

MODEL GUIDELINES FOR A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

What is the role of the Parish Priest in a Parish Pastoral Council?

While he does not chair the PPC, the Parish Priest is the President. By presiding at the meetings of the PPC the Parish Priest brings the authority of the Bishop to the work of the Council.

As Parish Priest he bears the ultimate responsibility for decisions regarding pastoral ministry and the overall mission of the parish. In rare cases he may choose not to follow the advice of the PPC (*Code of Canon Law 536*) but as a member of the PPC he will not readily ignore their advice because he has participated in the prayerful process of making the decision.

He shares his understanding of the pastoral needs of the parish, including his hopes and aspirations for the future. He also enables the members of the Council to exercise and develop their own gifts and together, they recognise and affirm the many gifts and ministries within the parish community.

How will members be appointed?

- A maximum of 12 members is recommended. Whatever selection process is agreed, the parish must be fully aware of, and involved in, the agreed process which may vary according to whether a Council is new or well established.
- Where no PPC is currently in existence, a core group is established and formed. (see paragraphs 7 & 8).
- To appoint new members to an existing PPC there may be a process of appointment or election. The parish priest:
 - tells the parish that new members are to be appointed to the PPC
 - invites the parish's involvement through prayer and nominations of suitable candidates

EITHER

- the parish priest works with appropriate people to discern who should be appointed, taking account of the parishioners nominated and any others with suitable gifts for this ministry.

OR

- the parish is invited to elect members from the list of nominees, to which the parish priest may choose to add further names

For what length of time will the pastoral council serve?

The aim should be for the Pastoral Council to remain unchanged for a 2 year period. After 2 years, at least one third of the membership should change. **No member should serve more than three consecutive terms.**

What are the qualities and skills needed by PPC members?

They should be members of the faith community, and regular participants in the parish Sunday Mass.

Qualities

- an ability to listen
- an ability to articulate accurately what one has heard
- a desire for spiritual growth
- an openness to study and reflection
- an eagerness to help the parish articulate its vision and direction

Skills

- an ease in working in groups
- an ability to inspire and lead others
- a willingness to delegate responsibilities
- an ability to “follow through” after making a commitment
- an ability to make decisions
- an excitement about the parish
- availability of time and focused energy

Developing a Vibrant Parish Pastoral Council (p 67)
ed. Arthur X Deegan II, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1995

Who will be responsible for the work and ongoing development of the PPC?

There will be an executive group, consisting of the Parish Priest, Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Secretary. They will be responsible for agreeing the agenda of each meeting and the ongoing formation of the council.

What is the role of the Chairperson?

- Establish a relationship of mutual trust and respect with the parish priest and develop an understanding of his vision for the parish.
- Together with the other members of the executive, prepare the agenda of the PPC meetings.
- Run the PPC meetings effectively, ensuring that everyone has a chance to contribute.
- Ensure significant time for prayer and formation is included at meetings to maintain the pastoral focus of the council.
- Provide encouragement and support for council members.
- Establish communications channels within the parish. These channels should ensure that the PCC is in two-way communication with parishioners and all groups within the parish.

What is the role of the Secretary?

- Liaise with the Chairperson and other members of the executive
- Produce and distribute agendas (plus any preparatory reading), at least one week prior to the meeting
- Organise meeting place and resources for the meeting, to include refreshments
- Ensure actions and decisions are recorded and circulated to the PPC members within ten days of the meeting, ensuring that a brief summary is made available to the parish

How will appropriate people be assigned to the posts of Chairperson and Secretary?

The role of the Chairperson is key. He or she must be able to work with the parish priest, and also have the confidence of the whole pastoral council. Several models for selection are available, but external facilitation may be helpful. The appointment of Chairperson should be for two years but, by agreement with the members of the PPC, the person may be re-appointed for a further year thereafter. Normally the Chairperson should have at least one year's experience as a member of the PPC. A vice-Chairperson may also be appointed to support the Chairperson, and occasionally deputise for him or her – this is a good development role.

How is the content of the agenda to be decided?

The executive should seek input from:

- individual PPC members
- the parish
- the deanery / PASTORAL AREA.
- the wider community (eg Churches Together)

How will the PPC ensure that there is a balance between business and ongoing formation in their meetings?

Formation can consist of:

- Ongoing faith enrichment and personal spiritual growth
- Greater knowledge of Church teaching
- Development of group skills to establish an effective team

A serious amount of time needs to be set aside for prayer and reflection, and its priority understood. Responsibility for leading prayer is taken by different people through the life of the PPC, and a range of different approaches should be encouraged.

How long should the meetings last?

Between an hour and a half and two hours.

How will decisions generally be made?

Decisions will be made through working towards consensus, taking account of the views of each member of the Council and arriving at agreement. Majority voting should be used only as a last resort.

“Consensus is a group decision (which some members may not feel is the best decision, but which they can live with, support, and commit themselves to not undermine), arrived at without voting, through a process whereby the issues are fully aired, all members feel they have been adequately heard, in which everyone has equal power and responsibility, and different degrees of influence by virtue of individual stubbornness or charisma are avoided so that all are satisfied with the process.”

A World Waiting to be Born : The Search for Civility

M. Scott Peck, Rider, London, 1993

How often will a PPC meet?

Every four to six weeks.

How will the PPC communicate with the parish?

The parish should be kept informed of the membership of the PPC, dates of meetings, and be given the opportunity of contributing to the agendas. They should also be given a summary of the outcomes of the PPC meetings through all available means of communication. The members of the PPC should ensure that they are accessible and well known to their fellow parishioners.

In what way, and how often, will the PPC evaluate their effectiveness?

The PPC arranges an annual parish meeting to review and reflect on the working of the PPC and the life of the parish, and plan for the future. The members of the PPC can review their own performance in a prayerful context at their annual Day of Reflection.

What happens to the PPC when there is a change of Parish Priest?

Normally, to ensure continuity in the life of the parish, the PPC will continue their work during the period of transition and any urgent questions may be referred to the local Dean. The PPC will welcome, support and help the new Parish Priest as he settles into his new role. After a suitable period (6 to 12 months), the new PP may wish to consider setting up a process for reviewing the work and membership of the PPC in the light of diocesan guidelines.

What is the role of the PPC when there is an unexpected loss of the parish priest?

- Where he considers it appropriate, the Bishop will authorise the PPC to continue in office until a new parish priest is appointed. The PPC will have the guidance of a canonical pastor, usually the local dean. Together with him, they can oversee the continuing pastoral care for the parish and ensure that parish life continues as normally as possible.

- It should be part of the ongoing role of every PPC to plan ahead for this sort of situation and have a regularly updated parish plan in place. The parish should be functioning in such a way that most ministry groups etc are already responsible for their own organisation and have clearly established lines of contact with the PPC and parish staff.
- See also the full text of the Diocesan Policy on Emergency Transitions – page 16.