

## Facilitated Event Summary

**Parish:** Loughshore

**Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012

**Venue:** Whitehouse Parish Centre

### **Introduction and Purpose:**

On Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> September, almost 40 people from the Parish gathered in Whitehouse for the first in a series of group meetings designed to establish- in time- a Parish Pastoral Council in the Parish. This was a great turnout for a first meeting. It was especially so, considering that we had a group that was representative of all four Churches in the Parish.

### **A Praying Discerning Community**

We began the evening with a period of prayer as a way of 'arriving' at the session and looking to God for direction for our session this evening. Each of the sessions we undertake will begin with a period of 15-20 minutes of prayer; sometimes silent, sometimes using scripture and reflection. This allows us to model the type of Church we want to see: a Church that is a Praying, Discerning Community. We continued our prayer using a reading from the Gospel of Luke (Lk9: 10-17):



**“He welcomed them and taught them about the Kingdom of God, and he healed those who were sick. Late in the afternoon the twelve disciples came to him and said, “Send the crowds away to the nearby villages and farms, so they can find food and lodging for the night. There is nothing to eat here in this lonely place.” But Jesus said, “You feed them yourselves.”**

**“But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered. “Or are you expecting us to go and buy enough food for this whole crowd?” For there were about 5,000 men there.**

**Jesus replied, “Tell them to sit down in groups of about fifty each.” So the people all sat down. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he kept giving the bread and fish to the disciples so they could distribute it to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers.”**



We ended the prayer reflecting on the apostles’ words, ‘we are in a lonely place here’. We acknowledged that there can be times when we feel lonely in our lives and in our Parishes. However, we reflected also that Jesus fed the hungry and lonely. We prayed that he would feed us throughout this evening and this process to come.

### **Introduction and Purpose**

We introduced the idea that tonight we would be looking at the topic of Parish Pastoral Councils and asking if having one is right for us in our time in our Parish. Before agreeing our purpose for the evening we agreed a set of guiding principles for this series of meetings:

- ✚ We are not the Parish Pastoral Council
- ✚ We are in the business of giving and receiving wisdom from all
- ✚ We collect any questions as we go
- ✚ Our work informs the way forward
- ✚ We meet in the Spirit of Christ-what does God want?
- ✚ We seek consensus- not voting
- ✚ Not ‘did I get what I want or did you get what you want- more can I live with the outcome and is it what is best for our Parish.

Agreeing this allowed us to reflect that in this process we must set aside our own issues or agendas and really pray and discern what God is telling us in our time in our Parish.

The purpose of the evening was then agreed as:

- ✚ To gather together as a community in prayer
- ✚ To draw from the experience of our Parishioners
- ✚ To discern the next steps in the process of revealing the Living Church in our Parish
- ✚ To explore the views of all present regarding a Parish Pastoral Council

### What is a Parish Pastoral Council?

We moved on to consider what a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) is. We heard the following:

## What?

A group of committed people of God (Priest, religious and lay people) called upon to **investigate** pastoral matters, **reflect** on them thoroughly and **recommend** practical conclusions

Priest acknowledges the wisdom of the Parishioners and expresses his desire to share with them his responsibility for the governance of the Parish

Set Pastoral Themes for the Parish- everything to do with the life of the Parish can be discussed



As such, the PPC would be a group drawn from the Parish who would be members of the PPC for a time before a new group of people would be chosen to carry on the work. The PPC is a place for co-responsibility between clergy, those in religious life, and laity. A PPC can help plan for what is needed now and, more importantly, plan for what is needed in the future. This is especially important in a world that is changing so rapidly. We heard that there was sound Church teaching and directives about having a PPC, coming from Vatican II and subsequent Church documents. Having heard about the nature of PPC's we moved on to our small group exercise for the evening.

## Exercise- A Successful Council

In six small groups we asked the people to complete the following task:

**Imagine we had a PPC that was working well in our Parish today.**

**What would it be about that PPC that made it work well?**

This was not a task asking for ideas for what the PPC would do. Rather it was for us to reflect on the nature of a successful PPC. In ways this was a difficult task because we are so often used to 'doing' and generating 'doing' ideas. We are less accustomed to reflecting on values and the nature of the groups we wish to set up. However, the benefits of taking the latter approach is that the group we will set up will be better formed and informed through taking time to reflect on its nature. This in turn will help ensure that decisions about ideas and 'doing' we will better decision and actions. The groups came up with many ideas which we grouped under the following themes for a successful PPC:



Each theme had several ideas behind it. They were as follows:

**Coming together in one Parish Family**

**Inclusive of people from all 4 Churches**

**Transparent**

**Part of the Parish Community**

**Listen with an open heart**

**Willingness to work without any hidden agendas**

**Communicate well with the Parish**

**Approachable**

**Known**

**Trustworthy**

**Work evident to the Parish**

**A Vibrant, Positive Group**

**Respect each other's views**

**Committed**

**Motivated**

**Enthusiastic**

**Energetic**

**Do-errs**

**Listen to each other**

**Co-ordinate the work of the groups in the Parish**

**Embrace change**

**Forward thinking**

**Progressive**

**A Parish that prays together and fulfils God's will**

**Prayerfully follow the guidelines for PPC's**

**Identify the spiritual and pastoral needs of the Parish**

**Reach out to everyone**

**Pray**

**Have a positive impact on people's lives**

**Sound Christian values**

Having completed the task and considered the whole idea of having a PPC, we asked ourselves the question:

**Is there consensus that having a PPC would be a good idea and that we should work together monthly to consider in more depth what a PPC could do in our Parish in or time?**

Happily, there was complete agreement on this question that we should move ahead together. Therefore, we set the following action:

- ✚ Our next meeting will be on 8<sup>th</sup> October at 8- 9.30 p.m. in Greencastle Parish Hall
- ✚ The topic will be: **What is a Parish? What is the nature of our Parish?**
- ✚ Jim from Living Church will continue to facilitate the meetings
- ✚ Jim will provide a write up of this and subsequent sessions for the Parish bulletin as well as the Living Church website:  
<http://www.downandconnor.org/livingchurch/pastoral-area-teams/>
- ✚ Fr Alexander will speak at Masses about the process
- ✚ All Parishioners are welcome to attend these meetings
- ✚ People can attend one, some or all of the meetings

This is an exciting time in our Diocese and in our Parish. The meeting reflected this excitement and, while a working meeting, was filled with energy and humour. Thank you to all who attended. A personal invitation is extended to all parishioners for the next and subsequent meetings.

Jim Deeds, Living Church September 2012