



Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Kilmore 2016-2020

(Approved by the Kilmore Diocesan Pastoral Council – 29 June 2016)



In parish communities throughout the country, the life of faith, liturgy and service is being enriched through the work of the parish pastoral council ... the many and varied gifts of parishioners are being welcomed ... collaboration between ordained and lay faithful is growing ... [Parish Pastoral Councils] are intended to give visible, local expression to the Church as a living and welcoming community, founded on the relationship of each Christian with Christ and the love that all Christians are called to share with one another.

*[Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development
Parish Pastoral Councils A Framework for Developing Diocesan Norms and Parish Guidelines, 2007,
pp.3 & 4]*

Introduction

It is diocesan policy that each parish should have a single Pastoral Council and that each church area should have representation on such councils.

Why this policy? The policy of one single Pastoral Council in a parish creates a unity of purpose in a parish – the sharing of resources, facilities and talents ensures that work will be done in an effective and efficient way. Planning for the future is one of the main functions of the Parish Pastoral Council. This cannot be done properly in a fragmented parish. The issues that a Parish Pastoral Council deals with are usually broad and general in nature, e.g. provision of adult religious education, youth ministry, social issues, supporting family life etc. A small church area on its own may not have the resources to respond to these issues. Priests will have some pressure reduced as they will have fewer meetings to prepare for and attend and there is less duplication of work.

It is also diocesan policy that the Constitution of and Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils should be regularly updated and revised in the light of pastoral developments and experience by the Bishop in consultation with the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the relevant members of the team in the Diocesan Pastoral Centre.

The election of Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Kilmore in 2016 will be the fifth opportunity for parishes to renew council memberships since 1997.

This document supersedes the one issued in 2012 and comes into effect on 1 September 2016.

Revised Standing Orders regulating the proceedings of Parish Pastoral Councils (and all church committees) will be issued in due course under separate cover.

The Mission of the Church

The Church is the living body of Christ in which all share in various and diverse ways the responsibility for the mission given to the Church by the Lord to:

- worship God in joyous celebration of the Mass and sacraments
- proclaim the Word of God to all people
- witness the love and redemptive healing of Christ
- serve those in need in both Church and society

“The Church comes to life in local faith communities of dioceses and parishes when members support and care for one another, proclaim and live by the gospel, celebrate the sacred liturgy and work in charity and justice for the good of the whole world ... It does this by the quality of the life of its members, its community life and worship, its involvement in the wider community and society of which it is part and especially its solidarity with the poor and needy.”

*[Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development
Parish Pastoral Councils A Framework for Developing Diocesan Norms and Parish Guidelines, 2007,
pp.10 & 12]*

The Parish

"A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop" (Canon 515).

Clergy, religious and laity together form a parish, a portion of God's People whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor so that all can continue the mission of Jesus here on earth. The People of God have different gifts, roles and responsibilities, yet all are under one head, Christ Jesus – sisters and brothers in Him.

What is a Parish Pastoral Council?

A Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) 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 this corner of the Lord's vineyard that is a parish.

The PPC shares the responsibility for building the parish into a vibrant Christian community that promotes the Gospel values of love, justice and peace.

The PPC actively seeks the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and is guided by the teachings, laws and recommendations of the Universal Church and the local diocesan Church.

{Diocese of Ossory, Parish Pastoral Council Handbook, 2011, p.12}

The authority of a PPC is ultimately based on the relationship of trust between a parish priest and his council.

[Diocese of Limerick, Parish Pastoral Council – New Challenges, New Guidelines, 2015, p.5]

Areas of Concern for a Parish Pastoral Council:

The Code of Canon Law gives general guidelines: “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 by fostering pastoral action.” [c.536#1].

