



PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS
HANDBOOK

Enlivened by the Spirit – “What is God asking of us?”

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WELCOME

With a deep sense of gratitude, I thank you for your generosity in serving your parish community as a member of your Parish Pastoral Council. As parish participants in the ministry of Councils, you are making a valuable contribution to the church. The wisdom, faithfulness and variety of personal gifts you bring are vital for the building up and renewal of our parish communities.

Together as a diocese we desire to be a people who walk together as “one body and one Spirit in Christ”. I appreciate that each parish within our diocese is unique with a history, composition and leadership unlike no other and that each parish will respond in its own creative way the carrying out of the mission of the Church, the mission of Jesus Christ.

The handbook affirms Vatican II, that when Councils understand their task, involve the right people, do their research, and plan for the future, they help parishes everywhere carry on the mission of the church. Our parishes have great potential to be able to live the Gospel mission with great vitality into the future, to be communities where people encounter the Gospel fully alive.

My prayer is that with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our parishes will continue to become strong evangelising communities. Let us pray for and encourage one another, that moved by the Holy Spirit, our Councils can be a great source of inspiration, co-responsibility and coordination towards the mission of the Church as it serves Christ’s presence in the world today.

Yours in friendship and service,

A handwritten signature in green ink, reading "Vincent Long Van Nguyen".

**Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv
Bishop of Parramatta**





INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends,

We are delighted to welcome you to the Parish Pastoral Councils (PPCs) of the Diocese of Parramatta. Thank you for your willingness to offer your gifts for the mission of the kingdom of God and God's glory. You have been chosen to be part of a representative body and affirmed by your communities for your humility, generosity and positivity.

Our relationship with God and our encounters with Christ through prayer, Scripture, Sacraments, Tradition and the Signs of the Times, call us to be prophetic witnesses to God's love in our world.

A Parish Pastoral Council enables the members of the parish community to fulfill their baptismal calling to share in Christ's mission to connect their needs and strengths with the parish's plans for the future.

This handbook is offered as a practical resource for Parish Pastoral Councils in our shared ministry of service across the diocese. We hope it will be helpful for those serving now and for those considering membership in the future. The subtitle of this handbook: Enlivened by the Spirit, "What is God asking of us?" expresses our hope that Council members will make the mission of Jesus the paramount consideration in all deliberations and prayerfully accept their role of collaboration in guiding the pastoral direction

of their parishes. It offers suggestions for promoting healthy communication, collaboration and cooperation. It highlights the importance of prayer and spiritual formation as central to the work of our Parish Pastoral Councils.

You will see references in this handbook to other resources with different terminology related to PPCs. Our hope is that this will encourage you to explore the different explanations and find what best helps you in your understanding of the mission of PPCs. May this resource be a one-stop shop for you to reference what you need, whenever you need it.

The Pastoral Formation Team desires to joyfully accompany and nurture Pastoral Councils on the journey towards synodality and collaboration. We seek to learn from your experiences and offer you enriching formation opportunities to further equip you in your discipleship and ministry.

We look forward to journeying with you.

In Friendship

The Pastoral Formation Team



“AT THE HEART OF THE CHURCH’S MISSION IS PRAYER”

**Pope Francis urges that all Christians
“go out as missionary disciples each
generously offering their talents,
creativity, wisdom and experience in
order to bring the message of God’s
tenderness and compassion to the
entire human family.”**

Pope Francis, Message for World
Mission Day (2016)

Generous and loving God,

Our parish communities of the Diocese of Parramatta pray that the future we plan will enable us to grow in loving relationship and desire for you. May this love flow on to and through our parish communities.

May the Holy Spirit guide our thoughts and responses, respecting the opinions of others and accepting change when necessary. Help us to hold with gratitude the talents you have given, always being willing to share these gifts for you in service for others.

Holy Spirit, fill us with faith, hope and love and encourage and support us as we walk together in the unfolding process of synodality. With grateful hearts we pray that our parish Pastoral Councils may be places of warm engagement in mission.

We place this prayer before you in the name of Jesus who is Christ forever and ever.

Amen.

The heart of Jesus Christ for Mission

Jesus has a heart of love; a true missionary heart, and a heart for mission which He wants us all to have. Jesus desires that our hearts be filled with God's love for all people which includes every precious person and living creature on the planet. When we are filled with God's love, we desire to share that love with others.

"Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say we are: "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are "missionary disciples"". Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #120.

Joy in God is the Heart of Mission

Mission begins with a kind of explosion of joy because of the incredible story of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ. The news that the rejected and crucified Jesus is risen and alive is something that cannot possibly be suppressed, it must be told. The glory of God and our joy and hope in Him is the heart of mission.

The Mission of the Church is that God may be glorified

At the heart of the mission of the church is thanksgiving and praise. As the People of God we are called into the continuation of the work of Jesus, which will proceed until love, justice and peace reign in the hearts and lives of the people of all nations.

The word Church is not a reference to a building, nor does it define an organisation. The Church is the people whom God calls to be one in Christ. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to fulfil our mission and the Holy Spirit leads us in the way of discipleship. The life of our Church comes from the Holy Spirit. Each one of us in the community of the Diocese of Parramatta is called to live this life in the Spirit.

Christ's Mission is our Mission:

- Proclaim the good news of God's love throughout the world
- Invite more and more people into the community of disciples
- Encourage the whole community of faith to grow in holiness
- Transform the world until justice, love and peace reign in the hearts and lives of all people

Mission focussed Christian communities in union with Christ are:

Attractive: The community is recognised and valued as a source of spiritual nourishment, belonging, healing, meaning, personal transformation and challenge.

Hospitable: Each member takes on a personal responsibility to welcome newcomers. A deep sense of respect for the dignity and worth of every person underlies every action.

