



Parish of Brunswick and Brunswick East

Guidelines for the Parish Pastoral Council

PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

This document outlines the purpose and function of the Parish Pastoral Council as a representative body of people who can support the 'in solidum' model of leadership being established across our parish and the parishes of Moreland and West Brunswick.

PREAMBLE

The Parish Pastoral Council has its main foundations in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council which proclaimed that clergy, religious and lay people come together in the Church's mission as the one People of God. This means that we all 'share in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ.'¹

Since Vatican II, papal teaching that considers mission at the local level has given increasing focus to the role of the Parish Pastoral Council. Pope Benedict XVI has said that lay people in the Church should be regarded 'as people who are really "co-responsible" for the Church's being and acting.'² Pope Francis, in his promotion of a 'synodal Church', one that moves forward through dialogue at all levels, has said with enthusiasm: 'How necessary pastoral councils are!'³

These inspirations for a Pastoral Council have been given further impetus, in recent times, by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse which urged the Church 'to explore and develop ways in which its structures and practices of governance may be made more accountable, more transparent, more meaningfully consultative and more participatory, including at the diocesan and parish level.'⁴

We have had an effective Parish Leadership Team since the parishes of Brunswick and Brunswick East were partnered in 2009. However, the introduction in 2020 of the 'in solidum' model means that we need a new body of leadership and parish representation with new responsibilities to guide the future directions of the parish. These guidelines set out the purpose, responsibilities, structure, membership and processes of that body, the Parish Pastoral Council.

¹ Vatican II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, paragraphs 2 and 10.

² Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion of the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic action. http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120810_fiac.html

³ Pope Francis, Discourse during the meeting with clergy, consecrated persons and members of pastoral councils, Assisi (4 October 2013): *Insegnamenti I/2* (2013), 328.

⁴ *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*, Final Report, Vol.16, Book 2, p.682.

PURPOSE OF THE COUNCIL

The Council exists to enable the whole parish to live out its mission:

To proclaim and live the message of
Jesus Christ
as a welcoming community
through our celebration of liturgy
and by serving the needs of others.

The Council enables this mission by fostering the spiritual growth and pastoral endeavours of the parish and by providing parishioners with a counselling voice in the direction and decisions of the parish.

ROLE

The Council seeks to:

- listen, represent and respond to the hopes, needs, concerns and ideas of parishioners
- actively encourage, support and give feedback to parish groups and programs
- inform and offer counsel and guidance to the Parish Priests, working in harmony with them in a spirit of co-responsibility.

PRINCIPAL TASKS

The Council's principal tasks are to:

- facilitate development of a Pastoral Plan which guides the life of the parish, paying particular attention to the differing histories, cultures and needs of the communities of Our Lady Help of Christians and Saint Ambrose's
- monitor and evaluate implementation of the Pastoral Plan
- ensure that the financial administration of the parish supports the Parish Pastoral Plan
- facilitate development and implementation of a Risk Management Policy for the parish
- participate in oversight of parish administration, including but not limited to administration of parish properties and assets and parish staff role descriptions
- support the development of our parish school community as advised by the School Principal.

COMPOSITION

The Council consists of:

- the Parish Priests
- eight elected parishioners
- three ex-officio members (the Pastoral Associate, a Finance Committee member and the School Principal).

The overall composition will aim to reflect the diversity of gender, age, ethnicity, education and work/life experience within the parish.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

All members of the Council are expected to:

- prepare for, regularly attend and actively contribute to Council meetings
- provide a voice for parishioners in the direction and decisions of the parish
- participate in sub-committees of the Council
- represent the Council to parishioners
- model and foster participative leadership within the parish
- through the gift of the Holy Spirit, provide Good Counsel to those in parish ministry and leadership⁵
- witness to the link between liturgy and the work of ministry

⁵ Good Counsel, or right judgement, is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit received at baptism and strengthened and sealed at confirmation. The other gifts are Wisdom, Understanding, Fortitude, Knowledge, Reverence, Fear of the Lord. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1303, 1831.

- participate in formation opportunities.

