



ACBC Response to the Governance Review

Diocesan Pastoral Councils: A Research Review

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Report

Following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (hereafter, “the Royal Commission”), several concerns regarding the governance of the Catholic Church in Australia were discussed. One of the proposals of the Royal Commission was undertaking a review of the governance and management structures of the Church to provide recommendations to Catholic dioceses and parishes in Australia.

The report from the governance review, *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia*, made a number of recommendations concerning diocesan and parish pastoral councils.¹ The bishops reflected on these and provided their response.² A list of the relevant recommendations is provided in *Appendix 1*, together with the bishops’ response to each. In particular, *The Light from the Southern Cross* report recommended that all dioceses in Australia be required to convene a diocesan pastoral council with membership drawn from the diversity of the lay faithful.³

This report is written in response to the recommendations concerning diocesan pastoral councils and examines the foundations for effective councils, explores the history of such councils in Australia, and discusses some enabling elements and models that may be useful in establishing or reviewing diocesan pastoral councils in Australia. Information on diocesan pastoral councils in Australia was gathered in 2021 and 2022 and reflects the prevalent situation at that time. The authors of this report acknowledge the progress made in some dioceses since that time.

Research Methods

The research methods for this study involved primary and secondary research. Secondary research is a common investigative approach that depends solely on existing data, involving organising, collating and analysing data from different sources to support research conclusions.

There were several data sources for this project. These included:

- A Literature Review on diocesan pastoral councils undertaken in 2021,

¹ Implementation Advisory Group and The Governance Review Project Team, *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia* (Australia, 1 May 2020), 106, 126, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TXZd4SP-EBk4VtH9JyB9PMSmjY9Mfj7E/view>.

² Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Response of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to The Light from the Southern Cross: Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia*, December 17, 2020.

³ Implementation Advisory Group, *The Light from the Southern Cross*, 106.

- A website analysis, investigating information on diocesan pastoral councils operating in Australia and overseas,
- Data collected for the *2019 Governance in Australia Survey* report,⁴
- Research findings reported in the *Synod of Bishops Australian Synthesis*,⁵ and
- Research findings from the *Diocesan Pastoral Councils: An Australian Historical Study* report.⁶

Data collection for the 2019 *Governance in Australia Survey* was carried out via an online survey undertaken from September to October 2019. Thirty dioceses responded to the survey: seven Archdioceses, 20 other geographical dioceses and the Military diocese, and three Eastern Catholic dioceses.

The fruits of the consultation for the *XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* were gathered using an online submission portal, open from mid-October 2021 until the end of February 2022.

Dr Damian Gleeson was commissioned by the NCPR to conduct a review of the historical aspects of Diocesan Pastoral Councils and Parish Pastoral Councils in Australia. His research was undertaken between August and September 2021.

⁴ Trudy Dantis and Stephen Reid, *Governance in Australia Survey 2019: A report to the Implementation Advisory Group* (Canberra, ACT: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, December 2019), 2-3.

⁵ Trudy Dantis, Stephen Reid and Leith Dudfield, *Synod of Bishops Australian Synthesis* (Canberra, ACT: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, August 2022), 1.

⁶ Damian John Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils: An Australian Historical Study*, (Australia: 2021), 5.

SECTION II: DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCILS— AN EMERGING REALITY IN THE CHURCH

Code of Canon Law

The requirement for a pastoral council is governed by the relevant codes of canon law. The Latin Rite churches are subject to the Code of Canon Law 1983 (CIC), whereas the Eastern Rite churches are subject to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO). Within the CIC, references to councils are found in paragraphs 511-514 (diocesan pastoral), 492-494 (diocesan financial), 536 (parish pastoral) and 537 (parish financial). Whereas in the CCEO, paragraphs 272-275 refer to pastoral councils. The relevant passages can be found in *Appendix 2* (for the CIC) and *Appendix 3* (for the CCEO).

It is worth noting that the Code of Canon Law 1983 has translation differences between the English translation approved for the U.S. (which is also the version available on the Vatican website) and the British English translation, which is approved for several other English-speaking countries, including Australia. For example, in relation to Canon 511 the U.S. version says:

In every diocese and to the extent that pastoral circumstances suggest it, a pastoral council is to be constituted which under the authority of the bishop investigates, considers, and proposes practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works in the diocese.⁷

Whereas the British version says:

In each diocese, to the extent that pastoral circumstances recommend it, a pastoral council is to be constituted whose responsibility is to investigate under the authority of the bishop all those things which pertain to pastoral works, to ponder them, and to propose practical conclusions about them.⁸

These differences can confuse the intention of the pastoral council, whether it is to be regarded as an obligation or a suggestion. Commentators on canon law note that while a diocesan pastoral council is highly recommended, it is nevertheless optional, left up to an individual bishop to determine if one is to be constituted within his diocese.⁹ Parish pastoral councils are similarly created at the directive of the bishop.