Such pastoral action should include:

1. Promoting the prayer life and the faith life of the parish
2. Adult Religious Formation and the Promotion of Scripture
3. Support for Family Life
4. Liturgy (though a separate group may be established to deal with this)
5. Ongoing skills training and formation for those on the PPC and for others in the parish
6. Care of people – the poor, elderly, youth, disabled, those who live alone etc. **At least one member of the PPC should be responsible for youth ministry in the parish and be in regular contact with the Diocesan Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry.**
7. Reaching out to the alienated and newcomers to the parish
8. Working to improve communication throughout the parish especially through the medium of a good, informative, and attractively produced parish newsletter
9. Dealing with social issues such as alcohol and drug abuse, housing, homelessness, etc. which affect the life of the parish
10. Developing appropriate parish policies regarding such issues as the times and number of Masses and the celebration of other sacraments and liturgical celebrations
11. Building up good relationships with other PPC’s in the pastoral area, the deanery and the diocese
12. Care of the sick, those in hospital, and the dying
13. Supporting the implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures
14. Electing representatives to the Pastoral Area Council

How the PPC functions is at least as important as anything it does. While the role of the PPC is consultative and advisory, it is vital that true listening and genuine dialogue takes place at meetings.

Pope St. John Paul II warned in his apostolic letter, *On Entering a New Millennium*, against setting up meaningless external structures which are ‘masks of communion’ and give the false impression that real listening and dialogue are taking place. He called for a ‘spirituality of communion’ which “implies the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome and prize it as a gift from God ... [It] means to know how to make room for our brothers and sisters ... resisting the selfish temptation which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy”. [*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, #43].

If the members of the PPC are reluctant to express their views, if the priest’s view, or the view of any one individual on the council, always prevails, then the PPC would appear to be dysfunctional.

The Second Vatican Council gives clear guidelines to priests on how to proceed in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*: “Let sacred pastors recognise and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the lay person in the Church. Let them willingly make use of their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action.” [*Lumen Gentium*, #37].

What is the difference between a Parish Pastoral Council and a Parish Finance Committee?

There is a clear distinction between a Parish Pastoral Council and a Parish Finance Committee. The latter is concerned with maintenance and administration. The PPC, on the other hand, is concerned with mission, with people, and with building up the faith, hope and love that cements them into a real, living and caring Christian communion. It goes without saying, however, that the PPC and the PFC should work closely together.

THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IS **NOT** A FINANCE COMMITTEE, NOR MUST IT INVOLVE ITSELF PRIMARILY IN THE MAINTENANCE OF PARISH PROPERTY OR THE RAISING OF FUNDS FOR THE PARISH.

It is recommended that the Chairperson of the PPC should be invited to attend some meetings of the Parish Finance Committee each year, particularly when the annual budget, annual accounts and diocesan returns are tabled and approved.

[Diocese of Kilmore, Financial Procedures: Financial Controls & Related Processes within Parishes, revised November 2014; #1.2, para. 3, p.5]

Canon Law on Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Committees

Canon Law refers to both the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee:

“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”.
[Canon 536 #1]

“The Pastoral Council has only a consultative vote and it is regulated by norms laid down by the diocesan bishop.” [Canon 536 #2]

“In each parish, there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish”. [Canon 536 #3]

Constitution of Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Kilmore

1. MEMBERSHIP

- a. It is diocesan policy that each parish has one Parish Pastoral Council. In order to ensure the efficient and effective working of the PPC, membership of each PPC shall consist of the following:
 1. the priest(s) of the parish in full-time or part-time ministry (ex-officio)
 2. a maximum of 12 elected parishioners
 3. any religious or lay person involved in part time or full time pastoral work in the parish (ex-officio)
 4. Parish Safeguarding Representative (ex-officio)
 5. Up to two additional people who may be co-opted by the priest in consultation with the elected members of the Pastoral Council
- b. The PPC is to be representative of each church area in the parish, of all social classes and backgrounds, and age groups, and of women and men. It is recommended that at least two members be under the age of 30.
- c. The role of the PPC will be consultative and advisory.
- d. When a parish becomes vacant due to death, resignation, or transfer of the parish priest, the PPC ceases to function. However, in the interest of continuity in the parish's work and mission, it is most desirable that the new parish priest would reconvene the Parish Pastoral Council at the earliest opportunity but no longer than two months of his appointment.

