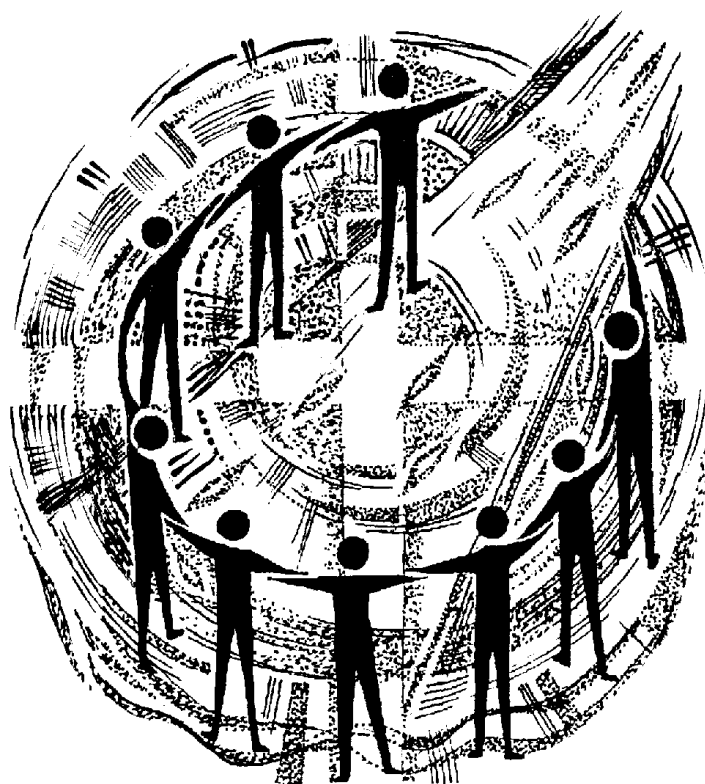


DIOCESE OF PORTSMOUTH

GUIDELINES

FOR

PASTORAL COUNCILS



September 2010

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FOREWORD

As a diocese, we are gradually emerging into a new vision for our life and work. In the consultation document – *Growing Together in Christ* - that began the whole process of consultation that led to the launching of the Pastoral Plan, I wrote these words:

“Our vision – and hope – is of ourselves as the gathered community of the disciples of the Lord, united in baptism and bonded together by Christ in the Eucharist. Our *mission* is so to live out this *communion* in the power of the Spirit that we proclaim the Gospel by our words and become the Good News by our way of life.”

Since the Pastoral Assembly of 2005, and the launch of *Go Out and Bear Fruit*, our task has been to translate into action that vision, and its implementation. A crucial element in that has been the restructuring of the diocese into Pastoral Areas, which now number 24 and which cover the whole of the diocese.

The establishment of Pastoral Councils for all the Areas is a very important part of this process. These *Guidelines for Pastoral Councils* give us a very necessary tool for setting them up and developing them. They build on the foundations laid in our 2003 *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils* and draw on the experience of the whole Church. In particular they reflect the journey that we have been undertaking in the diocese to find and record the best practice that we need if we are going to make our Pastoral Areas into effective apostolic and collaborative communities.

These *Guidelines* represent the experience that I have had, together with that of the Vicars General and others, of all the work that has been going on in Pastoral Areas, and, particularly, from two years of systematic visitation to all the Area Pastoral Councils or their equivalents. I am now delighted to be able to offer you these *Guidelines* as a tool for the further development of Pastoral Councils in each one of our twenty four Pastoral Areas.

I do so with confidence, and with a most sincere acknowledgement and thanks to Nicky Stevens, the Head of the Department for Pastoral Formation, who has worked tirelessly and with great skill to bring them to the light of day.



Bishop Crispian

September 2010

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

Pastoral Area

A Pastoral Area is a geographical area of the diocese within which resources and efforts are shared so as to enable us to proclaim the Good News more effectively to the world in which we live. Each Pastoral Area consists of a number of local communities which, together, form a single unit which is in the process of developing its own identity.

In his Advent 2008 Pastoral Letter, Bishop Crispian asked each Pastoral Area to work towards the long-term goal of becoming a single parish. Each Pastoral Area is unique, and so will journey towards this goal at its own pace, creating every opportunity for organic growth in relationships between the different communities. In this process, each community has much to give and much to gain. Over time, each Pastoral Area will become a community of communities held together by a network of interdependent relationships, rather than a collection of independent units.

The Pastoral Area is the level at which pastoral needs are discerned and addressed and all pastoral activity is planned. Much of the responsibility for this rests with the Pastoral Council.

