, maps or other drawings are essential and the coordinator or an appropriate agency, may be able to help with all three. Make sure the illustrations match the text.

It is important that visuals are large and access to a photocopier which enlarges would be useful. Colour grabs attention but be careful that the final display is not gaudy. Backing sheets for example, should be in one colour or

complementary colours.

Text: it is vital that the text is kept to a minimum. Once you have decided what you want to say, work on the shortest way of saying it. Sometimes just a few words can be very effective: for example, 'Time Is Running Out' in large letters with surrounding pictures of how our present lifestyle is damaging our environment.

Mood: the most effective displays are those which are generally positive rather than negative. Some environmental issues such as global warming, for example, terrify some people and the exhibition should motivate people to act rather than simply frighten them. The example given immediately above would be most useful if it was counterbalanced by a second display using the wording 'Building a Better Future' and displaying positive images of people working for change.

Location: very often people place exhibitions at the back of the church because that is where space is allocated. However, other locations could be considered: the pulpit, lectern or pillars in the church could display a selection of posters or long, thin graphics. Since people face the front during the service in rectangular, the congregation can hardly ignore the posters. Avoid vague posters which distract and annoy people.

Timing: It is sensible to time the display to coincide with something relevant, eg CAFOD Family Fast Day, One World Week, Christian Aid Week, special Sundays.

An exhibition should be shown for a limited time only. People get bored with looking at something for more than three weeks and associate the theme with their boredom. A permanent display should be regularly updated. A poster on a lectern could be changed every

week to give a variety of thoughts connected to the issue. Posters and other useful materials can be obtained from organisations mentioned in the "Useful Addresses" Section.

At the end of the display, you could incorporate details of any follow up, action ideas, dates of meetings etc.

A Few Ideas

A very simple display can be made to look attractive simply by having a colourful, striking backdrop.

If you have access to a photocopier which enlarges and reduces, enlarged type-written text looks more professional and can be read more easily than handwriting.

If you have photographs of people from the parish involved in some kind of activity linked to the Campaign, they could give your display a

good local feel. Other ideas along this line might

include items from the parish newsletter, posters

advertising training days etc.

A challenging title (such as a question) is a good way of attracting people to look at the display.

You might like to experiment with different shapes for the 'panels' which make up the display. For example, panels could be shaped like a jigsaw which needs to be fitted together.

Enlist the help of creative people in the parish. The standard of your display will improve and you will have involved more people in the campaign.

Do's ...

- Be realistic about how much you can do and say
- Design your display before you begin
- Identify your target audience
- Make it simple and clear
- Make sure the message stands out
- Be as consistent as possible with style
- Make good use of things you already have available
- Use your imagination
- Make sure it is colourful and eye-catching
- Use photos, graphics and cartoons
- Use enlarged text (preferably printed)
- Suggest some kind of further action/enquiry/local contact
- Have something for people to take away with them
- Get permission to put up your display
- Decide who will set up the display and who will take it down.

... and Don'ts

- Don't try to say everything - just the key points/issues
- Don't squash too many things together - a clear layout is vital
- Don't have too much text - this may look too heavy-going
- Don't block out any other group's notices etc.

How to Speak in Public

A good speaker persuades, informs, inspires and entertains.

Preparation

Decide what you want to say, how you are going to say it and what reaction you want from your audience.

Make a rough plan of the major points to mention in the talk. Don't write out the whole talk and read it because this will be very boring for listeners.

Prepare your opening and closing remarks very well and memorise them. Don't open or close apologetically or overstate your case.

Use personal experience, stories, or something topical wherever possible to prompt interest. Over-use of statistics can be very boring.

Believe passionately in what you have to say and aim to enjoy yourself.

Before an important talk quietly instruct the subconscious mind to look after you, clear your mind of worries and picture yourself as a positive, successful speaker.

Research your topic so that you are confident with it and if possible find out:

- The size of your audience
- Its average age
- Any likely difficulties
- Particular points of interest for the audience.

Don't take yourself too seriously and remember: a speech is not a matter of life or death.

Don't go over the time allotted for your talk as this will antagonise the people who invited you.