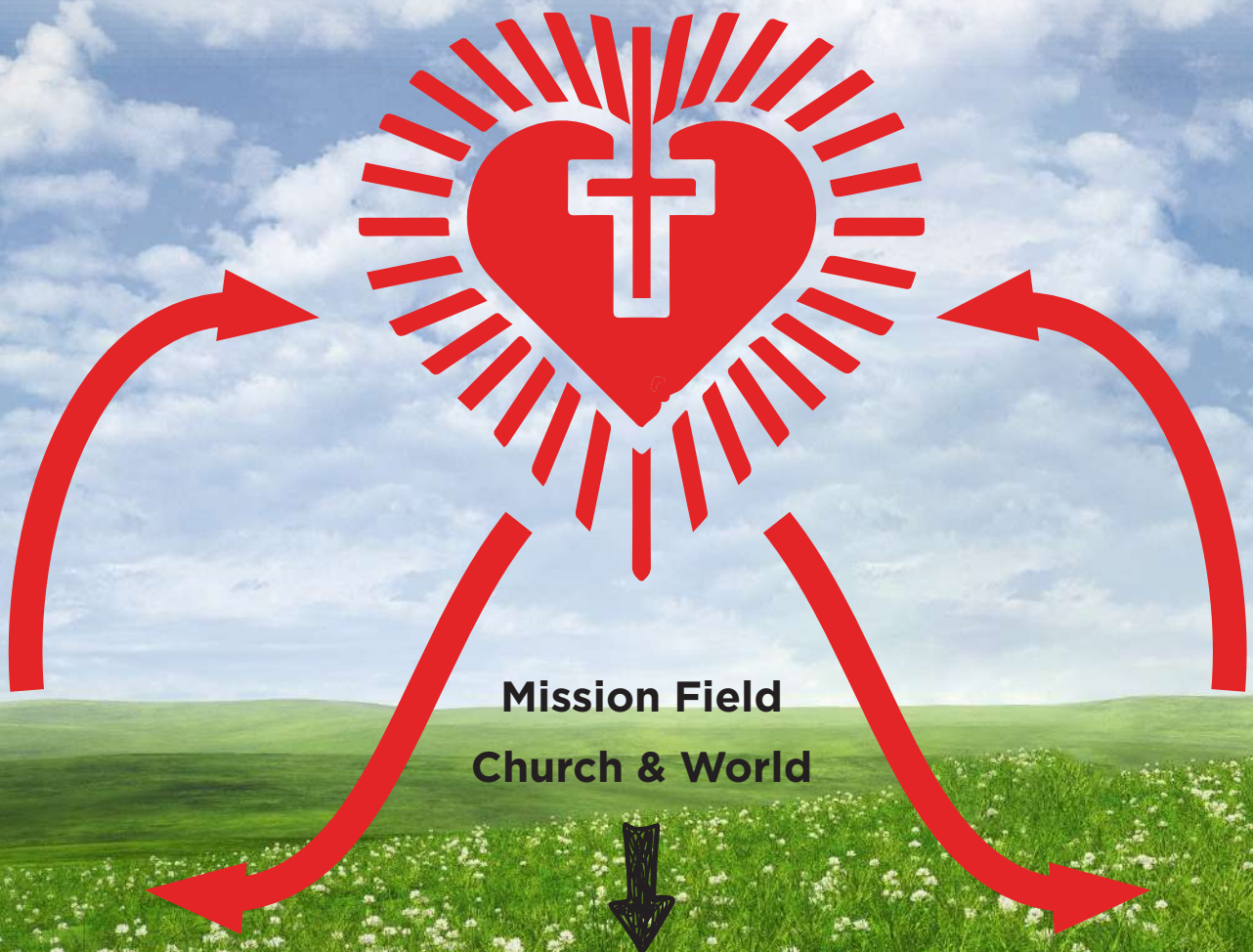
Inclusive: There is a spirit of inclusion in the community for everyone.

Outward focused: The community actively embraces a life-giving focus directed towards recognising and responding to issues of concern.

Our role in God's Mission is to be a messenger of the Good News to others:

Through our Baptism, we are drawn into God's communion of love, and commissioned to go out on mission and draw others into this communion. Below is a simple depiction of our mission. We follow Jesus Christ (symbolised by the Cross), who through the power of the Holy Spirit (symbolised by the red arrows) draws us into the Heart of God, sacramentalised in our church, the Body of Christ, and propels us back into the world to share the Good News with others, and so the cycle continues.

**God invites all creation to
participate in the divine
communion of love**



Parishes are called to a key role in Mission

Our Pastoral Councils are representative bodies in our church, the Body of Christ, both symbolising our call to walk together (be synodal) in this mission. Our Councils operate as strong synodal bodies, “walking together” with the Holy Spirit in discerning a response to God’s mission in our local context.

One of the outcomes of Second Vatican Council was the promotion of Pastoral Councils as part of the movement towards shared responsibility and shared service. Our Councils are an expression of the reality that by reason of our Baptism, every one of us is equal in dignity and responsibility when it comes to living and communicating the love and values of Christ in our world. This can be understood as promoting the Mission of the Church, which is the task of all of us.



Pastoral Councils

Pastoral Councils are important to help enable the parishes to continue to develop, to nourish our faith communities and to reach out to others. Within our diocese there are 3 types of Pastoral Councils:

- Parish Pastoral Council (PPC)
- Deanery Pastoral Council (DePC)
- Diocesan Pastoral Council (DiPC)

Pastoral Councils are important to help enable the parishes within our diocese to continue to develop, to nourish our faith communities and to reach out to others.

Pastoral Councils are the functional structure of Catholic communities. They are supportive, visioning, advisory, consultative and planning bodies that help articulate the Mission of the parish, deanery and diocese. Councils are involved in a process of evaluation and forward thinking to help the community stay up to date with the changing circumstances of life and faith. They are involved in pastoral planning and setting goals and are responsible for seeing the bigger picture of the parish, deanery and diocese.

Council members meet with the parish, deanery and Diocese and offer the wisdom of the community. In addition to doing long-range planning, the Council members assess whatever pastoral concerns that are brought before them. The most important work Councils do is planning, especially planning on how to witness to Jesus and bring his presence into the world. Working in collaboration to develop a pastoral plan, they help ensure the vibrancy of parishes and that the presence of Jesus is shining forth.

Our Councils assist Bishop Vincent Long by carefully listening to the needs of the parishioners within the Diocese of Parramatta furthered by wisely analysing what they have heard and by offering helpful recommendations.

As our Pastoral Councils work together, we strive to keep before us the mission of Jesus, a mission Jesus shared with His Church.

Parish Pastoral Council Goals:

Create

parish communities that are capable of spreading the Word of God and uniting parish family with the entire community.

Assure

an analysis of both spiritual and temporal needs of the individual, the family, the parish and the greater community. After setting priorities, develop and implement programs aimed at meeting these needs.

Serve

as a permanent structure for constructive dialogue between clergy and laity of the Parish, Deanery and Diocese so all can work in close cooperation and collaboration as a truly Christian community in fulfilling Christ's saving mission.

Provide

leadership, direction, formation, resources and encouragement in accordance with the mission of the parish. Providing a safe environment for people to express pastoral concerns is important

Cooperate

with and effectively carry out the guidelines and pastoral direction given by the Bishop and the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

Determine

and utilise the abilities of all members of the parish community. To serve as an organising and coordinating body for all organisations, committees and group activities within the parish.

OUR PARISHES

“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).

Our Parishes, as the local presence and embodiment of Christ’s life, exercise a constant and unchanging mission in the midst of a changing world – to make Christ known and to make disciples.

Within the parish the Pastoral Council has a special role. It helps the parish achieve its mission and become a community of collaborative ministry.



THE PASTOR'S ROLE:

A pastor has responsibilities arising from his ordination and appointment by the bishop and is the appointed leader of the parish. He is called to be a servant of the people and to be the animator, motivating people to work together. Consultation with parishioners assists the pastor to carry out his duties. As the community leader, he engages with the Parish Pastoral Council on mission and liaises with deanery representatives on deanery and diocesan initiatives related to the parish.

By asking the Parish Pastoral Council to help him think through events at the parish, a pastor is asking the Council to do what the church envisions Councils doing. Wise pastors consult because they want to make sound decisions about the life of the parish and because they desire the wisdom of their people.

The Parish Pastoral Council serves in an advisory role and the pastor takes into account their opinions and recommendations.



UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

The Parish Pastoral Council is a consultative body, pastoral in nature, because it strives to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit among God's people in the parish.

The PPC provides the space for the Holy Spirit to become alive and active in a parish community through the members of the Pastoral Council. The aim of a Pastoral Council is to bring the church closer to the people and the people closer to the church. They are the vital bridges which can enable us as a church to reach out to those who are on the outskirts or the fringes of our communities.