⁷ “Code of Canon Law,” Apostolic Constitution *Sacrae Disciplinae Leges*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html.

⁸ The Canon Law Society Trust, *The Code of Canon Law in English Translation (Australian Edition)*, trans. The Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and The Canadian Canon Law Society, (Sydney: Collins Liturgical Australia, 1983), 92.

⁹ With thanks to Professor Michele Riondino, professor of canon law at Australian Catholic University, who was consulted on the appropriate translation and interpretation of these passages.

History of Australian Diocesan Pastoral Councils—Damian Gleeson

Dr Damian Gleeson was commissioned to undertake a significant study into Diocesan Pastoral Councils (DPCs) in Australia.¹⁰ His study included a comprehensive look at the history of archdiocesan and diocesan pastoral councils in Australia since Vatican II.

His report noted that six of the archdioceses (Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra & Goulburn, Hobart, Perth and Sydney) have previously had pastoral councils, primarily during the 1960s-70s, but currently none are in existence. At the time of writing, the re-establishment of the Adelaide archdiocesan pastoral council was on the agenda. Ten dioceses have had pastoral councils since Vatican II, and five of those (Ballarat, Maitland-Newcastle,¹¹ Parramatta, Port Pirie, and Toowoomba) were still in existence. However, only the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle had had a continuous Diocesan Pastoral Council from its inception in 1990, whereas other dioceses have had periods of ceasing and restarting such Councils.

Dr Gleeson observed that there were historical inaccuracies reported in both *The Light from the Southern Cross* report and the bishops' response regarding the existence and successes of Australian diocesan pastoral councils. His research indicated that Australia had had significant achievements with councils in the past. The reasons for the decline and discontinuation of early DPCs were complex and varied but included factors such as the death of a bishop, lack of interest by the replacement bishop, inadequate formation and renewal of members, a narrow understanding of Vatican II, and councils where the majority of members were appointed by the bishop. Dr Gleeson stated that the "attitude, energy and enthusiasm of a bishop are the largest factors influencing the existence, meaningfulness and longevity of a Diocesan Pastoral Council".¹² Diocesan pastoral councils were seen to have successes in shared decision-making, respectful engagement between clergy, religious and lay people, and the broad implementation of pastoral services.

Some exemplary models of diocesan pastoral councils were identified in his report. These demonstrated some of the following traits:¹³

- Extensive consultation across clergy, religious and laity before the formation of the Council,
- Strong inter-connecting relationships with parish and regional pastoral councils, and active engagement in diocesan and parish renewal programs,
- Accommodations made for distanced and isolated communities by drawing on representatives from the different regions (vicariates/deaneries) within a diocese,
- Strong relationships with other diocesan organisations, especially finance and education,
- Nature of council membership – an elected, appointed or a hybrid system,
- Ex-officio input not outweighing the representative voices of clergy, religious and laity.

¹⁰ Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils: An Australian Historical Study*.

¹¹ While a diocesan pastoral council for Maitland-Newcastle was in existence at the time of writing Dr Gleeson's report, the council was dissolved on the death of the bishop in November 2021. The council is currently in abeyance.

¹² Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils*, 82.

¹³ Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils*, 83-85.

Some other attributes that contributed to successful DPCs in the past included:¹⁴

- Selecting the best available lay people,
- A broad pastoral and social justice paradigm,
- Parliamentary decision-making,
- Focus on ‘total mission of the Church’,
- Effective secretariat or subcommittees to drive initiatives,
- Integrated model of partnership between pastoral councils at parish, deanery and diocesan levels,
- Chairmanship vested in lay people.

¹⁴ Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils*, 86-87.

SECTION III: ENABLING ELEMENTS

While there is a great deal of literature on the development and management of effective parish pastoral councils, there is much less on diocesan pastoral councils. Monsignor John Renken, a prominent canon law expert, examined the role of diocesan pastoral councils in his 1993 article which looked at the role and functioning of pastoral councils in the Church.¹⁵ Renken noted that there are three mentions of diocesan pastoral councils in Vatican II texts. The first is in *Christus Dominus* which says:

*It is greatly desired that in each diocese a pastoral commission will be established over which the diocesan bishop himself will preside and in which specially chosen clergy, religious and lay people will participate. The duty of this commission will be to investigate and weigh pastoral undertakings and to formulate practical conclusions regarding them.*¹⁶

The second is found in *Ad gentes* which says:

*To improve coordination, let the bishop set up, insofar as possible, a pastoral council, in which clergy, Religious, and laity may have a part, through the medium of selected delegates. Moreover, let them take care that apostolic activity be not limited to those only who have already been converted. A fair proportion of personnel and funds should be assigned to the evangelization of non-Christians.*¹⁷