Each elected member of the Council will be nominated to liaise between the Council and one or more groups from the parish mission areas of proclamation, community, worship and service.

OFFICE BEARERS

At the beginning of each year the Council will elect a Chairperson, a Deputy Chairperson and a Secretary.

EXECUTIVE

The Parish Priests, Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Secretary will form an Executive which meets at least once between Council meetings to follow up on decisions of the last meeting, prepare for the next meeting, or deal with urgent parish matters. Where the priests become aware of an urgent matter for counsel, they will contact the Chairperson in the first instance.

ELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

Elected parishioners are to:

- be over the age of 18
- be active in and have a deep commitment to the communal, sacramental and pastoral life of the parish and have experience in some parish ministries
- be familiar with the structures and groups of the parish and with the Parish Pastoral Plan
- have demonstrated skills in teamwork and collaborative decision-making
- be familiar with and express commitment to the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

The election process will consist of the following:

- The Chair of the Council calls for membership nominations.
- Prospective members submit their nomination which is supported by three parishioners.
- The Executive considers particular talents which would add value to the Council and may approach individual parishioners who have those talents with a view to them being nominated.
- Nominees provide a photograph and a 200-word statement outlining their background and motivation for seeking election which is posted in the foyer of each church and included in the Parish Newsletter for two weekends.
- Parishioners over the age of 16 are eligible to vote.
- The election is held by email or by secret ballot after Mass on two consecutive weekends.
- Where the number of nominations matches the number of available positions, the Executive will declare the nominees as members of the Council without election.
- Results of the election will be announced at weekend Masses and a commissioning of the new Council held at a weekend Mass soon after.

TERM OF OFFICE

The term of elected membership is three years. To facilitate continuity, half the Council members may stand for a second term. Anyone who serves two terms consecutively must then stand down for at least one term.

An elected member may resign at any time by offering their resignation to the Chairperson. If the Chairperson wishes to resign, they offer their resignation to the Parish Priests. A new Chairperson will be nominated by the Council if the Deputy Chair does not wish to take on the role.

The tenure of an elected or ex-officio member may be reviewed by the Executive if the member fails to fulfil the Responsibilities of Members detailed in these Guidelines.

The Council may fill any casual vacancy by invitation. To be invited, a parishioner must meet the criteria indicated in these Guidelines and undertake a briefing and discernment process with two current members.

MEETING PROCEDURES

Frequency

There will be six meetings held between February and November and avoiding the Easter season.

Duration

PPC meetings will run for one hour with up to a 30-minute extension by member agreement. The meeting will be followed by a 'Cuppa'.

Agenda

- Proposed items for the agenda and relevant background information may be submitted to the Secretary by anyone in the parish.
- The agenda items are decided by the Executive.
- Standing items are reports from the Finance Committee, the Parish School and the Safeguarding Children and Young People Committee.
- If consideration of an item would benefit from the expertise of a person who is not a member of the Council, the Executive arranges the attendance of that person.
- The agenda and any background papers are provided to members at least one week before the meeting.

Process

The meeting aims to be a process of communal discernment drawing on the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially Good Counsel.

- Before the meeting, members review the agenda and background reading and give prayerful reflection to items that will require a decision.
- The meeting begins with a prayer that centres the group in the presence of God.
- Each agenda item is introduced by a Council member who has either proposed the item or has been briefed by the parishioner who proposed it.
- Where an item requires a decision, possible decision outcomes are clarified.
- Options are discussed in a way that seeks to build a shared wisdom from the wisdom of each person.
- Depending on the complexity or significance of the matter under discussion, the meeting may pause for a time of reflective silence.
- When the allocated time for consideration is reached, a decision is taken or, if further information or reflection is needed, the matter is deferred to an agreed date.

Decision making

Decisions are made by consensus, a level of agreement in which each member feels that their views have been heard, that the issue has been given due consideration within the meeting time frame, and that they can live with and support the decision in the present circumstances. Where consensus cannot be reached, the matter is deferred for a period in which further discernment with parishioners and/or persons of relevant expertise takes place. This discernment is recognisant of relevant Archdiocesan governance. When the discernment period is completed, the matter is then considered again at a subsequent Council meeting.

