

DIOCESE OF MEATH

Best Practice for Parish Pastoral Assemblies 2023-2026



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INTRODUCTION

In the Encyclical, ‘The Joy of the Gospel’, Pope Francis urges the entire Church “to embark on a new chapter of evangelism”. He firmly believes the parish is not an outdated institution, precisely because it possesses great flexibility, creativity, generosity of spirit, and parishioners on fire with the Holy Spirit who are willing to share in Christ’s mission of evangelisation. Speaking of the vibrancy and responsiveness of the parish, Pope Francis applauds the dynamic nature of the parish as it adapts to the contours of the pastoral landscape in a spirit of openness, dialogue, co-responsibility, and compassion. If a parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, is missionary in nature, supported in prayer, and open to the Holy Spirit, it will continue to be ‘the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters’¹

At the opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome, Pope Benedict XVI asked what paths can be taken to evangelise all the baptised. He asked that we ‘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 recognised as ‘co-responsible....thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature committed laity.’²

At parish level, structures such as Parish Pastoral Councils expresses this shared responsibility of all the baptised for the mission of Christ. The pastoral leadership provided by Parish Pastoral Councils furthers this work of the Church in a genuine spirit of collaboration, dialogue, prayer, discernment and pastoral action. Pope Francis endorsed the work of Parish Pastoral Councils when he said, “How necessary pastoral councils are! A Bishop cannot guide a Diocese without pastoral councils. A Parish Priest cannot guide without pastoral councils.”³

These norms are a guide to structured leadership within a parish in the Diocese of Meath. They offer a basic structural outline for Parish Pastoral Assemblies and supports best practice structures already existing in the Diocese of Meath.

1. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, n. 28
2. Benedict XVI, opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the Theme: ‘Church and Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility’, 26 May 2009.
3. Congregation for the Clergy, “The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church”, 20 July 2020, n.108
4. Pope Paul VI, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 18 November, 1965, n. 1

CHURCH AS THE ‘PEOPLE OF GOD’ – *FIT FOR MISSION*

1. The Second Vatican Council (1961-1965) defined Church as the ‘People of God’ specifically in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Within this new self-understanding, Vatican II strongly affirmed that all the baptised share in their ‘proper and indispensable role in the mission of the Church’.⁴ This informed definition of ‘church’ led to the development of new mechanisms for a shared responsibility for the mission of Christ.
2. The Council’s Decree on the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* stated: ‘The laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world.’⁵ It articulated the mission of the ‘people of God’ when it said, ‘They exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, their temporal activity openly bears witness to Christ and promotes the salvation of men. Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardour of the spirit of Christ.’⁶
3. Drawing on the conciliar documents, an introductory canon in the Code of Canon Law speaks of Church as the ‘People of God’ and states: ‘Christ’s faithful are those who, since they are incorporated into Christ through baptism, are constituted the people of God. For this reason, they participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ. They are called, each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world.’ (Can. 204 §1)
4. In developing new mechanisms for a shared responsibility for the mission of Christ, the Council urged the establishment of councils ‘which assist the apostolic work of the Church either in the field of evangelization and sanctification or in the charitable, social, . . . and here it is fitting that the clergy and Religious should cooperate with the laity.’⁷ While preserving the proper character and autonomy of each organization, these councils will be able to promote the mutual coordination of various lay associations and enterprises.

5. Pope Paul VI, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 18 November, 1965, n. 3

6. Cf. *ibid*, n 2

7. Cf. *ibid*, n. 26

5. “What does it mean to be the People of God?”, Pope Francis asked in a weekly audience. “Being the Church, being the People of God, means being God’s leaven in this our humanity”, and the mission of the People of God, the Pope continued, is “to bring God’s hope and salvation to the world: to be a sign of the love of God who calls all to friendship with him.”⁸

6. The Council expressed its earnestness in this developed understanding of the People of God when it ‘earnestly entreats all the laity in the Lord to answer gladly, nobly, and promptly the more urgent invitation of Christ in this hour and the impulse of the Holy Spirit.’⁹ The gifts of the Holy Spirit expressed in the ministries and charisms are given for the building up of the Body of Christ and for its mission of salvation in the world. Indeed, the Church directed and guided by the Holy Spirit, calls each in an individual way, active and co-responsible.

7. This call to active, co-responsible participation by the laity in the mission of the Church also has foundation in Scripture:

‘Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace and its various forms.’ (1 Pet 4:10)

‘The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour (Luke 4:18-19). The mission of Jesus is clearly defined in this passage from the Gospel of Luke and in turn defines the mission and pastoral action of every local church.

8. *Christifideles Laici*, brings focus on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world. *Church communion then is a gift, a great gift of the Holy Spirit*, to be gratefully accepted by the lay faithful, and at the same time to be lived with a deep sense of responsibility. This is concretely realized through their participation in the life and mission of the Church, to whose service the lay faithful put their varied and complementary ministries and charisms.¹⁰

8. Francis, General Audience, 12 June 2013, n.4,5

9. Pope Paul VI, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 18 November, 1965, n. 33

10. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 30 December 1988, n.20

9. Collaboration is at the heart of the ideal Parish Pastoral Assembly. Mindful of Christ's prayer at the Last supper: 'that all may be one' (Jn. 17:21), when ordained and lay members of Christ's faithful understand their role and ministries as complementary and their purposes are joined to the one mission and ministry of Jesus Christ, the work of evangelisation is truly realised.
10. The theological significance of Parish Pastoral Councils is supported in '*The Pastoral Conversion of the community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church*' when it states, 'The theological significance of the Pastoral Council is inscribed in the constitutive reality of the Church, that is, in her being "the Body of Christ", that generates a "spirituality of communion". In the Christian community, in fact, the diversity of charisms and ministries that derive from incorporation into Christ and from the gift of the Holy Spirit may never be homogenised until they become "uniformity, the obligation of doing everything together and all as equals, of always thinking the same thing in the same way". On the contrary, in virtue of the baptismal priesthood, every member of the faithful is created for the building up of the whole Body and, at the same time, the whole People of God, in the reciprocal co-responsibility of its members, participates in the mission of the Church, that is, discerning in history the signs of the presence of God and becoming witnesses of His Kingdom.'¹¹

11. Congregation for the Clergy, "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church", 20 July 2020, n.109

SECTION 1

UNDERSTANDING 'PARISH'

1. According to the *Code of Canon Law* (1983), 'A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop.' (Can. 515)
2. Quoting the Code of Canon Law, the Catechism gives a fuller expression, when it says:

"It [the parish] is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ's saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love." (CCC n.2179)
3. Historically the Christian faithful have been gathered together in local faith communities called parishes, which from the Greek *paroikia* indicates a temporary residence on a journey. Our parishes then are our homes while we are pilgrims on our faith journey to God, and as with any home, they provide us with shelter, security, and sustenance. Weekly we come together as a family bringing our joys and sorrows, our hopes and disappointments, to place them at the table of the Lord in the Eucharist. From that table we are fed and nourished to bring Good News to the world beyond the faith community.
4. A parish is charged with the mission of the universal church to preach the Good News; to teach; to celebrate the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist; to heal and to liberate in the name of Jesus. Everything a parish undertakes is done in order to fulfil that mission in communion with the local Bishop who unites all parishes with one another and with the universal church.
5. Pope St. John Paul II, in *The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*, stated, 'The ecclesial community, while always having a universal dimension, finds its most immediate and visible expression in the parish.

"A parish is not mainly a structure, a geographical area or a building. The parish is first and foremost a community of the faithful. This is the task of a parish today: to be a community, to rediscover its identity as a community. You are not a Christian all by yourself. To be a Christian means to believe and to live one's faith together with others. For we are all members of the body of Christ.... For fellowship to grow....., the commitment of all parishioners is needed. Each of their contributions is vital."
(Pope St. John Paul II – Draw Near to God)

It is there that the Church is seen locally. In a certain sense [the parish] is the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.’¹² In essence, the parish is a ‘living cell’ of the local and universal Church. ‘It is not principally a territory or a building, but rather the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit, a familial and welcoming home, the community of the faithful.’¹³

6. The Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development, in formulating a framework for Diocesan Norms and Parish Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils understood, “The Church comes to life in local faith communities of dioceses and parishes when members support and care for one another, proclaim and live by the gospel, celebrate the sacred liturgy and work in charity and justice for the good of the whole world....It does this by the quality of the life of its members, its community life and worship, its involvement in the wider community and society of which it is part and especially its solidarity with the poor and needy.”¹⁴
7. In summary, the purpose of the parish is to live out the Catholic Church’s universal mission at a local level. The parish is where the Church lives, where the Gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to ‘renew the face of the earth’ (Ps. 104:30). Parishes are the place where God’s people meet Jesus in Word and Sacrament. We are therefore reminded, ‘It is the responsibility of the parish community and its leadership to ensure that the faith it teaches, preaches and celebrates is alive and that it is a true sign, for all who come in contact with it, that this truly is the living Body of Christ.’¹⁵

12. John Paul II, *The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*, 1988, 26.

13. Cf. *ibid.*

14. Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development Parish Pastoral Councils A Framework for Developing Diocesan Normans and Parish Guidelines, 2007, pp 10&12

15. National Directory for Catechetics – US Bishops, 29C

SECTION 2

THE PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY

Cognisant of the Church's understanding of the role of pastoral councils, and the canonical provision for their establishment, our Bishop has encouraged the formation of a Parish Pastoral Assembly in every parish in the Diocese. The use of the term 'Assembly' is firmly rooted in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (I Cor 12:27). The Pastoral Assembly is an extension of the assembly – the People of God - gathered for worship, which becomes a living symbol of Christ in the world through its pastoral action.

1. The Parish Pastoral Assembly is a faith-filled, consultative body of the faithful, through which priests and people work together as co-responsible partners in furthering the mission of Christ in their own parish. Through this partnership a vibrant Christian community, rooted in baptism and marked by its faith, worship and service is created.
2. To fulfil its role the Parish Pastoral Assembly needs to be a representative body in which the diversity of the parish community is reflected. The Parish Pastoral Assembly maintains an overview of the whole parish and plans strategically to ensure that the faith of the community is nurtured and its mission [to evangelise], served.¹⁶
3. The *Code of Canon Law* (1983) sets itself the task of giving legal expression to the role of Parish Pastoral Assemblies [Councils]. The decision that Parish Pastoral Assemblies are to be established is the responsibility of the Bishop:
 - §1 If, after consulting the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a Parish 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 by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral care in the parish, give their help in fostering pastoral action.
 - §2 A pastoral council possesses a consultative vote, and it is regulated by the norms established by the diocesan bishop. (Canon 536, § 1-2)

16. Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development: Living Communion – Vision and Practice for Parish Pastoral Councils in Ireland Today, 2011, p29

4. Pastoral

The Assembly is '*Pastoral*'. In other words, its primary concern is promoting '*pastoral action*', not administration, buildings, asset management, finance, appointment of staff, all of which are the responsibility of other groups in the parish.