The third, Renken notes, is found in a note in *Presbyterorum ordinis*, which distinguishes between the function of the senate of priests and the pastoral council, noting that the pastoral council “includes laymen” and “whose function is confined to investigating question[s] of pastoral activity”.¹⁸

Renken highlights seven insights in relation to the role of pastoral councils, both diocesan and parish. First, that their purpose is to do pastoral planning. However, the second insight notes that this does not extend to organising pastoral activities directly. Instead, the council is intended to have an advisory role. The third insight relates to distinguishing the purpose of and coordination between

¹⁵ John A. Renken, “Pastoral Councils: Pastoral Planning and Dialogue among the People of God,” *The Jurist* 53, (1993): 132-54, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/juristcu53&div=10&id=&page=>.

¹⁶ Paul VI. “Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church: *Christus Dominus*,” (1965), 27, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_christus-dominus_en.html.

¹⁷ Second Vatican Council, “Decree *Ad Gentes* on the Mission Activity of the Church,” (1965), 30, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html.

¹⁸ Paul VI, “Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests: *Presbyterorum Ordinis*,” (1965), quoted in Renken, “Pastoral Councils,” 133.

the pastoral council and other related committees, such as the presbyteral council and the finance council. The fourth insight notes that the pastoral council is one of several ways in which the mission of the Church is shared. The fifth relates to the diversity of the members of the council, who each bring their own strengths and vocations. The sixth notes that it is a consultative committee, rather than one responsible for decision-making. However, Renken emphasises that while the role of the council is an advisory one, the advice offered should not be dismissed or disregarded easily. The final insight is that the council requires “the support of the community’s leadership if it is to be effective in pastoral planning”.¹⁹ This includes support for policy, leaders valuing the advice provided by the council, and the provision of appropriate resources to allow the council to carry out its role.

The following sections of this report describe the enabling elements of a diocesan pastoral council. These elements are membership, term of office, planning resources, frequency of meetings, relationships, the importance of prayer, and other governance matters.

1. Membership

As noted in Gleeson’s report, the membership of the diocesan pastoral council is integral to its successful functioning.²⁰ Most DPCs are composed of both *ex-officio* members and elected or appointed members. In some councils, the bishop appoints these members, in some he only confirms their membership, while in others, the appointment process does not involve the bishop directly.

CIC 512§2 states that:

The members of Christ’s faithful assigned to the pastoral council are to be selected in such a way that the council truly reflects the entire portion of the people of God which constitutes the diocese, taking account of the different regions of the diocese, of social conditions and professions, and of the part played in the apostolate by the members, whether individually or in association with others.²¹

Our research indicates that there are six criteria by which members could be appointed:

- I. **Skills-based, expertise, experience** – Members may be selected based on their experience, gifts or known expertise in a particular area. An example of this is the appointment to the 1967 DPC in Sydney of Roy Boylan who was recognised as being “loyal and trustworthy” and had been responsible for the earlier establishment of the Pauline Association.²²
- II. **Representative** – A representative membership can be formed in several ways, depending on the focus of the diocese:

¹⁹ Renken, “Pastoral Councils,” 154.

²⁰ Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils*.

²¹ The Canon Law Society Trust, *The Code of Canon Law*, 92.

²² Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils*, 33.

- a. Some DPCs asked for the various groups and apostolates in the diocese to select members for the DPC.
 - b. Others required that there be a certain number of diocesan clergy, religious brothers or sisters, and laity to represent the diocese as a whole.
 - c. Another approach was to select members from each parish in the diocese.
 - d. The Diocese of Parramatta took this a step further and selected members from deanery pastoral councils, who were themselves representatives from the relevant parish pastoral councils.²³
 - e. Yet another approach is to nominate members who are representative of a certain geographical region.
 - f. Some DPCs have required that a particular ratio of the council should be filled by women, ensuring a greater gender representation on the council.²⁴
 - g. Finally, members could be selected who were representative of the demographic character of the diocese, such as requiring a certain number of people from a particular country or race who are prominent in the diocese.
- III. **Expressions of interest** – Rather than members being selected based on skills or representative characteristics, membership can be formed by potential members submitting expressions of interest. While this is a good method to ensure that members are likely to be enthusiastic about their role, it can also lead to a council which may be skewed in one way or another, if members are appointed without due consideration of criteria or expertise.
- IV. **Nominations** – As an alternative to calling for expressions of interest, members may be nominated to be on the council. The nomination may be based on their skills and experience, or their characteristics as a representative of a certain area, group or demographic. Depending on how the council is conceived, the bishop of the diocese may be the sole nominator of members, or nominations could come from other trusted advisors or representative groups. This can be a good way to ensure that certain skill sets are represented but could miss potentially valuable council members who are not yet well known. If nominators are of only one or a few people, it could also lead to a council being skewed to match the interests of the nominator, rather than being of value to the diocese.
- V. **Ex-officio** – As mentioned previously, many DPCs have *ex-officio* members who gain membership of the council based on the role that they have within the diocese. In general, *ex-officio* members have included:
- The bishop
 - Auxiliary bishops
 - The vicar-general
 - Co-ordinator of diocesan pastoral team
 - Chancellor
 - Finance Officer
 - Director of Strategic Pastoral Planning
 - Coordinator of Adult Faith Formation

