



Mission Plan July 2026
Part I

Introduction

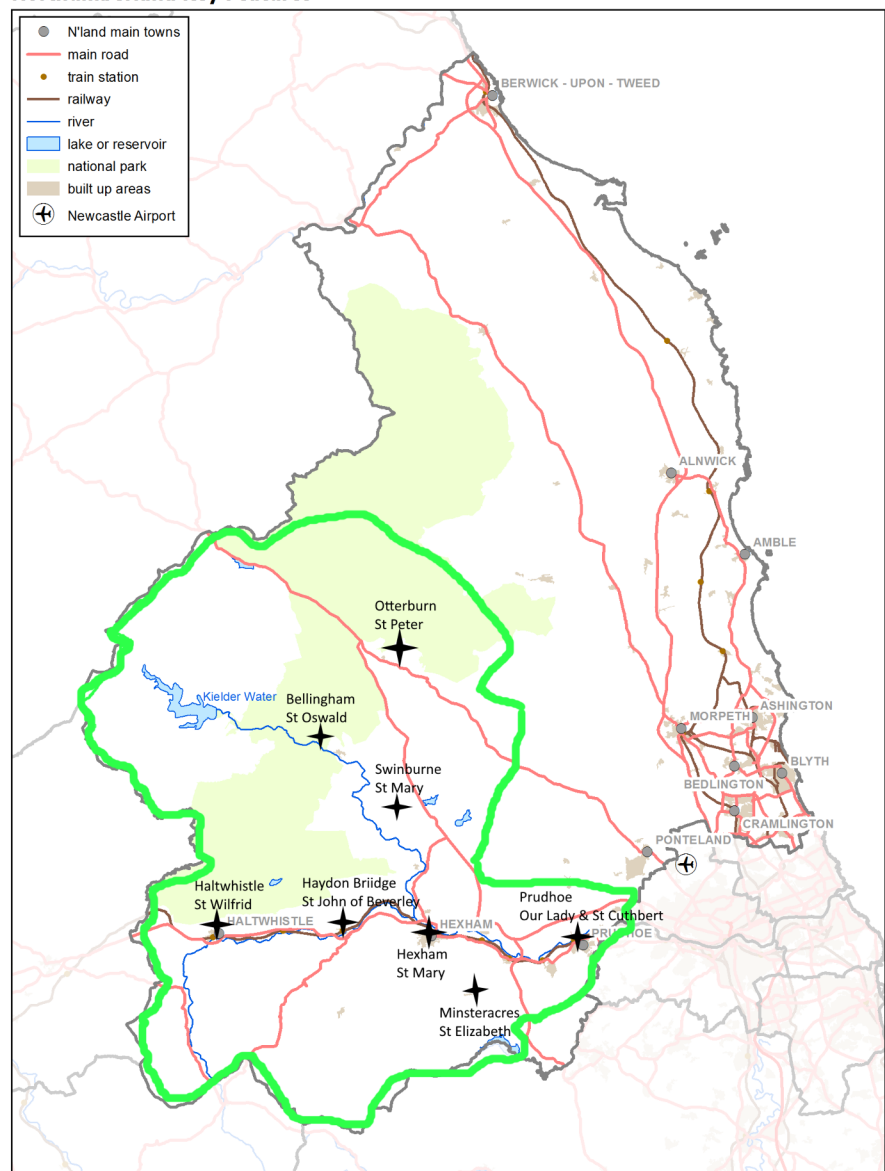
Heavenfield covers a wide geographic area in the western Tyne Valley including the settlements of Bellingham, Haltwhistle, Haydon Bridge, Hexham, Otterburn, Prudhoe and Minsteracres. Minsteracres is a Passionist retreat centre that maintains the parish of St Elizabeth.

The Parishes of Haydon Bridge and Haltwhistle have been united for a number of years, as are Bellingham and Otterburn. Currently there are two priests at Hexham, one at Prudhoe plus the Minsteracres community. The Passionists have stated their intention to leave Minsteracres this year, and a Carmelite community with two active priests will take over from the diocesan priests at Hexham in September 2026. There is one permanent deacon, based at Minsteracres.