The word “pastoral” therefore concerns us with the question: “What is God asking of us?”

The purpose of the Council is to:

- Listen and Respond to the Holy Spirit - the Pastoral Council will prayerfully consider what the Holy Spirit is calling the parish to be and become.
- Investigate pastoral matters
- Ponder them
- Formulate practical conclusions concerning them

The recommendations of the PPC are taken seriously when grounded in prayer, discernment, and communal wisdom. The pastor is responsible for the final approval of PPCs recommendations concerning pastoral planning, programs, and services for the parish, as well as for their implementation.

Advisory Capacity:

The PPC, unlike the parish finance Council, is not mandated by Canon Law. The primary role of the PPC is advisory, making recommendations to the pastor about the spiritual well-being of the parish. As a visionary Council, it concerns itself with where the parish wants to be in three to five years, not with the administrative aspects of running the parish.

8 ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

(Source: Called to Serve – Diocesan Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils. Fourth Edition, 2010, Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Virginia, USA).

1. The PPC is advisory to the Pastor. Members of the Council strive to bring the voices, needs and concern of the entire faith community to its work. Under the leadership of their pastor, they work with one another to serve the needs of the whole parish.

2. The PPC is prayerful. A Council is a group of people who pray to discern the will of God for the parish community.

3. The PPC is pastoral. Through Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist all Christians are called to be Christ in the world. The parish Council tries to provide appropriate resources and methods to serve the people of the parish as they engage in the mission of the Church.

4. The PPC is representative. Each Council member endeavours to listen to parishioners and then faithfully present their concerns, ideas and questions to the parish Council.

5. The PPC is discerning. The Council functions in an atmosphere of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit in order to become and remain grounded in faith and responsive to the Church's mission. Trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit, Council members set aside their individual opinions and prejudices and listen to one another and to other parishioners.

6. The PPC is prophetic. The parish Council must have the courage and foresight to set the direction for the parish community, challenging the parish to grow in response to the Gospel.

7. The PPC is enabling. The Council endeavours to foster the faith growth of individual Catholics of the parish and the broader community.

8. The PPC is collaborative. The parish Council challenges its members, the parish staff, committees, organizations and other groups in the parish to work together. A clear, common understanding of the parish's mission fosters collaborative actions.



OUR PASTORAL COUNCILS SEEK TO:

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 within the parish

set

long-term and short-term pastoral goals for the parish

evaluate

information gathered in order to contribute towards the decisions that reflect the values of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church

provide

opportunities for parishioners to grow in their relationship with God and with each other to develop, implement and improve parish initiatives that assist parishioners in their continuing efforts to live as effective Christians in society

MAJOR TASKS OF THE PPC INVOLVE:

Reflection & Planning

Discerning the needs of the parish community and involving the whole parish in responding to the identified needs.

Animation

Enabling the baptised to discover their call as disciples of Christ by discerning the gifts of the parishioners and developing them through the provision of training and on-going formation.

Action

Providing structures that will match the needs of the parish with the gifts and resources in the parish.

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 proceeding towards bringing about Christ's mission in the local community and furthermore to the wider world.



DISCERNING TOGETHER & PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

(Source: The Parish Pastoral Council: Synodality, Calling all to participate in the mission of Christ and the life of the Church, Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey, USA, 2021).

The primary responsibility of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) is pastoral planning and taking an active role in helping set the direction for the parish.

Pastoral planning is a mission-motivated, ongoing cyclical process. It involves discernment, prioritising goals and objectives, implementation and evaluation. Knowing that a parish cannot do all things at once, prioritising goals helps to determine areas of greatest need or activities that are achievable within a particular time frame.

The PPC practices discernment and consensus in the decision-making process.

Discernment is a process of decision making that utilises listening to the word of God, and reflecting on the mission of Jesus, the mission of the universal church and the mission of the parish. Discernment requires an open mind and an open heart.

Consensus is discerning together, as a Council, as a body. Although the body of the PPC has several members, when a decision has been made through prayerful discernment, the Council expresses unity – unity of spirit and unity of purpose. Coming to consensus requires focusing on the common good, to attributes of discipleship. Consensus requires humility, honesty, integrity and gentleness.

Parish Pastoral Councils are always about raising new questions. At its heart is a desire to anticipate the future and respond in a Christlike way. Pastoral planning is a ministry designed to focus parish attention on the Gospel.

RELATIONSHIPS

(Source: Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils, Cecilia Anning).

Inter-parish relationships

The Pastoral Council reports to the parish community regularly and seeks the input of parishioners through parish consultations, focus meetings and conversations.

Two-way communication is essential for the effectiveness of the Council. On a regular basis the PPC communicates to the parish, inviting the parish for feedback, being open to new ideas, perspectives or ways to approach an issue.

Having structures and processes in place which maximise the flow of information between individuals and groups within and beyond the parish is vitally important.

Some Inter-parish relationships include:

- Parish Ministry Groups eg. Eucharistic ministers, choir ministry,
- Parish Committees eg. Church building and grounds committee
- Finance Committee
- Working groups may be set up for specific purposes and with a definite time limit, e.g. planning a centenary celebration for the parish.

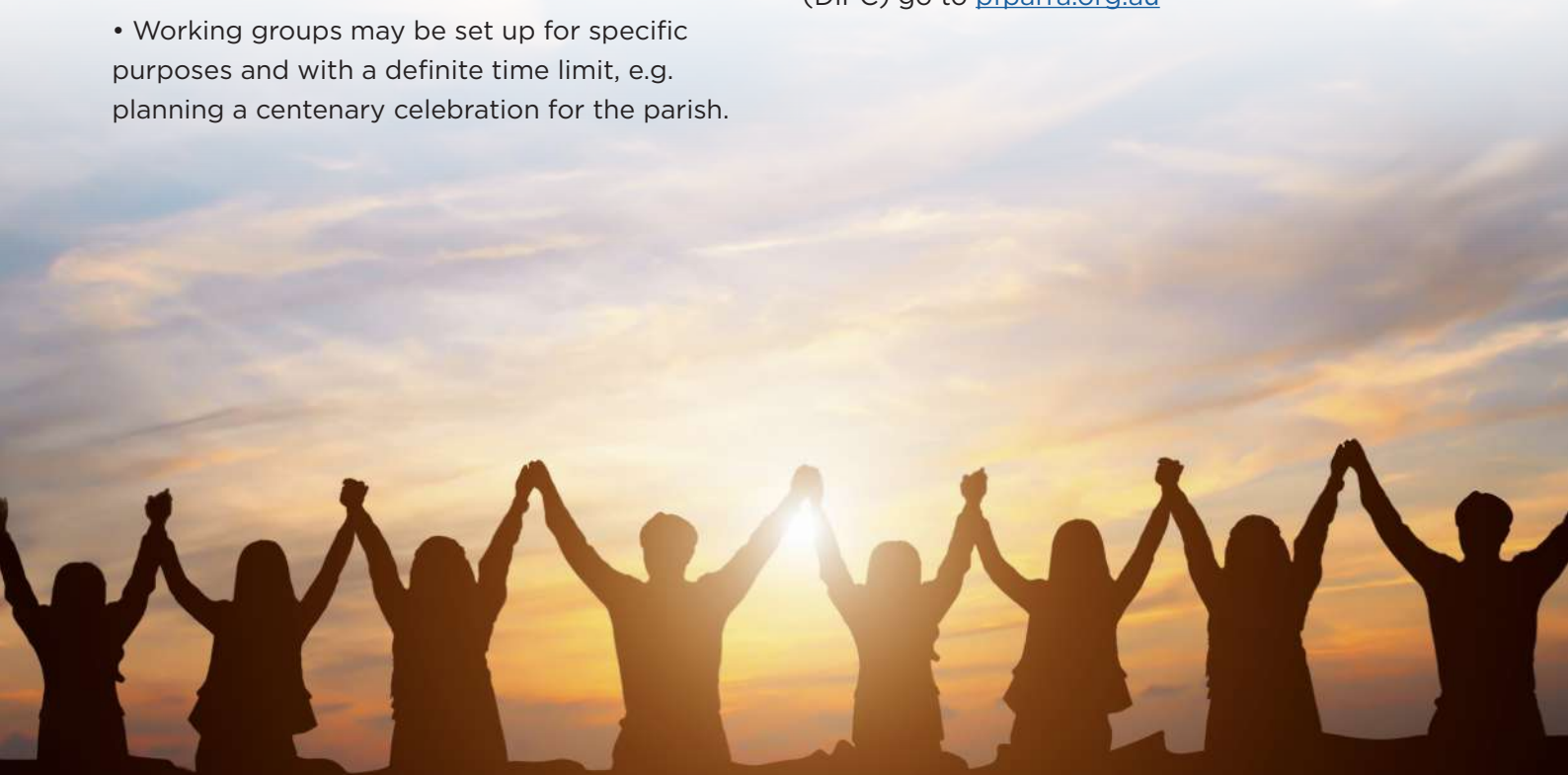
The PPCs relationships with the Deanery and Diocese