Be sensitive to your audience and amend the content and length if they seem to be getting bored or annoyed.

Delivery

Know what you want to say and say it clearly. 'Hmm's', 'um's', coughs and 'you know's' are all signs that you are not sure what to say.

Try to speak with confidence and fairly slowly without gabbling words.

Speak up because people will get bored if they have to strain to hear you.

Vary your pitch and speed, ie. ranging between high and low pitch and soft and loud to provide variety. Silences and pauses can be very effective.

Use ordinary spoken English and avoid literary turns of phrase. Define terms that may confuse. Give full titles of organisations you refer to, rather than sets of initials which maybe unfamiliar to the audience.

Try not to be over-emotional because you will put people off. Be reasonable, steady and good-humoured.

Some fear is essential to keep the adrenaline flowing but will distract the audience if you are very obviously nervous. Look relaxed and smile as often as possible. Remember the audience feels good will towards you and will be embarrassed if you are clearly not in control. Make eye contact with as many people as possible. (Don't focus on one person only).

Try not to distract your audience by fidgeting or shuffling your feet.

Speaking in Church

Find out how you are going to be introduced and where you will be sitting. Discuss what you intend to say with the priest to see if he has any comments. You may be mentioning a few topics which have been covered in the parish recently.

Make sure your dress is appropriate to the occasion.

Examine the place you are to speak from in terms of:

- Being heard - actually try the microphone if there is one
- Being seen
- Some where to put your notes
- Lighting so that you can see your notes

In Catholic churches you may be asked to speak at the homily time, but you may be assigned the time after communion. If the latter, cut down the talk because people do not expect a long input at that time. Try to avoid speaking at the very end of Mass because people do not listen well at this time and some will probably leave.

It is useful to imagine you are attempting to communicate with a person in the far corner of the church. Avoid touching the microphone and do not drop your voice at the end of the sentence or turn your head away from the microphone.

Use visual imagery - and better still use visual objects. They are an enormous help and rarely used by the clergy. Children particularly respond well to specific examples.

Make a few simple points and do not be afraid of repetition. An old principle of preaching is:

- Tell them what you are going to tell them
- Tell them
- Tell them what you've told them

The beginning and ending are important - have these carefully worked out. It is often easier to end with a quotation summing up what has been said.

Remember to thank the priest publicly for the

opportunity to speak - this establishes the official nature of the talk.

Towards the end refer to any follow-up meetings. Make it clear that you can discuss and answer questions after Mass and refer to any literature to be handed out.

Try not to depend on more than a few written headings. Even if the full text has to be written out, do not read it or you will lose your listeners.

It is not always easy to be light-hearted about justice and development issues - but smile and be cheerful. This means being relaxed which depends on being confident about what you are going to say and that it is worth hearing.

A talk must not last more than ten minutes (and is better shorter than longer).

Possible Introductions

The question: to make an audience think. The question should be carefully chosen and the more dramatic and unusual it is, the better.

The facts: to catch the audience's attention quickly, and appeal to their intelligence.

The quotation: to appeal to the imagination and allow them to associate themselves with the sentiments of a famous person.

The joke: to capture the audience's attention and make them laugh and relax.

The shock: to wake up an apathetic audience.

The personal touch: to strike up a personal relationship with an audience. Tell them about yourself or add some local colour to make them aware that you know something about them and their lives.

Possible Endings

In addition to any of the above you can:

Summarise: to round off the speech decisively.

Call to action: to stimulate a definite response.

Explain the options: to conclude on a reasoned note.

How to Use the Media

Using the media can enable you to spread your message to a wider public.

Contacting Local Media

Using your local newspaper, radio or television station to get your message over to the widest possible audience is both essential and easy. Local journalists are interested in what you have to offer because you live in the area, can provide local names and faces for their stories and can give them something to interest their readers or audiences. So don't be shy about it. They won't bite. Indeed they will be glad to hear from you. The media is a people business and you are concerned with people issues.

