



## Facilitated Event Summary

**Parish:** St. Teresa of Avila

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> July 2012

**Venue:** Parish Centre

### **Introduction and Purpose:**

On Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2012, 17 people gathered in the Parish Centre for the third in a series of group meetings designed to establish- in time- a Parish Pastoral Council in St. Teresa's Parish. Having acknowledged at our last meeting that there would be fewer people tonight as a result of holidays, we reflected that the number of people who came was great and reflects a real interest in our Parish development at this time.



Fr. Aloysius led us in prayer this evening- choosing Romans 12 as a scripture to reflect on. He read how St. Paul encouraged us to be one body in Christ and to see that we all have gifts in the spirit. Fr. Aloysius encouraged us to work to create a truly Living Church 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:

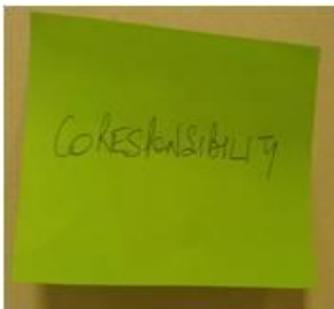
- ✚ To gather together as a community in prayer
- ✚ To explore the issue of 'Consultation'
- ✚ To consider in more depth roles of the people on a Pastoral Council

### **Review of the Previous Meetings:**

As agreed, we spent a little time reviewing the previous two meetings. For details of these meetings, please visit <http://www.downandconnor.org/livingchurch/pastoral-area-teams/>.

### **Exercise One:**

For the first exercise of the evening we considered:



How do we practically understand Co-responsibility in action between Priest and People in our Parish Pastoral Council? This question arises when we consider that in Canon Law, the Pastoral Parish Council is seen as a 'consultative' body with the Parish Priest as the presiding officer to whom recommendations are made but who can freely choose which advice to accept.

In order to do this, we formed five groups with each group receiving a statement about some element of the consultative nature of the Parish Pastoral Council. The statements were:

- 1. Councils succeed to the degree that the pastor accepts their recommendations and implements them.**
- 2. Priests who refuse good advice alienate councilors and weaken the parish**
- 3. The pastor consults, not because he wants to surrender responsibility for the parish, but because he wants to exercise it wisely**

**4. Councils have a consultative only vote, because the Church does not want to force priests to take poor advice**

**5. The pastor's role is to guide the consultation so that it might lead to wisdom, the wisdom that should inform his decisions**

We asked the groups to spend 5 minutes discussing the statement before considering the following:

 **What does this statement say to you?**

 **What can you live with about this statement?**



**Is there anything you find difficult with this statement?**

The information we received back showed that the groups had put a lot of effort into understanding the nature of consultation as well as the way that they saw the Pastoral Council working. By taking the areas people could live with and then flipping the areas they had difficulty with we came up with the following guidelines for understanding co-responsible working within our Parish:

-  Happy if everything can be discussed
-  Priest and people working together
-  Both lay people and priests can be guided by good advice
-  It is important to use language that is positive and avoid emotive and discouraging language
-  Consultation does not imply voting- it is a process of consensus
-  When we speak about the Church, we mean the people of God
-  No issues should be forced
-  The Council should be a protected space for Clergy and Lay people alike

- 🌍 Guidance (if two way) can lead to Co-responsibility and Co-responsibility can lead to wise decisions

One group reflected that a lot of this type of positive co-responsible working was already happening in our Parish and that feedback from parishioners is that they are happy and encouraged by this. In our discussion and feedback during this exercise we heard a quote from Mark Fischer who writes on Pastoral Councils:

**“All Christians are to build community, pray, collaborate with the pastor, lead by example and be spiritual. They do so, not in an impersonal process but in a relationship. It is a relationship with a pastor who knows their readiness...with fellow parishioners whose wisdom they seek, and ultimately with God whom they glimpse in dialogue.”**