In addition to the relationship the parish has in and amongst itself, it also has relationships to the Deanery and to the Diocese. Each parish is not an independent Church, rather all the parishes of the Diocese of Parramatta make up a single community of faith under the leadership of Bishop Vincent Long.

The Deanery and Diocese provide structures for the mutual exchange of information and coordination of activities on issues affecting parishes. The Deanery structure exists for the purpose of mutual support between parishes, joint planning of key elements of pastoral life and mission and sharing of resources.

Parish Pastoral Councils relate with the wider Church by participating in Deanery and Diocesan gatherings and providing support for initiatives promoted at these levels. Parish Pastoral Council relationships are collaborative and underpinned by frequent and effective communication.

To learn more about the Deanery Pastoral Councils (DePC) and Diocesan Pastoral Councils (DiPC) go to pfparra.org.au





INVOLVING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

(Source: Four Ways to Build More Effective Parish Councils: A Pastoral Approach by Mark F. Fischer and Mary Margaret Raley)

Council members are disciples with a specific task. It is a task of investigating, pondering and drawing practical conclusions. Serving on the PPC is a ministry to the whole parish.

The right people are those who understand why the priest wants to consult a Council and what the priest is consulting about. Council members should always be people able to act intentionally within a framework of faith. Council members have to understand deeply that the parish exists for the mission of Christ.

The right people for the Council are those willing to make the mission of Jesus the foundational and paramount consideration in all their deliberations.

SELECTION PROCESS

When parishioners understand the Council ministry and have an opportunity to discern which parishioners are suited for it, they can contribute enormously to the selection of PPC members. The process for identifying new PPC members ideally includes opportunity for parishioners to participate prayerfully.

Council members are to be chosen so as to reflect the wisdom of the parish community. Parishes must decide upon a method of prayerfully selecting members that is appropriate to their own particular situation. Some of these options include:

Nomination by parishioners
followed by a process of
discernment

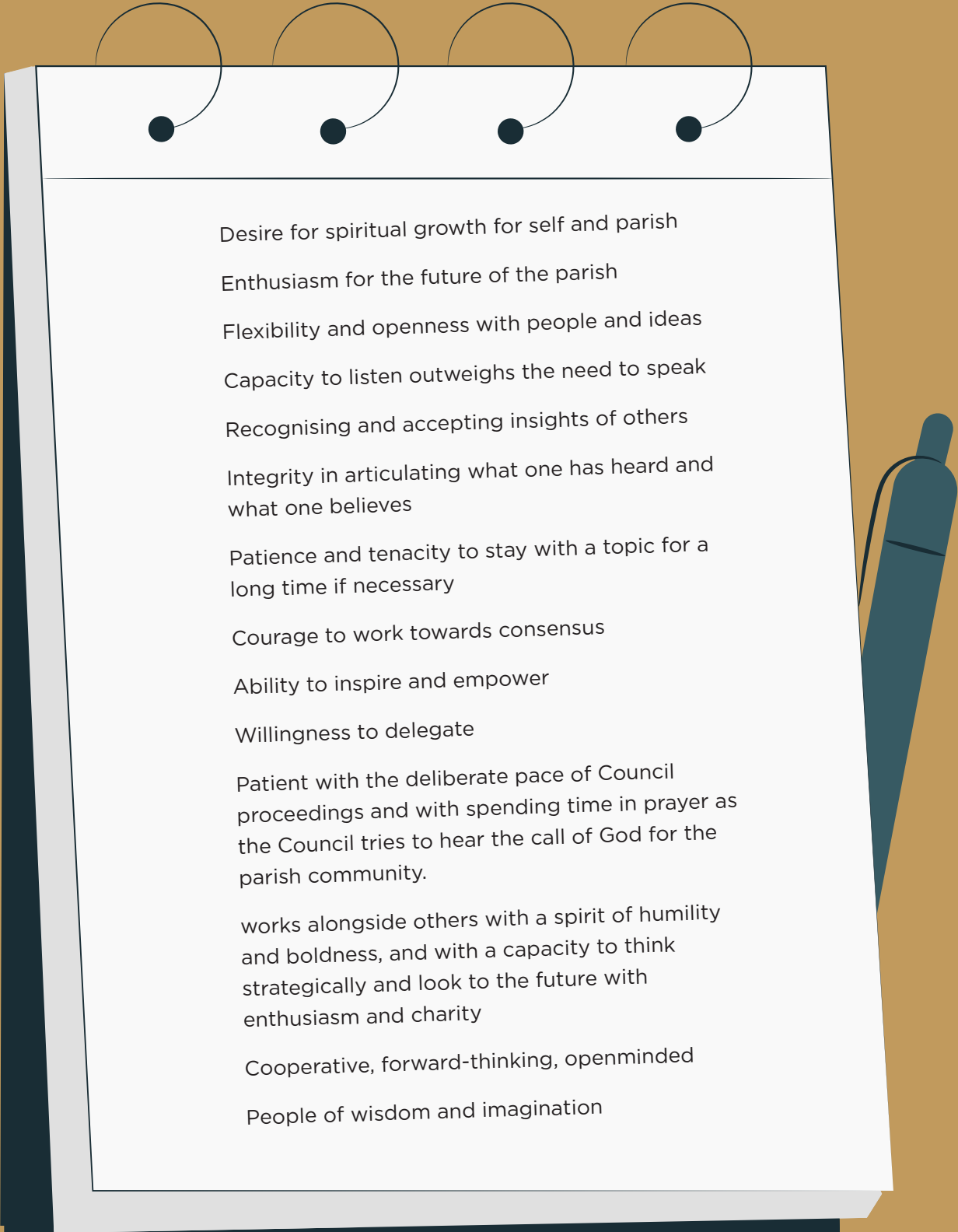
Election by
the parish community

Selection of representatives from
parish organisations

Selection by the parish priest in
consultation with the present
Council members



HELPFUL ATTRIBUTES FOR MEMBERS OF A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL



