



Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Kilmore 2012

Parish Pastoral Councils

It is the policy of the diocese of Kilmore that each parish should have a Pastoral Council and that no church area be without representation on the Parish Pastoral Council. Many parishes set up Pastoral Councils in 1999 in preparation for the Jubilee Year celebrations. In order to assist parishes in setting up Pastoral Councils a document was produced by the diocese early in 1999 called 'Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Kilmore'. The Bishop, in consultation with the Diocesan Pastoral Council, decided that this document needed to be continually up-dated and revised in the light of experience. This is the 2012 edition.

What is A Parish Pastoral Council?

A Parish Pastoral Council is a representative body of the faithful, working in close partnership with the priest(s) of the parish to further the mission of Christ and his church in the parish.

There is a clear distinction between a Parish Pastoral Council and a Parish Finance Committee. A Finance Committee is concerned with stones, bricks, mortar and money (that is with maintenance and administration). The Pastoral Council, on the other hand, is concerned with people - 'living stones' - and with building up the faith, hope and love that cements them into a real, living and caring, Christian community (that is with mission).

Areas of Concern for a 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.' [536 #1]

Such pastoral action should include

1. Promoting the prayer life and the faith life of the parish
2. Adult Religious Formation and promotion of Scripture
3. Support for Family Life
4. Liturgy (though a separate group may be set up to deal with this).
5. On-going skills training and formation for those on the Pastoral Council 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 Pastoral Council should be responsible for youth affairs in the parish and be in regular contact with the diocesan youth worker)
7. Reaching out to the alienated and the newcomers to a 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, drugs, housing etc which affects the life of the parish.
10. Developing appropriate parish policies regarding such issues as the times and number of Masses
11. Building up good relationships with other Pastoral Councils in the Pastoral Area, the deanery and the diocese.
12. Care of the sick, those in hospital, the dying.
13. Supporting the implementation of safeguarding children policies and procedures.
14. Electing representatives to the Pastoral Area Team

How the Pastoral Council functions is at least as important as anything it does. While the role of the Council is consultative and advisory it is vital that true listening and genuine dialogue takes place at the meetings. Pope John Paul 11, in his Apostolic Letter 'On Entering the New Millennium' warns 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 calls for a 'spirituality of communion':

'A spirituality of communion 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 temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.' [#43].

If the members of the Pastoral Council 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 Pastoral Council would

appear to be dysfunctional.

The Second Vatican Council, in its 'Dogmatic Constitution on The Church' gives clear guidelines to priests on how to proceed:

'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.' [#37]

Canon Law

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

'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 537).

So a Parish Pastoral Council is not a finance committee, nor must it involve itself primarily in the maintenance of parish property, or the raising of finance for the parish.

Constitution For Pastoral Councils

Membership

1. It is the policy of the diocese of Kilmore that each parish has **one** Parish Pastoral Council and that this Council is to consist of between 16 and 20 people including:

- (a) The priest(s) of the parish
- (b) Any religious or lay person involved in part time or full time Pastoral work in the parish.
- (c) The Parish Safeguarding Children representative(s)

- (d) A youth officer
- (e) The lay people elected by the parishioners
- (f) Up to four people who may be co-opted by the priest, in consultation with the elected members of the Pastoral Council

2. The Parish Pastoral Council is to be representative of each geographical area in the parish, of all social classes, and age groups and of women and men. It is recommended that at least two members be under the age of 30.

Officers

- 3. The parish priest will preside over meetings of the Pastoral Council. He is not the Chairperson.
- 4. The Chairperson is to be carefully selected by the Pastoral Council. His/her main function will be to facilitate the smooth running of the meetings.
- 5. Each Council will select a secretary who will take minutes of each meeting and notify the members of meetings at least one week in advance.
- 6. Newly elected officers will be authorised by the Bishop. Each Pastoral Council will forward the name, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the Chairperson, secretary and youth officer to the Bishop's House, Cullies, Cavan, within a week of their election. In the absence of a response within ten days those nominated will be deemed to have been authorised by the Bishop
- 7. Officers should, except in exceptional circumstances, retain their positions for the full term of the Council.

