

Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Archdiocese of Dublin

1.1 The Parish Pastoral Council

The Parish Pastoral Council is a consultative body in which the faithful, exercising their baptismal responsibilities, collaborate with the parish priest in the development of the parish.

The parish pastoral council is a leadership group through which priests and people work together as partners in furthering the mission of Christ in their own place. (Parish Pastoral Councils – Bishops conference no. 3.1 page 18)

Guided by the values of the Kingdom of God, the Parish Pastoral Council helps to build up a vibrant Christian community that is rooted in baptism and marked by its faith, worship and service.

2.1 The Role of the Parish Pastoral Council

The role of the Parish Pastoral Council is outlined in Canon 536 of the code of Canon Law:

- §1. If, after consulting the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish. In this council, which is presided over by the parish priest, Christ's faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral care in the parish, give their help in fostering pastoral action.
- §2. The pastoral council has only a consultative vote, and it is regulated by the norms laid down by the diocesan bishop.

2.2 *The Processes of the Pastoral Council.* Processes that enable the pastoral council to foster pastoral action in the parish include:

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| Reflection & Planning | In collaboration with the parish community the pastoral council discerns the needs of the parish community and involves the whole parish in responding to the needs. |
| Animation | Enabling the baptised to discover their gifts in response to the needs and challenges of they face and developing these gifts through the provision of training and on-going formation. |
| Action | Providing structures which connect the needs of the parish and the gifts and resources in the parish and in the diocese. |
| Communication | Ensuring that effective dialogue takes place within the parish, the wider community and the diocese. |
| Evaluation | Reviewing the life and activities of the parish, so that parishioners might have a sense of a developing dynamic Christian community. |

2.3 *Areas of Pastoral Action.* Areas of concern for Parish Pastoral Councils include:

Formation that is ongoing and lifelong and includes:

- Participating in a broad programme of renewal with particular focus on young people and the family
- Family-focussed catechesis , recognising the family as the primary place where faith is transmitted and nurtured
- Scripture reflection based on the Gospel of Luke and on the writings of St Paul
- Programmes that help all the baptised to have a better understanding of their faith
- Teaching people how to pray
- Ongoing formation for Pastoral Councils so that they can assist in the process of evangelisation and mission
- Formation for those who answer the call to leadership

Worship that

- Is Participative
- Promotes understanding of the link between Eucharist and daily life
- Fosters the relationship between Liturgy & Justice, 'enabling us to become bread broken for others, to build a more just and fraternal world.'

Evangelisation through:

- Witness, for 'the Christian community evangelises through living its life in a way that wins respect, goodwill and confidence of all people.'
- Participating in a common programme of missionary outreach and evangelisation including home visitation
- Discovering points of contact between Irish culture and the Church

Service that:

- Is exercised in a spirit of fellowship, recognising the talents and callings of all the baptised, enabling them to flourish
- Pastoral care that responds to diverse cultures and spiritualities
- Sharing and caring that reaches out to immigrants and invites them to become full members of the community.

(Quotations taken from Archbishop Martin's address to Parish Pastoral Councils in Kilmacud 2008)

3.1 Guidelines

Aided by the general framework provided by this document, each Pastoral Council will fashion its own guidelines. (Elements to be included in the parish guidelines are appended to this document). Whilst taking into account the special needs of the individual parishes the guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils should remain faithful to the basic nature of Parish Pastoral Councils outlined in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the Code of Canon Law.

3.2 *Approval of Guidelines.* The guidelines are to be submitted to the Archbishop for approval; they are to be reviewed every **four years** and resubmitted for approval. **The dissolution of a Parish Pastoral Council, for whatever reason, is a matter for the Archbishop.**

3.3 *Parish Finance.* The Finance of the parish is the remit of the Finance Committee which is obligatory in Canon Law.

4.1 Membership

Members shall be Catholics who participate fully in the life and worship of the parish, have a concern for the parish and are available to attend a minimum of half the meetings in the space of one year.

4.2 *Formation.* If the Parish Pastoral Council is to exercise its functions properly in the parish, it is important that all parishioners grow in their understanding of:

- The rights and responsibilities of all the baptised
- The parish as a vibrant part of the Church
- The role of the Parish Pastoral Council
- The rights and duties of the ordained.

4.3 *Selection of members.* The methods used for designating members of the pastoral council will vary between parishes. It is important that the approach taken is in keeping with the size and nature of the parish. Some of the processes that have been tried and found satisfactory include:

- Elections by the parish community
- Nomination and discernment
- Selection of representatives from parish organisations
- Selection by the Parish Priest in consultation with the present council members

It may be decided to hold a Parish Assembly before the selection of new members. This will enable parishioners to understand more fully the mission of the parish, the nature of parish pastoral councils and share the process for selection.

