

Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Down and Connor

Parish Pastoral Council

The Parish Pastoral Council is a key group in terms of developing and ensuring the implementation of our Diocesan Plan as well as realising the mission of the Parish. The Pastoral Council is a group made up of the People of God in a particular area, under the spiritual leadership of their Parish Priest who are called to the ministry of servant leadership. Through Baptism and Confirmation, each of us is called to participate fully in the life and mission of the church in our parish. All members of the Church share in the responsibility for fulfilling the Church's mission according to each one's particular charism and roles. The Pastoral Council will be a group who see themselves firstly as a praying, discerning community whose task it is to help those in the Parish fulfil this calling of their baptism.

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 encourages 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)

..it is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is gradually promoted, with respect for vocations and for the respective roles of the consecrated and of lay people. This demands a change in mind-set, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as "collaborators" of the clergy but truly recognized as "co-responsible", for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity. This common awareness of being Church of all the baptized in no way diminishes the responsibility of parish priests. (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009)

“Is pastoral discernment a habitual criterion, through the use of Diocesan Councils? Do such Councils and Parish Councils, whether pastoral or financial, provide real opportunities for lay people to participate in pastoral consultation, organization and planning? The good functioning of these Councils is critical...The spread of bible study groups, of ecclesial basic communities and of Pastoral Councils is in fact helping to overcome clericalism and to increase lay responsibility. ” (Pope Francis, Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America, July 2013)

WHAT IS A PASTORAL COUNCIL? WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Pastoral Council is a Parish group which exists to ensure that parishioners focus on their 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 in the Parish? Pope John Paul said that the Parish is a ‘...**family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit, a welcoming and familial home.**’ This echoes the sentiment of what St. Paul tells us,

‘There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.’ Galatians 3:28

With these thoughts of Parish and community in mind, the Parish Pastoral Council is called to do three things:

- **Review** Pastoral Matters: in other words find out what is happening in the Parish and ask what else could be happening
- **Reflect:** they pray, discuss and discern these matters
- **Recommend:** they recommend practical ways forward to enhance the mission of the Parish according to their planned Pastoral Themes

In order to do this, the Parish 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 mission of existing groups in the parish
- liaise with existing Parish committees, for example Safeguarding and Finance
- carefully evaluate 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.

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.’

Consultative

In the Code of Canon Law, the Council is described as ‘consultative’ to the parish priest (Canon 536). The use of the word ‘consultative’ reminds the Pastoral Council that it is the Parish Priest who has ultimate responsibility for decisions regarding the overall mission of the Parish. 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, led 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.’ (Fischer, Mark. F., *Pastoral Councils in Today’s Catholic Parish*, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT, 2001, p196)

This context means that the Parish Priest will not usually set aside the advice of the PPC because he has participated fully in the prayer, discussions and deliberations leading to the decision. However, there may be occasions on which he will choose not to follow the advice of the Pastoral Council due, for example, to some information he holds confidentially or an issue of Church teaching.

Roles and Responsibilities of Parish Pastoral Council Members

There are various roles and responsibilities that members of the Parish Pastoral Council will be called to.

The Parish Priest:

The Parish Priest has been entrusted with the care of the Parish by the Bishop. The Parish Priest (who presides at all Council meetings) seeks counsel and invites the Council to study and reflect on Pastoral issues pertaining to the Parish. By presiding at the meetings of the Council, Parish Priest brings the authority of the Bishop to its work.

His role includes:

- Enabling the process of discernment for appointment of office bearers (according to the Council’s Constitution- see **Appendix III**)
- Enabling the process of discernment of new office bearers when a position becomes vacant or is not being fulfilled
- Encouraging the council to have a pastoral, whole parish and Pastoral

Community perspective on what they are about and to plan ahead

- Ensuring that there is on-going formation for the group
- Setting the agenda with the chairperson and secretary
- Giving direction when necessary
- Maintaining the connection with the diocese and the wider community.

He also gathers the Executive Committee.