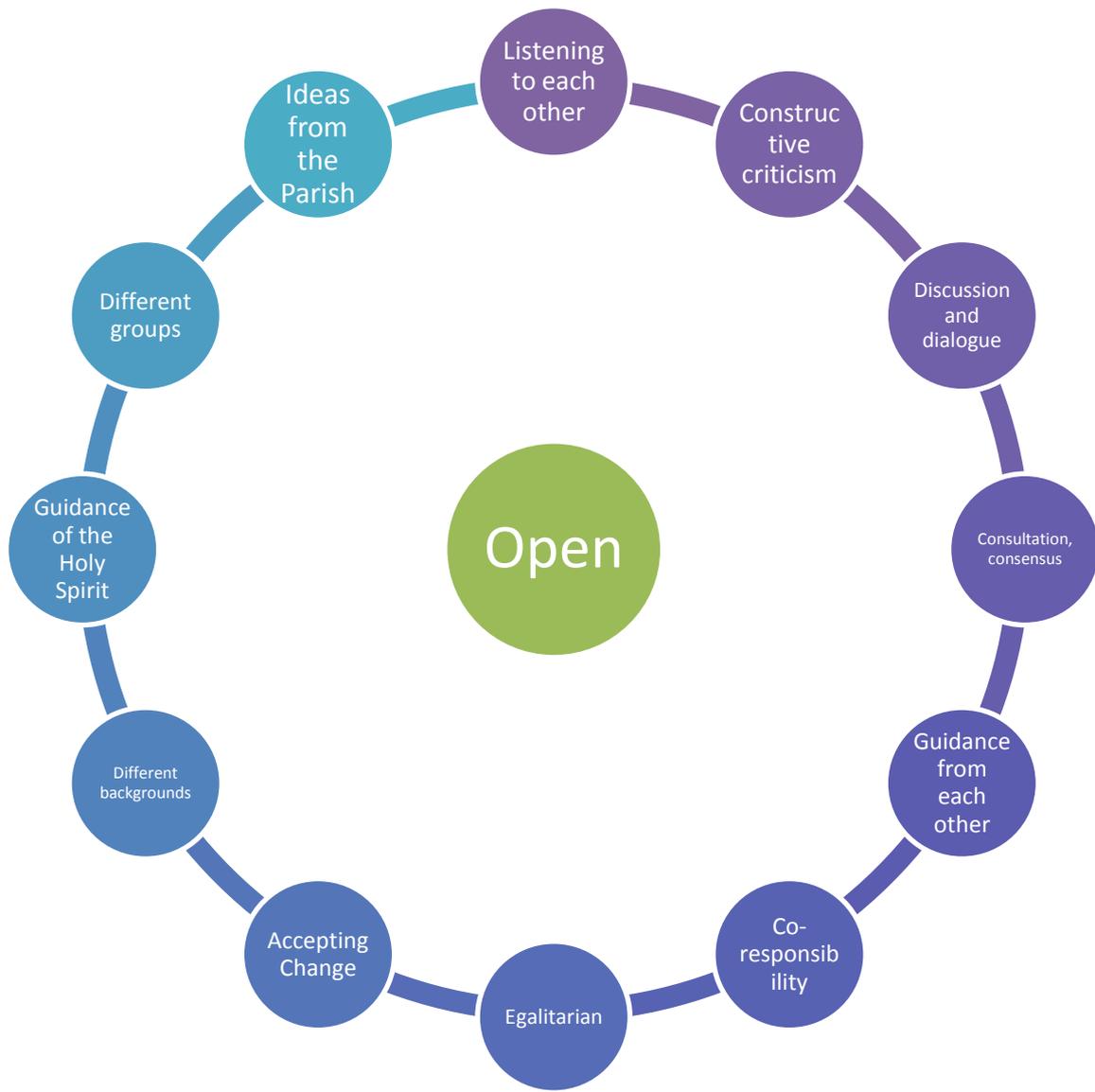
In this way, we said, that though it was possible that on rare occasions the Parish Priest may choose not to follow the advice of the Council, this was unlikely as the Father Brendan would be in relationship with the other members of the Council; he would have participated in the prayer and discernment; and he would have been part of the consensus reaching process (we model this consensus approach in these meetings).

### **Exercise 2:**

The second exercise followed on from the discussion at the end of the first Exercise. We set ourselves the target of beginning to craft some statements about our Parish Pastoral Council according to the themes that had come up in Exercise 1 above. To this end, we split into 3 groups with each group having a theme to reflect on and begin to bring together. This exercise took about 15 minutes and each group came back with a group of words and phrases they felt to be important to our task of moving towards establishing a Parish Pastoral Council. The themes and key words/phrases will be kept along with all of the other information from the last two meetings and will form part of the information that the Parish Pastoral Council will receive when they are established. We also agreed that we would review this information at the start of our next session with those people who are presently on holiday (or could not come for another reason) and who will attend the next meeting. The groups and their key words/phrases were as follows:







## **Conclusion:**

This was a very exciting session to be part of. There was a real sense of the group considering in great detail what style of work the Parish Pastoral Council would do. There was also more clarity regarding the role of the Parish Priest and how we envisage the Parish Priest and lay people working together. It was heartening that there was confidence expressed that we could see the Parish Pastoral Council finding a very constructive way of working with Father Brendan, Monsignor Tom and Father Aloysius in the future. We reflected as a group that we were lucky to have the priests we currently have with their experience and their openness to the Living Church process in our Parish.

We did not get time to look at the role of the Chair, Executive Committee, Secretary and ordinary members. We agreed that it was more sensible to deal with that in the next session when we would also look at the skills, qualities and experiences necessary for members of the Parish Pastoral Council.

We finished with prayer and took comfort from a scripture reading from 2Thessalonians3: 14-17:



**“Through the Good News that we brought he called you to this so that you should share the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Stand firm, then, brothers and sisters, and keep the traditions that we taught you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father who has given us his love and, through grace, such inexhaustible comfort and such hope, comfort you and strengthen you in everything good that you do or say.”**

We agreed to meet again on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August in the Parish Centre at 7 p.m. We will begin with a review of this session; move on to look at the roles of the members of the Council and also the skills, experiences and qualities of Council members. It was felt that it was useful to have the notice in the bulletin and for a message of summary and invitation to come from the pulpit on the weekend masses. Jim Deeds agreed to speak at the masses on the weekend of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> August.

Jim Deeds

Living Church 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012