Pastoral Council

The Pastoral Council is the key group within the Area in terms of developing and ensuring the implementation of a vision for the Area in light of *Go Out and Bear Fruit*, our Diocesan Pastoral Plan. There is only one Pastoral Council within a Pastoral Area.

If the Pastoral Area has become a parish, then the Pastoral Council referred to in these Guidelines is the Parish Pastoral Council.

If the Pastoral Area is working towards becoming a single parish then the words 'Parish Pastoral Council' in any of the quotations, or the words 'Pastoral Council' in these Guidelines, refer to the Area Pastoral Council, and 'parish' to the Pastoral Area.

Worshipping Community Pastoral Group

The Area Pastoral Council may discern that it would be beneficial, from the point of maintaining identity, for each worshipping community to have some form of pastoral group which addresses needs particular to that community.

These Worshipping Community Pastoral Groups function within the context of the Pastoral Area and the Area Pastoral Council. Their role is clarified by the Pastoral Council to minimise any possible confusion about areas of responsibility, and to ensure that such groups

understand themselves as part of a Pastoral Area in which activities and initiatives are coordinated for the good of the whole.¹

Terminology used for priests

- a) If a Pastoral Area has already become a parish, the 'Coordinating Pastor' is the 'Parish Priest'. All other priests are 'Associate Parish Priests' (except in the appointment of a newly ordained priest who is known as the 'Assistant Priest' for a limited period as agreed by the Bishop) with appropriate canonical rights and responsibilities.
- b) If a Pastoral Area is working towards becoming a single parish, the 'Coordinating Pastor' continues to be a parish priest. Other priests, who share pastoral responsibility, are known as 'Co-Pastors' and may continue to use the title of parish priest (except in the appointment of a newly ordained priest who is known as the 'Assistant Priest' for a limited period as agreed by the Bishop).

Within this document, the term 'Coordinating Pastor' is used to refer both to the Parish Priest of a Pastoral Area which has become a single parish, and the Coordinating Pastor of an Area which has not yet become a parish. In quotations from documents, the word 'parish priest' will usually refer to the priest who, in Portsmouth Diocese, is known as the Coordinating Pastor.

¹ This understanding of the concept of subsidiarity draws on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* para 1883

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH SAY ABOUT PASTORAL COUNCILS?

‘(The function of a diocesan pastoral council) is to study and weigh those matters which concern the pastoral works in the diocese, and to propose practical conclusions concerning them.’

(*Code of Canon Law, 1983, Canon 511*)

(Concerning parish pastoral councils) ‘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. The pastoral council has only a consultative vote, and it is regulated by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop.’

(*Code of Canon Law, 1983, Canon 536*)

The lay faithful should accustom themselves to working in the parish in close union with their priests, bringing to the Church community their own and the world’s problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which need to be examined together and solved through general discussion ... The Council’s mention of examining and solving pastoral problems ‘by general discussion’ ought to find its adequate and structured development through a more convinced, extensive and decided appreciation for Parish Pastoral Councils.

(Pope John Paul II, 1988, *The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici)*, para 27)

Communion must be cultivated and extended day by day and at every level in the structures of each Church’s life. ... To this end, the structures of participation envisaged by Canon Law, such as the Council of Priests and the Pastoral Council, must be ever more highly valued. These of course are not governed by the rules of parliamentary democracy, because they are consultative rather than deliberative; yet this does not mean that they are less meaningful and relevant. The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Pastors and faithful: on the one hand uniting them a priori in all that is essential, and on the other leading them to pondered agreement in matters open to discussion.

(Pope John Paul II, 2001, *At the Beginning of the New Millennium (Novo Millennio Ineunte)*, para 45)

WHAT IS A PASTORAL COUNCIL? WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Pastoral Council is a collaborative structure which exists to ensure that we focus on our primary function as Christians: the continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ in our time and place. One question is at the heart of the work of every Pastoral Council: where and how is God calling us as a Catholic community?

To answer this question, the Pastoral Council will:

- 'search out and respond to the hopes, ideas, needs and concerns of parishioners
- grow in knowledge and awareness of what is already happening in the parish
- encourage and support the good work of existing groups in the parish
- evaluate carefully information gathered in order to contribute towards the making of decisions that reflect the values of the gospel and the teachings of the Church
- set long-term and short-term pastoral goals for the parish
- provide opportunities for parishioners to grow in their relationship with God and with each other
- develop, implement and improve parish initiatives that assist parishioners in their continuing efforts to live as effective Christians in society.²

Within the context of our own Diocese of Portsmouth, the Pastoral Council will also

- work to develop awareness of the different communities within the Pastoral Area (parish)
- encourage and support the building of interdependent relationships between members of different local communities and ministry groups
- explore how best to 'steward' the many gifts with which God has blessed the Pastoral Area and individuals and communities within it
- use our Diocesan Pastoral Plan, *Go Out and Bear Fruit*, to develop a Plan to support the ongoing life and growth of the Pastoral Area

Extracts from various resources on Pastoral Councils, describing the role and function of the Council, are in Appendix 2. These could be used as reflection and discussion material by the members of the Council as they clarify and evaluate their work.