Desire for spiritual growth for self and parish

Enthusiasm for the future of the parish

Flexibility and openness with people and ideas

Capacity to listen outweighs the need to speak

Recognising and accepting insights of others

Integrity in articulating what one has heard and what one believes

Patience and tenacity to stay with a topic for a long time if necessary

Courage to work towards consensus

Ability to inspire and empower

Willingness to delegate

Patient with the deliberate pace of Council proceedings and with spending time in prayer as the Council tries to hear the call of God for the parish community.

works alongside others with a spirit of humility and boldness, and with a capacity to think strategically and look to the future with enthusiasm and charity

Cooperative, forward-thinking, openminded

People of wisdom and imagination

EXAMPLES OF PASTORAL ACTIVITIES WHICH COULD CONSTITUTE AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE PPC

- Faith formation eg. talks, practical workshops, retreats, reading material, learning about prayers, etc.
- Social justice eg. homelessness, mental health, environment, refugees and migrants, etc.
- Catholic education of children
- Outreach
- Evangelisation
- Programs of sacramental life and preparation
- Promotion of Eucharistic devotion
- Enhancement of programs for the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist
- Nurturing prayer life
- Effective participation in the liturgy
- Welcoming and hospitality
- Home visiting
- Building community
- Special care for the sick and dying
- Strengthening relations with the bishop, diocesan-pastoral efforts and a worldwide Catholic identity
- Outreach to and inclusion of youth and young adults in the life of the parish



PASTORAL PRACTICES FOR PPC MEMBERS

When Council members come to meetings with their ideas as gifts, with open hearts and ears, the stage is set for conversion. The decision comes to the Council rather than the Council coming to a decision. The ability to enter into dialogue with an attitude of openness to the Spirit requires a willingness to be changed.

At the end of each Pastoral Council meeting, it can be helpful to allow time to review and process the meeting, asking such questions as:

- **How were we true to our mission?**
- **How did we interact with each other?**
- **How were Gospel values fostered?**

Helpful pastoral practices may encompass the following:

Our Values:

1. "It's not about us" – it is about God. What we strive for is bigger than us because it is about God, and so we are **humble** about our own or our parish or deaneries accomplishments (because they are really God's victories).
2. "Promise and possibility" – we are **positive** and solution-focused rather than problem-fixated.
3. "Over and above" – we do not sit on the sidelines but get involved and work hard to make things happen and to make them great. We are **generous** with our time and gifts.

Pastoral Council Norms:

- We put the **parish's, deanery or diocese's interests** above our own personal interests or responsibilities (positive and generous).
- We put the best possible interpretation on others' words and actions (positive and generous)
- Frank and fearless: State your position as well as you can (generous), but also, be curious about other's positions (especially when they are different from your own) (humble)
- **Everyone speaks** at every meeting – responsibility of all to ensure this happens (generous and humble)
- Conflict about the issue is great! It is **how we disagree that matters** (positive and generous)
- We do not interrupt each other (humble)
- We are accountable to one another for these norms; we name it and apologise when required (humble)

Used with permission from St. Declans Parish – Peshurst.

A SPIRITUALITY FOR PPC's – GROUNDED IN PRAYER

Source: Called to Serve – Diocesan Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils. Fourth Edition, 2010, Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Virginia, USA)

The major task of parish pastoral planning is to discern prayerfully God's will and God's plan and as such it is essential that Council meetings occur in the context of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit. Prayer is truly at the heart of the work of the Council and asks the Holy Spirit for wisdom and guidance to achieve the best outcomes for the parish.

A prayerful attitude should underpin all the Council reflections, discussions, deliberations, decisions and actions. Meetings begin and end with prayer and, when necessary, turn to prayer during the meeting. Calling for quiet moments of reflection in the midst of meetings can provide the opportunity for being more open to the Holy Spirit.

What is called for is prayer that moves hearts and changes lives. Christ's presence should be evident throughout Council meetings. The desired atmosphere is like an "upper room" where the people gathered are open to and respectful of one another.

Prayer can take many forms; there is no one way for the Council to pray –

- listening to the Word of God
- articulating responses to the Word
- reflecting on this Word
- sharing with each other thanks, petition, praise, sorrow, concern, and resolve.



SUGGESTED PRAYERS FOR PPC MEETINGS

Suggested prayer reflection: *(Adapted from: Called to Serve – Diocesan Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils. Fourth Edition, 2010, Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Virginia, USA)*

Leader: (slowly, and with conviction) **Our Parish Pastoral Council is prayerful.**

Council member: Our Council is a group which prays in order to discern the will of God for the parish community.

(Pause) All Respond: Loving God, fill us with your spirit - enlighten us, we pray.

Leader: **Our Parish Pastoral Council is pastoral.**

Council member: Through baptism confirmation and Eucharist all Christians are called to be Christ in the world. Our parish Council strives to provide appropriate resources and methods to serve the people of our parish as we engage in the mission of the church.

(Pause) All Respond: Loving God, fill us with your spirit - enlighten us, we pray.

Leader: **Our Parish Pastoral Council is representative.**

Council Member: As Council members, we endeavour to listen to parishioners and then faithfully present expressed concerns, ideas and questions to the parish Council.

(Pause) All Respond: Loving God, fill us with your spirit - enlighten us, we pray.

Leader: **Our Parish Pastoral Council is discerning.**

Council Member: Our Council functions in an atmosphere of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit in order to become and remain grounded in faith and responsive to the church's mission. Trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit, we set aside our individual opinions and prejudices and listen to one another.

(Pause) All Respond: Loving God, fill us with your spirit - enlighten us, we pray.

Leader: **Our Parish Pastoral Council is prophetic.**

Council Member: Our Council must have the courage and foresight to set the direction for our parish community, challenging the parish to grow in response to the Gospel.

(Pause) All Respond: Loving God, fill us with your spirit - enlighten us, we pray.

Leader: **Our Parish Pastoral Council is enabling.**

Council Member: Our Council endeavours to foster the faith growth of individual Catholics of the parish and the broader community.

(Pause) All Respond: Loving God, fill us with your spirit - enlighten us, we pray.

Leader: **Our Parish Pastoral Council is collaborative.**

Council Member: Our parish Council challenges its members, the parish staff, committees, organizations and other groups in the parish to work together.

(Pause) All Respond: Loving God, fill us with your spirit - enlighten us, we pray.

Scriptural Reflection:

(Adapted from: Infusing the Pastoral Council with the Spirit of Christ. Sr. Kathleen Turley, RSM, M.A. Chancellor: Planning and Pastoral Services Diocese of Albany)

Sign of the Cross

Opening Prayer

A prayer calling us to be open to the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout the meeting.

Scripture Reading

Choose a passage from Scripture. It is most appropriate to use the Gospel reading from the previous or the following Sunday or the Gospel of the day.