4.4 Representation. Care needs to be taken that a broad representation of all members of the parish is considered for membership. It is important that the members of the pastoral council recognise that they represent the whole parish community and not just a particular geographic area or group.

4.5 Composition. The guidelines for the Parish Pastoral Council shall state the number of:

- *Ex officio* members which includes all those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral ministry in the parish. These include Parish Priests, Curates and others in ecclesial roles. *Ex officio* members should not exceed 40% of the total membership
- members selected by the parish in general
- parishioners who are appointed because of their expertise in particular fields or to ensure good representation of the whole parish
- representatives of schools or other relevant organisations

The number of co-opted members **and the ex officio members taken** together may not exceed the number of members selected by the parish.

4.6 On-going formation. Prayer, reflection and ongoing catechesis on the nature and mission of the Church is most important for all members of the Parish Pastoral Council.

4.7. Period for Membership. Elected and appointed members of the Parish Pastoral Council are to have terms of office. The term should be no shorter than one year and no more than four years, with the possibility of reappointment for one or more terms, according to the needs of each parish. If a member is reappointed it must be stated how many times this can take place - the period of time in-between appointments must also be stated.

- Staggered terms of membership, to maintain a minimum of stability and efficiency, are recommended and might be considered by the parish.
- On the appointment of a new Parish Priest, it is recommended that the membership of the Council be *reviewed* within one year.
- The Parish Pastoral Council itself may fill any casual vacancy by invitation; the length of service of the person who fills the vacancy needs to be outlined.

4.8 Size. It is suggested that the Parish Pastoral Council should consist of between 10 to 15 members including those in ecclesial roles.

5.1. Roles

The Parish Pastoral Council is a dynamic body of people 'in which the complementary and diverse ministries and gifts of all the members.... work together in a spirit of unity and love, in a spirit of communion'.¹ The roles which members take should be clear and agreed. These include the roles of president, chairperson, and secretary.

5.2 *All members.* All members have an important role to play in the workings of the Parish Pastoral Council. Their role includes:

- Actively listening to the needs and concerns of the parishioners
- Attending meetings
- Taking part in discussion
- Offering items for the agenda
- Carrying out tasks to which they have committed themselves

5.3 *President.* The Parish Priest has been entrusted with the care of the parish by the Bishop. He convokes the meetings and is the president of the council. **If, for some reason the parish priest is unable to attend the pastoral council meeting, the council may meet to further council matters. No binding decisions may be made.(cf 6.7)**

In his absence he may appoint a delegate to take his place. (Bps. Conf. 3.5 Roles page 25)

The role of the president includes the following:

- Preparing the agenda for meetings with the secretary, the chairperson and other members of the pastoral council as agreed
- Encouraging the pastoral council to have a pastoral, whole-parish perspective on what they are about
- Ensuring that there is ongoing formation for the group
- Maintaining the connection with the diocese and the wider community

5.4 *Chairperson.* The Chairperson is elected by the members of the Council for a fixed period of time with an option for renewal. The role of the chairperson includes

- Preparing the agenda for meetings with the secretary, the president and other members of the pastoral council as agreed
- Chairing the meetings
- Ensuring that agreed parish policies are carried out
- Encouraging all members to be involved in the meetings of the council and in its activities.
- Liaising with the diocesan pastoral council and/or diocesan offices and other groups in the area.

Parishes might wish to appoint a Vice Chairperson to assist the Chairperson.

5.5 *Secretary.* The secretary is a member of the council elected by the group for a fixed period. Generally the secretary will:

¹ At the Beginning of the New Millennium, 43

- Prepare the agenda for meetings with the chairperson, the president and other members of the pastoral council as agreed
- Take minutes of meetings
- Attend to correspondence
- Distribute minutes and agenda to members before meetings
- Send relevant items from meetings to the parish office for inclusion in the newsletter

5.6 Committees/subgroups. The Parish Pastoral Council is primarily concerned for promoting action through pastoral planning. While it is not immediately responsible for the implementation of projects the council ensures that projects are carried out. In this way the council enables members of the parish to recognise their gifts for ministry and to use them for the good of the parish and its mission.

Depending on the circumstances of the parish committees/subgroups might include:

- Evangelisation
- Communications
- Liturgy
- Justice and Peace
- Faith Development
- Others as needed

The involvement of parishioners from outside the council should always be sought for particular projects.

For particular tasks it may be helpful for the pastoral council to nominate a subgroup on a more short-term project basis.

6.1 Meetings

Members of parish pastoral councils generously give of their time to attend pastoral council meetings. It is of great importance that there is clarity about the structure and nature of the meetings, that they are prepared with care and facilitated in such a way as to make the most of the time and the gifts of those present.