The Chair:

The chairperson's task is to follow the agenda, to start and end on time, and to give everyone a chance to speak and be heard. S/he facilitates the meeting. In this way, the Chair's role is to combine the skills of practical chairing with those of facilitation to ensure that all members of the Pastoral Council have an opportunity to be heard. In this way their tasks include:

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 differences of opinion when they arise
- 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
- Preparation of a yearly report to the Bishop (see **Appendix II**)

The Chair is chosen from the members of the Council for a maximum of one term of the PPC's office and may have a Vice-Chair.

The Secretary:

The secretary keeps a record of meetings, a record that reflects whether or not the meetings achieved the agenda. S/he circulates relevant material to the members. The secretary is chosen from among the members of the PPC.

The Executive Committee:

The Executive Committee usually consists of the Parish Priest, the Chair and the Secretary of the Parish Pastoral Council. The Executive of the Pastoral Council 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 Parish.

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

The Prayer Leader:

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.

The person nominated to lead prayer at the PPC creates a central focus, choosing a prayer that relates to the particular meeting. It is recommended that the prayer leader is aware of the agenda well in advance of the meeting and shapes the prayer according to the themes on the agenda. They are responsible for any photocopying of prayers for the other members. They can be nominated at the end of one meeting or agreed for the whole year as part of planning.

See **Appendix I** for a further discussion on prayer in the life of the PPC

All members:

Each person, regardless of holding an office, is called to do the following:

- **Attend** - commit to regular attendance at the PPC,
- **Grow** - in knowledge of the Parish and the mission, as well as our own faith,
- **Assist** - where possible in the activities suggested in the Pastoral Plan for the Parish,
- **Participate** - fully in the deliberations,
- **Emulate** - Christ and His Way.

HOW DOES A PASTORAL COUNCIL WORK?

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. The PPC can agree within their Constitution how many meetings they will have during the year (it may be that there will be no meetings during the summer months for example).

Planning Days/ Days of Retreat

Each Parish Pastoral Council will have at least one full day's training/ reflection/ planning per year. This is an opportunity to deepen their understanding of their mission; to develop their pastoral themes for their Parish and to bond together as a group. These days should be prayerful as well as business like. Parish Pastoral Councils may give consideration to these days being facilitated by someone outside their own Council.

Developing a Pastoral Plan

Through consultation with the people of the Parish, the Council develops a Plan to enable the people to grow in their relationship with God and the Church. This plan identifies pastoral themes and action points, and builds on previous initiatives in the Parish, so that what has already taken place is respected and used as the foundation for further growth. Regular and on-going communication and consultation with people in the Parish 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, and that the Pastoral Council finds willing co-workers to enable the Plan to be made a reality. The Parish Pastoral Plan should also be clearly linked to the Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

'Since one of the functions of a PPC 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.' (Anning, Cecelia, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils (Third Edition)*, Faith and Life, Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007, p43)

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.' (Harrington, Donal, *The Welcoming Parish*, Columba Press, Dublin, 2005, p95)

b) Agenda

The agenda (as well as the minutes of the previous meeting) should be circulated to members one week in advance of the meeting, to enable them to begin prayerful consideration of the matters that will be discussed.

When compiling the agenda, the Executive Committee 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, two or three 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.

d) Minutes 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 Parish Pastoral Council to the people of the Parish

Because the minutes of the Parish Pastoral Council meetings may 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, bulletins and websites. The Pastoral Council should have an open Parish Assembly once a year at which members:

- report on the work of the Parish Pastoral Council,
- report on progress made in implementing the Pastoral Plan
- ask for feedback and comments from their fellow Parishioners

The Chair is responsible for the preparation of a yearly report to go to the Bishop's Office. See **Appendix II** for the format of this report which should be no more than 3-4 pages long.

f) Evaluation

Regular consideration is given to evaluating issues that have been on the agenda and the ways in which these have been actioned.

g) Sub-groups

The Council's work is not to carry out the Pastoral Plan, but to encourage, invite and support others throughout the Parish 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 Parish, confident that God always gives the gifts the community needs for the community's needs.

h) Confidentiality

Members of the Parish Pastoral Council should feel free to speak honestly at the meeting and to have their confidentiality respected. In this way, while it is essential to communicate to the wider Parish the discussion and decision taking place, it is not necessary to detail comments of individual members.