Reflection/sharing experiences

- What words spoke to you today in this reading?
- What action does the reading call you to do?
- How has the reading motivated or challenged you?
- What new insight has the reading prompted?
- What has the reading moved you to do?

Draw all the responses together after all those who wish to share have had an opportunity to do so.

General Intercessions

Pray for the needs of the parish and community.

Invite Council members to bring forth personal, parish and community concerns. End with a response such as 'Lord, hear our prayer'.

End the prayer with the Lord's Prayer

Alternative prayer:

Loving God,

We pray that our Pastoral Council can be a vehicle to envision a new future, to provide leadership to implement the vision and to witness to the unconditional love of God and the healing presence of Christ in our world.

May we strive to live as Jesus did and in doing so, may our Council be fueled with the life of Jesus, creating unlimited power to transform our world.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

(Adapted from: Infusing the Pastoral Council with the Spirit of Christ. Sr. Kathleen Turley, RSM,)

Prayer for the close of meeting: *(Adapted from: University of Notre Dame: Faith, Indiana, USA)*

Loving God,

Lord of day and night,

of beginnings and endings,

As we prepare to conclude this meeting,

We lift up our hearts to You,

The divine source of all life.

We thank you for the gifts that have been present within this act of service to the community.

For the gifts of fellowship and understanding,

Of mutual respect and shared vision,

We are grateful for the gifts of perseverance and insight into the common concerns we share,

For these and all other graces, we are thankful.

As you have blessed our coming together, now bless our departure and journey home.

May your blessing be upon us,

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

*I begin this session by acknowledging
the Traditional Custodians of the land
on which we gather today, and pay my
respects to their Elders past and present.
I extend that respect to Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.*

APPENDIX 1: MEETING AGENDA TEMPLATE

Name:			
Date of Meeting:		Time:	
Meeting Chairperson:		Location:	
Minute Taker:			
Attendees:			
Apologies:			

Time	Agenda Item	Speaker	Focus area

APPENDIX 2: MEETING MINUTES TEMPLATE

Meeting Name:					
Date of Meeting: (MM/DD/YYYY)		Time:			
Meeting Chaired by:		Meeting Opened:			
Minutes Prepared By:		Location:			
1. Attendance at Meeting					
Name:			Present/Apology/No Response		
2. Acceptance of Previous Minutes					
Accepted:					
Seconded:					
3. Agenda and Notes, Decisions, Issues (Including formation)					
Topics & Notes		Owner/Presenter		Outcomes	
4. Action items					
Action		Owner		Which Goal/Focus Area Aligned to	
5. Next Meeting					
Date: (MM/DD/YYYY)		Time:		Location:	
Meeting Closed:					

APPENDIX 3: DISCERNMENT GUIDE FOR OFFICE BEARERS

Adapted from Cecilia Anning's Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils

A SUGGESTED PROCESS OF SELECTION

Before the meeting, invite all PPC members to read the Role Statement for Office Bearers [see statutes]. Then, begin the process with prayer to the Holy Spirit for guidance.

The usual practice is for the President or ex-officio member to chair the following sections, acting as a Returning Officer.

The previous office bearers, at this point, may be invited to offer a short description of how they experienced their role.

1. Choosing the Chairperson

Invite each PPC member to write down the names of two people whom they wish to recommend for the position of chairperson. (Secret ballot)

2. The Returning Officer will then collect the written sheets and name the people recommended (but **not** the number of times each has been recommended).

3. Invite those recommended to indicate whether they accept or decline nomination, giving their reasons for either accepting or declining. This is an opportunity for a given member to share the gifts and experience they may bring to the role.

4. If necessary, decide the position by ballot. (Again, secret ballot. It is suggested not to share the number of votes received by each nominee, only to name the successful nominee.)

5. Choosing the Secretary

Initially clarify whether or not there is a minutes' secretary separate from this role. Ask each PPC member in turn if he/she would be open to accepting the position of secretary. Usually, simple negotiation will decide the position. If not, conduct a ballot as above.

6. Choosing the Deputy Chairperson

Ask each PPC member in turn if he/she would be open to accepting the position. If negotiation cannot determine the position, conduct another ballot as above.

7. Thank all who accepted nomination and made the process possible.

8. Thank the three PPC members who accepted the positions.

9. Thank the outgoing office bearers for their committed efforts during the previous term.

APPENDIX 4: The Parramatta Way of Safeguarding is to...



Act with Justice, and state that we have a zero tolerance for any form of abuse or harm to children or any person

Act with justice and ensure that laws and obligations are upheld, and safety is paramount

And it is to

Love tenderly, as we accept all who come to the Diocese of Parramatta from all walks of life, cultures, and abilities

Love tenderly, as we accept any person for who they are and where they are at in their lives

Love tenderly, as we look after and prioritise children and care for those who may be in a difficult situation or at risk of harm for whatever reason

Love tenderly, as we are servants of the Church, and our role is to walk beside you and support you

And acknowledge

The traditional custodians of the land in which the Diocese of Parramatta sits - the Darug and Gundungurra people

The lifelong trauma of abuse victims and those failures of the Church to protect children and all adults at risk

The diversity of many cultural groups that reside in Parramatta creating a kaleidoscope of diversity and beliefs that are valued and respected

And celebrate the talents and gifts of the community and families of all abilities

And promote

The principles of Catholic social teaching of dignity, respect, association, participation, support for the vulnerable, solidarity, stewardship, subsidiarity, equality and the principle of the common good.

*"This is what the Lord asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God."
(Micah 6:8)*

APPENDIX 5: COMMISSIONING CEREMONY SUGGESTIONS:

After the homily:

PRIEST: Invite Parish Pastoral Council members to come before the congregation to be commissioned (Each is called by name).

On behalf of our parish community of which you have been called to serve, I commission you as Parish Pastoral Council members. Your sharing in responsibility in the mission of the church and in the ministry of Jesus will be joined with the efforts of others throughout the Diocese of Parramatta, to effectively build up the Body of Christ. Service to the people of God takes many forms and requires a diversity of gifts and talents. Christ calls us to the challenge of discipleship, to be a sign of God's kingdom in this time and place.

Do you understand and accept the responsibility of service on the Parish Pastoral Council?

MEMBERS: We do.

PRIEST: *Will you do your best to work for the wellbeing of the parish community, the deanery, the diocese, and the wider society?*

MEMBERS: We will.

PRIEST: *Let us pray. Brief period of silence.*

Loving God, bless and strengthen today our sisters and brothers who have committed themselves to this special ministry of leadership on our Parish Pastoral Council. Help them to be formed in your Word, sensitive to the needs of others, and reconciling in their relationships. Give them vision and courage to seek the truth and to discern your will in all matters they will be asked to consider. We ask for them the grace to fulfil their unique roles in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Jesus Christ.

Loving God, please accept our prayer in the name of that same Jesus Christ, our Lord.

ALL: Amen

Prayers of the Faithful:

That the members of our Parish Pastoral Council may give witness to the presence of Christ by lives manifesting faith, hope and love.

We pray to the Lord.

That the Church, the People of God, may grow in Christ and in the bond of common fellowship.

We pray to the Lord.

That all who are concerned with the wellbeing of our parish may be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit and strive to carry out God's will.

We pray to the Lord.