The distances between the communities are considerable. Otterburn and Haltwhistle are around 20 miles to the north and west of Hexham respectively. Minsteracres is 11 miles to the south of Hexham and Prudhoe is 12 miles to the east. Public transport is available, but in general only from the centres of community and at peak times. Many people in these rural areas have no practical public transport services to enable participation in parish or partnership activities. Distance also makes it a challenge to provide Mass to these communities, whether on a Sunday or weekday.

To put things in perspective, the pastoral area covered by the Heavenfield Partnership covers an area equivalent to the distance from Sunderland to Alnwick and from Tynemouth to Prudhoe. It is an extraordinarily large area to administer and support spiritually.

Northumberland Key Features



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We have reduced the number of Sunday Masses for these communities from 12 to 9 over the last 5 years.

The current Sunday Mass provision, excluding Minsteracres, is a vigil Mass at Hexham at 5.30pm on the Saturday, a 09:00 Mass at Haydon Bridge serving the Haydon Bridge and Haltwhistle community, a 10:30 Mass at Hexham, and 11:00 at Bellingham. There is an evening Mass (18:00) at Hexham. There are two weekend Masses at Prudhoe: Saturday 5pm and Sunday 10.30am. There are two Sunday Masses currently at Minsteracres.

The Priest saying the Sunday morning Mass at Haydon Bridge needs to leave straight after Mass to drive to Bellingham. The shortest route between the two is 16.4 miles and takes 31mins in good conditions. That route is however a small country route and in the winter the longer (23.7m, 38mins) is recommended for safety. (Distances and times from www.theaa.com). This leaves no time for any pastoral interaction with the community at Haydon Bridge.

The worshipping community.

The Mass attendance across the partnership in 2018 was 654 (excluding Prudhoe which joined the Partnership in 2025). Currently the equivalent figure is 376 (574 including Prudhoe).

The population in the area is very mixed, with a wide spread of incomes, ages and employment types. The area is popular with people commuting to Newcastle and other towns, but there are also groups dependent on local businesses, and there are also elderly who can be particularly isolated when living in rural areas. There is new house building in and around Hexham, Haltwhistle and Haydon Bridge and Prudhoe which gives an opportunity for outreach.

A Summary of our Plan

Worship

- We will reduce the number of Sunday Masses in the Partnership from 9 to 6 based on the current Mass centres at Hexham, Bellingham, Prudhoe and Haydon Bridge.
- We will encourage and enable a full communal prayer life for the community.
- We will encourage a culture of welcoming and invitation to individuals and families that we meet in the course of the liturgical year, particularly Baptism, Marriage, Confirmation, Christmas and Easter.

Teaching

- We aim to ensure a properly formed community who are confident in their faith and ready to express and live that faith publicly.
- We will establish a route for the identification and training of new leaders in the parishes.

Service

- We will build on our current good level of support for our Catholic Charities and our involvement in our local communities, whether in groups or as individuals.

Community

- We will orient ourselves to a wider view of our Catholic community; to look outward and to enjoy the full variety of our Partnership.
- We will ensure our isolated and vulnerable are supported and feel part of our ecclesial life.
- We will work on all aspects of our communications to reach all our communities.

Finances

- We will work to achieve a positive balance between income and costs, and enable a reserve for stability and resources for growth.

Buildings

- We will reconfigure our current property portfolio to reduce building related expenditure, including both maintenance and repair costs, insurance etc.
- To maximise income from the use of the buildings, and to ensure suitable warm, sustainable and welcoming resources essential for our mission.

People

- We aim to retain, recruit and enable ever larger groups of volunteers and people engaged in our ministries. To look outward to our communities, engage and encourage them to contemplate the invitation of Christ.

Our Plan in more detail

This plan is created from the combined submissions of our partnership parishes, and relies upon those underlying aims and objectives to be fruitful. It aims to enable the effective implementation of the local initiatives described in their submissions.

1- Mission

Worship

Goal: To ensure the reliable and accessible distribution of Sunday Mass in the area, consistent with the welfare and capability of our clergy.

Why? The Sunday Mass is the fundamental bedrock of our community and on this all our other mission actions are based. In recent years we have seen a change from 6 priests and 2 deacons to now 3 active priests and 1 deacon in the area (i.e. a 50% drop). We need to adjust to this new reality.