The first step is to let the media know who you are, where you are, and what you do and how you can be contacted. This can be done by phoning all the media offices in your area and asking for the names of the journalists assigned to cover news in your town or village. Have a chat with them. Suggest story ideas and generally let them know you are around. On the journalists' side, you are a new 'contact' and will be entered into their address books and diaries for future reference.

When establishing the initial contact, arm yourself with copies of leaflets from J&P or whatever agency you are campaigning for at the time. Explain what J&P does that the reporter (who may be covering several stories at the same time) can get the correct information. Take the trouble to be accurate, spell out your name, the date, time and venue of an event.

If you live in fear of speaking to the press, gain some confidence by asking the reporter why the paper is interested in a particular story. If a contentious issue comes up and you need to be sure of your facts contact the relevant agency or your J&P Fieldworker.

By following these simple guidelines and **relaxing**, talking to the Press can be fun and not a chore.

Writing Press Releases

To obtain coverage the story you wish to tell should be of interest to the public. Local papers look for local angles. People in Bristol, for instance, don't really care about a seminar in North Yorkshire. So the local element is essential in obtaining coverage. If you are planning an event involving several well-known members of your community, the press will be interested. Provide photographs whenever possible, or ask the Press to send a photographer.

When writing, journalist's usually stick to the five W's: **what** is happening, **when** is it happening, **who** is doing it, **where** is it happening, **why** is it happening?

So you could write a press release as follows:

What: a skip will be placed

Where: outside St Angela's Catholic Church

When: from Monday 10 August

Who: by the parishioners

Why: because they wish to collect all their newspapers for recycling. Of a possible 87%, only 30% of paper in the UK is recycled.

If space is short, editors will often leave out the last few paragraphs. The first paragraph is the most important one and must attract and hold the editor's attention. If he or she has to wade through three paragraphs before getting to the point, the chances are your story will end up in the bin. There must be a basic reason for telling the story and you have to find that peg on which to hang the story.

Apply the 'inverted pyramid' style of writing, i.e. put the important ideas and significant quotations at the beginning, followed by progressively more detailed, less crucial information. The lead sentence should sum up the one or two ideas that inspired the release.

Use good, simple English and avoid jargon.

Don't put J&P's or your parish's name in every sentence or paragraph – once or twice is quite enough.

The best way to learn is to **read** the stories in your local papers and observe how they are written. Two things characterise most newspaper reports:

- The topic is stated in the first few words,
- The gist of the story comes across in the first paragraph and the rest of the story substantiates the report.

All press releases must be typewritten, with double spacing between the lines and four spaces between paragraphs. Leave a margin of about one inch on each side and print on one side of the paper only.

Write 'Press Release' at the top of each one and if you wish to have it kept until a certain date write: 'Embargoed until ...'.

At the end of each release, give the name and telephone number of the person they can contact for more information and then write 'ends'.

Giving Interviews

The guidelines for dealing with the Press are also relevant when dealing with local radio. When giving an interview decide in advance what message you want to convey and get it across no matter what the question is. Use short, uncomplicated sentences and beware of firing a lot of statistics. You will very often be dealing with people who have little knowledge of the issues you are working on and their

questions can be vague or trivial.

Q: We hear that today a large skip has been placed outside your church. Who put it there and why?

A: Only 30% of paper in the UK is recycled and the figure could be more like 87%. Parishioners of St Angela's will from now on collect their wastepaper in a skip they themselves have organised and arrange for it to be recycled. Preventing waste is one way of saving our dwindling natural resources and easing poverty.

Don't be shy about radio interviews. Broadcast journalists are experienced in dealing with members of the public who are nervous. Give the interviewer a press release as a basis for the interview. They will put you at your ease. Ask them beforehand what the question will be. Always **listen** to the question. Remember people like you will be listening to the broadcast. The public only expect the presenters and not the interviewees to be professional.

Attracting Media Attention

- Organise a special display in the parish.
- Capitalise on the visit of a specialist speaker.
- Visit your local MP to solicit his or her support for your concern.
- Ask a parishioner with some relevant experience to give an interview or write a story.
- Produce some street theatre.