APPENDIX 6: PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL GUIDELINES

Both new and established PPCs are recommended to establish or revisit their own PPC guidelines. The guidelines contained here have been sourced from the Diocese of Parramatta document titled “Parish Finance and Administrative Standards”.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Parish Pastoral Council is a vital aspect of communion with the Church, being co-responsible in both the building up of the Body of Christ and in the participation of the Church’s mission. Considering the pastoral questions of our day and making appropriate recommendations to the Pastor, the members of the Parish Pastoral Council are imbued with a pastoral spirit to aid the Pastor with the pastoral governance of the parish.

The People of God, endowed with *sensus fidei*, “the sense of the faithful”, are called to synodality, that is to practice continual discernment within the Body of Christ, united with the voice and action of the Holy Spirit. Such discernment includes listening to the Word of God, discerning the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel, and consulting with all the baptised through formative processes. The synodal task ensures both fidelity to our Catholic Church and creative engagement with our current context, leading to effective planning for mission.

St Paul VI states: “It is the function of the pastoral council to investigate everything pertaining to pastoral activities, to weigh them carefully and to set forth practical conclusions concerning them so as to promote conformity of the life and actions of the People of God with the Gospel”, in the awareness that, as Pope Francis recalled, the purpose of such a Council “should not be ecclesiastical organisation but rather the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone”.

The Diocese of Parramatta serves the mission of the church through the work of a number of pastoral councils. These include the Diocesan Pastoral Council, Deanery Pastoral Councils, and a Parish Pastoral Council in each parish, as mandated by the Bishop (see Canon 536).

2. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1. THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL RECOMMENDS THAT;

In dioceses, as far as possible, councils should be set up to assist the Church’s apostolic work, whether in the field of evangelisation and sanctification or in the fields of charity, social relations and the rest; the clergy and religious working with the laity in whatever way proves satisfactory. (Apostolate of the laity, n.26).

2.2. THE COUNCIL’S ROLE IS TO PARTICIPATE IN GOD’S MISSION THROUGH BEING:

- i. A representative body which is a significant form of the synodal church, accompanying and guiding the community in their efforts to live as missionary disciples.
- ii. Advisory, in the sense that its proposals must be accepted favourably by the pastor to become operative. The pastor considers proposals attentively, especially if they express themselves unanimously, in a process of common discernment.
- iii. Discerning, that is, through shared formation and attentiveness to church and world, formulating pastoral goals to further the mission of Christ in their local context.

2.3 THE COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE TO:

- i. Offer the art of accompaniment both within the council and in its journey with the community.
- ii. Cultivate a discerning heart in all its work.
- iii. Listen to what the Spirit is saying through attentiveness to:
 - the hopes, ideas, needs and concerns of parishioners,
 - the deposit of faith, and
 - the signs of the times in their local neighbourhood.
- iv. Discern what the community is being called to be and do through:
 - Collaboratively shaping a shared vision faithful to the gospel and Church, and attentive to the pastoral context.
 - Identifying and supporting the good that is happening in alignment with that vision;
 - Ensuring compliance with safeguarding; work, health and safety; and professional standards;
 - Identifying and calling forth the gifts of the community;
 - Developing pastoral goals to work towards the parish vision and aligned with the diocesan vision;
 - Coordinating the implementation of the pastoral goals; and
 - Reviewing these goals.

3. KEY RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER BODIES

The Council provides and receives key information and advice on pastoral matters, in relationship with:

- i. Their parish, particularly through their pastor and leadership team.
- ii. The Parish Team and Parish Finance Committee
- iii. Ministry Teams
- iv. Other local and diocesan bodies (e.g. chancery, local government council)
- v. the work of the Diocesan and Deanery Pastoral Councils. This includes good communication and collaboration with their own parish Deanery Pastoral Council representatives.

4. MEMBERSHIP

4.1. CANON LAW REQUIREMENTS

- i. The members of Christ's faithful assigned to the pastoral council are to be selected in such a way that the council truly reflects the entire portion of the people of God ... (Can. 512 §2.).
- ii. Only those members of Christ's faithful who are outstanding in firm faith, high moral standards, and prudence are to be assigned to the pastoral council. (Can. 512 §3).

4.2. QUALITIES REQUIRED FOR MEMBERSHIP

Each member is expected to be:

- i. A prayerful Catholic, 18 years or older, committed to growth in faith and sharing in the mission of Christ;
- ii. A good listener and an interested communicator who believes in the value of shared discernment;
- iii. Willing to grow in awareness of the pastoral needs of the parish and diocese to commit to examining and studying relevant issues;

- iv. Seeking to promote the Church's merciful, joyful engagement with the wider community;
- v. Keen to explore how the people and leadership at each level of the parish can grow in faith, awareness and skills for the mission of evangelisation in today's world;
- vi. Accepting of the mission and purpose of the council, including its role as a consultative body within the structure of the Catholic Church;
- vii. Open to study and reflection and willing to come prepared to meetings;
- viii. Strongly interested in the directions of the church locally, nationally and beyond; and
- ix. Willing to make a three-year commitment to the work of the council.

4.3. TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

Membership consists of:

- i. Eight to twelve appointed parishioners, offering a diversity of age, gender, and ethnic origin, representative of the whole parish, not representing a ministry or sub-group;
- ii. The Pastor; and
- iii. Ex-officio members

4.4. EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Ex-officio members will consist of:

- i. The Pastor as president of the council;
- ii. The following possible members: **a.** Member(s) of clergy **b.** Member(s) of Parish Leadership Team **c.** Member(s) of Parish Team **d.** Member of Parish Finance Committee **e.** School Executive Member(s) **f.** Other members of key local institutions/movements.
- iii. A good ratio (at least 2:1) of appointed versus ex-officio members, to enable the counsel of the parishioners to be more effectively heard;
- iv. A clearly defined sense of whether each ex-officio member – other than the pastor – is a voting member, and whether they can stand as an office bearer, recognising again the spirit of ensuring the voice and role of appointed parishioners is foremost.

4.5. INDUCTION, FORMATION AND COMMISSIONING

- i. Prior to the first meeting, an induction including welcome and initial orientation will be offered by Council executive in collaboration with Pastoral Planning Office;
- ii. Lay members of the Council are diocesan volunteers, and as such, should familiarise themselves with relevant diocesan policies prior to commencement of their role;
- iii. There will be a session of formation for all Council members annually; and
- iv. Parish Commissioning of Council members is strongly encouraged.

4.6. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

In a spirit of prayerfulness each member of the Council will:

- i. Attend the regular meetings of the Council;
- ii. Provide input to deliberations of the Council;
- iii. Develop a spirit of discernment and the ability to listen and understand the issues affecting the lives of parishioners;
- iv. Provide support and encouragement for other members of the Council;
- v. Actively participate and empower other community members in the implementation of finalised plans of action;
- vi. Embrace opportunities for personal faith development and for gaining skills to assist with effective participation in the Council's operations; and
- vii. Represent the Council when required e.g. other Parish meetings, deanery or diocesan meetings.