² Anning, Cecelia, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils (Third Edition)*, Faith and Life, Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007, p12

Pastoral

The Council is 'Pastoral'. In other words, its primary concern is pastoral issues, not administration, buildings, management or finance, which are all the responsibility of other groups.

'Pastoral issues are those that impact on the lives of parishioners in the areas of

- integration of their faith into everyday life – home, work, community
- nourishment and support of their faith as they try to live as faithful disciples of Jesus
- outward focus for the development of a vital Christian community, actively engaged in Jesus' mission of service and influence in the wider world.'³

Consultative

In Church documents, the Council is described as 'consultative' to the parish priest (Coordinating Pastor). The use of the word 'consultative' reminds the Pastoral Council that it is the Coordinating Pastor who has ultimate responsibility for decisions regarding the overall mission of the Pastoral Area. This consultative role of the Pastoral Council is situated within a context of relationship and shared vision:

'All Christians are to build community, pray, collaborate with the pastor, lead by example, and be spiritual. But only pastoral councils investigate, ponder and propose. They do so, not in an impersonal process, but in a relationship. It is a relationship with a pastor who knows their readiness and wants their help, with fellow parishioners whose wisdom they seek, and ultimately with the God whom they glimpse in dialogue.'⁴

This context means that while there may be very rare occasions on which the Coordinating Pastor will choose not to follow the advice of the Pastoral Council, he will not usually ignore their advice because he has participated fully in the prayer, discussions and deliberations leading to the decision.

³ Anning, Cecelia, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils (Third Edition)*, Faith and Life, Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007, p12

⁴ Fischer, Mark. F., *Pastoral Councils in Today's Catholic Parish*, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT, 2001, p196

HOW DOES A PASTORAL COUNCIL WORK?

Prayer

Prayer is an essential part of Pastoral Council meetings, and is never omitted from the agenda. Time spent in prayer enables members to listen attentively to Scripture and to each other in order to discern where the Holy Spirit is leading the community.

See Appendix 1: Prayer and Pastoral Council meetings

Steering Group

The Steering Group of the Pastoral Council (which, in some places, is known as the Leadership Group or Executive) meets between the regular meetings of the Pastoral Council to identify items for the forthcoming agenda, to ensure that agreed actions are being undertaken, and to monitor progress against the agreed vision for the Pastoral Area.

The Steering Group consists of 4-5 people (including the Chair of the Pastoral Council and the Coordinating Pastor), all of whom are also members of the Pastoral Council.

The Steering Group does not initiate any course of action which has not been considered and agreed by the Pastoral Council.

Regular meetings

The Pastoral Council meets every 4-6 weeks, for a maximum of two hours. This frequency of meetings ensures that momentum is maintained.

It is extremely beneficial for the Pastoral Council to have a longer meeting once a year (e.g. a day) to allow time for prayer, reflection, formation and evaluation.

Developing a Pastoral Plan

Through consultation with the people of the Pastoral Area, the Council develops a Plan for the Area to enable the implementation of our diocesan Pastoral Plan, *Go Out and Bear Fruit*. This plan identifies priorities for action and energy, and builds on previous initiatives in the Area, so that what has already taken place is respected and used as the foundation for further growth. Regular and ongoing communication and consultation with people in communities throughout the Pastoral Area (including schools) is vital, both during the development of the Plan and in its implementation and evaluation. This ensures that the Plan reflects and responds to the hopes and concerns of the people of the Pastoral Area, and that the Pastoral Council finds willing co-workers to enable the Plan to be made a reality.

'Since one of the functions of a PC is to be a listening group that searches out and responds to the hopes, ideas, needs and concerns of parishioners, ways must be found to keep in touch with issues of concern to the community.'⁵

Way of operating

a) Style of meeting

While much can be learnt from the secular world about effective meeting styles, members of the Pastoral Council recognise that the way in which they function gives messages to others about what it means to be in a leadership role within the Church.