How to Produce Newsletters & Pamphlets

Newsletters and pamphlets help to spread the latest information on your campaign

PLANNING

A pamphlet about a meeting should have the following information:

- What the meeting is about (a protest or a launch)
- When and where it will be held
- Who will speak
- Who or what group is organising the meeting. Include contact information.

A pamphlet about an issue should tell people:

- What the issue is
- Why it is important
- Why they should be concerned about it
- What they are being asked to do about it.

Before you write pamphlets about an issue, make sure that you understand the issue properly and that you have all the information you need. If you are not clear about something or you need some more facts, do some research – seek help from your J&P coordinator. There are three things we need to think about when planning a newsletter or pamphlet: the aim of the publication, who it is for (the target group), and what we want to say (the content).

The aim: all media can be used to inform, educate, politicise or mobilise. We need to be clear which of these we want to achieve.

The target group: all media communication must be written with a particular target group in mind. We need to ask who are the target groups, what will interest them, and what kind of language they respond to?

The content: when planning the content of a newsletter or pamphlet, list all the information that will be needed before starting to write.

A pamphlet about a group should contain the following information:

- The name of the organisation or group
- Its aims
- Who belongs to it
- Why people should join it.

DESIGN

The way we arrange the writing on the pamphlet or newsletter, the headings and the pictures we use can all make the pamphlet more interesting. If it looks like the page of a difficult book, full of long words, no one will want to read it.

MAKE IT EASY TO READ

Use good English

- Use short sentences and short paragraphs
- Be direct – say what you mean.
- Write in point form: this is especially useful for lists.
- Indent the first line of each paragraph or leave a line space between them.

HEADINGS

Use CAPITALS, underline, use *italics* or **bold** for emphasis.

USE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations and photographs help make a pamphlet more attractive.

Logos are the signs that organisations/groups use for their names. If you use a logo on all your pamphlets and all your other media, people will learn to recognise it. A logo helps people identify quickly which organisation has produced the pamphlet. If you are producing pamphlets, newsletters, notices etc., on a regular basis as a part of a parish group, it might be worth designing a parish group logo.

USE EXISTING NEWSLETTERS

There are a variety of newsletters which may provide an opportunity for you to advertise your parish programme or campaign.

The vast majority of parishes have weekly newsletters which are generally read by parishioners. Check the copy deadline each week and provide all the necessary copy so that the editor or parish priest can insert it.

Shrewsbury Diocese welcomes diary dates for its quarterly magazine *MouthPeace* jointly with Liverpool Archdiocese and in its quarterly *Quick News Network* mailing.

How to Network

Identify as many allies as possible!

PREPARATION

There is a danger that small groups of people active in a particular cause become insular and parochial. One goal of the group should be to identify as many allies as possible within the parish to enlist their support and cooperation. Another should be a willingness to reach out to other Christian Churches and groups sharing similar concerns, particularly those in the immediate locality. Small groups are vital, but in order to bring about the scale of changes necessary, caring people must combine their resources. In addition, only by listening to others can we sharpen our goals and strategies in order to be effective.

Clarify what your group hopes to achieve from networking, e.g.

- To create more of an impact in your area
- To ensure the greatest possible participation of parishioners
- To unite Christians in their response to social concerns
- To tackle structural injustice more effectively
- To enjoy some sort of exchange with other groups involved in justice work
- To act in line with modern understanding of mission

Once you have clarified why you want to network, the 'who' and the 'where' follow logically. The basis for networking may be:

- Geographically proximity
- Church structures in your deanery or diocese
- Local government structures (your local borough or county)
- Informal contacts (other groups interested in similar issues or doing similar work).

NETWORKING INSIDE THE PARISH

Identify individuals and groups that ought to be contacted about the issue with which you are concerned because they are in key positions or undertake work which could complement your own. Some possibilities are:

- Clergy and lay workers
- People who run the parish magazine and choir/s
- Leaders of such groups as St Vincent de Paul, Liturgy, Prayer, Catholic Women's League, Knights of St Columba.
- those responsible for preparing children for First Communion
- Confirmation groups
- Parish Council

Be sure you know why you are contacting them and have something to suggest rather than appearing vague, e.g. the Liturgy Group and choir might help to prepare a special liturgy. The Knights and CWL are very experienced fundraisers and could help with pamphleteering, and those who prepare young people for Confirmation might find some of your work useful for their own programmes and could prepare young people to take up social justice concerns.