Decision Making

There are a number of decision-making models available:

- **Consultative** - Parish Priest makes the decisions after consulting the council for ideas
- **Majority** - A decision is made when the majority of the PPC agrees
- **Delegative** - A decision is passed to a sub group to make
- **Discernment**— Following time for prayer, deliberation and attendant to the movement of the Holy Spirit in all members, a decision is made on the basis of a discerned consensus.

There is no single decision making style that should be applied to all situations. For significant issues, however, a discerned consensus process is recommended as a way of ensuring that there is shared ownership of any decisions made.

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

The Steps in a prayerful effort to know and do God's will through discernment are:

We seek to be FREE

- Freedom of Spirit comes not only with a desire to know God's will but with a determination to do it once it is known.
- Being consciously disinterested about the outcome is the only valid starting point for discernment.
- Trusting God must overflow into trusting the sincerity of others in the discernment process.

We seek CLARITY and INFORMATION

- We need a clear and precise formulation of the question at issue, a statement of genuine alternatives for choice.
- We need to be well informed on the issue at hand, seeking expertise wherever it is to be found.

We engage in honest DIALOGUE as opposed to debate

- We are all ready to search out and present reasons for and against every option.
- No-one 'takes sides'

We seek a clear CONSENSUS accompanied by peace in the Lord

- We arrive at a conclusion by consensus.
- We allow time to test the decision by looking for confirmation from God through the movements of our spirits, through ratification by religious authority, and through experience when carrying out the decision.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PASTORAL COUNCIL

Size

The Pastoral Council consists of 8-15 people: clergy and laity, women and men. This size of group will be reflective of the size of the Parish (with a small Parish community likely to function well with a smaller Pastoral Council and a large Parish requiring a larger Pastoral Council. This will, however, rely on the discernment of the Parish Priest and Parish community) facilitates the active participation of all members, and increases the likelihood of constructive outcomes. Members should be reflective of the whole community in terms of age, gender, cultural diversity etc.

Skills, Qualities and Experience of Pastoral Council Members

While it is important that the Pastoral Council as a whole is a body fit for the purpose of being a praying discerning and wise group, it is useful to remember that people can gain skills and experience as they grow. Qualities speak of who you are. In this way, the requirements for people who sit on Pastoral Councils will be more heavily weighted to their qualities and approach to prayer and consensus reaching rather than particular skill sets and experience. However, the following experiences are necessary for all Pastoral Council members:

- Baptised
- Practicing the Catholic faith

- In full communion with the Church
- A regular attender of Mass in the Parish
- Supporting the Parish through giving of time, energy and finances
- Aware of the nature, role and work of the PPC
- Understanding that you will be working as part of a team

Some examples of useful skills are:

- **Communication Skills**
- **Motivator**
- **Facilitation**
- **Listener**
- **Organiser**
- **Delegator**
- **People management**
- **Leadership**
- **Good listener**
- **Ability to speak the truth**
- **Discerning**
- **Ability to make and act on decisions**

Some useful qualities for members to have are:

- **Vision**
- **Committed**
- **Prudence**
- **Discretion**
- **Adaptable**
- **Eagerness to help in achieving the vision of the Parish/ Diocese**
- **Approachable**
- **Christian integrity**
- **Perseverance**
- **Faith**
- **Prayerful**

Means of appointment

The whole Parish should be informed that there is a process in place to choose new members and what that process entails. Bulletin notices and pamphlets can be useful in letting the Parishioners know what a PPC is and what is expected of its members.

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

The following are some of the possible ways of appointing members:

- Parish Priest chooses the candidates he feels would be suitable
- Parish Priest asks for nominations from within the Parish of those who the whole Parish feel would be suitable and the PPC is drawn from this list.
- An election may be held in the Parish
- The Parish avails of a Diocesan PPC development programme and the PPC is formed following this programme's completion
- Replacement member(s) can be co-opted
- A combination of these methods above

Ex officio members may include, for example; a representative of the schools in the Parish, religious Sisters or Brothers, youth workers.