'The pastoral council is itself meant to be an experience of the kind of church it seeks to bring about in the parish. It is permeated with a spirit of partnership, where gifts are prized, where listening is real, where decisions are shared. It is a place where collaborative ministry is experienced as synergy, an experience of God's Spirit. If it is not such a transforming experience of church for its members, it has lost its way.'⁶

b) Agenda

The agenda should be circulated to members at least a few days in advance of the meeting, to enable them to begin prayerful consideration of the matters that will be discussed.

When compiling the agenda, the Steering Group should ensure that items relate clearly to the overall purpose of the Pastoral Council, and be realistic about how much can reasonably be considered during a meeting in a way that enables next steps to become clear.

While it may be helpful to assign timings to agenda items to give a flow to the meeting and ensure that time does not 'run out', it is also important to ensure that there is enough flexibility for reflection and discussion, so that people do not feel rushed.

If an agenda item has not been completed, a couple of members might be asked to give further consideration to it and circulate suggestions for the way forward in advance of the next meeting.

c) Dates of meetings

To enable participation by as many Council members as possible, meeting dates are set well in advance, perhaps by as much as a year.

⁵ Anning, Cecelia, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils (Third Edition)*, Faith and Life, Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007, p43

⁶ Harrington, Donal, *The Welcoming Parish*, Columba Press, Dublin, 2005, p95

d) Notes of meetings

Notes of the meetings consist of a brief record of the main points of discussions, actions agreed, the names of the people who have agreed to take the actions, and the timeframe within which they will take them.

e) Communicating the meeting of the Pastoral Council to the people of the Pastoral Area

Because the notes of the Pastoral Council meetings will make little sense to those who were not part of the meeting, it is suggested that a brief summary is prepared which can be circulated through newsletters and websites.

The Pastoral Council may host an open meeting once a year at which members report on the work of the Pastoral Council, progress made in implementing the Area Pastoral Plan and *Go Out and Bear Fruit*, and challenges encountered.

f) Evaluation

Regular consideration is given (e.g. at every third meeting) to evaluating issues that have been on the agenda and the ways in which these have been discussed.

g) Sub-groups

The Council's work is not to carry out the Area Plan, but to encourage, invite and support others throughout the Pastoral Area to do so. This may take place through the setting up of sub-groups (usually including at least one member of the Pastoral Council) which take responsibility for particular areas of action, and report back to the Council regularly on progress. Members of the Pastoral Council are always alert to the gifts of people throughout the Pastoral Area, confident that 'God always gives the gifts the community needs for the community's needs'.

Making decisions by consensus

'If the group is seeking to discover where God might be leading them as a parish, the use of the voting process implies that God is always on the side of the majority. However, a simple reading of the Hebrew Scriptures reveals that there were many occasions in which God also spoke through a single person or small group, often without support from the wider community.'⁷

The Pastoral Council will have a variety of ways of making decisions which are appropriate to the nature of the decision. For significant issues, a consensus process is recommended as a way of ensuring that there is shared ownership of the decisions taken by the Pastoral Council.

⁷ Anning, Cecelia, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils (Third Edition)*, Faith and Life, Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007, p30

'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.'⁸

For consensus decision-making to be effective, it is necessary that:

- members have had the opportunity to reflect on the issue in advance of the meeting, and to seek background information if appropriate
- the atmosphere is prayerful, reflective, honest, open and trusting
- members recognise that no one of them has all the wisdom necessary for discerning the way forward, but that each one of them has an important contribution to make
- consideration of the issue is not rushed
- each person has an opportunity to express their ideas; they are listened to carefully and respectfully, and have the opportunity to clarify their suggestions if there are questions
- all members desire to find the way forward which is the best way forward for the Pastoral Area
- members are prepared to recognise the suggestions of others as valid, even if they disagree with them
- the person leading the discussion is able to summarise areas of agreement and disagreement at various times during the discussion, to test if consensus has been reached.
- 'Consensus is achieved when all the participants in the process, including the pastor, agree that they have been heard, are valued for their convictions and are, consequently, able to affirm and support the prevailing position.'⁹

⁸ Quoted in Scott Peck, M., *A World Waiting to be Born: Civility Rediscovered*, Bantam, New York, 1994, p311

⁹ Gubish, Mary Ann, and Jenny, Susan, with McGannon, Arlene, *Revisioning the Parish Pastoral Council*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, N.J., 2001, p60

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PASTORAL COUNCIL

Size

The Pastoral Council consists of 12-15 people: clergy and laity, women and men. This size of group facilitates the active participation of all members, and increases the likelihood of constructive outcomes. While members do not necessarily come from each of the communities that make up the Pastoral Area, they should be reflective of the whole community in terms of age, gender, cultural diversity etc.