5. "Each parish is to have a finance council which is regulated by universal law as well as by norms issued by the diocesan bishop; in this council the Christian faithful, selected according to the same norms, aid the pastor in the administration of parish goods." (Canon 532)

6. It goes without saying, the Parish Pastoral Assembly and Parish Finance Committee should work closely together in order to facilitate "an organic blending of legitimate diversities"¹⁷ which collectively work together in advancing the mission of the Church in the local context.

7. However, the Parish Pastoral Assembly is concerned with people and the Christian faith, hope and love that shapes them into a real, living and caring Community who strive to live as faithful disciples of Jesus in a spirit of service and influence in the wider world. Such an authentic Christian community promotes Gospel values of love, justice and peace, always reaches out beyond itself to bring the good news of the Gospel to others, especially the poor, those on the margins of society.

"Feed my sheep"

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him,

"Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

(Jn. 21: 15-17, 19)

17. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Inuente*, n.46

8. Areas of pastoral focus for a Parish Pastoral Assembly may include:

- Proclamation of the Word of God
- Faith formation and catechesis
- Parish liturgical celebrations and liturgical ministry
- Bringing Catholic insights and action to social issues such as alcohol, drugs, poverty, housing, refugees, etc, which affect the life of the parish
- Support for family life
- Evangelisation
- Effective, vibrant parish communication through social media platforms
- Promoting the prayer life and the faith life of the parish
- Promotion of vocations
- Support for the faith life of young people
- Familiarity with the Scriptures
- Care of people - the poor, elderly, the bereaved, those with additional needs and those who live alone, etc
- Outreach to newcomers to a parish
- Outreach to those on the margins of the Church and society
- Developing appropriate parish policies regarding such issues as the times and number of Masses
- Ecumenism
- Building up good relationships with other Parish Pastoral Councils in the local area, the deanery and the diocese
- Pastoral care of the sick, those in hospital, the dying
- Supporting the implementation of safeguarding children/vulnerable persons policies and procedures
- Outreach to lapsed Catholics or 'new seekers'
- Promoting 'Care for our Common home
- Outreach to ethnic groups
- Ongoing skills training and formation for those on the Parish Pastoral Council and for others in the parish
- Developing broad programmes of renewal and faith formation

The above outline does not detail a comprehensive list of pastoral concerns, nor are they prioritised in any particular order, as each individual parish will have its own particular pastoral needs.

9. Consultative

“Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes.” (St. Paulinus of Nola)¹⁸

The collaboration of all members, ordained, lay and religious, is integral to each stage of the work of the pastoral assembly. The parish pastoral assembly needs to develop ways and means of building its connection with the parish community, gathering the views and wisdom of parishioners and being a channel of communication.

10. In the Code of Canon Law, the Assembly [Council] is described as ‘consultative’ to the parish priest (Can. 536).

11. Members of Parish

Pastoral Assemblies are people of faith who come together as one body to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying in the parish today. Relationships on the Parish Pastoral Assembly are characterised by a spirituality of communion that encourages fruitful dialogue ‘leading to

Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative. Attentively in Christ, let them consider with fatherly love the projects, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity.
(*Lumen Gentium* n.37)

pondered agreement in matters open to discussion.’¹⁹ Consultation in the church is rooted in the understanding of the Church as a community of believers who share in the priestly, prophetic and governing mission of Jesus. It also reflects our belief in the universality of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They respect the diversity of roles and functions of all members, including the hierarchic leadership of the pastor, and together as a unified body they engage in a process of consultative decision-making.

12. The Parish Pastoral Assembly is not a legislative body for issuing decrees or statues on its own behalf or that of the parish priest, but is engaged with the priest in a common search for wisdom. While the Parish Pastoral Assembly needs to be aware of all parish activities; it is not within the scope of the Council to ‘direct’ parish activities.

18. Epistola 23, 36 to Sulpicius Severus: CSEL, 29, 193.

19. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Inuente*, n.45

The priest consults his people because he knows that wisdom resides with them. That wisdom emerges in dialogue. It emerges in the knowledge and common sense of fair-minded people. The task of parish pastoral assembly members is to “represent” by “making present” the wisdom of the parish.²⁰

13. By virtue of his office the Parish Priest presides over and ratifies all pastoral assembly processes, leading up to and including final options and implementations. This collegial process respects the role of the Parish Priest who, in turn, takes into account the integrity, expertise and prayerful deliberations of the members of the pastoral council and of the whole community. While the structures of participation are consultative rather than judicial, this does not mean that they are less meaningful and relevant. The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Parish Priests and the faithful. ‘The spirituality of communion, by prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every member of the people of God, supplies institutional reality with a soul.’²¹
14. The fact that Canon Law describes the Parish Pastoral Assemblies [Council] as ‘*consultative*’ does not mean that the parish priest is free to do his own thing: rather it means that he is called to listen carefully and consider seriously what the assembly is saying and come to a mature decision based on what he has heard.
15. While it is true the parish priest bears the ultimate responsibility and authority for decisions within the parish community, Vatican II emphasises that the parish priest has a clear duty to respect and value the wisdom and insights of all the baptised. It is important to keep in mind the consultative role of the Pastoral Assembly is situated within a context of relationship and shared vision: ‘All Christians are to build community, pray, collaborate with the pastor, lead by example, and be spiritual. But only pastoral assemblies investigate, ponder and propose. They do so, not in an impersonal process, but in a relationship.’²²
16. Canon 127 §2.2^o makes it clear that if members of the Parish Pastoral Council [Assembly] are in agreement, the administrator – in the case of a parish, the parish priest – should not act against them unless he has good reason.

20. Diocese of Kerry – Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils

21. Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church, 2018, n.107

22. Fischer, Mark F., Pastoral Councils in Today’s Catholic Parish, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT, 2001, p.196.

As the official delegate of the diocesan church the parish priest is ultimately responsible for decisions made at parish level and while he should do everything possible to facilitate consensus, his ultimate responsibility is to ensure decisions are made for the overall good of the parish. If a parish priest ever has to stand in opposition to the Parish Pastoral Assembly then it means a breakdown has occurred in communication, in relationships and in the decision making process.²³

17. How each Parish Pastoral Assembly functions is as important as anything it does. It is vital that time be given to prayer and that true listening and genuine dialogue take place at every meeting. Members are encouraged to express their views, to listen to each other and to respect the views of others.
18. The authority of a Parish Pastoral Assembly is ultimately based on the relationship of trust between a parish priest and his assembly.²⁴
19. In the event the pastor and the Parish Pastoral Assembly develop serious and continuous conflict so that they cannot work together productively, the pastor must request the assistance of the bishop in facilitating a reconciliation.

23. Diocese of Raphoe - 'What is a Parish Pastoral Council?' - Resources

24. Diocese of Limerick, Parish Pastoral Councils - New Challenges, New Guidelines, 2015, p.5.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY

- 1. Prayerful.** Prayer is central to the work and life of the parish pastoral assembly as its source of inspiration and vision. This is not book-end prayer that opens and closes meetings but prayer that unites the council in a singular purpose, aims to change hearts and minds, prayer that sincerely searches out the mind of God in relation to the particular parish, a particular meeting, a particular agenda. Prayer is a source of strength and guidance and a group that spends quality time in prayer will be formed into a community of faith at the heart of the parish. Therefore, the Parish Pastoral Assembly devotes time to reflective prayer, grounded in scripture at each meeting. Provision should be made at least once a year for Retreat whereby the council can spend time together solely in prayer, reflection and spiritual sharing.
- 2. Pastoral.** The assembly by its nature is pastoral. Its purpose is to collaborate in planning the spiritual and pastoral needs of the parish in order to build their parish as a living Christian community committed to sharing the Good News. It takes account of the circumstances of the parish, the teaching of the Church, the 'signs of the time' and the reflections of the members of the community in the light of the Gospel.
- 3. Representative.** Care should be taken that a broad representation of all members of the parish is considered for membership. It is important members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly recognise they exercise their responsibility with a concern that includes all parishioners and not just a particular geographic area, age composition, socio-economic background, parish group, cultural group domicile in the parish, or personal interest. Members must be Catholics who participate fully in the life and worship of the parish and have a concern for the parish in which they live and worship.
- 4. Discerning.** Through a prayerful consensus process, the assembly merges the diverse opinions, experiences, skills and gifts of the assembly members, and having listened to, and prayed about parishioners' needs and ideas, discerns recommendations concerning the direction and priorities of the parish 'enabling them to become bread broken for others, to build a more just and fraternal world.'²⁵

25. Archbishop Martin's address to Parish Pastoral Councils, Kilmacud, 2008.

5. Responsive. Only a group which is united in faith and prayer, with an understanding of the Church's mission/purpose, will be able to discern the pastoral and spiritual needs of the parish community and be responsive to those needs. Having considered the strengths and weaknesses of each considered option, the Assembly, in light of parish needs and resources, responds in a way that is inspired by Christian charity, and ensures the faith of the community is nurtured and its mission served.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, "I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (Mt. 25:35-36)

6. Enabling.

Having discerned the needs of the local community, in light of their local situation and Christian mission, the Parish Pastoral Assembly can then enable parishioners to develop their gifts and participate in the pastoral action of the parish, and in this way respond to their baptismal call. In the spirit of God's love, members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly strive to recognise and support each other's gifts and seek ways in which each parishioner's gifts may surface, grow and flourish for the good of the Church. Among parishioners, it results in a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders. The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the laity, can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfil its mission for the life of the world.

(Adapted from: 'Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils', Archdiocese of Boston)

From this we can establish certain characteristics of a Parish Pastoral Assembly. It is:

- an approved structure recommended by the church
- a group that includes both priests and people
- a group that is representative of the parish community
- a group whose role is to help in fostering pastoral action
- a group that is consultative by nature. ²⁶

26. Diocese of Cork and Ross, Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils.

WHY HAVE A PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY?