The Pastoral Council members are not 'representative' of a particular community or area of concern, and, further, the Pastoral Council does not function as a kind of parliament.

Term of office

The term of office for a PPC is three years. No member should serve more than two consecutive terms of office before leaving the PPC for at least one period of three years.

It is highly recommended that a newly formed Pastoral Council remain unchanged (if possible) for a two year period. After two

years, it is suggested that a third of the membership leaves and is replaced by new members who will begin to serve for a three year period. In this way, within every three year cycle there should be some of the PPC who will leave and this will ensure new membership, new energy and new ideas.

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. Every Pastoral Council member should be given a copy of these *Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils* as well as the Constitution of the PPC (see **Appendix III**). It is worth remembering that even one new person in a group changes the dynamics of a group, and it becomes a new group.

Change of Parish Priest

Each Parish will have a PPC and therefore a change of Parish Priest will not mean that a Parish will not have a PPC. However, in the circumstances of a change of Parish Priest the current PPC ceases to exist. There are two of options open to the new Parish Priest:

- **The Parish Priest can reconstitute the established PPC.** This may be especially valuable as a means of support for the transition to the new Parish for the new Parish Priest
- **The Parish Priest may decide to form a new PPC** entirely and run a new process (in accordance with the Norms) to establish a new PPC. This new PPC must be in place as soon as is practicable and in accordance with the existing Constitution.

A new Parish Priest should be allowed to direct the Parish free from any pre-imposed preconditions and therefore in the event of a

new Parish Priest commissioning a new PPC or beginning to work with an established PPC, it is reasonable to expect the pastoral plans of the PPC be reviewed and amended according to the new Parish Priest's contribution and the contribution of any new members of the PPC.

Where the position of Parish Priest becomes vacant or in cases of sabbatical leave, illness etc

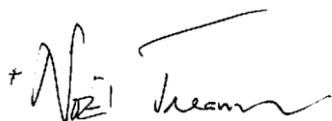
In these circumstances the PPC may remain in existence with the permission of the Bishop. A person delegated by the Bishop to have oversight of the Parish pending the appointment of another Parish Priest will act as President of the PPC.

Constitution

Aided by the Norms each Pastoral Council will fashion its own Constitution which must be approved and endorsed by the Bishop. Whilst taking into account the special needs of the individual parishes the Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils should remain faithful to the basic nature of Parish Pastoral Councils outlined in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Code of Canon Law and this document. (cf **Appendix III** for a template Constitution). A Constitution can be reviewed but it must subsequently be approved and endorsed by the Bishop.

Review of Norms

The above Norms will be reviewed every three years or earlier if so determined by the Bishop. The latest date for the review of these guidelines will be January 2021.



✘ Noel Treanor
Bishop of Down and Connor

5th day of January 2018

APPENDIX I: PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF THE PASTORAL COUNCIL

Prayer 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. At the Beginning of the New Millennium”

(*Tertio Millennio Ineunte*), para 38

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.

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.

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. 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.

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.

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?
- 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.

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 Parish, the diocese, 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*, a collection of over 100 prayer resources. (Harrington, Donal and Kavanagh, Julie, *Prayers for Parish Groups*, Dublin: The Columba Press, 1998).

Appendix II: Format for Annual Report to the Bishop

Parish:

Year of Reporting:

Introduction: (for example names of the members of the PPC, offices held, number of meetings held within the year)

Pastoral Priorities for the Year being reported:

Specific Tasks/ Events/ Undertaking during the year:

Progress/Impact within the Parish of these events:

Plans for the coming year:

Retreat/ Training/ Formation Undertaken:

Concluding remarks:

SIGNED PARISH PRIEST / ADM:

DATE:

SIGNED CHAIR:

DATE:

Appendix III: Constitution Template

(Must be written by the PPC according to local circumstances and following deliberations in keeping with the Diocesan Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils)

