

Facilitated Event Summary

Parishes: Larne, Glenarm, Carnlough, Cushendall, Cushendun, Glenariffe

Date: 24th September 2012

Venue: Drumalis Retreat Centre, Larne

Introduction and Purpose:

On Monday evening 24th September 2012, 44 people representing all 6 Parishes gathered together in Drumalis Retreat centre to consider the idea of forming a Parish Pastoral Council in each Parish.



Before beginning the work for the evening, we heard a welcome from Sister Anna from Drumalis and from Fr Peter Forde. We then gathered in prayer for 20 minutes in order to ensure that we built the evening's work on solid foundations. We had a lit candle and a book of Scriptures as our focal point. We prayed and reflected on the Lord's Prayer. Each of the 6 clergy from across the Parishes read aloud one line from the Our Father and followed it with a short reflection on that line. Our reflections urged us to see one another as one family under God. We heard a call to reach out to those in need, to forgive those who wronged us and, through all of this, to call on God to get us through (providing our 'daily bread'). The

prayer time was respected and entered into by all and the moments of silent reflection felt very intensely prayerful indeed. At the end of the prayer, the clergy returned to the groups who sat according to their Parish. In so doing, they symbolically as well as physically joined with the lay people and those in religious life, all as the people of God gather together to discern God's will in or time for our Parishes.

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 what the next steps in the process of revealing the Living Church in our Parishes
-  To explore the views of all present regarding a Parish Pastoral Council
-  To respect the past but address the future

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 of these themes had ideas behind them. Those were as follows:

Co-responsible:

All decisions are collective decisions

All opinions are valued

It would be open to the suggestions of the parishioners

Priest and parishioners working together with everybody being listened to

Respect for all

People on the PPC have an effective voice

Faith-filled:

Prayerful

Members would have a commitment to regular mass attendance

Inclusive:

Representative of all age groups 16 and up

Fixed term membership to ensure rotation of membership

Relevant, Accepted, Accessible:

Good communication within the PPC itself

Good communication out to the Parish

Parishioners know who is on the PPC, what their role is and how to contact them

The PPC members would be approachable and their work transparent

Positive Attitude:

Owning your own gifts and contributing them to the Parish

Joyful

Positive thinking

Purposeful:

Encourage participation in the Church

Bond the Parish

Create a sense of Parish community

A shared Parish vision

Outcomes

Realistic- only do what we think we are able to achieve

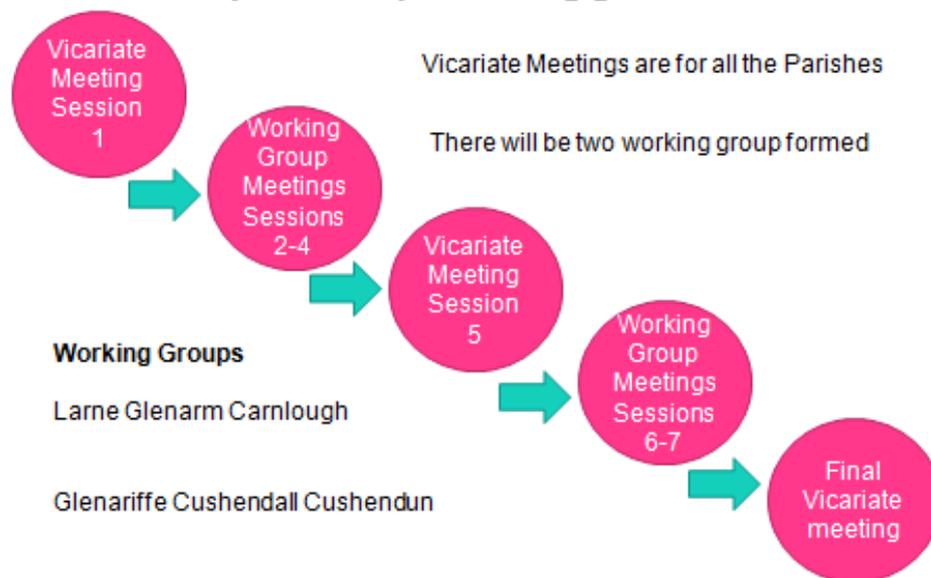
Looking at the above allows us to say that the groups broadly defined the PPC as:

“A co-responsible group of the faith filled people drawn from the Parish community who they represent across the age ranges and who are accepted by and accessible to the members of that community. They meet with a positive and realistic attitude with the purpose of helping the Parish to achieve its mission.”

Next steps

At this point we came to a position of consensus that it seems like a good idea to create PPC's built upon the themes set out above. Jim from Living Church set out a suggested process of meetings to help move towards setting up a PPC:

Next Steps- Helpful Suggestions



The process set out above would entail monthly meetings set across the next 7-8 months. It would involve two working groups each of three Parishes as set out above as well as meetings with all six Parishes as happened tonight. We agreed that it would be a process that should be open to all Parishioners and that people should feel free to come to one or all the meetings. There was agreement that it was worth investing this time in the process. We went on to discuss communications strategies for inviting people to come along. These were included in our summary of action as below:

- 🌐 Each of us present are to personally invite anyone we think may benefit from coming to the next and subsequent meeting

- 🌍 The priests of the Parishes will speak positively of the process at Mass and tell the parishioners that they are all personally invited to attend
- 🌍 We are to be clear that the meetings are open to all- not just people who want to sit on a PPC. We are simply gathering information and shaping what a PPC would look like in our Parish. In that way we welcome all contributions
- 🌍 There will be a short summary of each meeting in each Parish bulletin
- 🌍 There will be a full summary emailed to each Parish office and put up on the Living Church website at <http://www.downandconnor.org/livingchurch/pastoral-area-teams/>

Conclusion:

Dominica, one of the people who came on the night, led us in reading the closing scripture piece, before Fr Peter thanked all for attending and said a closing prayer. This was an energy filled and enjoyable evening in what is an exciting time for our Diocese. It was heartening to see so many people engaged in discussing our Parishes and our Church. People came from each of the six Parishes but we have room for more people to come along. The prayerful and respectful atmosphere was carried throughout the evening. We practiced reaching consensus on the topics we were discussing. This practice is extremely useful as reaching consensus (as opposed to voting) is the way that most successful PPC's reach their decision. There is a commitment from all the people who gathered to see this through and to add to our number. We look forward to our next meetings which will look at the topic: What is a Parish? They are arranged as follows:

✚ **24th October at 7 in Cushendall for Cushendall, Cushendun and Glenariffe**

✚ **25th October at 7 in Drumalis for Larne, Carnlough and Glenarm**