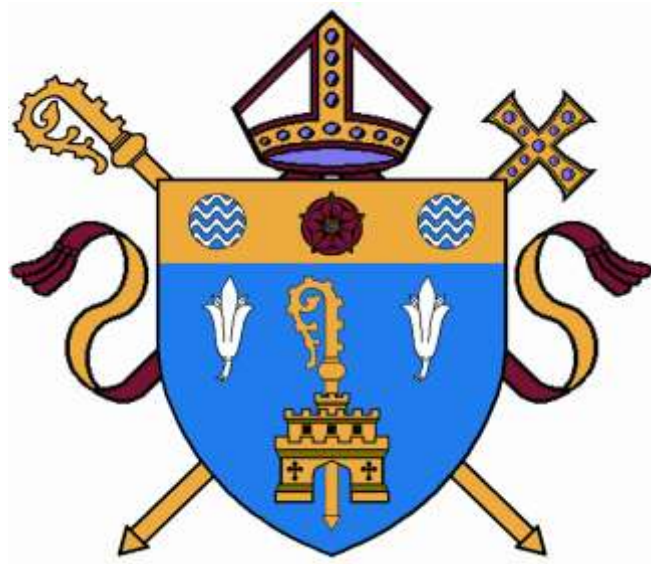


The Catholic Diocese of Lancaster

Diocesan Norms & Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils



+Michael G Campbell OSA
Bishop of Lancaster

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In his Apostolic Exhortation at the Beginning of the New Millennium, Pope St John Paul II stated that “the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptised and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church’s life.” The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity of Vatican II noted that as:

“Participators in the function of Christ, priest, prophet and king, the laity have an active part of their own in the life and action of the Church... Nourished by their active participation in the liturgical community... they should develop the habit of working in the parish in close union with their priests, of bringing before the ecclesial community their own problems, world problems and questions regarding personal salvation, to examine them together”.

Parish Pastoral Councils, like so many other structures, are only useful if they enable the baptised to engage in the mission of the Church more fruitfully. Unless they give expression to the needs and mission of the local Church they are but ‘talkshops’.

It is important that Parish Pastoral Councils, reflect upon the Mystery of Christ and respond to His teaching in the light and spirit of the Beatitudes :

“Blessed [are] the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed [are] they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed [are] the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed [are] they who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed [are] the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed [are] the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed [are] the peacemakers: for they shall be called children of God”. (Mt 5)

With the above in mind, I reiterate the desire and recommendation of all my predecessors since Bishop Foley, that all parishes in our Diocese have a Parish Pastoral Council in place and working effectively as soon as possible.

The role of a Parish Pastoral Council is set out 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.

Parish Pastoral Councils are not an end in themselves, but are at the service of mission and evangelization. Parish Pastoral Councils should have pastoral work as their concern and thus be an instrument that enables priests and people to work

together to build up a dynamic Christian community that is characterised by faith, mission, worship and service.

In particular they should facilitate the coordination of parish services regarding:

- proclaiming the Word of God and developing faith formation, especially for the young,
- fostering the sacramental, liturgical and prayer life of the parish,
- supporting marriage and family life,
- enabling the lay faithful to carry out their particular vocation of shaping society in accordance with the Gospel.
- strengthening commitment to social justice and caring for the poor and marginalised,

Parish Pastoral Councils should also:

- encourage leadership in initiatives reaching out to young people and engaging them in their journey of faith;
- look to ways of welcoming new members into their communities and ensure that people of different nationalities and culture find their place in the liturgy and parish life;
- address creatively the particular social challenges of the parish and ensure that the parish community is sensitive to the needs of all.

In order to carry out this mission, Parish Pastoral Councils should see their task in terms of:

- Prayerfully *discovering* the needs of the parish and involving everyone in a response.
- *Enabling* the baptised to discover their call as Disciples of Christ.
- *Providing* the necessary structures that will marry the needs of the parish with the many gifts and resources of the community.
- *Ensuring* that all voices within the parish, the diocese and the wider community are heard and respected.
- *Reviewing* the life and activities of the parish so that these are seen to foster the Mission of the Church.

Parish Pastoral Council Model Constitution:

1. Constitution

Aided by the general framework provided by this document, each Pastoral Council will fashion its own Constitution and guidelines. Whilst taking into account the special needs of the individual parishes the guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils should remain faithful to the basic, pastoral and consultative nature of Parish Pastoral Councils outlined in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Code of Canon Law and this document. The Finances of the Parish are already catered for by the Finance Committee which is obligatory by Canon Law.

2. Membership Members shall be baptised Catholics who participate in the life and worship of the parish and are available to attend a minimum of half the meetings in the space of one year.

3.1. Selection of Members

The Parish Priest or Priest in Charge must decide upon the appropriate method of selecting members that is suited to their own particular situation. Some of these options include:

- Elections by the parish community
- Nomination and discernment
- Selection of representatives from parish organisations
- Selection by the Parish Priest in consultation with assistant priests, deacons and/or with the present council members

3.2. Composition of the Parish Pastoral Council

The Constitution/guidelines for the Parish Pastoral Council shall state the number of: *Ex officio* members, which should include all those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral ministry in the parish (Parish Priests, Assistant Priests, Deacons, Parish Sisters), Representatives of each separate Eucharistic community (i.e. Chapel of ease) where these exists, members selected by the parish in general; parishioners who are appointed because of their expertise in particular fields; *Ex officio* members should not exceed 40% of the total membership.