It is very important not to dictate to others. Ask for their help and suggest a way forward, but be careful not to impose or be judgmental if they do not wish to collaborate at all or at least not in the way suggested. Remember, people are not enemies simply because they don't put your concerns at the top of their agendas.

Once contact is made with people, it should be kept up and someone or a few members could be responsible for liaising with key contacts such as the parish priest.

Try to be positive to requests for help from other parish groups and individuals and support as many parish activities as possible.

NETWORKING OUTSIDE THE PARISH

Identify likely allies such as :

Similar groups in other Churches
Diocesan Justice & Peace Commissions
Local clergy and Churches Together groups
Support groups of organisations such as World Development Movement, Church Action on Poverty, Amnesty International, Oxfam, Traidcraft, local credit unions, Lets schemes, solidarity groups etc.

Identify other important contacts such as:

Local press and radio (See *How to ... Use the Media* section)

Media personalities who live in your area

Local MP/MEP's and local-government politicians.

When you have contacted them, have something positive to suggest. You may, for instance, have invited one of CAFOD's speakers from a Third World country as a guest speaker and feel that Third World groups who relate to Christian Aid and Oxfam may also be interested; or you may want to set up a meeting to look at homelessness in your area which might involve local councillors, a spokesperson from Social Services, the Salvation Army, etc.

When you approach them be sure to have a title and possible dates to suggest and invite the local press to cover it. Respond positively to requests for help and take opportunities to network whenever they arise.

WHEN NETWORKING IS APPROPRIATE

The following could be ideal times to network with other groups:

Special occasions organised by agencies:

- CAFOD's Lent and Harvest Fast Days
- One World Week (October)
- Women's World Day of Prayer (March)
- Mass lobbies of Parliament

Times of particular religious reflection during the year e.g. Advent and Lent

A time of local interest in an particular issue:

e.g. Local opposition to toxic waste dumped in the area.

WHEN NETWORKING REMEMBER

Be positive and helpful Suggest ways of working that are attractive and encourage others to enjoy the opportunity of collaborating with your group.

Be rational Try not to be fanatical about the importance of your concerns, yet don't lose credibility by failing to defend challenges when they come. Remain clear-headed.

Be patient When making new contacts you cannot presume to know that they will know all about you and the activities of your group – in fact, a major part of your campaigning will be to inform and educate people about things of which they have little prior knowledge. You may have to explain what your campaign is about over and over again. Do it with enthusiasm.

Be efficient A major reason for networking is to work more effectively. Efficiency is necessary to maintain contacts. e.g. if you promise a photo to a reporter from the local press, send it immediately. Make a careful note of people's addresses and phone numbers.

Be prepared to work hard Making and maintaining contacts takes time. Sometimes, the harder you work, the more people are impressed with your efficiency and you end up coordinating a number of tasks. Ensure that one person doesn't end up doing everything.

Be practical It is sometimes better to select one or two contacts and make a big effort to work with them rather than trying to keep large numbers of people informed of every move your group makes.

Be informed Do sufficient research to be clear who the key contacts are.

Remember Networking is a two-way process. Always be prepared to support the initiatives of other groups who are your allies.

How to Organise a Public Meeting

You may wish to organise a public meeting or invite a speaker at some time during the year. Time given to sorting out the following points will ensure a successful meeting almost every time.

OBJECTIVES

Be clear about the purpose/s of the meeting. It might be a good idea for someone to clarify them at the start of the meeting and refer to them again at the end. Be clear who your target group is for the meeting, as this will assist you in advertising.