Sample role description for a member of the Pastoral Council

A practising Catholic who is

- committed to the future of Portsmouth diocese through the implementation of *Go Out and Bear Fruit*
- committed to the good and growth of the whole Pastoral Area (rather than focussed on the needs of one particular community within the Pastoral Area)
- able to work collaboratively with the Coordinating Pastor, other clergy and lay people
- open to the purpose and role of a Pastoral Council as outlined in these diocesan Guidelines
- prepared to share prayer and faith with others
- alert to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit within the Pastoral Area, the Pastoral Council and their own life
- able to work as part of a group
- willing to share their gifts and identify and draw out the gifts of others
- able to listen to others and value differences
- committed to participating fully in the meetings of the Pastoral Council
- responsible, with all other members, for the way of working and decisions of the Pastoral Council, and actions arising from these.

Means of appointment

Membership of the Pastoral Council is a ministry within the Pastoral Area. As with other ministries, it is important to ensure that members are appointed who possess the skills, experience and expertise necessary to carry out their ministry.

The following process is suggested:

- The communities of the Pastoral Area are informed that new members need to be appointed to the Pastoral Council. Information about the role of the Pastoral Council and the skills and qualities desired of members is circulated, and clergy also preach about this over a number of weeks.

- The clergy encourage people's involvement through prayer and the opportunity to suggest anyone they think would be suitable. Those who have been put forward are invited to an information evening which outlines the role of the Pastoral Council, and what is expected of members, and gives the opportunity for questions. They may be given the opportunity to speak for a couple of minutes about their background, their hopes for the Pastoral Area and the gifts they would bring to the Pastoral Council.
- The Coordinating Pastor works with appropriate people to discern prayerfully who should be invited to take up the ministry, taking account of those suggested and any others with suitable gifts. It is important that those invited to be members of the Pastoral Council should not be seen as 'yes people' – some people have the gift of asking 'awkward questions', and this can be extremely valuable in a group.
- 'Voting' for 'candidates' is not recommended as it may give the impression that Pastoral Council members exist to be 'representative' of a particular community or area of concern, and, further, that the Pastoral Council functions as some kind of parliament.
- Ex officio members may include the Chair of the Pastoral Area Finance Committee, and a representative of one of the schools in the Area, as well as one of the Area deacons.

Term of office

The Pastoral Council should, initially, remain unchanged for a two year period. After two years, it is suggested that a third of the membership changes, with no member serving more than three consecutive terms. The average term of office is three years. However, this will only become apparent after the Council has been in place for a couple of years.

Induction of new members

Induction of new members should include an introduction to the work that has been done by the Pastoral Council in recent years, and the way in which the Pastoral Council operates, as well as the opportunity to meet other members outside Council meetings (perhaps a social gathering for those on the Pastoral Council). Every Pastoral Council member should be given a copy of these *Guidelines for Pastoral Councils* and *Go Out and Bear Fruit*.

It is worth remembering that even one new person in a group changes the dynamics of a group, and it becomes a new group.

Role description for the Chair of the Pastoral Council

The Chair is responsible for

- Maintaining a good working relationship with the Coordinating Pastor and other clergy
- Ensuring that significant time at meetings is given to prayer and formation
- Keeping the focus of the Council on its aims
- Encouraging the active involvement of all members at meetings
- Giving members opportunities to play to their strengths and use their gifts and skills
- Dealing constructively with conflict when it arises
- Managing meeting time effectively
- Working collaboratively with all other members of the Council to set realistic short-term and long-term goals for the Council
- Ensuring there are outcomes for each agenda item
- Maintaining two-way channels of communication between the Pastoral Council and the people of the Pastoral Area

Role description for the Secretary of the Pastoral Council

The secretary is responsible for

- making a brief record of issues discussed with outcome(s) and name(s) of person / people who will take responsibility for proposed action and by when
- distributing these notes within a week of the meeting
- preparing a summary of issues raised and actions agreed for circulation throughout the Pastoral Area

CLERGY AND THE PASTORAL COUNCIL

The Coordinating Pastor is the president of the Area Pastoral Council, and is an integral member of the Council. By presiding at the meetings of the Council, the Coordinating Pastor brings the authority of the Bishop to its work.

The Coordinating Pastor shares his understanding of the pastoral needs of the Area, 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 Area.

It is important that all priests in active ministry in the Pastoral Area are members of the Council, or, if they are not, that they know that they are always welcome to contribute items for consideration by the Council.

If there are Permanent Deacons in the Pastoral Area, it is advisable that one or two of them should be part of the Pastoral Council, always bearing in mind that the Council should have a balance of clergy and laity.