1. The Parish Pastoral Assembly is a collaborative structure which exists to ensure that we focus on our primary function as Christians: the continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ in our time and place. Dynamic Parish Pastoral Assemblies assist parish priests and parishes by:

- Establishing vibrant leadership in evangelisation
- Offering practical, wise and prudent advice
- Providing oversight of the parish: its outreach and mission, ministries and apostolates, its liturgical and sacramental life
- Evaluating carefully information gathered in order to contribute towards the making of decisions that reflect the values of the gospel and the teachings of the Church
- Setting long term and short term pastoral goals for the parish
- Creating opportunities for pastoral planning in support of the ongoing life and growth of the parish
- Creating supports which enrich the ministry of the priest
- Cultivating holiness and a missionary purpose among parishioners
- Encouraging and supporting the good work of existing groups in the parish
- Motivating parishioners to reach out to lapsed or inactive Catholics
- Offering practical assistance in supporting the laity in the parish to live and communicate the truths of our faith in their particular context in life
- Fostering a spirit of collaboration and cooperation throughout the parish
- Supporting a newly appointed Parish Priest in understanding the history and culture of the parish
- Providing a pivotal support in parishes that do not have a resident Parish Priest
- Anticipating the reaction or response to parish initiatives

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PARISH PASTORAL ASSREMBLY WITH THE DIOCESE AND THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

1. Guided by Teaching and Tradition, He [the parish priest] is to cooperate with his proper bishop and with the *presbyterium* of the diocese. Moreover, he is to endeavour to ensure that the faithful are concerned for the community of the parish, that they feel themselves to be members both of the diocese and of the universal Church, and that they take part in and sustain works which promote this community. (Canon 529 § 2)

2. A parish is not an isolated unit but is part of a diocesan church, “in which the one, holy catholic and apostolic church of Christ is truly present and operative” (Canon 369). The diocese is a living reality, a family of communities made up of the parishes.
Members of a parish, while consciously building communion in the local community, also need to be conscious of their membership of a diocese and of the universal church. While all have a role in maintaining this relationship, the parish priest/pastoral administrator is the official delegate of the diocesan church who is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the parish remains in sacramental and ecclesial communion with the local diocese and the universal Church.²⁷
I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. 1Cor 1:10

3. Individual parishes express their relationship with the diocese by:
 - Drawing on the wisdom and rich traditions of the wider church community.
 - Establishing links with other parishes in the area with a view to strengthening interdependent relationships, sharing resources and ministries, coordinating Mass schedules, facilitating annual/sick leave, planning joint initiatives and learning from each other.
 - Engaging the support of various diocesan agencies and committees.
 - Availing of the resources and assistance from the staff employed by the diocese to work with parishes.

27. Diocese of Raphoe - 'What is a Parish Pastoral Council?' - Resources

- Attending the annual gatherings of pastoral assembly members, meetings of chairpersons and the annual commissioning ceremony for parish assembly members and their families.
- Where appropriate, pooling financial resources for the overall good of the diocese.
- Participating in diocesan gatherings, supporting initiatives promoted by the diocese and sharing concerns raised at grass root level.
- Exploring how best to ‘steward’ the many gifts with which God has blessed the individual, the parish, the deanery and communities within the diocese.
- Contribute to the development of a Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

SECTION 3

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY

1. Vatican II documents speak of parish pastoral assemblies [councils] as “representative” or “reflective of” the People of God. The Church does not understand representation as majority rule nor is it a matter of simply selecting an assembly that mirrors a demographic profile. Representation aims to make present the wisdom that resides in the people of God. ²⁸

2. Canon Law speaks in general terms about the criteria for membership of parish pastoral assemblies. It states that members will be chosen to reflect the wisdom of the entire people of God and they should be in full communion with the Catholic Church, outstanding in firm faith, prudent and have high moral standards. Ideal members are those who have the ability to study, investigate and thoroughly examine pastoral matters. In “A Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils,” Jane Ferguson states that pastoral assembly members should be people of prayer, have missionary zeal, be willing to learn, are collaborative and have the ability to delegate.
(Ferguson, Jane, *A Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2005)

3. **Members of the parish pastoral assembly therefore have a responsibility to:**
 - Listen to the needs of parishioners;
 - Submit agenda items on an agreed date before meeting;
 - Read materials circulated;
 - Prepare agenda items, have points ready especially if responsible for a particular item;
 - Actively listen to the views of others in a non-judgemental manner;
 - Participate in discussion but do not force personal opinions;
 - Carry out actions agreed at meeting;
 - Notify secretary in advance if unable to attend a meeting. ²⁹

4. Size

The Pastoral Assembly consists of 7-12 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 Parish Pastoral Assembly and a large Parish requiring a larger Pastoral Assembly). This will, however, rely on the discernment of the Parish Priest and parish committee/steering group. Members should be reflective of the whole community in terms of age, gender, cultural diversity etc.

28. Diocese of Kerry – Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils

29. C.f. Ibid

Parish Population	Size of Assembly
< 5,000	7
5-10,000	10
>10,000	12

(Please note: the above recommendation is only a guideline.)

5. Skills, Qualities and Experience of Pastoral Assembly Members

While it is important that the Pastoral Assembly 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 Assemblies 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 Assembly members. They should be:

- Baptised
- Practicing the Catholic faith
- In full communion with the Church
- A regular attender of Mass in the Parish
- Be at least sixteen years of age
- 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 ³⁰

30. Diocese of Down and Connor, Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Down and Connor, January 2018, p.8

SECTION 4

SETTING UP A PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY

1. A committee/steering group should be established by the parish priest to oversee the process of establishing a Parish Pastoral Assembly. This group may be constituted from among outgoing members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly. The group takes responsibility for formulating guidelines/parameters which enable a *parish conversation* on Parish Pastoral Assembly to begin. Only a group which is united in faith and prayer, with a sense of common purpose/mission, will be able to proceed in a discerning, Gospel-led way.

2. Having dialogued with the parish priest and parish community, the committee should:
 - clarify their task within a defined timeframe
 - take responsibility for arranging the ‘education and formation’ of the parish community via the parish newsletter, an open information meeting, the Sunday homily, leaflets, speakers, etc)
 - organise the process of securing new members
 - keep the parish community informed at all times
 - coordinate the presentation of the appointed members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly to the parish (social media, weekly newsletter, noticeboards, commissioning liturgy etc)

3. Throughout, the committee should consider ways it can help discerning parishioners:
 - understand how a Parish Pastoral Assembly can further the spiritual and pastoral life of the parish
 - be aware of and build upon the good work already happening the parish
 - to have a whole-parish approach to all their work
 - to be open, flexible and transparent in all their actions
 - articulate the fundamental belief and commitment to prayer and discernment through the invocation of the Holy Spirit
 - recognise and appreciate their God-given gifts and have confidence in their ability to contribute to pastoral leadership in their parish
 - to be cognisant of the criteria for membership of the Parish Pastoral Assembly
 - respond generously to the call from their parish to membership of the Parish Pastoral Assembly

(Adapted from Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development: Living Communion – Vision and Practice for Parish Pastoral Councils in Ireland Today, 2011, Appendix 3, p 62)

4. While Parish Pastoral Assemblies are well established in many parishes, renewing membership – in part, or in full – presents an opportunity for the whole parish to enter more fully in reflection and dialogue, appraising the parish’s needs and giving fuller expression to the co-responsibility of priests and laity for furthering the mission of Jesus in their parish.

5. Where two parishes are grouped together under the pastoral and spiritual leadership of a parish priest, diocesan norms recommend the establishment of a single Parish Pastoral Assembly. In this instance, the committee should engage in dialogue and reflection

with the parish priest and a core-group from each parish to better understand the historical, geographical, faith, financial and cultural

‘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.’³¹

landscape of both parishes. This enables the committee to ensure balanced representation on the soon-to-be formed Parish Pastoral Assembly. In this pastoral context, it is imperative the Parish Pastoral Assembly nurtures a spirit of collaboration for the spiritual and pastoral development of both parishes under the stewardship of one parish priest.

6. Selection of Members

The methods used for designating members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly vary depending on rural/urban context, population, geographical size of the parish, number of distinct pastoral areas/churches within a parish, one/two parishes, etc.

7. Where there has been good preparation in a parish over a period of time, and it has included Open Meetings to discuss the mission and needs of the parish in a context of prayer, this method of discernment honours the parish as a community of believers and as people gifted with the Holy Spirit through Baptism and Confirmation.

31. Anning, Cecelia, Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils (Third Edition), Faith and Life, Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007, p.43.

8. Given the wisdom and experience of local churches, the diocese would advocate three models of election:

(i) **WHOLE-PARISH ELECTION BY NOMINATION**

When the parish has completed its preparatory work and parishioners have been well informed of the intention to set up a Parish Pastoral Assembly - its role and ministry, nominations for membership are sought from all parishioners.

The parish priest and committee should decide on the best process for submitting nominations by a specified closing date.

If the number of nominees falls short of the quota of members required for the Parish Pastoral Assembly, the parish priest should co-opt extra members to reach the required quota.

Possible criteria deployed in selecting members when forming the Parish Pastoral Assembly:

- Desirability for particular liturgical, pastoral or theological competence
- Merit of individuals with specific talent, artistic ability, charisma etc.
- An unrepresented pastoral group (young people, college graduates, newly married couples, religious communities, choirs, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Ministers of the Word, etc)
- Representation from a particular pastoral area or parish in the case of two parishes
- Emphasis on social outreach
- Gender representation

If the number of nominees exceeds the required quota for the Parish Pastoral Assembly, the parish priest and committee should discern the skill-set required on the assembly and prioritise nominees accordingly.

Thereafter, the nominees are invited to an open meeting of instruction, reflection, and prayer, facilitated by someone with experience in this kind of pastoral leadership. Where possible, the open meetings should be modelled on the structure of a regular Parish Pastoral Assembly meeting to give nominees a sense of timing, commitment, and organisation, and the place of prayer in discernment. The quality of presentation, the active engagement of participants and the general conviviality of the meetings are integral to the discernment process.

In order to assist nominees in making an informed decision, these meetings should address:

- Call of the baptised
- Mission of Church and parish
- Collaborative ministry - skills and qualities
- Prayer, discernment and consensus
- Role and function of a Parish Pastoral Assembly
- Holding effective meetings
- Members tasks and responsibilities
- Processes used to select members

When the series of meetings are complete, willing attendees are invited to confirm their names for membership of the Parish Pastoral Assembly.

The committee and parish priest should coordinate the presentation of the new Parish Pastoral Assembly members to their parish at the main Sunday Mass where they are formally given their commission in pastoral ministry. A suggested ‘commissioning ceremony’ template is available in Appendix IV.

(ii) PARISH OPEN MEETINGS

The ‘Parish Open Meetings’ differs from the ‘Whole Parish Approach’ in the manner in which it seeks nominations. At the end of a parish programme of formation those who believe they are called to service in the parish through membership of the Parish Pastoral Assembly are invited to come forward voluntarily to a ‘general assembly’ of nominees.