What we will do: We propose to reduce the number of Sunday Masses in the area from 9 to 6. A draft schedule is now being discussed in the Partnership and we aim for this to be in place for Autumn 2026.

How we will do it:

- Further discussion on the detail of the schedule in the Partnership
- consultation with the parishes
- final decision process to be completed in October.

Goal: To encourage and enable a full communal prayer life for the community outwith the Sunday obligation, ensuring that God is central to our daily lives.

Why? Whilst the Eucharist is the Source and Summit of Catholic life, there is a wide range of prayer and spiritual practices available to us including the Morning and Evening Prayer, the Rosary, Bible study, etc. Praying in community is a valuable part of building and forming our faith.

What we will do: Set up a Partnership group to promote and provide formation on the wide range of forms of communal prayer available to us all, including the sick and housebound.

How we will do it: Minsteracres mission group; Sycamore 'Ways of Praying' series; Morning and evening prayer groups in each parish. Rosary before Mass, online prayer/study...

Goal: To ensure a welcoming and open culture of invitation to individuals and families that we meet in the course of the liturgical year, particularly Baptism, Marriage, Confirmation, Christmas, Easter etc.

Why? Many people have an incidental relationship with the Church. We need to be receptive to these people and ready to welcome them and help them discover a relationship with Christ and the Church.

What we will do: Review and strengthen the current arrangements for welcome at all our churches. Create pathways that invite visitors to enquire and discover the faith in its fullness.

How we will do it:

- Each PPC to examine its current welcome provision, and ensure that all aspects of welcome and invitation are present in its activities. This will specifically include attention to those who are most affected by the changes in Mass provision and need to find a new 'home'.

Teaching

Goal: To ensure a properly formed community who are confident in their faith, and ready to express and live that faith publicly.

Why? Outreach to those around us, both within our community and without, demands that we 'Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence;' (1 Peter 3:15). Many may not have had past opportunities to learn about their faith, but in a secular world it is important that we all improve on our faith understanding and on our ability to communicate it.

What we will do: Create a team of catechists and leaders across the Partnership who can co-ordinate the Sacramental Preparation (including RCIA) in common across the Parishes and create wider programmes of formation for all parishioners and those who would like to join us.

How we will do it: Set up Partnership Formation group to design and implement a formation programme across the area.

Goal: To establish a route for the identification and training of new leaders in the parishes.

Why? We have a good body of experienced people in the Partnership, but over time these will naturally move on, and we need to ensure a continued stream of new leaders in all aspects of the life of our communities. (Catechists, readers, liturgical ministers, youth leaders, communications, finance, parish leadership etc. etc.)

What we will do: Clergy and PPC's to start identifying needs and possible candidates for roles in the parish.

How we will do it: Having identified needs and candidates, we will make use of appropriate Diocesan training programmes and resources, co-ordinated across the Partnership by our Deacon.

Serve

Goal: To build on our current good level of support for our Catholic charities and our involvement in our local communities, whether as a group or as individuals.

Why? The Church exists to bring the love of Christ to the world. Service is not an optional activity but a natural expression of Christian discipleship. We are all called to serve God and our neighbour. Worship, prayer and formation naturally lead to service. Many people in our towns have little contact with the Church, but continue to search for meaning, hope and belonging.

What we will do: Ensure local church communities are supported in the work they do in serving others. Ensure existing serving groups are welcoming to new people. Become more outward looking and deliberately reaching out beyond our existing congregations.

How we will do it:

- Establish a sub committee to identify what we do to serve and where we are active; to improve our effectiveness and to communicate to our wider community as an invitation to them to become involved.
- Create teams to welcome new (housing) residents;
- strengthen relationships with schools;
- develop online communication and outreach; [Establish communications group]
- Create opportunities for people to explore the Catholic faithful
- Invite those who have become disconnected from the Church to reconnect with parish life.

Community

Goal: To orient ourselves to a wider view of our Catholic community; to look outward and to enjoy the full variety of our Partnership. To ensure our isolated and vulnerable are supported and feel part of our ecclesial life.

Why? Although our individual communities are strong, there is a danger that they become isolated and vulnerable. Actively promoting and participating in the wider Catholic context allows us to grow and potentially be more fulfilled.