* * * * *

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way
to something unknown,
something new.
Yet it is the law of all progress that is made
by passing through some stages of instability
and that may take a very long time.
And so I think it is with you.
Your ideas mature gradually. Let them grow.
Let them shape themselves without undue haste.
Do not try to force them on
as though you could be today what time
-- that is to say, grace --
and circumstances
acting on your own good will
will make you tomorrow.
Only God could say what this new Spirit
gradually forming in you will be.
Give our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.
Above all, trust in the slow work of God,
our loving vine-dresser.
Amen.

(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)

RESOURCES

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<http://mfischer.stjohnsem.edu/Chapter%20PDFs/Pastoral%20Councils.pdf>

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Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Parish Pastoral Councils: A Framework for Developing Diocesan Norms and Parish Guidelines*, Veritas Publications, Dublin, 2007

Pickett, William L., *A Concise Guide to Pastoral Planning*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, In, 2007

<http://www.pastoralcouncils.com/> - Mark Fischer's website

SUPPORT

Support for Pastoral Councils is available from:

Department for Pastoral Formation

Park Place Pastoral Centre

Winchester Road,

Wickham,

Hants., PO17 5HA

Contact Nicky Stevens or Teresa Keogh

e: nstevens@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk or tkeogh@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

t: 01329 835583

APPENDIX 1

PRAYER AND PASTORAL COUNCILS

WHY IS PRAYER IMPORTANT?

Prayer is an expression of our relationship with God, listening and speaking, being drawn into the very life of the Trinity. One image for this communion with God and each other is that of Jesus as the vine, whose life flows into us as the branches. We are invited to remain in him (communion) and to 'bear fruit' (mission). Through prayer, we become attentive to the presence of God's Spirit in us as individuals, in the community, in the local area and in the world. Prayer can change us as it opens us to new possibilities and ways of living as people who are in the process of conversion to Jesus Christ.

PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF THE PASTORAL COUNCIL

1. At Pastoral Council meetings

Prayer at Pastoral Council meetings is not an optional extra. It invites us to remember that members gather as disciples to share in the work of God at this time and in this place. It helps us to focus on the fact that it is not our work or agenda that brings us together – we are there to carry forward the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If we forget this, we run the risk of being concerned only with our own agendas. Pope John Paul II reminded us that *there is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan.... God of course really invites us to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that 'without Christ we can do nothing'. It is prayer which roots us in this truth.*¹⁰

When a Pastoral Council has a long agenda, it is often tempting to shorten the time set aside for prayer, or to omit any opportunity for individual or shared reflection. When someone asked St. Francis de Sales how much one should pray, he suggested a half hour each day, unless a person was busy, in which case they should pray for an hour. On this basis, time for prayer is the first item to be put on the agenda for a meeting, and the last item to be removed if time is short. Through their shared prayer at meetings, members are enabled to focus on both the identity and the mission of the Pastoral Council, and are formed into a community of faith at the heart of the parish.

¹⁰ *At the Beginning of the New Millennium (Tertio Millennio Ineunte)*, para 38

It is strongly suggested that at least 15 minutes is timetabled for prayer at the beginning of the meeting, and 7-10 minutes at the end of the meeting. It might also be appropriate to pause for a few moments of quiet prayer during the meeting, especially if the discussion has become heated, or appears to be going nowhere. Reminding ourselves that God is working in and through every person at the meeting will be especially helpful at this point.

a) Creating a prayerful environment

A simple focus consisting of a candle, bible or lectionary, an image of Christ etc can create a prayerful environment for the meeting, and act as a reminder of the Council's purpose and mission.

b) Leading prayer

Since the Pastoral Council works in as collaborative a way as possible, the privilege of leading prayer is shared by all members of the group. While some people will be comfortable leading prayer on their own, others may be happier leading the prayer as part of a small group. Prayer leaders should aim to maximise participation in the prayer through inviting others to read and ensuring that there is time for quiet reflection as well as sharing the fruits of that reflection.

Saint Paulinus of Nola encourages us *to listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes*¹¹. Time for shared reflection in a prayerful setting gives each person the opportunity to benefit from the Spirit's inspiration in others.

At a practical level, the person / people who are leading the prayer at a meeting should spend time preparing for this beforehand, and ensure that there are enough copies of any materials being used in the prayer for all council members.

c) Prayer at the beginning of the meeting – a suggested format

Invitation to prayer

An opportunity for people to become still and focus on the presence and power of God, and to lay aside other concerns.

Perhaps play a piece of quiet music...

