



Furthering the Mission of Christ and His Church

Diocese of Elphin
Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils





Introduction

Since my episcopal ordination on July 13th 2014 I have enjoyed visiting the parishes of our diocese and have appreciated opportunities to discuss local pastoral concerns and priorities with clergy and Parish Pastoral Council members. This round of visits will conclude in February.

These discussions highlighted something now internationally recognised, i.e. that functioning Parish Pastoral Councils are an important means of inviting parishioners of all ages to discern their gifts and to place them at the service of their parish community. In the first instance this applies to the members of the Parish Pastoral Council themselves, who commit themselves to taking on a particular responsibility for the pastoral mission of their parish. What is sometimes overlooked, however, is that Parish Pastoral Councils are not expected to “do” everything, any more than the priest is. In fact if they seek to do everything, they can end up excluding the participation of others. On the contrary, Parish Pastoral Councils have an important role in helping other members of the parish community to recognise their gifts and to place them at the service of the community. PPCs are well placed to initiate and encourage projects which, as well as making a valuable and lasting contribution to the pastoral life of their parishes, will facilitate the active participation of more parishioners and a greater understanding and sense of ownership on the part of a wider cross-section of parishioners.

Parish Pastoral Council members occasionally find themselves on a steep learning curve. For new members, the learning has to do partly with identifying the challenges (e.g. the quality of liturgy; action for justice and social concern, education in faith for young people, vocations etc.) and partly with the development of a concrete pastoral strategy for responding to those challenges. Sometimes the task seems to be daunting, but the important thing is to identify what can be done, rather than to lament the present situation. Finding the balance between speaking and listening, between following and leading is all part of the learning curve for any group trying to work together.

Naturally questions arise, questions relating to vision, assumptions and expectations, training needs etc.. Parish Pastoral Councils, as they mature, can also find it necessary to reflect upon their own spirituality and on how best to draw encouragement and succour from both the teaching and prayer traditions of the Church. For all of these reasons, Parish Pastoral Councils, be they new or longer established, require time outside of their normal business meetings, to develop their vision, their spirituality and their team skills. I strongly encourage Parish Pastoral Councils to have one “non-business” meeting each year, preferably over a day at some venue outside the parish, when they can attend to these things

The initial constitution of Parish Pastoral Councils for the Diocese of Elphin was promulgated by my predecessor, Bishop Christopher Jones, on August 15th 2004 and was the fruit of much consultation throughout the diocese. I am delighted to reissue that with some minor changes. It is my hope that this revised constitution will support the formation and work of every Parish Pastoral Council, work best explored and undertaken in light of local circumstances.

Finally I wish to express my thanks to all who contribute to the life and mission of their parish by serving on their parish’s Parish Pastoral Council at this time. Thank you for giving visible expression to the Church as a communion of all the faithful who, by virtue of their Baptism are entrusted with a mission and called to exercise that mission as “one body in Christ”. I also wish you every blessing as you continue the work of building the connection between your Council and your parish community. This is vital for the times we live in.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Doran'.

+ Kevin Doran

Bishop of Elphin

January 3rd 2015

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord



Introduction

It is the policy of the Elphin diocese that each of the diocese's thirty-seven parishes have a single Parish Pastoral Council.

A Parish Pastoral Council (PPC herein) is a consultative body of the faithful, representative of the whole parish community, willing to work in close partnership with the priest(s) of the parish to further the mission of Christ and his Church in the parish.

Membership

In order to ensure the effective working of the PPC, membership of each Council consists of between 8 and 15 people including:

- The priest(s) of the parish (ex officio)
- Any adult(s) employed by the parish to engage in pastoral ministry (ex officio)
- One member of the Parish Finance Committee (ex officio)
- Lay people nominated and / or elected by parishioners
- Person or persons co-opted by the Pastoral Council.

All priests serving the parish are encouraged to participate in all Parish Pastoral Council meetings.

PPC's are expected to be representative of the Church areas in the parish, and as far as possible of all adult age groups, of women and men, and of adults from different backgrounds.

Each PPC is to decide whether the term of membership is to be three or four years and the term of membership of any nominated / elected member should not exceed two consecutive terms. Irrespective of the term of office, it is strongly recommended that, within one year of the appointment of a new Parish priest / Administrator, a new PPC should be put in place.

To promote continuity the election of members from different Church areas are to take place in different years.

Members are expected to treat in strict confidence any matters of a sensitive nature that arise and / or are discussed during meetings.

Members failing to attend three consecutive meetings without a reasonable explanation will be deemed to have resigned. Vacancies are to be filled by co-opting new members. Members are encouraged to avail of opportunities provided by the diocese to deepen their own spirituality, levels of religious knowledge and understanding and all opportunities likely to enhance their service as Parish Pastoral Council members.

Officers

The parish priest is to preside over the meeting of the Pastoral Council (Can. 536). A meeting of the Parish Council is not valid in the absence of the Parish Priest / Administrator.

The PPC is to host elections for a Chairperson, a Secretary and a Youth Officer during their September meeting every second year. All three officers are to be encouraged to serve a two-year term.