2. GUIDELINES FOR THE ELECTION OF A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

- a. The process of electing a new PPC should be open, flexible and transparent.
- b. The parish priest in consultation with the outgoing PPC will oversee the election of the incoming PPC and ensure that all church areas are represented fairly.
- c. Church members aged 16 years and over should be encouraged to participate in the process of selecting representatives for their PPC.
- d. Every effort should be made to ensure a gender balance in the final make-up of the incoming PPC.
- e. When elections have taken place, the man and woman at the top of the list in terms of votes received should be invited to join the PPC. If, for some reason, they cannot give the necessary commitment, the next in line is then asked.
- f. Once the 12 elected members of the PPC are in place, the parish priest should begin the process of co-opting two extra members, if required, at the first meeting of the incoming PPC. These members can be selected for a number of reasons:
 1. to correct an imbalance in terms of gender representation among elected members,
 2. to include a particular talent or artistic ability, or
 3. to ensure the inclusion of an unrepresented pastoral group (e.g. young people, religious communities resident in a parish¹, choir members, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Ministers of the Word, etc.).
- g. The parish safeguarding representative and the Pastoral Area Team representative are ex-officio members of the PPC during their respective terms of office.²

3. OFFICERS

- a. The parish priest will preside over meetings of the PPC. He is not the chairperson.
- b. The **chairperson** is to be carefully selected by the PPC. His/Her main function will be to facilitate the smooth running of meetings.

¹ *In parishes where a number of different religious communities have houses and no religious has either been elected or been automatically appointed by virtue of an ex-officio role to serve on the PPC, the parish priest (in consultation with the incoming PPC) should endeavour to seek one representative for all such communities.*

² *Where a parish has more than one safeguarding representative, they should agree among themselves and in consultation with the parish priest which of them will serve on the PPC.*

- c. Each PPC will select a **secretary** who will take minutes of each meeting and notify members of meetings at least one week in advance.
- d. Each PPC may also select a vice-chairperson and assistant secretary.
- e. Newly elected officers will be authorised by the Bishop. Each PPC will forward the name, address, telephone number(s) and email address of the chairperson, secretary, and youth officer to the Bishop's Office within one week of their election. In the absence of a response from the Bishop's Office within ten days of submission, those nominated will be deemed to have been authorised by the Bishop.
- f. At the appropriate time, each PPC shall nominate the requisite number of representatives to serve on the Pastoral Area Council. The Parish Youth Officer shall be an ex-officio member of the Pastoral Area Council.
- g. Officers should, except in exceptional circumstances, retain their positions for the full term of the Council.
- h. The parish priest, the chairperson and the secretary will form the Executive Committee of the PPC
- i. The chairperson, secretary and Pastoral Area representative(s) should be selected from among those elected to the PPC by parishioners and not from any subsequently co-opted members (except in the situation where the Parish Youth Officer is a co-opted member of the PPC).

4. GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION/ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- a. The parish priest should convene a short meeting of the incoming PPC as soon as practically possible after the selection of the initial 12 members has been completed to address the issue of co-options, if required.
- b. Once the final composition of the incoming PPC is confirmed, the parish priest should convene an informal meeting of the full council as soon as practically possible and which he should facilitate himself.
- c. The informal nature of the first full meeting of the incoming PPC will give the new members an opportunity to get to know one another within the context of the PPC.
- d. It is recommended that the following procedure be employed in the election of the chairperson and secretary:
 - 1. Each member is asked to write the name of their preferred nominee for either position on a voting slip.
 - 2. Those nominated are asked whether or not they wish to accept the nomination.
 - 3. If more than one person accepts the nomination, a secret ballot takes place.
 - 4. Where there is an equality of votes after the ballot among two candidates, the position will be filled by the drawing of lots. Where there are more than two candidates in an election and there is an equality of votes among the top two candidates, the nominee(s) with

the lowest number of votes is/are eliminated, allowing for a run-off ballot between the top two candidates. If there is still an equality of votes after this further ballot, then the position will be filled by the drawing of lots

5. No-one can self-nominate themselves for any officer position.
- e. PPC's are empowered to fill any remaining officer positions in an open and transparent manner