TITLE: Constitution of **(insert name)** Parish Pastoral Council

DEFINITION

The Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) is a Parish group which exists to ensure that we focus on our vocation 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? In this respect they we called to do three things:

- **Review** Pastoral Matters: in other words to find out what is happening in the Parish and to ask what else could be happening
- **Reflect:** we pray, discuss and discern these matters
- **Recommend:** we recommend practical ways forward to enhance the mission of the Parish according to our planned Pastoral Themes

In the Code of Canon Law, the Council is described as ‘consultative’ to the parish priest (**Canon 536**). The use of the word ‘consultative’ reminds the Pastoral Council that it is the Parish Priest who has ultimate responsibility for decisions regarding the overall mission of the Parish. Together we are co-responsible for building a vital Christian community focused on living and promoting the Gospel values of love, justice and peace. The Gospel mandate of mutual love, listening and understanding should prevail among all members of the Parish Pastoral Council.

MISSION STATEMENT

Examples below (please adapt as necessary):

“Inspired by the Holy Spirit and guided by God’s love, the Parish Pastoral Council of the Parish of *(insert name)* aims to enable parishioners to move closer to God and to promote an inclusive, vibrant Parish.”

“We, the Pastoral Council of the Parish of *(insert name)*, inspired by the love of Jesus, will develop a vibrant and inclusive spiritual community which welcomes the active participation of everyone in the faith life of the Parish.”

PURPOSE

To assist the Parish Priest in his leadership role of planning, organising, initiating, promoting, coordinating and reviewing evangelism, worship, religious education and various spiritual, pastoral or communal activities within the parish.

AIMS

The PPC will aim to fulfil its role by:

- (i) Growing in knowledge and awareness of what is already happening in the parish.
- (ii) Encouraging and supporting the good work of existing groups within the parish.
- (iii) Searching out and responding to the hopes, ideas, needs and concerns of parishioners.
- (iv) Evaluating information gathered in order to inform decisions that reflect the values of the Gospel and teachings of the Church.
- (v) Setting long and short-term goals for the parish, taking into account the Diocesan Pastoral Plan.
- (vi) Providing opportunities for parishioners to grow in their relationship with God and with each other.
- (vii) Developing, implementing and improving parish initiatives that assist parishioners in their continuing efforts to live as effective Christians in society.

MEMBERSHIP

- (i) The Parish Priest/ Administrator will be an *ex officio* member and will be the President of the PPC.
- (ii) Any assistant priest assigned to the Parish, an assigned Parish Sister or other pastoral associates appointed by the Bishop are *ex officio* members.
- (iii) The PPC will have a three year term of office during which some members of the PPC will retire with new members selected.
- (iv) Members of the PPC (excluding *ex officio* members) will serve for a maximum of two terms of office before being required to retire for at least one further term before being eligible for consideration for membership once more.
- (v) Including *ex officio* members there will be a minimum of eight and a maximum of fifteen members of the PPC, all shall be aged 18 years or older and drawn from those who are:
 - Baptised as a Catholic, or a previously baptised non-Catholic who has been formally received into the Catholic Church
 - Practicing their faith
 - In full communion with the Catholic Church
 - A regular attender of Mass in the Parish
 - Supporting the Parish through giving of time, energy and finances
 - Aware of the nature, role and work of the PPC
 - Understanding that he/she will be working as part of a team

THE METHOD OF SELECTING PPC MEMBERS SHALL BE AS FOLLOWS:

- (i) Enter the way(s) in which the PPC will be formed (e.g. by appointment by the Parish Priest, by election, by a combination of both appointment and election etc etc)
- (ii) A **Chairperson**, **Vice Chairperson** and **Secretary** will be appointed from among the PPC members. An office bearer will hold office for no more than one 3 year cycle of the PPC. A full list of appointees will be displayed on the notice board in the church porch.

(iii) The Parish Priest will be responsible for enabling the process of discernment for the appointment of office bearers for the PPC and replacing office bearers when a position becomes vacant or is not being fulfilled.

