

DIOCESE OF ELPHIN



**CONSTITUTION FOR
PARISH
PASTORAL
COUNCILS**



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Just four years ago, I published a new template Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese. Following a consultation with existing Pastoral Councils, I am now publishing this new revised version of the Constitution. I would ask all Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese to take this opportunity to review their own mission effectiveness in the light of the provisions of the Constitution.



The Second Vatican Council, in *Lumen Gentium* IV speaks about the mission and the responsibility of the lay faithful in the Church which, in all its diversity of gifts and services, is one body in Christ:

Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. (LG 37)

While the Parish Pastoral Council is described as “a consultative body of the faithful” which works “in close partnership with the priest(s) of the parish”, it is not defined entirely by its role in “assisting the priest”. It is also a valid and essential means by which members of the lay faithful can be helped to discern the particular gifts which the Spirit has given to them and to place those gifts at the service of their parish community and the wider community of the Diocese.

The establishment and on-going formation of a Parish Pastoral Council is not without its challenges. It takes time and energy. It may sometimes seem easier both for the priest and for the parishioners if there is no Parish Pastoral Council. I am convinced, however, that a well-established and well-formed Parish Pastoral Council helps the parish to grow and helps the priest to grow.

The parish is not just about the provision of services. It is about evangelisation and mission. While the priest has overall responsibility for the parish, it would be foolish to assume that he alone has all the wisdom and the gifts necessary for the life of the parish. I am asking that parishes which do not currently have a Parish Pastoral Council would prioritise the process of establishing one. I have asked our Director of Pastoral and Faith Development, Justin Harkin, to prioritise the development of a voluntary team which will be available to assist parishes in establishing new PPCs and which will support the regular on-going formation of existing PPCs.

I am also conscious that, in many of our parishes, local Church councils operate independently of one another. While it is important to recognise the identity of local Church communities, it is also vital that parishes operate as a coherent whole.

Indeed it is going to be more and more important in the coming years that neighbouring parishes work more closely together, so that important pastoral activities, such as formation for ministry and adult catechesis can be more effective. This is no longer an option. It is essential to the very survival of any coherent sense of Church in our Diocese.

I want to take this opportunity to say a word of thanks to the hundreds of women and men who, in recent years – and over many years – have generously given the gift of their time and energy as members of Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese.

Writing about the gift of faith, St. Paul once wrote: “We carry this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us”. Sometimes, perhaps, we may be discouraged by how closely the Church seems to resemble an earthen vessel; fragile and vulnerable. I encourage you, however, to remember the Treasure that is entrusted to us, not just for ourselves, but for the generations that come after us. As we begin a new decade, I wish you many graces and blessings as you work together for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Yours sincerely,



Kevin Doran
Bishop of Elphin

Feast day of St. Brigid,
February 1st 2020



INTRODUCTION

It is the policy of the Diocese of Elphin 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 actively 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 deacon assigned to minister in 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)
- Relevant volunteer pastoral ministers (e.g. volunteer catechist; parish youth minister)
- Members of the lay faithful nominated or elected by parishioners.
(see below)

A maximum of two members may be co-opted by the Pastoral Council. All priests serving the parish are encouraged to participate in all Parish Pastoral Council meetings. The PPC should not, however, become a clergy meeting with parishioners on the fringes.

PPC's are expected to be representative of all 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. Members of the PPC are not, however, representing particular groups. Their responsibility, individually and collectively, is for the whole parish.

DISCERNING THE MEMBERSHIP

Membership of a Parish Pastoral Council is a ministry of service to Christ and to the community of the Church which is His body. It is important, therefore, that the whole parish is invited to engage in a process of discernment, so that those who are called by the community are actually also those whom God is calling.

A straight election is not always the best way to get the balance of gifts that

are required for the pastoral leadership of the parish. An alternative possibility is a nomination process in which half the membership would be made up of those who have the highest number of nominations and the other half would be drawn from the remaining nominees, by a process which considers not only the nominations they received but also which of them would contribute to making up the best balance of skill sets, age groups, men and women, station areas in the parish etc.

The term of the PPC should be three or four years, as determined by the outgoing PPC and should be notified to the parishioners prior to the nomination / election of new members.

