



Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Lancaster

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In his Apostolic Exhortation *At the Beginning of the New Millennium*, Pope John Paul II stated that ***“the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptised and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church’s life.”*** The *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity of Vatican II* noted that as: ***“Participants in the function of Christ, priest, prophet and king, the laity have an active part of their own in the life and action of the Church... Nourished by their active participation in the liturgical community... they should develop the habit of working in the parish in close union with their priests, of bringing before the ecclesial community their own problems, world problems and questions regarding personal salvation, to examine them together”.***

Parish Pastoral Councils, like so many other structures, are only useful if they enable us to engage in the mission of the Church more fruitfully. Unless they give expression to the needs and mission of the local Church they are but ‘talk-shops’. It is important that they reflect upon the Mystery of Christ and respond to His teaching in the light and spirit of the Beatitudes :

“Blessed [are] the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed [are] they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed [are] the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed [are] they who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed [are] the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed [are] the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed [are] the peacemakers: for they shall be called children of God”. (Mt 5)

With the above in mind, I re-iterate yet once again, the need for all parishes in the Diocese to have a Parish Pastoral Council in place as soon as possible.

The role of a Parish Pastoral Council is set out in Canon 536 of the Code of Canon Law:

§1. If, after consulting the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish. 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.

§2. The pastoral council has only a consultative vote, and it is regulated by the norms laid down by the diocesan bishop.

Parish Pastoral Councils are not an end in themselves, but are at the service of mission and evangelization. Parish Pastoral Councils should enable priests and people to work together to build up a dynamic Christian community that is characterised by faith, mission, worship and service.

In particular they should facilitate the coordination of parish services regarding:

- proclaiming the Word of God and developing faith formation, especially for the young,
- fostering the sacramental, liturgical and prayer life of the parish,
- supporting marriage and family life,
- enabling the lay faithful to carry out their particular vocation of shaping society in accordance with the Gospel.
- strengthening commitment to social justice and caring for the poor and marginalised,

Parish Pastoral Councils should also:

- encourage leadership in reaching out to young people and engaging them in their journey of faith;
- look to welcoming new members into their communities and ensure that people of different nationalities and culture find their place in the liturgy and parish life;
- address the particular social challenges of the parish and ensure that the parish community is sensitive to the needs of all.

In order to carry out this mission, Parish Pastoral Councils should see their task in terms of:

Prayerfully discovering the needs of the parish and involving everyone in a response.

Enabling the baptised to discover their call as Disciples of Christ.

Providing the necessary structures that will marry the needs of the parish with the many gifts and resources of the community.

Ensuring that all voices within the parish, the diocese and the wider community are heard and respected.

Reviewing the life and activities of the parish so that these are seen to foster the Mission of the Church.

The following Diocesan norms should form the basis for the introduction or development of Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese. I pray that Parish Pastoral Councils will be fruitful instruments of evangelization, mission and service in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Patrick O'Malley", is written above a horizontal blue line.

Bishop of Lancaster, 1 February 2006

Diocesan Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils

1. *Establishment*

A Parish Pastoral Council should be established and operative in each parish in the Diocese by the Fifth Sunday of Easter 2006. A review process will be initiated in two years time with a view to establishing definitive norms across the Diocese for such councils.

2. *Guidelines*

Aided by the general framework provided by this document, each Pastoral Council will fashion its own guidelines. (A structure for the parish guidelines is appended to this document). Whilst taking into account the special needs of the individual parishes the guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils should remain faithful to the basic nature of Parish Pastoral Councils outlined in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the Code of Canon Law.

The Finances of the Parish are catered for by the Finance Committee which is obligatory by Canon Law. Such a committee may or may not however, fall under the general oversight of the Parish Pastoral Council.

3. *Membership*

Members shall be baptised Catholics who participate in the life and worship of the parish and are available to attend a minimum of half the meetings in the space of one year.

3.1. *Selection of Members*

Parishes must decide upon a method of selecting members that is appropriate to their own particular situation. Some of these options include:

Elections by the parish community

Nomination and discernment

Selection of representatives from parish organisations

Selection by the Parish Priest in consultation with assistant priests, deacons and/or with the present council members

In some cases it may be decided to precede the selection of Members by the holding of a Parish Assembly to inform all parishioners of the nature of Parish Pastoral Councils and of the Process for selection.

3.2. Composition of the Parish Pastoral Council

The guidelines for the Parish Pastoral Council shall state the number of:

Ex officio members, which should include all those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral ministry in the parish (Parish Priests, Assistant Priests, Deacons, Parish Sisters), Representatives of each separate Eucharistic community (i.e. Chapel-of-ease) where these exists, a representative of the parish finance committee;

members selected by the parish in general;

parishioners who are appointed because of their expertise in particular fields;

Ex officio members should not exceed 40% of the total membership

3.3. Representation

A broad representation of the whole parish is the ideal; what is essential is that the members of the council undertake to be representative of the whole community and focus on what is best for the whole parish not individual parish groups.