4.7. ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE

- i. The Pastor as president of the council plus office-bearers will form the executive;
- ii. The office-bearers, chosen by the members, will be: **a.** Chairperson; **b.** Deputy Chairperson; and **c.** Secretary.
- iii. Office-bearers may hold office for no more than three years. Office-bearers may be re- appointed. Council members discern the office-bearers;
- iv. The Executive is responsible for the following: **a.** Organising the agendas; **b.** Coordinating the business of the Council between meetings; **c.** Representing the Council, whether on a particular topic as noted in the minutes, or in ad hoc situations such as liaising with members of the Deanery Pastoral Council, clergy of the Deanery and other people in leadership positions; **d.** Keeping a record of membership, correspondence, meeting attendance and projects; **e.** Managing any finances and risk assessments as required; **f.** Ensuring provision of timely minutes, agendas, and reports to members and relevant bodies; **g.** Reviewing the effectiveness of the Council; **h.** Conducting, at minimum, one meeting of all Executive members between each meeting of the Council to manage its responsibilities and business; and **i.** Circulating outward correspondence from the Council.

4.8. TERM OF MEMBERSHIP

- i. The term of membership is three years;
- ii. It is anticipated that approximately half the Council members will continue for a second term to facilitate continuity in Council business;
- iii. Any member who serves two terms consecutively will then stand down for a minimum period of one term; and
- iv. Any member of the council may resign by giving written notice of intention to the executive. The resignation shall operate from its acceptance by the Pastor.

4.9. NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERSHIP

- i. A nomination process for new members and members available for a second term will occur at the end of each term of Council membership. **a.** All parishioners will be asked to recommend either their own self or other parish members for possible membership of the Council; **b.** Each person recommended will be invited into a process both to receive current information about Parish Pastoral Councils and to indicate their willingness to nominate; **c.** If the number of acceptances of possible membership is more than required, the membership will be finalised by either negotiation or a discernment process.
- ii. Membership is determined through nomination endorsed by the pastor;
- iii. Ex-officio appointments are determined by the Pastor in consultation with the Council;
- iv. Prior to joining the Council, new members will receive an induction on responsibilities and expectations as a member (c.f. 4.5.i, ii).

4.10. CASUAL VACANCIES

- i. The Council may fill any casual vacancy through appointment by the Pastor, in consultation with the council members;
- ii. Prior to joining the Council, the proposed candidate will receive an induction on responsibilities and expectations as a member (c.f. 4.5.i, ii);
- iii. After completing the remainder of the current term of membership for a casual vacancy, the new member may nominate for a normal first term;
- iv. A position is considered vacant when confirmed in writing, and occurs if a member: **a.** resigns from the Council, **b.** withdraws from active participation in their parish, **c.** does not fulfil the main membership responsibilities (4.6).

5. PROCEDURES

5.1 MEETINGS

It is recommended that the Council meets monthly. There will be a minimum of six meetings of the Council each year. A quorum consists of fifty percent of Council members, excluding ex-officio members, and must include the Pastor or his delegate.

5.2 CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING

- i. The consensus approach to decision-making will be used in the process of contributing towards the making of Council decisions, with each member offering their conscience-derived input towards final outcomes;
- ii. In a spirit of synodality non-binding votes may sometimes be taken to obtain indicative Council feeling on particular matters; and
- iii. Lobbying, competition and domination should be avoided, so as to support a full burgeoning of synodality in the Council.

5.3. TASK GROUPS AND WORKING PARTIES

Such groups:

- i. May be set up under the auspices of the Council;
- ii. May be established for specific purposes for a fixed duration; iii Will report and be answerable to the Council;
- iii. Following review of their activities, may be extended for a further period by the Council to continue their task or project; and
- iv. May include members of the Council and other persons from the parish and local area.

5.4. COMMUNICATION WITH THE PARISH

- i. The Parish Pastoral Council will report to the parish community regularly;
- ii. It will seek the input of parishioners through various means, e.g. parish consultations, focus meetings, conversations, suggestion boxes; and
- iii. An Annual General Meeting will be held on a date determined by the council.

5.5. COMMUNICATION WITH THE PARISH

These Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines will be reviewed at the end of each Council's term, or more frequently if the need arises. Consultation with the Parish community and Diocese will occur regarding any changes to these Guidelines.

Use and Adaptation of Guidelines and Further Support

These guidelines may be adapted to reflect local pastoral circumstances. Note that any such adaptation requires the approval of the Diocese. The Pastoral Formation Team is available to assist with any adaptations as well as with the establishment, formation and ongoing life of the Council, including with planning for mission. Contact met@parracatholic.org.

References

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<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/07/20/200720a.html>

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_e_n.html

These guidelines were last updated 19 May 2021



APPENDIX 7: ONGOING FORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR PPC's

Because Councils are constantly evolving and we ourselves are always transforming, ongoing reflection, discernment and formation must be enriching, engaging and nurturing. The Pastoral Formation Team offer monthly formation reflection and knowledge, prayer and skilling to assist and equip members to clarify their understanding of the role as PPC members and to discover more deeply their love of God.

Offerings for PPC Members:

Monthly induction As Council members, you are warmly invited and encouraged to participate in monthly induction and ongoing formation opportunities offered by the Diocese of Parramatta and beyond. Formation topics are varied and are shaped according to the context and needs of members. The meetings are designed to include input, interaction and mutual sharing of experiences and ideas. In this way a rich variety of ideas, possibilities and challenges are shared.

Mass of Commissioning of Parish Pastoral Councils. Are encouraged to be celebrated individually in each parish. At this Mass each Council member is commissioned by their parish priest. Since the Council is a ministry of service to the entire parish, it is most appropriate that new members are introduced to the parish community. This is best done by commissioning new members to the Council within a Sunday Eucharist. This is an important way of connecting the Council with the community and for the parish to recognise, accept, support and pray for all members of the Council. (*Source: Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils by Cecilia Anning*).

Refer to Appendix 7: Commissioning ceremony

Gathering for Chairpersons of Pastoral Councils. This meeting focusses on a specific aspect of their role of leadership. The gathering also provides an opportunity for chairpersons to develop a network for mutual sharing.

For helpful resources please refer to the following websites:

Diocese of Parramatta <http://parracatholic.org.au/>

The Well <http://thewell.org.au/>

Catholic Youth Parramatta <http://parracatholic.org/cyp/>

Pastoral Formation Website <https://pfparra.org.au/>

Contact the Pastoral Formation team: met@parracatholic.org

*The Pastoral Formation team desires to walk together
with Jesus, humanity and all creation into the depth of
God's love.*

*Guided by the Spirit of God's mission we joyfully
accompany others on our shared journey of faith
enrichment providing opportunities for personal growth
and community leadership building*



REFERENCES

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- The Essential Elements of Parish Life Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, Office of Pastoral Planning
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- Diocesan Pastoral Councils & Deanery Pastoral Councils Handbook – Guiding our Parishes, Moved by the Spirit, Diocese of Parramatta
- Called to Serve – Diocesan Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils Fourth Edition, 2010, Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Virginia, USA <https://richmonddiocese.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/calledtoserve.pdf>
- Parish Pastoral Council E-book, Catholic Archdiocese of Perth
- Strengthening and Revitalising Parishes, Catholic Archdiocese of Perth
- A handbook for parish Pastoral Councils by Jane Ferguson, 2005.
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- One Body. One mission. The Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Diocese of Pittsburgh, 2010
- Making Parish Pastoral Councils Pastoral by Mark F. Fischer
- Four Ways to Build More Effective Parish Councils: A Pastoral Approach by Mark F. Fischer and Mary Margaret Raley
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Pastoral Formation