6.2 Centrality of Prayer, reflection and formation. The unique nature of the pastoral council requires that a spirit of prayer and reflection should pervade the meetings. Since the principal tasks of the pastoral council include discernment and faith formation, it is important that time is taken in each meeting for the formation of the members and for nourishing their faith through prayer informed by the concerns of the meeting, the liturgical year, the parish, the Church, and the world.

6.3 Frequency. Meetings should take place according to an agreed calendar. Some parishes may choose to meet monthly in order to fulfil their tasks. Other parishes may choose to meet less frequently especially where committees and/or subgroups are furthering the work of the council.

6.4 Agenda. Each pastoral council needs an agreed method of compiling the agenda that best suits its purpose.

6.5 Quorum. A quorum must be agreed from the outset. In general the minimum number of members required is a half plus one. **A legitimate quorum must include the president/ or his delegate**

6.6 Resignation. Members failing to attend an agreed number of meetings, (the number to be determined by the Council) without reasonable explanation shall be deemed to have resigned,

6.7. The Consultative Process. The collaboration of all members, ordained, lay and religious, is integral to each stage of the work of the pastoral council. The parish pastoral council needs to develop ways and means of building its connection with the parish community, gathering the views and wisdom of parishioners and being a channel of communication. Having discerned the needs of the local community, in light of their local situation and Christian mission, the pastoral council can then enable parishioners to develop their gifts and participate in the pastoral action of the parish, and in this way respond to their baptismal call.

By virtue of his office the Parish Priest presides over and ratifies all pastoral council processes, leading up to and including final options and implementations. This collegial process respects the role of the Parish Priest who, in turn, takes into account the integrity, expertise and prayerful deliberations of the members of the pastoral council and of the whole community.

While the structures of participation are consultative rather than deliberative, this does not mean that they are less meaningful and relevant. The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Pastors and the faithful: on the one hand uniting them (from the outset) in all that is essential, and on the other hand, leading them to pondered agreement in matters open to discussion.²

7.1 The Relationship of the Parish Pastoral Council with the Archdiocese and the Universal Church

The Parish Pastoral Council is engaged in the mission of Christ as part of the local Church, the Archdiocese of Dublin and also as part of the universal Roman Catholic Church.

7.2 The relationship with the Archdiocese of Dublin. To foster the relationship between the parish and the diocese, pastoral councils:

- Make connections with other parishes with a view to sharing resources, planning joint initiatives and learning from one another

² At the Beginning of the New Millennium, 45.

- Engage the support of various diocesan agencies and committees
- Attend annual gatherings of members of pastoral councils, meetings of chairpersons, etc.
- Participate in diocesan gatherings, support initiatives promoted by the diocese and share the concerns raised by the people in the parishes

7.3 The relationship with the universal Catholic Church. As a part of the universal Church the pastoral council will draw on the wisdom and rich traditions of the wider Church community, take an interest in the Church’s global mission and find ways in which to actively support this mission.

Check list of elements to be included in Parish Guidelines

No.	Item	Detail	✓
1.	Name	The Council shall be called (<i>PARISH</i>) Pastoral Council	
2.	Mission Statement	Include the Mission Statement of the Parish	
3.	Description	The Parish Pastoral Council is.... (<i>See 1.1</i>)	
4.	Selection of members	Detail the selection process used in the parish (<i>See 4.3</i>)	
5.	Number of	Ex-officio (<i>See 4.5</i>)	

	Members	Selected by the parish (<i>As above</i>)	
		Members selected for their expertise (<i>As above</i>)	
		The number of co-opted members and the parish team taken together may not exceed the number of members selected by the parish.	
6.	Selection of Officers Term of Office	The Parish Priest shall be the President of the Council. The Chairperson and Secretary shall be elected by the members and shall remain in office for (<i>AGREED TERM</i>)	
7.	Roles	All members (<i>See 5.2</i>)	
		President or his delegate (<i>See 5.3</i>)	
		Chairperson (<i>See 5.4</i>)	
		Secretary (<i>See 5.5</i>)	
8.	Terms of office of the Council	The period of membership of the Council members shall be for (<i>AGREED TERM See 4.7</i>)	
		Members failing to attend (<i>AGREED NUMBER</i>) of meetings without reasonable explanation shall be deemed to have resigned.	
9.	Meetings	The number of meetings a year (<i>See 6.3</i>)	
		The Parish Priest shall convene the meetings and he or his delegate shall preside at all meetings	
		The agenda shall be compiled (<i>AGREED METHOD</i>)	
10.	Approval	These guidelines have been approved by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of the Archdiocese of Dublin on (<i>DATE</i>)	
11.	Amendments	The Guidelines may be amended by the Council with the approval of the Archbishop	