²³ Diocese of Parramatta, *Handbook: Deanery and Diocesan Pastoral Councils* (Parramatta, NSW: 2018), 13.

²⁴ Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle Eparchy, *Decree Promulgating the Rules of the Pastoral Council of the Eparchy of St Thomas, The Apostle, Melbourne* (Mickleham, Victoria: 20 March 2016), 3.

- Parish priest of the cathedral
- Chief Executive Officer.

VI. **Hybrid** – Most DPCs in Australia use a hybrid model for selecting members. As mentioned previously, many include both *ex-officio* and elected or appointed members. There may also be a mix of those representing parishes and those representing other demographic criteria. Some DPCs may have several selection methods to ensure a healthy mix of council members.

The NCPR's 2019 survey of diocesan pastoral councils determined that among the members of the extant councils, 42 per cent of the members were clergy, deacons or members of religious orders, while the remaining 58 per cent were lay people.²⁵ Of these, 112 members (55%) were men, while 92 (45%) were women.²⁶ However, the majority of male members were ordained. Upon investigating the sex of lay members of the councils, 41 were men and 78 were women.²⁷ The survey also reported on the male/female ratio of the Chairs of the DPCs. Among the nine DPCs who reported these details, four councils were chaired by men and five by women.²⁸

2. Term of Office

Another aspect to consider is the term of membership. While some members, such as those in *ex-officio* roles, may hold membership for the entire duration that they are in that role, other members usually have specific terms of office.

Data collected from Australian dioceses showed that most DPCs required a term of two or three years, with consideration given to whether members could be elected for further terms.²⁹ Some DPCs required that half the council positions were to be put up for election each year, so that while there were fresh recruits coming into the council, there were also members still serving from previous years to provide continuity.³⁰

3. Planning Resources

A diocesan pastoral council needs to source appropriate information about the diocese to function and advise the bishop appropriately. This information can come from several sources:

- I. **Surveys / Census** – The *Social Profiles* created by the NCPR for each parish, diocese and the whole of Australia provides useful information on the demographic makeup of Catholics living in the diocese. Other surveys such as the National Count of Attendance and the National

²⁵ Dantis and Reid, *Governance in Australia Survey*, 7.

²⁶ Dantis and Reid, *Governance in Australia Survey*, 7.

²⁷ Dantis and Reid, *Governance in Australia Survey*, 7.

²⁸ Dantis and Reid, *Governance in Australia Survey*, 8.

²⁹ Dantis and Reid, *Governance in Australia Survey*, 35-65.

³⁰ Dantis and Reid, *Governance in Australia Survey*, 35-65.

Church Life Survey provide valuable data on attendance trends and information on the beliefs and attitudes of Mass attenders.

- II. **Diocese demographic data, growth and change** – The diocese itself may collect valuable information about the characteristics of the people within its remit. It may also collect information on areas of growth within the diocese and any plans to establish, suppress or notably alter existing parishes.
- III. **Financial data** – Many DPCs either have a financial representative or receive regular reports from the diocesan finance council. This allows DPC members to have a clear understanding of the financial constraints of the diocese, which may impact, or inspire, pastoral planning.
- IV. **Consultation processes** – While council members may be able to bring reports from the parishes or groups they represent, other ways of consulting with people in the diocese are valuable. These could include reports of discussions held at parish or diocesan assemblies, or there may be other communication methods employed to ensure the DPC is listening to the voices of their people.
- V. **Reports from various agencies and offices** – The DPC can benefit from regular reports from other diocesan agencies and offices. Apart from the diocesan finance council, communication from other offices, such as the Catholic Education Office, any sub-committees, the presbyterial council, and religious communities, may prove valuable to the DPC’s pastoral planning role.
- VI. **Annual reports** – Annual reports of the diocese or reports from parishes within the area provide valuable information on how the community has been affected throughout the year and its successes or challenges in that time.