These nominees are invited to a series of ‘*Discernment meetings*’ facilitated by someone with experience in pastoral leadership. Where possible, the open meetings should be modelled on the structure of a regular Parish Pastoral Assembly meeting to give the nominees a sense of timing, commitment, and organisation, and the place of prayer in discernment. As with the Whole Parish Approach, the quality of presentation, the active engagement of participants and the general conviviality of the meetings are integral to the discernment process. In order to assist nominees in making an informed decision, these meetings should address topics similar to those discussed in the Whole Parish Approach with particular emphasis placed on recognising their ‘*call to serve*’. Nominees need to be mindful of the responsibilities placed on all members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly:

- Actively listening to the needs and concerns of the parishioners
- Attending meetings
- Offering items for the agenda
- Taking part in discussions
- Participating in the process of discernment
- Carrying out tasks that are assigned to them

Through the invocation of the Holy Spirit the parish, represented by those present discerns and ‘calls forth’ membership to the new Parish Pastoral Assembly. When the series of meetings are complete, willing attendees are invited to confirm their names for consideration as members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly.

If the number of nominees falls short of the quota of members required for the Parish Pastoral Assembly, the parish priest should co-opt extra members to reach the required quota. Depending on the number of members co-opted onto the newly formed Parish Pastoral Assembly, the newly formed Assembly may benefit from an induction session to introduce the members to one another and consolidate the Assembly as a pastoral leadership team in the parish. It is important to ensure members are appointed who possess the skills, qualities, experience and expertise necessary to carry out their pastoral ministry.

If the number of nominees exceeds the required quota for the Parish Pastoral Assembly, the parish priest and committee should discern the skill-set required on the council and prioritise nominees accordingly.

As with the Whole Parish Approach, the committee and parish priest should coordinate the presentation of the new Parish Pastoral Assembly members to their parish at the main Sunday Mass where they are formally given their commission in pastoral ministry. A suggested ‘commissioning ceremony’ template is available in Appendix IV.

Induction of new members should include an introduction to the work that has been undertaken by the Parish Pastoral Assembly in recent years. Each member of the Assembly should be given a copy of these *Best Practice for Parish Pastoral Assemblies* as well as the Constitution of the Parish Pastoral Assembly (See Appendix I). It is worth remembering that even one new person in a group changes the dynamics of a group, and it effectively becomes a new group.

(iii) ELECTION BY MINISTRIES

This model presupposes that there are active ministry groups or committees in the parish.

In this procedure and model, each member of the Parish Pastoral Assembly will have served on some specific ministry committee for at least a year before being selected for the Assembly.

When required, the members of each ministry committee (or alternately, all the people involved in a particular area of ministry) nominate several committee members as candidates for the Parish Pastoral Assembly. The ministry committee then elects (or chooses by lot) one of the nominees to serve on the Parish Pastoral Assembly for a specific term determined by the Constitution of the Parish Pastoral Assembly.

In this structure the Parish Pastoral Assembly coordinates and links together the various areas of ministry in the parish: worship, education/faith formation, social justice, stewardship, administration, special needs, etc.

ASSEMBLY COMPOSITION

1. In order to ensure the efficient and effective working of the PPA, membership of each PPA shall consist of the following:

- The priest(s) of the parish in full-time or part-time ministry (*ex officio*).
- A maximum of 10, but no less than five elected parishioners. It is recommended that at least two members be under the age of thirty.
- Any religious or lay person involved in part time or full time pastoral work in the parish (*ex officio*).
Ex officio members include all those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral ministry in the parish. These include Parish Priests, Curates and others in ecclesial roles. *Ex officio* members should not exceed 40% of the total membership.³²
- Parish Safeguarding Representative (*ex officio*). A Parish Child Safeguarding Representative shall be invited to report twice annually to the Assembly and to attend any other meeting of the Assembly that may be considered necessary.
- Up to two additional people may be co-opted by the parish priest in consultation with the elected members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly depending on the needs of the Assembly.

2. If the parish priest decides to co-opt two additional members on to the Assembly because of their expertise, a short meeting should be convened as soon as practically possible by the parish priest after the recruitment process is complete. This should be completed before the Assembly is formally commissioned for ministry.

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

- Attend - commit to regular attendance at the PPA
- Grow - in knowledge of the Parish and the mission, as well as their 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

32. Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Archdiocese of Dublin, May 2021, P4.

TERM OF OFFICE

1. The term of office for membership of the Parish Pastoral Assembly is four years. No member should serve more than two consecutive terms of office before leaving the Parish Pastoral Assembly for at least one period of four years.
2. When a parish becomes vacant due to death, resignation, or transfer of the parish priest, the PPA's term of office ceases. However, in the interest of continuity in the parish's work and mission, it is desirable that the new parish priest would reconvene the Parish Pastoral Assembly at the earliest opportunity but for no longer than two months of his appointment to aid his transition to the new parish. Thereafter, the new parish priest can formally reconstitute the established Parish Pastoral Assembly, or decide to form a new Assembly.
3. Where the position of Parish Priest becomes vacant in cases of sabbatical leave or illness, the Parish Pastoral Assembly 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 Parish Pastoral Assembly.³³

33. Diocese of Raphoe - 'What is a Parish Pastoral Council?' – Resources, P.3.

SECTION 5

APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS

1. At the initial meeting, the newly formed Parish Pastoral Assembly members are tasked with responsibility of electing officers. These officers ensure the efficient and effective management of meetings, prayer, and the implementation of decisions.

2. For the election of the Chairperson and Secretary, each member of the Assembly is invited to write the name of their preferred nominee for either position on a voting slip.

'The Parish Pastoral Assembly [Council] is a dynamic body of people 'in which the complementary and diverse ministries and gifts of all the members.....work together in a spirit of unity and love, in a spirit of communion.' ³⁴

3. Members are not permitted to self-nominate themselves for any officer position.

4. Those nominated are asked whether or not they wish to accept the nomination. If more than one person accepts the nomination, a secret ballot takes place.

5. Where there is an equality of votes after the ballot among the candidates, the position will be filled by drawing lots.

6. Where there are more than two candidates in an election and there is an equality of votes among the top two candidates, the nominee(s) with the lowest number of votes is/are eliminated, allowing for a run-off ballot between the top two candidates. If there is still an equality of votes after this further ballot, then the position will be filled by the drawing of lots. ³⁵

7. If the Parish Pastoral Assembly deems it beneficial to appoint additional 'officers' from among Assembly members, they should do so in an open and transparent manner.

8. **The Executive Committee.** The Executive Committee usually consists of the Parish Priest, the Chairperson, the Vice Chairperson, if deemed necessary, and the Secretary of the Parish Pastoral Assembly.

34. Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Archdiocese of Dublin, May 2021, P5, 5.1.

35. Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Kilmore 2016-2020, P9 ,4.d.

The Executive of the Pastoral Assembly meets between the regular meetings of the Pastoral Assembly 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 Assembly.

9. Parish Priest.

The Parish Priest has been entrusted with the care of the Parish by the Bishop (Canon 515). He therefore is an *ex officio* member of the Assembly and presides over it. He wishes, first of all, to listen to a source of wisdom and counsel larger than his own, believing in a collaborative process where the Spirit's gifts can be shared. He, secondly, implies his trust in the assembly members to work for the good of the parish and thereby empowers them to perform their ministry. He thirdly, enters a covenant with them, agreeing to pursue an issue with them, to hear their recommendation.

10. By virtue of his office, he convokes the meetings and assumes the role of President. By presiding at the meetings of the Assembly, the parish priest brings the authority of the Bishop to its work. His role includes:

- Gathering the Executive Committee
- Enabling the process of discernment for appointment of office bearers (according to the Assembly's Constitution- see Appendix I)
- Encouraging the assembly to have a pastoral, whole-parish 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
- Enabling the process of discernment of new office bearers when a position becomes vacant or is not being fulfilled

11. Chairperson.

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. They facilitate 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 Parish Pastoral Assembly have an opportunity to be heard. In this way their tasks include:

- Keeping the focus of the Assembly 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 Assembly to set realistic short-term and long-term goals for the Assembly
- Ensuring there are outcomes for each agenda item
- Preparation of a yearly report to the Bishop (See Appendix II)

12. The Chairperson is chosen from the members of the Assembly for a maximum of one term of the PPA's office and may have a Vice-Chairperson.

13. Vice-Chairperson.

Each Parish Pastoral Assembly should decide if there is a need to appoint a Vice-Chairperson. The Vice Chairperson acts in the absence of the Chairperson in two instances:

- (i) The Chairperson is unable to attend a scheduled meeting.
- (ii) If the Chairperson finds a personal 'conflict of interest' with a motion on the agenda.

14. The Secretary.

The secretary is chosen from among the members of the PPA for an agreed fixed period. It may be advantageous to rotate the role of Secretary during the term of the Parish Pastoral Assembly.

15. Generally, it is expected the Secretary:

- Prepares the agenda for meetings with the Chairperson, the Parish Priest and other members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly as agreed (this may include feedback from sub- groups)
- Takes the minutes of meetings
- Attends to correspondence
- Distributes minutes and agenda to members before the meeting
- Sends out relevant items for meetings to the parish office for inclusion in the newsletter
- Liaises with the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly where one exists and other groups in the area.

16. Communications Officer

Good and clear communication is essential to all we do as individuals, groups, parishes and Dioceses. The Parish Pastoral Assembly is not a legislative body overseeing decision-making in the parish. They are stewards, working collaboratively with the parish priest in the work of evangelisation with responsibility for building a vibrant Christian community. Therefore, they should be dynamic, open, transparent, and approachable. They are encouraged to ensure good

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' .Rom 10:14-15

two-way communication between the parish and the wider community by drawing upon available expanding technologies, media and expertise (local media, websites, attractive and effective newsletters and bulletins, resources etc.)

17. The Parish Pastoral Assembly may consider appointing a 'Communications Officer' with interest and expertise in this area for communicating the work of the assembly to the parish. It will greatly assist the parish priest and assembly in its purpose to worship God, make new disciples, strengthen social action in line with the social teaching of the Church, and transform communities through the sharing of information, good practice, and good news stories. The Communications Officer should never communicate personal opinions but liaise with the Parish Priest in respect of content and subject matter. In an age of expanding technologies, it is recommended they can ensure the legal framework surrounding data-handling is observed.