(iv) Any member who misses more than two consecutive meetings without explanation will be deemed to have resigned from the PPC and will be replaced in accordance with the method of selecting members

(v) Each person appointed to the PPC will receive a copy of this Constitution and the Diocesan Norms for PPC's.

(vi) A priest delegated by the Bishop to have oversight of the Parish in the legitimate absence (e.g. sickness, administrative / sabbatical leave) or death of the Parish Priest and/or pending the appointment of a new Parish Priest, will act as President of the PPC. In these circumstances the PPC will remain in existence with the permission of the Bishop.

(vii) When a new Parish Priest or Administrator is appointed the PPC ceases to exist.

There are two of options open to the new Parish Priest:

- The new Parish Priest can reconstitute the previously established PPC. This may be especially valuable as a means of support for the transition to the new Parish for the new Parish Priest
- The new Parish Priest may decide to form an entirely new PPC and run a new process (according to the Diocesan Norms and existing PPC Constitution) to establish a new PPC. This new PPC must be in place as soon as is practicable.

EXECUTIVE GROUP

There will be an executive group, consisting of the Parish Priest, Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Secretary. They will be responsible for agreeing the agenda of each meeting and the on-going formation of the PPC.

MEETINGS

(i) Meetings will be held **[insert frequency]**, or more frequently as required, and will start and end with prayer. Meeting dates will be publicised in advance.

(ii) Items for the agenda may be sought from individual Parish Pastoral Council members and parishioners. Any such item is to be submitted in written form to the Parish Pastoral Council secretary at least fourteen days in advance.

(iii) The agenda and previous minutes will be circulated to members one week in advance of the next meeting.

(iv) Meetings will normally last for no more than two hours.

(v) Recommendations of the PPC will be made through working towards discerned consensus when possible, taking account of the views of each member of the PPC and arriving at an agreement. **[expand on this section according to the conclusions reached in deliberations on decision making]**

(vi) A quorum at Council meetings shall comprise 50% of members including at least one Office bearer.

(vii) The Council shall have power to appoint sub-committees. Each sub-committee shall have a Chairperson and Secretary.

(viii) As President of the PPC, the Parish Priest may decide to convene and chair an extraordinary meeting if and when he considers it necessary.

ANNUAL REPORTING

(i) The PPC will arrange an annual parish assembly for all parishioners to attend. This will provide an opportunity to review and reflect on the working of the PPC and the life of the parish, and plan for the future.

(ii) The PPC will provide an annual report to the Bishop (**see appendix II of the Diocesan Norms for the format of this report**).

PLANNING DAYS/ DAYS OF RETREAT

Populate this section taking into account what is written in the Diocesan Norms e.g.

“Each Parish Pastoral Council will have at least one full day’s training/ reflection/ planning per year. This is an opportunity to deepen their understanding of their mission; to develop their pastoral themes for their Parish and to bond together as a group. These days should be prayerful as well as business like. Parish Pastoral Councils may give consideration to these days being facilitated by someone outside their own Council.”

DEVELOPING A PASTORAL PLAN

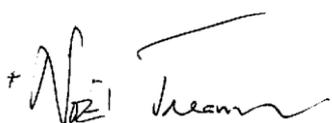
Populate this section taking into account what is written in the Diocesan Norms e.g.

“Through consultation with the people of the Parish, the Council develops a Plan to enable the people to grow in their relationship with God and the Church. This plan identifies priorities for action and energy, and builds on previous initiatives in the Parish, so that what has already taken place is respected and used as the foundation for further growth. Regular and on-going communication and consultation with people in the Parish 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, and that the Pastoral Council finds willing co-workers to enable the Plan to be made a reality.”

AMENDMENT OF THIS CONSTITUTION

The Constitution may be amended by the PPC with the approval of the Parish Priest and the Bishop.

This Constitution has been approved by Bishop Noel Treanor, Bishop of Down and Connor:

SIGNED 
 + Noel Treanor
 Bishop of Down and Connor

DATE: 5th day of January 2018