4. Frequency of Meetings

CIC 514§2 states that diocesan pastoral council meetings should occur “at least once a year”.³¹ The *Governance in Australia Survey* report prepared by the NCPR for the Implementation Advisory Group showed that among the dioceses which have convened DPCs, most meet between one and four times a year.³² Some dioceses, such as the Diocese of Bathurst, assign council members to working groups that meet more frequently.³³ Other dioceses, which have a large number of representatives attending, engage a smaller sub-set of the council as a steering committee to meet with the bishop on a more frequent basis.

5. Relationships

Good relationships with other entities in the diocese are essential for the DPC to understand and support the diocese appropriately. Based on the research data gathered from dioceses, the following were important relationships:

³¹ The Canon Law Society Trust, *The Code of Canon Law*, 92.

³² Dantis and Reid, *Governance in Australia Survey*, 6; Implementation Advisory Group, *Light from the Southern Cross*, 170.

³³ Michael McKenna, *Diocesan Pastoral Council Statutes*, (Bathurst, NSW: 2016), 1.

- **Finance Council** – Many DPCs either required that a representative from the diocesan finance council was an *ex-officio* member of the diocesan pastoral council, or that the finance council provided regular reports on the financial situation of the diocese.
- **Presbyterial Council / Council of Priests / Senate of Priests** – Dr Gleeson’s report noted that “In nearly every diocese, the establishment of a Senate of Priests preceded the formation of a DPC”.³⁴ Some DPCs required representation from a member of the Council of Priests, while others recognised that cooperation between the two councils was important.
- **Parish Pastoral Councils** – Several DPCs require a representative member from each of the diocese’s parish pastoral councils to attend meetings. Some require a representative from each parish council, others just from the parishes themselves. Good communication between the diocesan and parish pastoral councils was identified in Dr Gleeson’s report as impacting the success of the councils and their positive influence on both the diocese and the parish. As Sr Cecilia Anning states in her 2007 handbook on Parish Pastoral Councils:

When the link between Parish Pastoral Councils and Diocesan/Deanery/Regional Pastoral Councils is clearly defined and maintained, a valuable structure for networking and support can be established.³⁵

- **Sub-committees** – The structure of the DPC can be quite diverse. While some require a small core committee, others legislate a much larger council, which may require members to form sub-committees or working groups to examine particular issues. For example, in the Diocese of Bathurst, members are assigned to one of six working groups that meet throughout the year, and then the DPC meets annually.³⁶
- **Catholic Education** – The relationship between the Catholic schools in the diocese and the parishes within which they reside is an important area for pastoral ministry. While some diocesan pastoral councils seek reports on the state of Catholic education in the diocese, there are a few that require a representative from this sector to attend and report at council meetings.
- **Other Agencies/Services** – The relationship with other Catholic agencies or services is integral to the pastoral care of the people within the diocese. Organisations such as St Vincent de Paul Society, CatholicCare, ministerial public juridic persons, safeguarding committees, Catholic Development Funds and Catholic Earthcare, to name a few, are examples of the agencies and services that may operate within the diocese. In addition, there are other commissions that may be established by the bishops to oversee other aspects of ministry. Some examples of these are the Diocesan Liturgical Commission or an Ecumenical Commission.
- **Religious Communities** – Depending on the diocese, religious communities may be directly involved in pastoral ministry in areas such as education, aged care, retreat centres, or other services. Alternatively, Institutes of Religious Men or Women, Institutes of Consecrated Life,

³⁴ Gleeson, *Diocesan Pastoral Councils*, 27.

³⁵ Cecilia Anning, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils*, 3rd ed. (Queensland, Australia: Faith & Life Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007), 34, http://mullumbimbycatholic.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Handbook_for_Parish_Pastoral_Councils.pdf.

³⁶ McKenna, *Diocesan Pastoral Council*, 1.

Societies of Apostolic Life or Associations of Christ's Faithful may have members who are residents of the diocese. Some DPCs require representatives on the council from these groups, while others have different arrangements to engage with them.

- **Ethnic Communities** – Within a diocese, distinct ethnic communities may be present, whose members bring their own gifts, challenges and culture. DPCs may find it beneficial to consult directly with these communities to determine and meet their pastoral needs.
- **Roles: *ex-officio* and representatives** – The relationships between the members of the council are imperative to its successful operation. Care should be taken in forming the council, as well as consideration to building relationships among the appointed members, providing opportunities for genuine discussion and consultation and appropriate processes for addressing conflicts that may arise.
- **Diocesan curia** – In order for the DPC to work effectively in support of the diocese, a good working relationship with the diocesan curia is vital. This grouping of bodies and people includes persons such as the vicar general, episcopal vicars and the chancellor and other individuals, such as the archivists, notaries and judicial officials.³⁷
- **Bishop** – Finally, the relationship between a diocesan pastoral council and the bishop is key to the DPC's success. The role that the bishop has in relation to the DPC varies in different dioceses. In some dioceses, the bishop is the Chair of the council; in others, he is the President, and another member is the Chair; while in other models, the DPC exists separately to the bishop but meets with and reports to him on a regular basis.