18. **The Prayer Leader.** Prayer is an essential part of Pastoral Assembly 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 Assembly meeting creates a central focus, choosing 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 can be nominated at the end of one meeting or agreed for the whole year as part of planning. (See Appendix III for a further discussion on prayer in the life of the PPA.)

GENERAL GROUND RULES FOR PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

(i) Show up on time and come prepared

Be prompt in arriving to the meeting and in returning from breaks.
Be prepared to contribute to achieving the meeting goals.
Read the meeting agenda and meeting documents before the meeting.
Come to the meeting with a positive attitude.

(ii) Stay mentally and physically present

Be present, and don't attend to non-meeting business.
Listen attentively to others and don't interrupt or have side conversations.
Treat all meeting participants with the same respect you would want from them.

(iii) Contribute to meeting goals

Participate 100% by sharing ideas, asking questions, and contributing to discussions.
Share your unique perspectives and experience, and speak honestly.
If you state a problem or disagree with a proposal, try to offer a solution.

(iv) Let everyone participate

Share time so that all can participate.
Be patient when listening to others speak and do not interrupt them.
Respect each other's' thinking and value everyone's contributions.

(v) Listen with an open mind

Value the learning from different inputs, and listen to get smarter.
Stay open to new ways of doing things, and listen for the future to emerge.
You can respect another person's point of view without agreeing with them.

(vi) Think before speaking

Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
It's OK to disagree, respectfully and openly, and without being disagreeable.

(vii) Stay on point and on time

Respect the groups' time and keep comments brief and to the point.
When a topic has been discussed fully, do not bring it back up.
Follow the agenda.
Do not waste everyone's time by repeating what others have said.

(viii) Attack the problem, not the person

Respectfully challenge the idea, not the person.

Blame or judgment will get you further from a solution, not closer.

Honest and constructive discussions are necessary to get the best results.

(ix) Close decisions and follow up

Make sure decisions are supported by the group, otherwise they won't be acted on.

Note pending issues and schedule follow up meetings as needed.

Identify actions based on decisions made, and follow up actions assigned to you.

(x) Record outcomes and share

Record issues discussed, decisions made, and tasks assigned.

Share meeting reports with meeting participants.

Share meeting outcomes with other stakeholders that should be kept in the loop.

SECTION 6

MISSION STATEMENT

1. By its very nature, every parish is missionary. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes, “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the people of God have become missionary disciples”.³⁶ A missionary parish therefore is “a community called to be open to the Holy Spirit so that the Good News of Jesus Christ can be known to all through welcome, engagement and outreach.”³⁷

“Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And remember, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.” Matthew 28:19-20

2. Dedicating time to compiling a mission statement in the early days of the newly formed Parish Pastoral Assembly is a beneficial and worthwhile exercise. It unifies members in a common purpose, brings clarity to their role, inspires commitment, cultivates a missionary character, offers direction for its activities, and communicates to parishioners a vision that promotes the ideals of ‘*welcome, engagement and outreach*’ centred on the word of God and the Eucharist. Ideally, the parish’s mission statement should be reviewed annually.
3. Mission statements are:
*“a broad statement of the overall direction and purpose of the parish.”*³⁸
4. A ‘*Parish*’ mission statement addresses three ‘audiences’:
 - Members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly
 - Parishioners
 - Parish staff, ministers & volunteers
5. The parish’s mission statement must emerge from a process in which all members are invited to contribute. It should be specific to the parish and not copied from another parish. It should reflect the spiritual dimension of the parish in such a way that it inspires as well as informs. Where possible, it should identify what distinguishes the parish from other parishes and speak of the gifts that enable the parish to undertake its mission.

36. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, n.120

37. Bishop John Arnold, *Hope in the Future*, Diocese of Salford.

38. William Rademacher and Marliss Rogers, *The New Practical Guide for Parish Councils* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988), p. 163.

6. Mary Ann Gubish and Susan Jenny S.C., identify four areas that should be included in a mission statement:
 1. **Identity:** stating the parish name, location, history, make-up, unique characteristics (We the parish of...)
 2. **Purpose:** stating the groups values, beliefs, central focus, reason for existence (Our mission is to....)
 3. **Function:** identifies the direction and meaning of its activities “to whom” and “what” (We are committed to...)
 4. **Future:** addresses areas of challenge, elements that are missing or in need of strengthening. (We seek to become...) ⁴⁰
7. The mission statement should be clear enough so that its intent is obvious, yet not so detailed that it becomes burdensome; flexible enough to allow for interpretation; it does not try to cover every conceivable situation; and short, clear, and understandable.
8. The completed mission statement should be clearly displayed in parish churches, parish centres, parish office, parish website, newsletter etc. Along with the mission statement, the names of members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly should also be displayed and ways in which the council can be contacted.

39. Mary Ann Gubish and Susan Jenny, S.C. with Arlene McGannon, *Revisoning the Parish Pastoral Council*, p. 108.

CONSTITUTION

1. The constitution is an important aid in the functioning of any Parish Pastoral Assembly. A constitution is simply the aims and rules by which the Assembly will undertake its mission. It's a statement of what the group is going to do and how it is going to do it. It is important because:
 - Without this written understanding people can easily find themselves at cross purposes and projects or initiatives remain incomplete.
 - It will serve as a reference, and help to resolve problems in times of controversy.
 - Parishioners will see the Assembly is democratic and accountable. This involves having a clear procedure by which decisions are made.
2. Aided by the Diocesan norms for Parish Pastoral Assemblies, each Parish Pastoral Assembly should formulate 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 Assemblies should remain faithful to the basic nature of Parish Pastoral Assemblies outlined in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Code of Canon Law, and these norms.
3. A Constitution can be reviewed but it must be approved and endorsed by the Bishop. A template Constitution is available in Appendix I.

SECTION 7

MEETINGS

1. Members of Parish Pastoral Assemblies generously give of their time to attend pastoral assembly meetings. It is of great importance there is clarity about the structure and nature of the meetings, that they are prepared with care and facilitated in such a way as to make the most of the time and the gifts of those present.
2. As Christians, the quality of our relationships with each other is central to our witness to what we believe. This includes a deep respect for each other and a consideration to different points of view, different ways of working and different ways of living out our faith. Clear and effective communication is essential to the whole process of working co-responsibly. Everybody has a contribution to make to the mission of the church.
3. The collaboration of all members is integral to each stage of the work of the Parish Pastoral Assembly. The Assembly, as a body, needs to build up its connection with the total parish community. Having discerned in the light of their local situation and of their Christian mission what needs to be done, it can then enable community members to develop their gifts and to participate in the pastoral action of the parish and in this way respond to their baptismal call.⁴⁰

*'The pastoral assembly [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.'*⁴¹
4. By virtue of his office the Parish Priest presides over and ratifies all Parish Pastoral Assembly processes, leading up to and including final choices and implementations. This collegial process respects the role of the Parish Priest who, in turn, takes in to account the integrity, expertise and prayerful discernments of the members of the assembly and of the whole community.⁴²

40. Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development: Living Communion – Vision and Practice for Parish Pastoral Councils in Ireland Today, 2011, p37, 3.6.

41. Harrington, Donal, The Welcoming Parish, Columba Press, Dublin, 2005, p95.

42. Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development: Living Communion – Vision and Practice for Parish Pastoral Councils in Ireland Today, 2011, p37

5. At the first meeting of the new Parish Pastoral Assembly, the Parish Pastoral Assembly shall set dates, time and locations for its meetings throughout the year.
6. The agenda of the first meeting of the Pastoral Parish Assembly will include the election of the Chair, Secretary and other officers if deemed appropriate by the Parish Priest in consultation with Assembly members.
7. A meeting of the Parish Pastoral Assembly cannot be held unless the Parish Priest or designate is present and a quorum of Assembly members are present. (See Quorum)
8. A member of the Parish Pastoral Assembly shall not invite representative groups, individuals or the media to a Parish Pastoral Assembly meeting unless it is a unanimous decision of the Parish Pastoral Assembly and has been approved by the Parish Priest.
9. **Agenda Item Request** - If a member of the parish has an agenda item that they would like the Parish Pastoral Assembly to discuss, they must contact the Chairperson and submit the requested item at least one week prior to the scheduled Parish Pastoral Assembly meeting. The Chairperson in consultation with the Executive Committee will decide if the requested item falls within the purpose of the Parish Pastoral Assembly.
10. **Presentation Request** - If a member of the public would like to present to the Parish Pastoral Assembly, they must contact the Chairperson and submit the request to present at least one week prior to the scheduled Parish Pastoral Assembly meeting. The Chairperson, in consultation with the Executive Committee, will decide if the topic of the presentation falls within the purpose of the Parish Pastoral Assembly. If it does, the presenter will be given a specified amount of time to present the item to the Parish Pastoral Assembly.
11. The Secretary shall, on behalf of the Parish Pastoral Assembly, give written notice of the dates, times and locations of the meetings of the Parish Pastoral Assembly to Assembly members along with the agenda and a copy of the minutes from the previous meeting.

12. Forming the Agenda

A well-planned agenda is essential to a successful Parish Pastoral Assembly meeting. The Executive committee meet in advance of each meeting to compose the agenda and have it distributed to Assembly members at least one week in advance so they can prepare for the meeting. When compiling the agenda, the Executive Committee should ensure that items relate clearly to the overall purpose of the Pastoral Assembly, and be realistic about how much can reasonably be considered during a meeting in a way that enables dialogue, reflection and discernment.

13. If all parties of the Executive are unable to attend a pre-meeting, it is mandatory that the Chairperson and Parish Priest meet prior to the scheduled meeting to review the agenda.

14. Some elements to include in each agenda would be:

1. At the top of the page, the date, time, duration and location of the meeting
2. Time for prayer
(It may be dispersed throughout the meeting – See Appendix III)
3. Apologies
4. Reference to minutes of previous meeting with intent for approval
5. Topics to be discussed:
 - Parish Priest's Report
 - Feedback on action items/sub-groups/sub-committees from the previous meeting;
 - New parish/diocesan items for discussion;
 - Presentations/items requested for inclusion on agenda
6. Action items
7. General discussion/reflection/AOB.

15. The Executive may agree to allot a specific amount of time for each item to ensure adequate time is given to each item. 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 members do not feel rushed.

16. There should be a standing item at the beginning of each agenda designated as "Declaration of Conflict of Interest." (See Conflict of Interest)

17. Additions to the agenda should be avoided unless approved unanimously by the members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly. These items should be deferred to the next meeting of the Parish Pastoral Assembly.

18. Quorum

Quorum means that a majority of the voting members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly as designated by the Parish Priest in accordance with this guideline are present at the meeting; and that this majority is made up of Parish Pastoral Assembly members. Clergy and *ex officio* members are not included in the calculation to determine quorum.