No member should serve more than two consecutive terms.

When the Council is first established, arrangements should be made that at least one third of that first members group would resign a year before the others. This is to ensure that there is the possibility of some continuity between one Council and the next.

OFFICERS

The parish priest is to be the President of the Council (Can. 536). If he cannot attend a person nominated by him is to preside. A meeting of the Council in the absence of the Parish Priest or a person specifically delegated by him, has no validity.

The PPC is to host elections for a chairperson and secretary at its first meeting and again two years later. Both officers are to be encouraged to serve a two-year term.

Chairperson:

The chairperson will be chosen by the members for his or her capacity to lead the work of the Council:

- involving all members in discussions, and to
- facilitating the smooth running of meetings
- holding the Council to account for carrying out decisions taken.

Secretary:

The secretary's main function will be to circulate the agenda at least four days prior to each meeting and to take the minutes during the meeting. The minutes should focus on recording what matters were discussed and what decisions were taken. They cannot be expected to include everything that

everyone said and, in many ways, that would not always be helpful.

- Officers may be re-elected but may not serve for more than four consecutive years.
- Specific planning for the meetings of the PPC will be carried out in advance by the chairperson, secretary and parish priest. Each member shares in the responsibility for the effectiveness of the Council and is encouraged to submit items for inclusion on the agenda at least one week before the meeting. Time may also be given to agreeing an agenda at the end of each meeting. Consideration should be given, however, to whether the members need more time to consider and do some personal research on matters of particular significance for the parish.
- 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, email address and telephone number of their chairperson and secretary to the Diocesan Office, so that all PPCs can be contacted on important diocesan matters.
- The chairperson and secretary of each PPC will be recognised as Link Persons with the diocese's Pastoral and Faith Development Services' Office.
- It is the responsibility of the chairperson and secretary, having consulted the parish priest, to convene the monthly PPC meeting.
- In the event that the chairperson or secretary cannot attend a meeting the presider is to seek nominations for a temporary chairperson or secretary.
- 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.

- On-going formation is crucial to maintaining focus on the mission of the PPC. One non-business meeting should take place each year, preferably with an outside facilitator, so that all the members can consider how the mission effectiveness of the Council can be maintained and strengthened. 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.

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

The role of the Parish Pastoral Council is to be consultative and advisory (Can 536. §2). Members should keep in mind that, like the Parish Priest, their mission is not to do everything themselves, but to facilitate the best use of the gifts of all the parishioners. With this in mind, the Council should recognise and promote the participation of all their fellow parishioners, in keeping with their responsibility as Baptised Catholics. As part of this process, the Council will periodically promote the faith formation of the parishioners and seek the view of the whole body of parishioners on important matters. 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, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 2001).

- 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.

- Members are encouraged to express their views, to listen to each other and to respect the views of others. Even the seating arrangement at meetings can determine how people communicate. There should be no “top table” at the Parish Pastoral Council.
- 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. Where objectives are time-limited, sub-committees will only continue in existence until their particular task has been completed.
- Each PPC, while not losing its broader focus, is encouraged to invite representatives of other parish groups to meetings that focus on issues of interest or concern. Those invited to participate in this way will not, however, be involved in the decision making process of the Council.
- The Parish safeguarding representative should be invited to come to a meeting of the PPC once each year to provide an assessment to the Council of the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures in the parish.
- Meetings should be conducted efficiently and should never exceed two hours.

PPCs are strongly encouraged to foster good working relations with the PPCs of neighbouring parishes, and to work in partnership regarding pastoral matters of mutual concern.

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
- Encouraging participation in the liturgical life of the parish
- 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
- Affirming and supporting other parish groups that contribute to the pastoral life of the parish
- Developing/supporting the pastoral care of the parish for young people, for persons with disabilities, for the elderly and marginalised
- Considering how newly arrived individuals and families can be welcomed in the parish community
- Delegating responsibility for specific tasks to groups or individual persons of known competence, e.g. maintenance of parish property and certain financial responsibilities
- Support initiatives designed to promote care for the earth which is our common home
- 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.

FINANCE & PROPERTY

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.



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