6. Importance of Prayer

Scripture tells us that prayer is vital to every aspect of our lives.

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made to God. (Phil 4:6)

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. (Eph 6:18)

Some dioceses have set out in their charter or terms of reference that meetings of the DPC should begin with prayer.³⁸ While other dioceses' charters may not be so prescriptive, many writings about best practices for parish pastoral councils (which also inform diocesan pastoral council practices) recommend prayer in the selection of members to the council, in preparation for council meetings, and in the meetings of the council itself.³⁹

³⁷ Brian Lucas, William D'Apice and Peter Slack, *Church Administration Handbook* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2008).

³⁸ Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide, Diocesan Pastoral Council for the Archdiocese of Adelaide Charter (a Working Document) (2019), 3.

³⁹ Anning, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils*, 60-66; Arthur X. Deegan II, ed., *Developing a Vibrant Parish Council* (Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995); Mark F. Fischer and Mary Margaret Raley, eds., *Four*

Throughout the recent Synod of Bishops consultation in 2021 and 2022, and during the previous *Listening and Dialogue* process in the journey towards the Plenary Council, which concluded in July 2022, Australian Catholics “have become more familiar with the practice of prayerful listening and dialogue”.⁴⁰ The practice of engaging with prayer and discernment in the decision-making process is integral to the synodal approach of listening to one another being fostered by Pope Francis. The model of Spiritual Conversations introduced in the Synod of Bishops consultation can be applied to other situations, such as diocesan pastoral council meetings, to allow discussion of different views and to encourage a recognition of the workings of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

7. Other Governance Matters

Safeguarding

Some dioceses require that members of the DPC hold Working with Children’s Checks or may have other safeguarding requirements.⁴² When selecting members, these matters should be taken into consideration along with their suitability to consult and liaise with parishioners in the diocese.

Conflicts of Interest

The terms of reference for the DPC should take into consideration how conflicts of interest for any members of the council will be addressed.⁴³

Ways to Build More Effective Parish Councils (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 2002); Oonagh O’Brien and Julie Kavanagh, *Parish Leadership Groups: A Resourcebook* (Dublin, Ireland: The Columba Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Dantis, Reid, and Dudfield, *Synod of Bishops Australian Synthesis*, 6.

⁴¹ National Centre for Pastoral Research, *XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: Listening and Discernment Guide Session I* (Canberra, ACT: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2021), https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/acbcwebsite/Articles/Documents/ACBC/Synod_-_Session_1_v5.pdf.

⁴² Diocese of Ballarat, Charter of the Diocesan Pastoral Council of the Diocese of Ballarat (Ballarat, 25 July 2015), 2.

⁴³ Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, *Statutes for Diocesan Council for Mission* (Newcastle: 21 May 2019), 4.

SECTION IV: MODELS OF DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCILS

Research showed several models of diocesan pastoral councils evident in Australian dioceses. Additionally, other models were identified in Catholic dioceses around the world. A few possible models that could be adopted in Australian dioceses are discussed in the sections below.

1. A Community of Communities

In this model, the members of the DPC are direct representatives of groups within the diocese in which they serve. The selection of members may relate to the geography of the diocese, to the cultural groups present, or to the various states of life represented in the diocese. A DPC based on this model reflects first and foremost CIC 512§2, which says, “The members of Christ’s faithful assigned to the pastoral council are to be selected in such a way that the council truly reflects the entire portion of the people of God which constitutes the diocese”.⁴⁴



For example, a diocese may require that each geographical region elect one or two members to the DPC. This may be particularly important in dioceses that include urban, regional and remote parishes. Alternatively, members could be chosen based on ethnic groups present in the diocese. Another approach would be to require that a specific number of laity, consecrated religious and clergy be appointed to the council in ratios that reflect the diversity of states of life within the diocese.

2. The Diocesan Forum

The diocesan forum model is one where the DPC is composed of several working groups which have responsibility for areas of interest and responsibility. In this model, the working groups meet throughout the year, then come together at the larger meeting, akin to a synod or conference, on a less frequent basis.



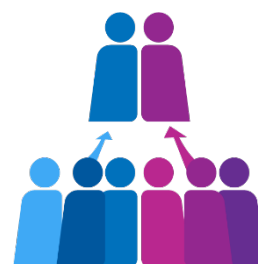
For example, the Diocese of Bathurst has a much larger DPC than other dioceses.⁴⁵ However, members are divided into six working groups that support the pastoral requirements of the diocese. These are (currently) Hearing and Proclaiming the Word of God; Worshipping God in Prayer and Sacrament; Building a Community of Love and Service; The Domestic Church: Marriage and Families; Participation of Indigenous Catholics; and Participation of Young Catholics. The working groups meet throughout the year but gather for an annual DPC meeting where the fruits of the groups are shared.