19. A quorum will consist of 50% of the membership of the Parish Pastoral Assembly, plus one.

20. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a central and integral part of the workings of any Parish Pastoral Assembly. Members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly should feel free to speak honestly at the meeting and to have their confidentiality respected. When communicating to the wider Parish the discussion and decision taking place, it is not necessary to detail comments of individual members. Some situations and matters discussed by the Assembly during the meetings require sensitivity and should be kept confidential.

21. Frequency

Meetings should take place according to an agreed calendar. It is recommended the Parish Pastoral Assembly should meet every 4-6 weeks for a maximum of two hours. This frequency of meetings ensures momentum is maintained. The Parish Pastoral Assembly can agree within their Constitution how many meetings they will have during the year.

(It is recommended the Assembly takes a complete break during the summer months)

22. Centrality of Prayer, reflection and formation

The unique nature of the Parish Pastoral Assembly requires that a spirit of prayer and reflection should pervade the meetings. Since the principal tasks of the Assembly include discernment and faith formation, it is important time is taken in each meeting for the formation of members and for nourishing their faith through prayer informed by the concerns of the meetings, the liturgical year, the parish, the Church, and the world.⁴³

43. Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development: Living Communion – Vision and Practice for Parish Pastoral Councils in Ireland Today, 2011, p38 (3.8)

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

1. A conflict of interest is a serious matter which impacts upon the perception of honesty and trustworthiness of the Parish Pastoral Assembly. For this reason, it must be addressed openly and immediately when it occurs. A conflict may be actual, perceived, or potential.

Actual: when a member has a private interest that is sufficiently connected to his or her duties and responsibilities as a Parish Pastoral Assembly member that it influences the exercise of these duties and responsibilities.

Perceived: when reasonably well-informed persons could believe that a Parish Pastoral Assembly member has a conflict of interest, even where, in fact, there is no real conflict of interest.

Potential: when a Parish Pastoral Assembly member has a private interest that could affect his or her decision about the matter proposed for discussion.

2. Members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly shall declare a conflict of interest in matters that they, members of their immediate families, business, community or voluntary interests in which they may have a vested interest, stand to benefit either directly or indirectly from decisions of the Parish Pastoral Assembly. A Parish Pastoral Assembly member shall exclude him or herself from discussions, resolutions and voting in which a conflict of interest is likely to result or the perception or the potential of a conflict of interest exists.
3. A Parish Pastoral Assembly member shall not accept favours or economic benefits from any individuals, organizations or entities known to be seeking contracts with the Parish.⁴⁴

44. Diocese of Calgary, Parish Pastoral Council – A Guideline, p. 10-11.

DECISION-MAKING

1. By reason of its existence, the Parish Pastoral Assembly is called to read and reflect the "signs of the times" to those planning and/or implementing short-term and long-term pastoral policies and activities in the parish.

The Pastoral Assembly's task is to offer counsel and seek consultation. ⁴⁵

2. Good counsel is the result of full, holistic, and active consultation. Consultation acknowledges that all the Christian faithful share, in diverse ways, the mission of Christ. Consultation accepts that each of the Christian faithful is formed, reformed, and endowed by the Spirit with qualities and gifts that can strengthen the community. Consultation recognizes that both the ordained and the non-ordained have distinct roles. The roles of each are complementary in community because of their common bond in the Body of Christ. ⁴⁶
3. Thus, the members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly, along with the Parish Priest, are called to reflect and consider pastoral issues for the common good, the work of evangelisation, and for the future outreach and mission of the local and diocesan Church. Their role is to understand, to reflect carefully and prayerfully and to seek consensus. However, under certain circumstances, the Parish Priest and Parish Pastoral Assembly may choose to attain a majority through voting to decide a course of action.
4. There are a number of decision-making models available to Parish Pastoral Assembly:
 - **Consultative** Parish Priest makes the decisions after consulting the assembly for ideas
 - **Majority** A decision is made when the majority of the PPA 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. ⁴⁷

45. Diocese of Austin, Policy on the Pastoral Council, 2005, E – 2.

46. Diocese of Austin, Policy on the Pastoral Council, 2005, E – 3.

47. Diocese of Down and Connor, Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Down and Connor, January 2018, P.7.

5. There is no single decision-making style that should be applied to all situations. Every member of the Parish Pastoral Assembly should be given an opportunity to express his or her concern or opinion about any issue or item being considered by the Assembly. For significant issues, however, a ‘*discerned consensus*’ process is recommended as a way of ensuring that there is shared ownership of any decisions made.

6. As the Parish Pastoral Assembly endeavours to reach a discerned consensus, members should:

- Familiarise themselves with the pastoral context;
- Clarify what is being asked or proposed;
- Source information that will help inform their decision;
- Where necessary, seek the advice of experts in their chosen field;
- Garner the experience of others who have encountered similar pastoral experiences and their respective responses;
- Explore all possible alternatives;
- Engage in honest, informed dialogue, rather than debate;
- Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
- Question is the approach ‘Gospel-led’;
- Agree on a course of action;
- 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.

‘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.’⁴⁸

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

SUB-GROUPS/COMMITTEES

1. The Parish Pastoral Assembly is primarily concerned with promoting actions through pastoral planning. While it is not immediately responsible for the implementation of projects the Council ensures the projects are carried out by encouraging, inviting and supporting others throughout the Parish to do so. In this way the Assembly enables members of the parish to recognise their gifts for ministry and to use them for the good of the parish and its mission.⁴⁹
2. Depending on the need and circumstances, the Parish Pastoral Assembly may set up sub-groups (usually including at least one member of the Parish Pastoral Assembly) which take responsibility for particular areas of action, and report back to the Council regularly on progress. Sub-groups may include:
 - Evangelisation
 - Communications
 - Liturgy
 - Ecumenism
 - Justice and Peace
 - Faith Development
 - Youth Ministry

The involvement of parishioners from outside the Assembly should always be sought for particular projects.

3. Depending on the parish, it is often advantageous if delegated members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly engage with each group in the parish during their term of office. Through this engagement, the Assembly offers support and encouragement, understands the group's mission in the parish, its structure, outreach, needs etc. It creates a culture of openness and cooperation and relates both the Assembly and the respective groups more closely together in building the Body of Christ.

49. Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Archdiocese of Dublin, May 2021, P6

HOSPITALITY AND PARISH MINISTRY MEETINGS

1. The early Christians understood the connection between receiving Christ in the Eucharist and sharing hospitality with others. In Acts, we read that “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . . Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:42, 46). Like the early Christians, we must also rely on and offer hospitality as a means of witnessing to and sharing the gospel.

‘Love each other, and have a profound respect for each other. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Work for the Lord with untiring effort and with great earnestness of spirit. If any of the saints are in need you must share with them; and you should make hospitality your special care.’ Rom.12:9, 12-13

2. Hospitality is a crucial ingredient in the life of every parish. Hospitality is a building block in the work of evangelisation. Investing money, energy or time in ‘hospitality’ is the heart of growing disciples, strengthening parish life, ensuring parishioners (and visitors) feel they belong and are appreciated. Hospitality leads to a sense of ownership and personal involvement among parishioners and Parish Assembly members. By extension, it acknowledges the commitment, creativity, insights, strengths and passion among members of the Assembly (and Parish) which shape and drive a parish in the work of evangelisation, prayer, hospitality, and mission.

3. The best hospitality is experienced when one human being engages another -

‘Their eyes were opened and they recognised Him in the breaking of bread.’ (Luke 24:31)

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.”

Hebrews 13:1-2

Offering hospitality at each Parish Pastoral

Assembly meeting should not be seen as a burden, but an invaluable charism which fosters unity and cooperation, creates a space to explore faith and share life. It strengthens prayer, belonging, communion, responsibility and service.

4. While many Parish Pastoral Assemblies offer hospitality when the formality of the meeting has concluded, each Council should decide on the ideal time for refreshments in the context of the Parish Pastoral Assembly meeting.

ONGOING FORMATION & SUPPORT

1. In practice, it is now evident that the task of establishing and maintaining effective parish pastoral councils requires training and support. While prayer, reflection and ongoing catechesis on the nature and mission of the Church are important for all members of the Body of Christ, it is all the more important for members of a Parish Pastoral Assembly. Parish Pastoral Assembly members are encouraged to avail of opportunities provided by the Diocese of Meath and other recognised providers to deepen their own spirituality, levels of religious knowledge and understanding, and any opportunities to enhance their service of the Gospel.

2. Planning Days/Days of Retreat

Each Parish Pastoral Assembly should factor in 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. Where possible planning days should be facilitated by someone outside their own Assembly.

3. Developing a Parish Pastoral Plan

Planning Days are ideal opportunities for the Parish Pastoral Assembly to consider developing a 'Parish Pastoral Plan' in line with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan. Such a plan enables Assembly members to grow in their relationship with God and the Church. The 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 Parish Pastoral Assembly finds willing co-workers to implement the plan.

4. Developing a Parish Pastoral Plan examines the present 'reality' in the parish, takes cognisance of God's Word and the Holy Spirit, explores various ways of responding, and identifies specific actions and reviews. Such a plan helps articulate short, medium and longer-term goals for the parish. It ensures the parish is outward looking, missionary, responds to the 'signs of the times' and provides continuity in a parish's outreach and mission.

5. The Diocese of Meath will provide resources for parishes wishing to develop a Parish Pastoral Plan.

RESIGNATION

Any member who misses more than three consecutive meetings without explanation will be deemed to have resigned from the PPA and will be replaced in accordance with the method of selecting members.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. Direct communication and face-to-face meetings along with the goodwill to resolve conflicts in favour of the common good are encouraged as promising practices to support conflict resolution.
2. Parish Pastoral Assembly members may review concerns regarding procedures, etc. with the Chairperson as a first step in resolving disagreements. If the procedural disagreement involves an action of the Chair, the Chair may be present or the Parish Priest will report the procedural concern to the Chair following the meeting.
3. A Parish Pastoral Assembly may, with a majority vote, should all of the above fail to resolve the issue, request a meeting with the Bishop or his designate.

ANNUAL REPORT

In addition to the annual report submitted to the Bishop (Appendix II), the Pastoral Assembly should have an opportunity to address the 'Parish Assembly' once a year. This may take place during Masses on a given weekend, as the Parish Priest determines.