3.3. Representation

A broad representation of the whole parish is the ideal; what is essential is that the members of the council undertake to be representative of the whole community and focus on what is best for the whole parish not just for individual parish groups.

3.4. Ongoing formation

Prayer, reflection and skills training are of paramount importance. To ensure that the Council is effective ongoing formation should be provided for every member of the Parish Pastoral Council.

3.5. Period for Membership

All members of the Parish Pastoral Council are to have terms of office. The term should be no shorter than two years and no more than four years initially, with the possibility of reappointment for one or more terms, according to the needs of each parish. If this is the case then it needs to be stated how many times the person may be reappointed the period of time in between appointments also needs to be stated.

The parish might consider having staggered terms to maintain a minimum of stability and efficiency.

On the appointment of a new Parish Priest or Priest in Charge, it is recommended that the composition and membership of the Council be reviewed within one year.

It is suggested that the Parish Pastoral Councils should consist of between 9 to 12 members.

4. Officers

At least three officers should be mentioned in the Parish Pastoral Council Constitution: President, Chairperson, and Secretary.

4.1. President

The Parish Priest or Priest in Charge (even if not resident) has been entrusted with the care of the parish by the Bishop; it is he who convokes the meetings and is the president of the Council. In extraordinary situations the Parish Priest as President may, after consultation with the Bishop, suspend or dissolve the Parish Pastoral Council with a view to its reformation.

4.2. Chairperson

The chairperson is elected by the members of the Council for a determined period of time with an option for renewal. The role of the chairperson is to prepare the agenda with the president and the secretary and to facilitate the meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council. The chairperson does not have executive powers in the parish or a role outside of the Council. Parishes might wish to appoint a vice chairperson to assist the Chairperson.

4.3. Secretary

The secretary is responsible for keeping a record of the meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council and for circulating minutes, agendas and relevant material to the Council members. The secretary could be elected for a renewable term of office; alternatively parishes might decide to appoint a secretary who is not a member of the Council as the task may sometimes limit participation in a meeting.

4.4. Responsibilities of all members

Responsibilities will differ according to the needs of the individual parishes but in general the members of the Council will be required to:

- attend regular meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council
- provide input to deliberations of the Council
- assist where possible with the implementation of Parish policies
- grow in knowledge and awareness of what is happening in the parish.
- take part in the training/induction of all new Council members and avail of ongoing formation.

5.1. Meetings

The Constitution/guidelines of the Parish Pastoral Council should specify the frequency of the meetings. Some parishes may need to meet monthly while others may choose less frequent meetings. The minimum requirement for meeting is four times a year.

5.2. Process

The collaboration between the Parish Priest or Priest in Charge and the Parish Pastoral Council is integral to each stage of the parish decision making process. In virtue of his office the Parish Priest presides over and ratifies all stages of the process leading up to and including final choices and implementations. This collegial process respects the authority of the Parish Priest and the integrity, expertise and deliberations of the members of the Council.

Above all, the Gospel mandate of mutual love, listening and understanding, should prevail among all the members of the Council.

5.3. Agenda

The agenda for each meeting will be finalised by the secretary, chairperson and the

president of the Council and should be circulated to Council members in advance of the meeting, together with any notes or other relevant material required. Minutes of the meeting will be circulated at an agreed time after the meeting has taken place. A period of time should be set on the agenda for prayer and reflection.

5.4. Quorum

Parishes must determine the minimum number of members who must attend the meeting and state which members are to be included. In general the minimum number of members required is one over one half. A legitimate *quorum* must include the Parish Priest or Priest in Charge.

6. Committees

The Parish Pastoral Council exists to coordinate the various parish initiatives of evangelization and pastoral action including the work of standing and *ad hoc* committees. Included here are some suggested core committees:

Liturgy

A committee responsible for overseeing arrangements for the provision of and training opportunities for readers, ministers of holy communion, choir, altar servers, sacristans, welcomers, bell ringers, collectors, etc., also provision for childrens' liturgy and other services in the absence of the Priest, Rosary groups, opportunities for prayer, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

Pastoral Works

Ensuring provision for: Sacramental programmes, taking Holy Communion to the sick and housebound, visiting the lonely and the bereaved, youth groups, making ecumenical contacts and carrying out other outreach work in the Community.

Social Events and Fund Raising

A committee responsible for organising 'after Mass' coffee mornings, social evenings, other Parish get-togethers, Parish fairs and raffles, bingo, youth and pre-school activities. *Ad hoc* committees can also be formed for special occasions.

+ *Michael Campbell OSA*

✘ Michael G Campbell OSA
Bishop of Lancaster

Date: 21 January 2017

Notary: 

Robert P Billing

Rev R Billing,
Bishop's Secretary