5. GENERAL FUNCTIONING OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

- a. Before each meeting, the Executive Committee will prepare an agenda for the meeting.
- b. The PPC will meet a minimum of **six** times each year. If the parish priest cannot attend, then another priest nominated by him may preside at the meeting.
- c. A meeting cannot be held in the absence of the parish priest (or a priest nominated by him) except in exceptional circumstances (e.g. long term absences due to illness).
- d. Notifications of meetings should be accompanied by an agenda outlining the business to be transacted at the meeting.
- e. The secretary will also arrange for notices of meetings to be published in the parish newsletter at least seven days prior to the date of the meeting.
- f. Meetings should be focused and last no longer than two hours with members encouraged to limit meetings to one and a half hours.
- g. A period of reflective, scripture-based prayer should be included in each meeting.
- h. Decisions of the Council on any issue shall, as far as possible, be arrived at by consensus. This is based on the conviction that when we, as Christians, approach decision making in a prayerful and respectful manner, we are guided by the Holy Spirit.
- i. Where a vote is deemed necessary, the following procedures shall apply:
 1. All members shall have a single vote.
 2. Decisions shall be made by a simple majority of the members in attendance at the Council meeting.
 3. In the case of equality of votes, the Chairperson shall have a casting vote.
- j. The term of office of the PPC is four years – the term of office for PPC's being elected in 2016 will expire on 31 August 2020.
- k. A member may serve on his/her PPC for a maximum of two consecutive terms.
- l. Any member failing to attend three consecutive meetings without having informed the secretary in advance will be deemed to have resigned. The secretary will write to the member in question to inform them of this ruling. Any such vacancies will be filled by co-option.

- m. A brief report on PPC meetings will be made available to all parishioners after each meeting through the Parish Newsletter informing the parish community of the PPC's considerations, and outcomes. The report should be agreed in advance by the Executive Committee.
- n. A quorum will consist of 50% of the membership of the PPC, plus one.
- o. Ongoing formation, religious education and skills training will be of vital importance for all members of the PPC. PPC Members will be encouraged to avail of opportunities provided by the Diocese of Kilmore through the Office of the Diocesan Director of Pastoral Services, the Diocesan Pastoral Centre and other recognised providers to deepen their own spirituality, levels of religious knowledge and understanding, and any opportunities likely to enhance their service.
- p. PPC members are expected to treat any matters of a sensitive nature that arise and/or are discussed during meetings in strict confidence.
- q. It is recommended that one special meeting per year is a public meeting of the PPC where all parishioners are invited to attend.
- r. The names of the members of the PPC should be posted on church noticeboards, on parish websites and calendars. Contact details for either the chairperson and/or the secretary should also be advertised with their consent.

6. SUB-COMMITTEES (Other than Parish Liturgy Groups)

- a. If necessary, sub-committees of the PPC may meet occasionally to discuss issues relating specifically to a particular church area or a specific pastoral project/activity (e.g. youth ministry etc.). This, however, can only be done with the permission of the PPC.
- b. Any such sub-committee will report back to the PPC which will have full power to implement or discard any advice or recommendation received from such sub-committees.
- c. Any such sub-committee will be empowered to co-opt persons from outside the core membership of the PPC to assist in their work only with the prior consent of the PPC.
- d. Any such sub-committee will consist of not less than four members of the PPC, one of whom will chair the sub-committee. The sub-committee will be given clear terms of reference by the PPC.
- e. PPC's and/or PPC-related sub-committees are encouraged to invite representatives of other parish groups to meetings that focus on issues of mutual interest and concern.

7. PARISH LITURGY GROUP

- a. It is recommended that there should be a liturgy group in each parish.
- b. The function of a Liturgy Group is to work with the priest(s) of the parish in planning, preparing and reviewing liturgies in order to ensure more participation and better quality.
- c. A parish liturgy group should consist of five to seven people who are selected by the PPC with at least one member being a member of the PPC and another the parish priest or his nominee.
- d. A person may be selected to serve on the parish liturgy group because they a Minister of the Word, an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, choir member, sacristan, church organist or other musician, a teacher in the local school, or because they have a particular skill or interest in liturgy.
- e. It is strongly recommended that one or more members of the Parish Liturgy Group be under the age of 30.

Pastoral Council Prayer

**We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
conscious of our sinfulness but willing to serve,
aware that You have called us and that we gather in Your Name.
Come to us, remain with us, and enlighten our hearts.
Give us understanding and perseverance to know Your Will,
along with the strength and courage to make Your Will our own.
Guide us by Your Wisdom as we seek to discern the vision
You have for our parish and how You are calling us to serve.
Unite us in the love of Jesus Christ and keep us faithful to all that is true.
As we gather in your name,
help us to treat one another with love and respect
that our discussions and reflections may help us
earn the reward promised to good and faithful servants.
We ask this of You who lives and reigns with the
Father and the Son, one God, forever and ever. Amen.**

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