¹¹ Quoted in *At the Beginning of the New Millennium (Tertio Millennio Ineunte)*, para 45

Focus for prayer

This might be

- the Gospel (or one of the other readings) for the following Sunday, or one of the readings of the day
- a Scripture passage or extract from a Church document that is relevant to an aspect of the mission of the parish that will be under consideration at the meeting
- a poem, song, or work of art expressing something of who we are and who we are called to be

If a text is being used, it is suggested that

- the passage is read once
- there is a time of quiet
- people are invited to say aloud a word, phrase or image that struck them (this is not a time for discussion, or saying why something has been chosen)
- the text is read again
- there is a time of quiet with some questions for reflection e.g. What is God inviting us to through this text? What challenges does this text offer us as a Pastoral Council? As a Pastoral Area?
- people are invited to share their responses to these questions. Again, these are not for comment or discussion.

Praying for guidance

The time of prayer is brought to a close by asking the Holy Spirit to guide the work of the Council and the meeting.

d) Prayer at the end of the meeting – a suggested format

- A re-reading of the text used at the beginning of the meeting
- A time of quiet reflection in which members are invited to review the work of the meeting
- Intercessions / prayers for the needs of the Pastoral Council, the Pastoral Area, the diocese, the neighbourhood, the world
- Time of thanksgiving for insights etc shared during the meeting – people might be invited to name these insights aloud
- ‘Glory be...’

A resource which could be used for either the opening prayer or closing prayer at Pastoral Council meetings is *Prayer for Parish Groups*¹², a collection of over 100 prayer resources.

¹² Harrington, Donal and Kavanagh, Julie, *Prayers for Parish Groups*, Dublin: The Columba Press, 1998

2. Prayer in the lives of the members of the Pastoral Council

a) Individual prayer

The prayer of a Pastoral Council is grounded in the prayer of individual members of the Council, who are each conscious of an ongoing need to develop a deeper relationship with God and a greater responsiveness to his calling. Time in personal prayer might involve:

- Reflecting on a passage of Scripture, perhaps one of the readings for the day or for the coming Sunday, or on a poem, work of art or piece of music
- Spending a few moments quietly each day becoming aware of the presence and action of God
- Taking time at the end of each day to give thanks to God for all that has happened during the day
- Prayer with others in the home e.g. family rituals

b) Days of reflection / retreat for members of the Pastoral Council

It is important for members of the Pastoral Council to take time on a regular basis for ongoing reflection (e.g. on a church document) and for more extended prayer than can happen at a meeting. Pastoral Councils might set aside two half days each year for this.

Members of the Diocesan Department for Pastoral Formation are willing to facilitate these days, or support them in whatever ways are necessary.

Prayer gives us the 'why' of the work of any parish leadership group. The very dynamic of prayer has at its core God's calling of us and our response, underscores the collaborative spirit in which we are called to engage with one another in the parish. The dialogue that emerges in prayer keeps us in touch with the mission of God's people, in which we are all called to share. The direction in which prayer leads us sets us on the path of God's work – a work greater than ourselves but a work in which we are called to participate for the building up of the kingdom of God in the places in which we dwell.¹³

¹³ O'Brien, Oonagh & Kavanagh, Julie, *Parish Leadership Groups: A Resourcebook*, Dublin: The Columba Press, 2001 p145

Further reading:

O'Brien, Oonagh & Kavanagh, Julie, *Parish Leadership Groups: A Resourcebook*, Dublin: The Columba Press, 2001

Harrington, Donal and Kavanagh, Julie, *Prayers for Parish Groups*, Dublin: The Columba Press, 1998 (As well as prayer resources which could be used for Pastoral Council meetings, the book contains an introduction (p11-19) on 'Praying Together: The heartbeat of every parish group' which could usefully be discussed at a Pastoral Council meeting.)

'Infusing the Pastoral Council with the Spirit of Christ', Sr Kathleen Turley RSM at www.usccb.org/laity/turley.shtml

APPENDIX 2

MATERIAL FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

‘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. It does this through building up a vibrant Christian community that is rooted in baptism and marked by its faith, worship and service.’¹⁴

‘Pastoral Councils are key bodies in promoting understanding of the Church’s mission as they encourage people to explore the possibilities for living that mission in all aspects of their lives.’¹⁵

‘(The Parish Pastoral Council) discerns the mission of the parish and envisions the ways in which the parish membership is being called by God to carry out that mission.’¹⁶

‘The role of the pastoral council is to assume responsibility for seeing that the aim of the parish is being achieved. Its activity pivots on its having an inspiring sense of the aim of the parish, a passionate sense of what the parish is called to be. It is the group with the main share of responsibility for focussing the parish on its aim and mission. It is the key group driving the process of the parish achieving its aim. ... The language here is crucial. The council is not there to achieve the aim of the parish. It is there to enable the parish to achieve its aim as a faith community.’¹⁷