What we will do: To move toward amalgamating parishes; moving from the current 5 to 2. This reduces the administrative burden, and enables a larger resource base for activities. Ensure the process of moving from discernment to action is as transparent as possible for all parishioners with the Why? for each action being evident and open. Communications must be as accessible and relevant to as many as possible, including to those without ready access to the internet. Develop database of parishioners, identifying particularly the sick and housebound to enable Eucharistic and social visits. Establish opportunities for wider (partnership) celebrations, missions and pilgrimages.

How we will do it:

- Develop annual calendar of partnership events. (Parish secretary and communications group).
- As we welcome our new clergy to the Partnership we will organise an 'All change' party in September 2026 to both welcome them, and to bring together our whole community as we begin our new journey.

2- Stewardship

Finances

Goal: To achieve a positive balance between income and costs, to enable a reserve for stability and resources for growth.

Why? We have seen congregations reducing steadily over the last decade, although we have many signs of new growth starting to take effect. We need to be in a financial position that allows us to be confident in our future but also strong enough to resource an outward mission to others.

What we will do:

Control and reduce costs through amalgamation and sharing of resources. This will also lead to better forecasting and control of finances and more effective use of joint resources.

Maximise income from our property.

Increase income both through increased donations per head and through encouraging congregation growth (outreach and welcome).

Amalgamation of parishes (see Community actions) would allow better forecasting and control of finances.

How we will do it:

Liaise with Diocese on possibility of amalgamation and the appropriate process.

Promotion of planned giving initiatives on more regular basis with a focus on the benefits of mission.

Establish Partnership finance team to share the expertise and planning, and create an appropriate mix of subsidiarity and solidarity.

Buildings

Goal: To reconfigure our current property portfolio to reduce building related expenditure including both maintenance and repair costs, insurance etc, to maximise income, and to ensure suitable, warm, sustainable and welcoming resources essential for our mission.

Why? We currently face unpredictable and often sizeable repair and maintenance costs on underutilised buildings. This drains resource whilst not providing an optimal environment for our work.

What we will do:

- Consider the viability of non-core buildings.
- Maximise income from parish property or ensure utilisation for church and mission.
- Review, monitor and control costs using quinquennial reports. Maximise grants etc to assist with cost of repairs.

How we will do it:

- Urgently establish a group to review partnership properties with a specific remit on utilisation and viability.
- Identify income generation possibilities.
- Ensure regular review of maintenance requirement, to achieve best work/cost/quality.

People

Goal: To retain, recruit and enable ever larger groups of volunteers and people engaged in our ministries. To look outward to our communities and engage and encourage them to contemplate the invitation of Christ.

Why? The role of the laity is to evangelise; in many ways but at all times. The more active the laity, the more able the clergy will be to provide the sacramental underpinning of our faith.

What we will do:

- Through our teaching and serving plans we will generate a dynamic interest in God and the Catholic Church. This will take time, but will result in the inflow of people and resources.
- Identify the skills, gifts and talents in our extended community (e.g. IT skills, finance, teaching, etc) and actively invite people to assist where their skills match our needs.
- Ensure younger adults are encouraged to play an active role in the life and mission of the Church.
- Identify areas where additional volunteers are needed, and where formation programmes need to be developed/implemented.

How we will do it:

- Set up a 'task and finish' group specifically to work on recruitment, renewal and encouraging volunteers. This will consider the culture and relationships we currently have, and how we might improve them.
- Hold a workshop/fair, in conjunction with our 'All Change' meeting in September to ensure wide visibility of opportunity and warm invitation to participation.

Heavenfield Partnership Team

William Charlton	St Oswald & St Peter
Deacon David Collins	St Elizabeth
Fr Jeffrey Dodds VG	PP at St Mary, St John & St Wilfrid, St Oswald & St Peter
Minnie Fraser	St Elizabeth
Lorna Garrett	Our Lady & St Cuthbert
Gerry Green	St Wilfrid & St John of Beverley
Fr Paul Kilduff	St Mary's Hexham
Fr Emmanuel Kabinga CP	Minsteracres
Joe Ronan	St Mary's Hexham
Fr Michael Whalen	Our Lady & St Cuthbert.

31st July 2026