⁴⁴ The Canon Law Society Trust, *The Code of Canon Law*, 92.

⁴⁵ McKenna, *Diocesan Pastoral Council Statutes*, 1.

3. The House of Representatives

The House of Representatives model, like its namesake in the Australian Parliament, directly represents groups present in the diocese on a relatively equal basis. These groups may be based on parishes, on agencies present or other important groups identified within the diocese.



An example of this is the model adopted by the Syro-Malabar eparchy that requires one representative from each parish with less than 200 families, and two representatives from each parish with 200 or more families.⁴⁶ The eparchy also requires a representative from the presbyteral council and identifies that a maximum third of the council is nominated by the bishop, and a minimum third of the council is filled by women.

4. A Gathering of Discerners

Another model is a Gathering of Discerners. In this model, the primary focus of the DPC is to reflect on data received from reports from parishes and agencies and prayerfully to propose a way forward for pastoral planning. Members of the DPC are selected based on their skills and gifts for discernment, or experience in relevant fields such as theology, sociology or law. The attention of this DPC is on the big picture vision for the diocese, and imagining anew what is and could be possible. While they are involved in discerning the vision for the diocese, the implementation of the vision is handed over to other competent groups.



5. A Peak Planning Body

A Peak Planning Body is another possible prototype. In this model, the DPC is an executive council responsible for the implementation of the bishop's vision for the diocese. Unlike the "Gathering of Discerners", the Peak Planning Body is a council of do-ers. Their responsibility is to ensure that the pastoral needs of the diocese are identified and addressed.



⁴⁶ Syro-Malabar Eparchy, *Decree Promulgating the Rules*, 2-3.

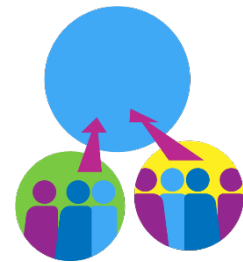
6. A Hybrid Model

While distinct models have been described above, each with different focuses, they can be combined in ways that best suit the needs of a particular diocese. For example, a DPC could ensure that specific ethnic groups within the diocese are represented (community of communities), that each parish elects a member to the DPC (House of Representatives), and that members of the DPC together discern the vision for the diocese (Gathering of Discerners). This hybrid model is most commonly seen in Australian dioceses with existing diocesan pastoral councils.



7. Alternative Consultative Bodies

While the formation of a Diocesan Pastoral Council is “greatly desired”, circumstances may arise where it is either not possible to implement a DPC, or to implement one in the expected form.⁴⁷ However, the spirit of a DPC and the intention behind it may still be present in other diocesan councils. For example, in the Maitland-Newcastle diocese, up until 2021, there existed a “Diocesan Council for Mission”.⁴⁸ It was noted in the Statutes for the council that it fulfilled the role of a Diocesan Pastoral Council, but this may not have been obvious to those viewing the diocese’s structure from outside.



Another example is how one diocese in the Philippines has approached the issue. In the Diocese of Antipolo, lay people were initially represented on a Diocesan Pastoral Council when it was formed in the 1980s. However, this structure was found to be “not convenient” and in the early 1990s, a purely lay council was devised.⁴⁹ This ‘Council of the Laity’ is made up of lay representatives from all the parishes in the diocese.

⁴⁷ Paul VI, *Christus Dominus*, 27.

⁴⁸ Maitland-Newcastle, *Statutes*, 2.

⁴⁹ “Diocesan Council of the Laity, Diocese of Antipolo”, Sangguniang Laiko ng Pilipinas, https://www.cbcpilaiko.org/members-directory/___trashed-3/diocesan-council-of-the-laity-diocese-of-antipolo/

CONCLUSION

While a Diocesan Pastoral Council can take on many forms, it is most important that the model adopted suits the diocese within which it operates. In some circumstances, a customary diocesan pastoral council may not meet the needs of the diocese, in which case the bishop should ensure that communication, consultation and inclusion of the members of the diocese are addressed in another suitable form.

Whatever is decided, it is important to ensure that the structure is reviewed on a regular basis, such as every 10 years. This ensures that the pastoral council continues to perform its role in a way that is most appropriate for the diocese, given the changes that can occur locally, nationally and globally over a decade.

APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE LIGHT FROM THE SOUTHERN CROSS AND THE BISHOPS' RESPONSES

Recommendations related to Diocesan Pastoral Councils

Recommendation 50

That either the Plenary Council 2020-21 or the ACBC legislate to make particular law requiring each diocese have a diocesan pastoral council or close equivalent, established and facilitated with reference to their local context and circumstances.