‘The task of the Pastoral Council is to build the parish as a living Christian community by identifying the needs of the community, discerning the gifts needed to fulfil those needs, and bringing together the needs and the gifts in ministry.’¹⁸

¹⁴ Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, *Parish Pastoral Councils: A Framework for Developing Diocesan Norms and Parish Guidelines*, Veritas Publications, Dublin, 2007, p18

¹⁵ Anning, Cecelia, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils (Third Edition)*, Faith and Life, Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007, p11

¹⁶ Gubish, Mary Ann, and Jenny, Susan, with McGannon, Arlene, *Revisoning the Parish Pastoral Council*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, N.J., 2001, p1

¹⁷ Harrington, Donal, *The Welcoming Parish*, Columba Press, Dublin, 2005, p96

¹⁸ Br Loughlan Sofield, talk on ‘Pastoral Councils as agents of transformation’ at the 2005 Los Angeles Religious Education Congress

‘It is a key element of the work of a Parish Pastoral Council to consider ways to provide opportunities for parishioners to:

- discover, or rediscover, the personal and community call to mission that derives from their baptism
- sustain their efforts to live as Catholics who effectively transform society.’¹⁹

‘Effective parish pastoral councils require a shared leadership among clergy and laity which calls forth the gifts of visioning, planning, empowering and evaluating. These gifts are placed at the service of the community for the fulfilment of the parish mission. While the pastor bears the ultimate responsibility and authority within a parish, the gifts of the laity ‘as each one has received’ (1 Pet 4:10) are needed and welcomed in the service of the parish as well. Those selected to serve on the parish pastoral council exercise their gifts to vision, plan, empower, and evaluate the parish’s programs and initiatives in light of the parish mission. The pastor and council do not work for or under one another, but rather with one another for the Kingdom of God. Together they lead the parish in the ongoing discernment and realization of its mission.’²⁰

‘The parish pastoral council is an institution that brings together lay people and religious who, with their pastors, work jointly to build the parish as a living Christian community. Thus parish council members care about parish life in other communities of the diocese, share in the concerns of the Church universal, and strive to bring the Gospel message to all people and places in their neighbourhood.

Through reflection, planning, animation and action, the parish pastoral council is the place where those ministries or services are brought forth that are needed for the growth of a living parish community. Thus the pastoral council must carefully consider the needs of the faithful and search within the community for the means that will adequately respond to these needs.

This responsibility of the parish pastoral council does not take away from the continued mission and responsibility of the parish as a whole. Each baptized parish member remains responsible in his or her own way for the mission of the parish. In this way, the parish pastoral council is a means for implementing better the responsibilities of the whole parish community.’²¹

¹⁹ Anning, Cecelia, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils (Third Edition)*, Faith and Life, Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007, p9

²⁰ Gubish, Mary Ann, and Jenny, Susan, with McGannon, Arlene, *Revisiting the Parish Pastoral Council*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, N.J., 2001, p87

²¹ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Parish Pastoral Council*, 1984, p5

'The Pastoral Council is not a legislative body, a grievance airing forum, the board of directors of a non-profit-making organisation, a democratically-elected governing body, or a talk-shop. The Pastoral Council is a representative body of the faithful, working in close collaboration with the priest(s) of the parish, with a view to furthering the mission of Christ and his Church in this corner of the Lord's vineyard. It is collegiality in action at parish level.'²²

'The primary ministry of the parish pastoral council is to collaborate in planning the way forward for the parish at its given time. It does this in the context of the circumstances of the parish, in light of the Gospel, of the teaching of the Church, of the reflections of the members of the community.

Processes in which the parish pastoral council is involved include:

- *Reflection and planning* In collaboration with the parish community, identifying their needs and the challenges they face, and reflecting in dialogue with them on what needs to be done.
- *Animation* Enabling the baptised to discover their gifts in response to the needs and challenges of the parish, and developing these gifts through the provision of training and ongoing formation.
- *Action* Providing structures that will make connection between the needs and the challenges of the parish with the gifts and resources in the parish and the diocese.
- *Communication* Ensuring that effective dialogue takes place within the parish, the diocese and the wider community.
- *Evaluation* Reviewing the life and activities of the parish so that parishioners might have a sense of a developing dynamic Christian community.'²³

²² taken from Dalton, William, *Parish Pastoral Councils*, Columba Press, Dublin, 1989, p15

²³ Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Parish Pastoral Councils: A Framework for Developing Diocesan Norms and Parish Guidelines*, Veritas Publications, Dublin, 2007, p19-20