ADVERTISING

People will only come to a public meeting if they are clear what it's about; choosing a punchy title can help to attract them. Also, a count-down splashed across posters is eye-catching. Project a positive image rather than highlighting only the crises in the issue you are dealing with. Posters should be visually attractive, and provide all necessary details in simple, large and easily readable type. Good positioning is often more important than the number of posters you distribute. Don't forget to place some in local schools, youth centres, other churches, libraries etc. If you are advertising in the parish newsletter or press, follow the guide-lines given in the skills sections on using the media and newsletters and bulletins. A verbal notice given from the pulpit together with encouragement to attend usually works wonders. Don't rely only on formal advertising: phone around and invite friends, and key people in other J&P groups and similar organisations.

If you are advertising the event widely, ensure that

- The names and telephone numbers of one or two key contacts are included in the publicity to answer enquiries.
- You have maps and detailed directions to send to anyone who needs them to find the venue.

TIMING

Try not to clash with a major media event such as the final of Wimbledon. This will affect attendance considerably! Avoid the summer months because people may be on holiday. If you choose an evening, avoid Fridays and Saturdays. On other evenings, give people a chance to return from work and have some supper: start about 7.30 p.m. or consider starting immediately after an evening service when people will be willing to stay on. A full day gathering will probably have to be at the weekend, but a weekday is better if you hope to have a lot of clergy present.

VENUE

Book a venue which is appropriate for the realistic size of the expected gathering. An enormous parish hall for half a dozen people lacks warmth and atmosphere. Check access (keys), heating, facilities for boiling water, cups etc. (since tea/coffee should really be offered if you are expecting people to stay for a long evening). Check that the chairs are clean (they may not have been used in a long time). If you book a local primary school, check that they have adult size chairs. Put up a few posters and check the lights so that the place is as attractive as possible.

AGENDA

Have a set agenda to follow and make it last between one and two hours. People become bored and annoyed if you keep them longer. Ensure that there is some kind of welcome and introduction and some kind of neat rounding off.

Before the questions you might give an opportunity for people to "buzz" or chat to their

neighbour. This provides a bit of relief, an opportunity for a stretch and breaks up long sessions.

SPEAKERS

It is important to offer hospitality to a speaker before and after the meeting. If you know the speaker is travelling some distance, invite him or her for a meal and offer accommodation. Brief the speaker extensively on the topic you wish him or her to deal with, what your aim is in holding the meeting, how many people you expect, their average age and any other useful background. If the speaker is organised by CAFOD or CIIR, for instance, don't assume automatically that the person is a Catholic. Some partners are not Catholic or even Christians. Research the back ground details of the speaker thoroughly and introduce him or her correctly.

CHAIRING THE MEETING

It is vital that a meeting is chaired:

- To welcome the speaker and the audience (particularly important when people from a variety of contexts are involved).
- To make sure that the agenda is adhered to
- To control the question and answer session
- To give a word of thanks at the end
- To give out necessary notices

SOUND EQUIPMENT

A microphone can sometimes put a distance between a speaker and the audience, but do use one if the speaker has a soft voice or if there is a large attendance at the gathering. Check out how the system works in advance. Make sure your guest is aware of it and ask someone to ensure that it is working properly.

VISUAL AIDS

Visual aids always make a meeting more interesting, but some rules need to be followed:

- Ideally, somebody should see the slides/video in advance to make sure that it is appropriate and won't take up too much time.
- Check the equipment and have a quick run-through before the meeting starts.
- Make sure that the screen is clearly visible from all points in the room.

RESOURCES

It is always a good idea to have a resources stall at a major event. If your speaker has written any books, have copies available. Stock materials relevant to the talk and a variety of other related material. Invite allied organisations to mount a stall at the meeting.

Place the stall in a suitable position, e.g. near the coffee and tea, and have prices clearly marked.

Mention from the platform that the resources are there and urge people to visit them after the talk. Also, give them time to do so, e.g. during an extended coffee break.

PRAYER/LITURGY

If your gathering is basically a church one, organise a short prayer at the beginning and end of the meeting. If a liturgy is central to an ecumenical event, try to involve as many people as possible from other churches in prayers, readings etc. Creative use of slides, music and/or drama can really set people in the right frame of mind to get a lot out of the meeting.

FOLLOW UP

Meetings should always have some kind of consequence. If your meeting is launching a campaign, inform people of the likely follow-up and ask them to give names and telephone numbers.