The Annual Report may include:

- Pastoral priorities during the year past
- Details of upcoming projects
- Progress made in implementing the Parish's Pastoral Plan (if applicable)
- Seeking feedback and comments from their fellow Parishioners
- Encouraging parishioners to volunteer in a spirit of stewardship

SECTION 8

TWO PARISHES — ONE ASSEMBLY

1. As the Diocese considers how best to plan and manage its pastoral care, mission, and sacramental life, in some instances parishes are ‘linked’ to one another in a way that acknowledges the historical, geographical, faith and cultural identities of the parishes involved and is consistent with conciliar theology, especially the ecclesiology of Vatican II. In such instances, the Bishop will entrust the pastoral and spiritual leadership of both parishes to a Parish Priest and request the establishment of a single/common Parish Pastoral Assembly.
2. Change – *an act or process through which something becomes different* - is viewed in many ways. It can be welcomed, viewed with suspicion or rejected. Everyone reacts to change differently. The key to linked-parishes engaging in deeper collaboration is an attitude of cooperation which results in finding opportunities for sharing resources to strengthen the missionary and sacramental life in each parish.
3. Since the Parish Pastoral Assembly is involved in planning rather than implementation, and since the two linked-parishes ‘*pastored*’ by one person are usually in close proximity, collaboration in some areas and ministries is not only good but advisable. Assembly members should be aware of all ministries, services and events of both parishes.
4. Although there may be a single/common Parish Pastoral Assembly, each linked-parish may establish *ad hoc* planning groups that address specific issues as directed by the Parish Pastoral Assembly or by the Parish Priest. These planning groups could be ‘self-run’ with oversight by and accountability to the common Parish Pastoral Assembly and Parish Priest.
5. Should they generate a recommendation for a particular activity or ministry for the parish they provide all necessary material to the Parish Pastoral Assembly to be presented to the Parish Priest. This latter action ensures first that the Pastoral Assembly is aware of what is happening in each parish, and secondly respects its role in the overall planning for the parishes and its recommending role to the Parish Priest.
6. The focus of the common Assembly is to foster collaboration between the two parishes without losing the distinctive gifts of either one. As mentioned previously, the single/common Assembly must have equal representation from both parishes.

Since consensus rather than “majority rules” voting should be the usual method for the Assembly to conduct its business, there should be no concern about one parish “overruling” another. The building up of the communities to be about the mission of Jesus overrides all other concerns.⁵⁰

7. Assembly considerations for ‘linked-parishes’

- All Christ’s Faithful have the right and duty to preserve and foster communion with the Church by the profession of our common faith, the celebration of the sacraments and recognition of the Church’s governance (cc.206 &209), observing in particular the teaching and policies of the Diocesan Bishop (c.212§)
- Baptism leads to a “genuine equality of dignity and action among Christ’s Faithful” (c.208). As congregations of Christ’s Faithful, parishes enjoy equal rights, irrespective of size, location or economic status.
- Appropriate Pastoral care is the right of every parish, to be provided by a priest, or, if necessary, by a deacon, an individual or group (cc.515 §1 & 517 §).
- As communities, parishes have the right to the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the sacraments (c.213), and to worship in their proper rite (c.214). The Eucharist is to be at the centre of parish assembly (c528 §2).
- On Sundays and other holydays the obligation of participating in the Mass is satisfied by assisting at Mass wherever it is celebrated in a Catholic rite (cc.1247 &1248 §1).
- Each parish is to attend to its spiritual condition, to the growth and continual sanctification of its people and to the fostering of vocations (cc. 210, 214, 770; also 839, 1174 §2, 1186)
- Each congregation has its own way of undertaking witness and service; apostolic activities, works of charity, (cc. 211, 215-216, 298-299, 384 §2, 839 §1), projects for justice and assistance for the poor (c222 §2).
- All must work to ensure the divine message of salvation may increasingly reach the whole of humankind in every age and in every land (cc.211 & 770; cc233, 264, 791).
- Every Christian Community has the right and duty to provide formation for new members and to assist all to grow in faith and love (c 217). Parents, priests and all the Faithful have responsibility for schools and education in its various forms (cc. 794, 788, 789, 793-798, 800 851).

50. Office for Pastoral Planning, Diocese of Toledo, Guidelines for Pastoral Councils, 2007, p.23-24.

- The Christian faithful, individually and collectively, have the right to make known their needs, desires and opinions to their priests and to one another (Lumen Gentium 37, cc.212 §§2 &3), and so to timely, accurate and complete information.
- Parishes have the right, on their own authority, to acquire, retain, administer and dispose of their own goods and property (cc.1255-56) in keeping with the law (cc.1257 & 1276).
- A parish has its own identity in law (c. 515 §3). It continues in being until it is suppressed or altered (c. 515§2 as regards altering a parish) by due process or ceases activity for 100 years (c.120 §1). However, a parish can be closed by a competent authority (see canon 120.1), amalgamated with other parishes to form a new one, divided up and joined either to other parishes or the parts made into new parishes (see canon 122).⁵¹

51. Diocese of Lancaster – Parish Handbook for Deepening Collaboration, Linking and Merging, 2009, p. 6-7

SECTION 9

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

Parish Pastoral Assembly members agree to observe the following principles:

- The primary considerations in making decisions are the parish's faithfulness, its values, the mission of evangelization and what is in the best interests of the Faithful and the Church.
- The Parish Pastoral Assembly is accountable to and must report to its parish, the Diocese of Meath and offices within the Roman Catholic Church.
- Parish Pastoral Assembly members will abide by all ecclesial and legal requirements, Diocese of Meath policies and administrative procedures and Roman Catholic Church teaching.
- Parish Pastoral Assembly members will, at all times, behave in a civil and respectful manner.
- The underlying principles of the Parish Pastoral Assembly code of conduct include the promotion of:
 - Faithfulness and prayer
 - Respectful partnerships
 - Clear, direct and honest two-way communication
 - Transparent processes
 - Democratic, informed decision-making
- Conflict between Parish Pastoral Assembly members should be addressed respectfully and fairly in accordance with the principles of justice.
- All Parish Pastoral Assembly members are expected to represent all members of the parish community. Parish Pastoral Assembly members are not there to represent just one viewpoint, or the view of an individual. Parish Pastoral Assembly members will therefore strive to seek the views and opinions of the whole parish community in order to achieve outcomes which reflect the common good.
- Parish Pastoral Assembly is not an appropriate forum for the discussion of individual parish staff or parishioners.
- A Parish Pastoral Assembly member who is approached by a parishioner with a concern relating to an individual is in a privileged position and must treat such discussion with discretion, protecting the confidentiality and privacy of the people involved. (Ask the parishioner to speak with the Parish Priest or seek their permission for the Assembly member to speak privately with the Parish Priest so that the person with the concern and the Priest can communicate directly). The Parish Pastoral Assembly must avoid an intermediary role.

- Parish Pastoral Assembly members must keep “in camera” matters discussed at meetings private and confidential.
- Parish Pastoral Assembly members should observe the need for orderly Parish Pastoral Assembly meetings and that council needs to “speak as one voice” in the parish, once a decision has been made.
- Parish Pastoral Assembly members must declare any conflict of interest when it arises.
- Parish Pastoral Assembly members will not be paid any remuneration for their service.
- Parish Pastoral Assembly members will actively participate in meetings. If Parish Pastoral Assembly members are unable to attend a meeting, they are requested to send their regrets to the Chair prior to the meeting.
- Parish Pastoral Assembly members will strive to welcome members of the parish who attend Parish Pastoral Assembly meetings as observers.

(Adapted from: Diocese of Calgary, Parish Pastoral Council – A Guideline.)

Appendix I: Constitution Template

(Must be written by the PPA according to local circumstances and following deliberations in keeping with the Diocesan norms for Parish Pastoral Assemblies)

TITLE: Constitution of (insert name) Parish Pastoral Assembly

DEFINITION

The Parish Pastoral Assembly (PPA) 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 Assembly: 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 Assembly [Council] is described as ‘consultative’ to the parish priest (**Canon 536**). The use of the word ‘consultative’ reminds the Pastoral Assembly 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 Assembly.

MISSION STATEMENT

Examples below (please adapt as necessary):

“Inspired by the Holy Spirit and guided by God’s love, the Parish Pastoral Assembly 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 Assembly 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 PPA will aim to fulfil its role by:

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

MEMBERSHIP

- The Parish Priest/ Administrator will be an *ex officio* member and will be the President of the PPA.
- Any assistant priest assigned to the Parish, an assigned Parish Religious or other pastoral associates appointed by the Bishop are *ex officio* members.
- The PPA will have a four year term of office during which some members of the PPA may retire with new members selected.
- Members of the PPA (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.
- Including *ex officio* members there will be a minimum of eight and a maximum of fifteen members of the PPA, 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
 - Practising 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 PPA MEMBERS SHALL BE AS FOLLOWS:

Enter the way(s) in which the PPA will be formed (e.g. by appointment by the Parish Priest, by ministries, by open meetings (discernment), by a Whole Parish Approach (nomination) etc)

A **Chairperson, Vice Chairperson** and **Secretary** will be appointed from among the PPA members. An office bearer will hold office for no more than one 3 year cycle of the PPA. A full list of appointees will be displayed on the notice board in the church porch.

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

Any member who misses more than three consecutive meetings without explanation will be deemed to have resigned from the PPA and will be replaced in accordance with the method of selecting members.

Each person appointed to the PPA will receive a copy of this Constitution and the Diocesan norms for Best Practice for Parish Pastoral Assemblies.

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 PPA. In these circumstances the PPA will remain in existence with the permission of the Bishop.

When a new Parish Priest or Administrator is appointed the PPA ceases to exist. There are two of options open to the new Parish Priest:

- In the interest of continuity in the parish's work and mission, the new parish priest can reconvene the Parish Pastoral Assembly at the earliest opportunity but for no longer than two months of his appointment to aid his transition to the new parish.
- The new Parish Priest may decide to form an entirely new Parish Pastoral Assembly and run a new process (according to the Diocesan Norms and existing PPA Constitution) to establish a new PPA. This new PPA must be in place as soon as is practicable.

EXECUTIVE GROUP

There will be an Executive Committee, 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

- 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.
- Items for the agenda may be sought from individual Parish Pastoral Assembly members and parishioners. Any such item is to be submitted in written form to the Parish Pastoral Assembly secretary at least fourteen days in advance.
- The agenda and previous minutes will be circulated to members one week in advance of the next meeting.
- Meetings will normally last for no more than two hours.
- Recommendations of the PPA will be made through working towards discerned consensus when possible, taking account of the views of each member of the PPA and arriving at an agreement. *[expand on this section according to the conclusions reached in deliberations on decision making]*
- A quorum at Assembly meetings shall comprise 50% of members plus one, excluding *ex officio* members and should include at least one Office bearer.
- The Assembly shall have power to appoint sub-committees.
- As President of the PPA, the Parish Priest may decide to convene and chair an extraordinary meeting as he considers it necessary.