The main functions of the chairperson will be to involve all members in discussions, to facilitate the smooth running of meetings and to follow up on actions that are agreed, to establish that they have been carried out.

The main function of the secretary will be to agree the agenda together with the chairperson and the parish priest and to circulate it at least four days prior to the meeting and to take the minutes during the meeting.

The main function of the Youth Officer will be to keep the faith development of younger parishioners to the fore and to liaise between the Council and parishioners willing to provide a service of leadership vis-à-vis youth ministry and teenage catechesis.

Officers may be re-elected but may not serve for more than four consecutive years.

Supporting the chairperson, secretary and priest to plan an agenda is every members' responsibility. Consequently members are expected to forward items for consideration to the secretary or chairperson at least one week before each meeting. Time may also be given to agreeing an agenda at the end of each meeting.

At least one week before each meeting the parish priest and elected officers are to meet and finalise the agenda.

After each meeting the parish priest and officers are to prepare a short report on the meeting for the Parish Bulletin or other designated mechanism of informing the parish community of the PPC's discussions, considerations and outcomes.

Each parish priest is to forward the name, address and telephone number of their chairperson, secretary and youth officer to the bishop of the diocese.

Either the chairperson or secretary is to serve as a link person with the Elphin diocese's Pastoral & Faith Development Services whilst the youth officer is to serve as a link person with the Elphin Youth Ministry Office.

At the end of June each year a short report is to be submitted to the Bishop offering a summary of the work of the Council over the preceding twelve month period, together with any recommendations that the PPC wishes to make to the Bishop.

General Functioning

Each Parish Pastoral Council is to meet a minimum of eight times every year. It is recommended that meetings be held on a fixed day of the month, e.g. the second Wednesday, and that the Council take a two-month break during the summer and a one-month break at Christmas.

The role of the Parish Pastoral Council is to be consultative and advisory (Can 536. §2) and members are encouraged to recognise and promote the participation of all their fellow parishioners, in keeping with their responsibility as Baptised Catholics. In this context members are encouraged to seek the views of other parishioners on important matters and the parish priest is strongly advised to give due consideration to the advice and recommendation of the Parish Pastoral Council.

How each Pastoral Council functions is as important as anything it does. It is vital that time be given to prayer and that true listening and genuine dialogue take place at every meeting (Pope John Paul II At the Dawn of the New Millennium 2001). Members are encouraged to express their views, to listen to each other and to respect the views of others.

To support dialogue and listening during meetings members are encouraged to sit around a table or in a circle.

Members are encouraged to begin every meeting with a period of reflective, scripture-based prayer and to conclude with a brief prayer. Responsibility for preparing the prayer element of meetings is to rotate among willing members and it is hoped that a spirit of prayer will permeate every meeting.

Meetings should never exceed two hours and members are encouraged to limit meetings to one and a half hours.

Each Parish Pastoral Council is encouraged to establish sub-committees to further agreed objectives and to co-opt other parishioners onto such sub-committees. Such sub-committees should regularly report to the PPC who in turn are encouraged to keep the parish community informed of developments.

Each PPC is encouraged to invite representatives of other parish groups to meetings that focus on issues of interest or concern to such groups.

A quorum will consist of half of the membership and ideally decisions should be arrived at by consensus.

Areas of Concern & Responsibility

Each PPC exists to further the mission of Christ and his Church in the parish. Members do so by contributing to the building up of the faith, hope and love of all parishioners. More specifically members contribute by:

- Encouraging fellow parishioners, through their example and conversation, to fully, actively and consciously participate in the Sunday Eucharist
- Praying for the well-being of the parish community
- Organising and / or promoting events that will contribute to the prayer life and faith life of the community
- Promoting and / or making available adult religious education opportunities at parish and inter-parish levels
- Welcoming the stranger, reaching out to the alienated and caring for the vulnerable
- Working to improve communication throughout the parish, especially through inputs in to the parish newsletter and hosting of meetings around issues of pastoral concern
- Caring for the priest(s) of their parish
- Encouraging participation in the liturgical life of the parish
- Affirming and supporting other parish groups that contribute to the pastoral life of the parish
- Developing / ensuring that the parish has an appropriate pastoral care programme for its young people, persons with disabilities, elderly and marginalised
- Delegating responsibility for specific tasks to groups or individual persons of known competence, e.g. maintenance of parish property and certain financial responsibilities

- Organising a get-together of representatives of all parish groups and organisations that contribute to the pastoral life of the parish at least once every three years with a view to nourishing them and gleaning their recommendations re: future pastoral planning and provision
- Conveying to non-church going parishioners, through word and action, that they are valued and integral members of the parish community.

In relation to all these areas of concern and responsibility, PPC members are encouraged to consult and involve fellow parishioners. Their key role is as facilitators of related opportunities and developments.

The Parish Pastoral Council is not responsible for managing the finances or property of the parish. This is the responsibility of the parish Finance Committee. It goes without saying, however, that the PPC and the PFC should work closely together.