In cases where the matter is deemed urgent and needs to be addressed outside of normal scheduled meetings, it is decided by the Executive after appropriate consultation.

PARISH PASTORAL PLAN

The Council will facilitate development of a Parish Pastoral Plan to guide the mission and life of the parish for a four-year period. The first of these plans will be formulated in the first year of operation of the PPC.

With broad participation and consultation of parishioners, the planning process will involve identifying current strengths in parish life, developing a vision for the future of parish life, establishing goals and flexible action steps to make the vision a reality. The Pastoral Plan will ensure that the management of parish finances, property, assets and personnel are linked to achievement of the plan.

It will be essential to frame the plan in such a way that it aligns with a Master Plan for the growth of the 'in solidum' model for the three parishes of Brunswick/Brunswick East, Moreland and West Brunswick. It is expected that such a Master Plan will develop in an organic way as areas for common endeavour and partnership evolve between the parishes.

A formal review of the Pastoral Plan, open to all parishioners, will be held two years after inauguration of the plan.

RELATIONSHIP WITH PARISH GROUPS AND PROGRAMS

The Council will be familiar with and support the activities of all parish groups and programs.

- Each group or program will have a nominated Council member to act as liaison with the Council.
- Twice yearly, each group or program will give a written report on its activities to the Council and the Council will offer feedback on that report.
- Parishioners seeking to establish a new group or program will first consult the Parish Priests, then seek the guidance of the Council as to how they might contribute to the Parish Pastoral Plan.

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION

The PPC will ensure that the Financial Administration of the parish supports the Parish Pastoral Plan. The Council will:

- ratify the Annual Operating and Capital budgets prepared by the Finance Committee
- receive and review six monthly Financial Reports of the parish
- receive Annual Audited Financial Statements prepared for the Finance Committee
- review and ratify the Annual Financial Statements prepared for submission to the Archdiocese and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

A summarised Annual Financial Report will be presented at the Annual Parish Forum.

COMMUNICATION WITH PARISHIONERS

Communication with parishioners will be attentive to the differing skills and resources of our diverse community, including access to technology, language and levels of literacy. Communication will involve at least:

- publication of a report on Council meetings in the Parish Newsletter and website
- the Council Chairperson occasionally giving a brief report at weekend Mass notice time
- including issues being considered by the Council in prayers of intercession at Mass
- each parish group having a nominated Council member as their liaison person with the Council
- an Annual Parish Forum for all parishioners.

COMMUNICATION WITH PARISHES OF MORELAND AND WEST BRUNSWICK

The Council will meet three times a year with the equivalent bodies of Moreland and West Brunswick.

Parish Priests will keep each parish informed of developments in the other parishes utilising the Brunswick-Moreland Mission website and the newsletter update column.

The Council Executive will work with leadership of Moreland and West Brunswick in developing a Master Plan for the growth of the 'in solidum' model for the three parishes.

REVIEW

The Council will develop review criteria based in these Guidelines and the goals of the Parish Pastoral Plan.

A day of review and retreat for the Council will be held once a year.

ANNUAL PARISH FORUM

An Annual Parish Forum will be held each November. The Forum will consider:

- a summary of the year's activities with particular relation to the Parish Pastoral Plan
- the principal achievements and challenges of the year and lessons learned
- feedback on the performance of the Council
- presentation of a set of accounts for the previous financial year (balance sheet and financial statement)
- drawing together a set of issues, topics, directions raised by parishioners for consideration of the Council over the coming 12-month cycle
- examining the goals of the Parish Pastoral Plan for the next 12 months and how they will be implemented.

FORMATION

A formation process will occur at the beginning of a Council term taking into account that some members may be new and some beginning a second term. Throughout the term, the Executive will identify courses and events that individual members may attend. Areas for formation will include:

- theology of mission
- theology of the pastoral council
- theology of synodality and stewardship
- theology of the Gospel
- spirituality leadership
- theology of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
- pastoral planning and meeting skills
- group processes of collaboration, accountability and transparency.