ANNUAL REPORTING

The PPA 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 consideration the Diocesan Norms e.g.

“Each Parish Pastoral Assembly 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 Assemblies may give consideration to these days being facilitated by someone outside their own Assembly.”

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 Assembly 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 Assembly finds willing co-workers to enable the Plan to be made a reality.”

AMENDMENT OF THIS CONSTITUTION

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

This Constitution has been approved by Bishop Tom Deenihan, Bishop of Meath.

SIGNED:

+ Tom Deenihan

Bishop of Meath

DATE:

Appendix II: FORMAT FOR ANNUAL REPORT TO THE BISHOP

Parish:

Year of Reporting:

Introduction: (for example: names of the members of the PPA, offices held, number of meetings held within the year, general overview of the parish)

Pastoral Priorities for the Year being reported:

Specific Tasks/Initiatives/Events/Undertakings during the year:

Progress/Impact within the Parish from these events:

Plans for the coming year:

Retreat/ Training/ Formation Undertaken:

Concluding remarks:

Parish Priest / Adm

Date

Chairperson

Date

Appendix III:

PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF THE PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY

Prayer at Parish Pastoral Assembly meetings

Prayer at Pastoral Assembly 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.” (*Tertio Millennio Ineunte*), n. 38

When a Pastoral Assembly 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. 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 Parish Pastoral Assembly, 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 Assembly 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 assembly 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.

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 Parish Pastoral Assembly?
- 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 Assembly 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 Parish Pastoral Assembly, 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 Assembly 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 IV:

COMMISSIONING & BLESSING OF NEWLY ESTABLISHED PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY

Since the Parish Pastoral Assembly is a ministry of service to the entire parish, it is most appropriate that new members are introduced to the parish community. This is best done by commissioning new members to the Assembly within a Sunday Eucharist. This is an important way of connecting the Assembly with the community and for the parish to recognise, accept, support and pray for all members of the Assembly.

Anning, C. (2007). Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils. Third edition. Faith and Life. Archdiocese of Brisbane. Australia. (p.28)

The commissioning should take place after the homily, before the Creed.

Parish Priest:

My dear friends, we have come to commission you into a specialized ministry of Christ's holy church. Christ alone is the source of all Christian ministry, through the ages calling men and women to serve.

By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry to witness to Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and to love and serve those with whom they live and work. We are ambassadors for Christ, who reconciles and makes whole. We are the salt of the earth; we are the light of the world.

Following his resurrection and ascension, Christ gave gifts to the church. These gifts were that "some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:11)

Today we come before God, the Almighty- Father, seeking his blessing on your ministry as members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly.

Parish Priest: I invite those who have been chosen to serve our community as members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly to stand.

Names of Parish Pastoral Assembly members are read out by the Parish Priest or a member of the out-going Parish Pastoral Assembly.

Parish Priest: You have been called from this parish community to serve as a member of the Parish Pastoral Assembly. Will you accept the responsibilities of parish leadership that we place on you?

PPA members: We will.

Parish Priest: Will you strive to be more like Christ so that you will be better able to serve his people?

PPA members: We will.

The Parish Priest addresses the Assembly members as he prepares to bless the Bibles.

Parish Priest:

The Bible is the inspired word of God. As Catholics, we believe this is the book of the Church, the sacred literature of God's people. Our church encourages us to read and reflect frequently on the pages of this book so that we may be continually formed into committed disciples of Jesus Christ and cooperate in his mission and the work of evangelisation. May the Word of God always inspire and direct you in your ministry, that the Lord who begins the good work in you, will bring it to fulfilment.

The Bibles are now blessed and presented to each member of the Parish Pastoral Assembly.

Parish Priest:

Saving God,
you have revealed your life and your love
through the lives of our ancestors in the faith.
From Abraham and Sarah, Moses and David,
to Mary and Joseph, to Peter and Paul,
you have spoken your word and called your people to fuller life.
We honour your presence in these Scriptures,
and we pray that the words of this sacred book
may become more deeply the living word of God,
forming our thoughts, desires, and actions.

We ask your blessing on these Holy Bibles ✠ in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The new members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly are invited to publicly declare their commitment to service in their parish.

Parish Priest: I invite the members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly to express their commitment through the words of their pledge.

PPA Members:

We are grateful for the trust placed in us and we accept this ministry within our community. We pledge ourselves to serve our parish with joy, love, and enthusiasm. We will work to build the life of the Christian community in our parish and diocese. We will strive to be conscious of the needs of all our parishioners and to make Christ present for everyone, following his example as one who served. We ask your prayerful support, encouragement, and insights as we commit ourselves to serve this community.

The Parish Priest now blesses the new Parish Pastoral Assembly.

Parish Priest:

Ever-living God,

you gather us together as [\[name of parish\]](#) Parish to carry the Gospel of Christ to all people.

Bless ✠ the members of this Parish Pastoral Assembly.

Let your Spirit enlighten their minds and guide all their actions, that they may be renewed in faith and united in love bringing to fulfilment the work of your Church to your greater honour and glory.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

The newly commissioned members of the Parish Pastoral Assembly return to their seat and join the assembly in the Profession of Faith.

Prayers of Intercession.

A selection of these, or similar prayers may be included in the parish's general intercessions of the Mass.

Parish Priest:

We are gathered to intercede for the faithful of our parish. Let us open our minds and hearts to the presence of the Spirit and pray for their needs.

1. For the members of our Parish Pastoral Assembly; may they prayerfully carry out their duties, witnessing to the presence of Christ with joyful hearts. Lord, hear us.
2. For all gathered here; that we may live out our baptismal promises and reach out with compassion and care to those in need. Lord, hear us.
3. We pray for the members of our Parish Pastoral Assembly. May they always discern the will of God in responding to the needs of those whom they are called to serve. Lord, hear us.
4. May our Parish Pastoral Assembly listen to the needs of the people and respond with wise and prudent decision for the good of the community. Lord, hear us.
5. May our parish be open to the ideas of others and foster a spirit of cooperation which brings us together in unity as brothers and sisters in Christ. Lord, hear us.
6. Through our participation in the Eucharist, may your Holy Spirit unite us in the service of the Gospel. Alert us to the needs of your community and bless us with the resolve to be responsive. Lord, hear us.
7. Help our Parish Pastoral Assembly cultivate a spirit of openness which encourages all our parishioners to offer their gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ. Lord, hear us.
8. For those who believe they have nowhere to turn. May our parish assist them in seeking out the help they need, realising they are not alone in this world. Lord, hear us.

Parish Priest:

Gracious God, may your Holy Spirit inflame our hearts, enliven our hope and open our minds, so that together with our brothers and sisters in faith we may recognise you in the Scriptures and in the breaking of bread. May your Holy Spirit transform us into one body and lead us to walk humbly in a spirit of service, love, justice, faith and joy, as witnesses of your resurrection, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

APPENDIX V

RESOURCES

Anning, Cecelia, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils* (Third Edition), Faith and Life, Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007

Archdiocese of Dublin, *Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils*, Dublin, 2021

Arnold, Bishop John, *Hope in the Future*, Diocese of Salford, On-line Resource. *Code of Canon Law*, London: Harper Collins, 1983

Congregation for the Clergy, *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church*, London, Catholic Truth Society, 2020

Diocese of Austin, Policy on the Pastoral Council, 2005, On-line Resource

Diocese of Calgary, Parish Pastoral Council – A Guideline, On-line Resource

Diocese of Cork and Ross, *Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils* -On-line Resources

Diocese of Down and Connor, *Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Down and Connor*, 2018

Diocese of Kerry, *Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils*, On-line Resources

Diocese of Kilmore, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Kilmore*, 2016-2020

Diocese of Lancaster, *Parish Handbook for Deepening Collaboration, Linking and Merging*, 2009

Diocese of Limerick, *Parish Pastoral Council – New Challenges, New Guidelines*, 2015

Diocese of Raphoe, ‘*What is a Parish Pastoral Council?*’ – On-line Resources

Diocese of Toledo, Office for Pastoral Planning, *Guidelines for Pastoral Councils*, 2007

Ferguson, Jane, *A Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2005

Fischer, Mark F., *Pastoral Councils in Today’s Catholic Parish*, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT, 2001.

Gubish Mary Ann and Susan Jenny, S.C. with Arlene McGannon, *Revisioning the Parish Pastoral Council*, New York: Paulist Press, 20021

Harrington, Donal, *The Welcoming Parish*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2005

Irish Episcopal Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal & Adult Faith Development, *Living Communion – Vision and Practice for Parish Pastoral Councils in Ireland Today*, Dublin: Veritas, 2011

Irish Episcopal Conference, Commission for Pastoral Renewal & Adult Faith Development, *Parish Pastoral Councils A Framework for Developing Diocesan Norms and Parish Guidelines*, Dublin: Veritas, 2007

Peck Scott, M., *A World Waiting to be Born: Civility Rediscovered*, Bantam, New York, 1994

Rademacher, William and Marliss Rogers, *The New Practical Guide for Parish Councils*, Twenty-Third Publications, 1988

PRAYER FOR A NEW PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY

Father,

Thank you for blessing us, our families and the communities which make up our parish.

Through our participation in the Eucharist may your Holy Spirit bind us together in unity and peace.

Help our Parish Pastoral Assembly to be true to you.

Sanctify our partnership with our priest(s).

Alert us to the needs of our community.

Open the scriptures to us when we pray.

Give us the resolve to be responsive.

Help us recognise and call upon the gifts of our fellow parishioners.

Bless us with a spirit of good humour.

Be our courage when the going is challenging.

Be our strength when we feel burdened by weakness and sin.

Be our joy at all times.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

St. Finian, patron of our Diocese.

Pray for us.

PRAYER FOR A PARISH PASTORAL ASSEMBLY MEETING

Heavenly Father,

we come to you today asking for wisdom and support as we begin this meeting. May everything we do begin with your inspiration and continue with your help.

We ask for guidance throughout this meeting.

Help us engage in meaningful discussion; allow us to grow closer as a group and nurture the bonds of community.

Fill us with your grace, Lord God, as we make decisions that affect this parish, its people, its mission, and the spiritual transformation of our parish community.

Bless us with a spirit of openness and honesty, good humour and cooperation. Continue to remind us that all that we do here today, all that we accomplish, is for the pursuit of truth, for the greater glory of you, and for the service of your Church.

We ask all these things in your name.

Amen.