3.4. On-going formation

Prayer, reflection and skills training are of paramount importance. To ensure that the Council is effective on-going formation should be provided for every member of the Parish Pastoral Council.

3.5. Period for Membership

Elected and appointed members of the Parish Pastoral Council are to have terms of office. The term should be no shorter than two years and no more than four years initially, with the possibility of reappointment for one or more terms, according to the needs of each parish. If this is the case then it needs to be stated how many times the person may be reappointed - the period of time in-between appointments also needs to be stated.

In the current interim period, all appointments should be made provisionally until June 2007.

The parish might consider having staggered terms to maintain a minimum of stability and efficiency.

On the appointment of a new Parish Priest, it is recommended that the composition and membership of the Council be reviewed within one year.

It is suggested that the Parish Pastoral Councils should consist of between 10 to 15 members.

4. Officers

At least three officers should be mentioned in the parish guidelines: president, chairperson, and secretary.

4.1. President

The Parish Priest or Priest-in-Charge (even if not resident) has been entrusted with the care of the parish by the bishop; he convokes the meetings and is the president of the Council. In extra-ordinary situations the Parish Priest as President may after consultation with the dean or bishop, suspend or dissolve the Parish Pastoral Council with a view to its re-formation.

4.2. Chairperson

The chairperson is elected by the members of the Council for a determined period of time with an option for renewal. The role of the chairperson is to prepare the agenda with the president and the secretary and to facilitate the meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council. Parishes might wish to appoint a Vice Chairperson to assist the Chairperson.

4.3. Secretary

The secretary is responsible for keeping a record of the meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council and for circulating relevant material to the Council members. The secretary could be elected for a renewable term of office; alternatively parishes might decide to appoint a secretary who is not a member of the Council as the task may limit participation in a meeting.

4.4. Responsibilities of all members

Responsibilities will differ according to the needs of the individual parishes but in general the members of the Council will be required to:

- attend regular meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council
- provide input to deliberations of the Council
- assist where possible with the implementation of Parish policies
- grow in knowledge and awareness of what is happening in the parish.
- take part in the training/induction of all new Council members and avail of on-going formation.

5.1. Meetings

The guidelines of the Parish Pastoral Council should specify the frequency of the meetings. Some parishes may need to meet monthly while others may choose less frequent meetings. The minimum requirement for meeting is four times a year.

5.2. Process

The collaboration between the Parish Priest and the Parish Pastoral Council is integral to each stage of the parish decision-making process. In virtue of his office the Parish Priest

presides over and ratifies all stages of the process leading up to and including final choices and implementations. This collegial process respects the authority of the Parish Priest and the integrity, expertise and deliberations of the members of the Council. Above all, the Gospel mandate of mutual love, listening and understanding, should prevail among all the members of the Council.

5.3. Agenda

The agenda for each meeting will be finalised by the secretary, chairperson and the president of the Council and should be circulated to Council members in advance of the meeting, together with any notes or other relevant material required. Minutes of the meeting will be circulated at an agreed time after the meeting has taken place.

A period of time should be set on the agenda for prayer and reflection

5.4. Quorum

Parishes must determine the minimum number of members who must attend the meeting and state which members are to be included. In general the minimum number of members required is one over one half. A legitimate *quorum* must include the Parish Priest or Priest-in-Charge.

6. Committees

The Parish Pastoral Council exists to coordinate the various parish initiatives of evangelization and pastoral action including the work of standing and *ad hoc* committees. *Included here are some suggested core committees:*

Liturgy – a committee responsible for overseeing arrangements for the provision of and training opportunities for readers, ministers of holy communion, choir, altar servers, sacristans, welcomers, bell ringers, collectors, etc., also provision for childrens' liturgy and other services in the absence of the Priest, Rosary groups, opportunities for prayer, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

Pastoral Works – ensuring provision for: Sacramental programmes, taking Holy Communion to the sick and housebound, visiting the lonely and the bereaved, youth groups, making ecumenical contacts and carrying out other outreach work in the Community.

Administration - ensuring volunteers to prepare news-bulletin, listing Mass intentions, organising the piety stall and newspaper sales, Missalettes, etc., seeing to requirements for the Sanctuary and Sacristy, overseeing good practice for protection of children and vulnerable persons, updating notice boards, book-keeping all Parish records, etc.

Property and Graveyard - to ensure secure keyholders, security, caretaking, cleaning, flower arranging, controlling heating, arranging electrical and other inspections, organising grounds' maintenance, repairs and servicing of equipment, etc., liaising with Undertakers, Monumental Masons and others if a parish has its own graveyard available for burials.

Social Events and Fund Raising - a committee responsible for organising 'after Mass' coffee mornings, social evenings, other Parish get-togethers, parish fairs and raffles, bingo, youth and pre-school activities.

6.1. *Ad Hoc Committees*

Ad hoc committees may be set up for specific purposes and with a definite time limit, e.g. planning a centenary celebration for the parish, ordinations etc.

7. *Diocesan Support*

In order to further facilitate parishes, the Diocese is committed to managing resources, training and on-going formation at deanery level under the guidance of each Vicar Forane (Dean) and Deanery Pastoral Council.