General Functioning Of The Pastoral Council

- 8. Before each meeting the priest, together with the secretary and chairperson (executive committee) will prepare an agenda for the meeting.
- 9. The Pastoral Council will meet a minimum of six times each year. If the parish priest cannot attend then another priest nominated by him will preside. A meeting cannot be held without the priest unless in exceptional circumstances e.g. long term absences due to illness.
- 10. Meeting should not last longer than two hours.
- 11. A period of reflective, scripture based, prayer should be included in each meeting.
- 12. The term of a Parish Pastoral Council is four years. A member may serve for two consecutive terms.

13. Any member failing to attend three consecutive meetings without a reasonable explanation will be deemed to have resigned. The secretary will write to the member in question to inform them of this ruling. Vacancies will be filled by co-opting new members.

14. A report on the meetings of the Pastoral Council will be made available to all the parishioners

15. A quorum will consist of half the members of the Council plus one.

16. On-going formation, religious education and skills training will be of vital importance for all members of the Pastoral Council.

17. The role of the Pastoral Council will be consultative and advisory.

Setting Up A Parish Pastoral Council

It is Diocesan policy that there be just **one** Pastoral Council in each Parish. If necessary sub-committees of the Parish Pastoral Council may meet occasionally to discuss issues relating, specifically, to a particular Church area. This, however, can only be done with the permission of the Parish Pastoral Council. The following are some of the reasons for having a strict policy of one Pastoral Council per parish: (i) It 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. (ii) Planning for the future is one of the Parish Pastoral Council's main functions. This cannot be done properly in a fragmented parish. (iii) The issues that a 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. (iv) It will help reduce pressure on priests who will have fewer meetings to attend and less duplication of work.

Guidelines for the Election of a Parish Pastoral Council

The Parish Priest in consultation with the outgoing Pastoral Council divides the whole parish into six constituencies according to population ensuring that all church areas are represented fairly. Church members 16 years or over are entitled to vote and should vote for one man and one woman in their constituency.

The man and the woman at the top of the list in terms of votes received should be invited to join the Pastoral Council. If for some reason they cannot

give the necessary commitment the next in line is then asked.

Once the elected members of the Pastoral Council are in place the Parish Priest should call a meeting to begin the process of co-opting 4 extra members. These members can be selected for a number of reasons: a particular talent or artistic ability or membership of an unrepresented pastoral group e.g. Young people, choir members, Eucharistic Ministers, Ministers of the Word etc.

The parish safeguarding representative and the Pastoral Area Team representatives are ex-officio members of the Pastoral Council during their respective terms of office.

Guidelines for the Election of the Chairperson

Nominees shall be sought by proposal and seconding. They shall be voted on by secret ballot. If there are more than two nominees there shall be a preliminary vote. Those two nominees receiving the highest number of votes shall be candidates in a further vote. The candidate receiving a majority of the votes shall be deemed elected. If there is only one nominee there shall still be a secret ballot. In order to be selected a candidate must receive a majority of the votes cast. If there is no nominee the Council will postpone the election to a later meeting.

Guidelines for the Election of Representatives

When the Council has to choose members to represent it on the Area Pastoral Council or the Diocesan Pastoral Council or on other such bodies, the procedure to be observed is as follows: a) Nominations shall be asked for, b) they shall be voted on by secret ballot. If there is only one nominee there shall still be a secret ballot. In order to be selected a candidate must receive a majority of the votes cast. If there is no nominee the Council will not be represented.

Guidelines for Setting up a Liturgy Group

The function of a Liturgy Group is to work with the priest(s) in planning, preparing and reviewing liturgies in order to ensure more participation and better quality. It consists of 5 to 7 people who are selected by the local pastoral council. At least one member of the liturgy group is to be a member of the pastoral council. A person may be selected for the liturgy group because they are a reader, Eucharistic minister, member of the choir, a teacher in the local school or because they have a particular skill or interest in the liturgy. It is recommended that one or more members be under the age of 30.