Recommendation 51

That either the Plenary Council 2020-21 or the ACBC legislate to make particular law that:

51.1 if there is no diocesan pastoral council in existence, the diocesan administrator or apostolic administrator elects a representative group of lay advisors to advise him;

51.2 where a see is vacant the diocesan pastoral council members continue to meet to advise the diocesan administrator on the ongoing pastoral needs of the diocese;

51.3 the members of the diocesan pastoral council participate in the diocesan synod;

51.4 the diocesan pastoral council must be consulted when parishes are erected, suppressed or notably altered;

51.5 the diocesan pastoral council must receive the diocesan annual financial report and be consulted before approval of the diocesan budget and before the diocesan tax on parishes is altered;

51.6 the diocesan pastoral council must be consulted when a new church is being built or a church is being reduced to profane use or to be sold or demolished;

51.7 the diocesan pastoral council must be consulted on matters of importance in the diocese;

51.8 the diocesan pastoral council develop and review (on a regular basis) a profile that identifies the needs of the diocese to support good governance including the development of a strategic plan; and

51.9 the diocesan pastoral council's profile should be used to inform the process of reflection with respect to the appointment of a bishop.

Recommendation 52

That the composition of a diocesan pastoral council be representative of the diversity of lay faithful within the diocese and include a broad range of skill sets and experiences to enable it to fulfil its mandated role.

Bishops' response:

Several observations are offered concerning diocesan pastoral councils. First, the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council (*Christus Dominus, Ad gentes, Presbyterorum ordinis*), the teachings of Pope Saint Paul VI (*Ecclesiae sanctae*) and Pope Saint John Paul II (*Christifideles laici, Novo Millennio ineunte*), the Second Synod of Bishops (*Ultimus temporibus*), the Congregation for Clergy (*Omnes Christifideles*) and the Congregation for Bishops (*Ecclesiae imago, Apostolorum successores*) all encourage the establishment of a diocesan pastoral council in each diocese, but leave it voluntary. The *Code of Canon Law* makes provision for and encourages, but does not make mandatory, the establishment of a diocesan pastoral council.

Secondly, in view of all these documents, it must be concluded that the Apostolic See did not/does not want to bind Bishops to a particular structure for receiving guidance about the current and future pastoral life of the diocese, but to leave the Bishop some freedom to develop structures suited to the circumstances and needs of the diocese in each place.

Thirdly, all of the indicated pronouncements and law present the diocesan pastoral council as an advisory body for dealing with pastoral planning, evangelisation, the sacramental life and doctrinal formation of the faithful, mission and apostolic initiatives, and ministry. The diocesan pastoral council may assist with decision-making. The guidance and advice offered by the diocesan pastoral council informs those entrusted with exercising a responsibility in the governance of the diocese.

Fourthly, it is noted that in several Australian dioceses that had diocesan pastoral councils for a time, these bodies withered in energy, membership and function after some years.

Nonetheless, the Report's recommendations that a pastoral council be established in each diocese, with significant membership drawn from lay women and men, as well as from consecrated religious and the clergy, is acknowledged. The ACBC will establish councils and group to study the theological foundations and role of diocesan pastoral councils, as first envisaged by the Second Vatican Council and subsequent Roman pronouncements and law, identifying what may be learned from existing or past diocesan pastoral councils, and setting forth a vision for the contribution of the pastoral council to planning the life and mission of the diocese.

The Fifth Plenary Council for Australia and the diocesan synods that will follow thereafter may assist bishops in determining the value of or need for a diocesan pastoral council or other advisory body, its proper purpose and structure, and its relationship with other advisory and governance bodies within the diocese. The Plenary Council and synods may also assist bishops who have existing diocesan pastoral councils to review them.

Recommendations related to Parish Pastoral Councils

Recommendation 77

That the ACBC commission a study to collate information about experiences of parish councils in Australia with a view to developing models that can be adapted to local circumstances for matters normally found in constitutions or rules for like bodies, including (but not limited to), objects, purposes, powers, procedures, skills matrices and accountability systems.

Bishops' response:

Agreed. This recommendation will be referred to the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry with the suggestion that the National Centre for Pastoral Research be consulted about already existing data and asked to consider the terms of the recommendation in light of the *Building Stronger Parishes* project.

APPENDIX 2: RELEVANT PASSAGES IN THE CODE OF CANON LAW 1983 (CODEX IURIS CANONICI, CIC)

Article 3: The Finance Committee and the Financial Administrator

Can. 492 §1 In each diocese a finance committee is to be established, presided over by the diocesan Bishop or his delegate. It is to be composed of at least three of the faithful, expert in financial affairs and civil law, of outstanding integrity, and appointed by the Bishop.

§2 The members of the finance committee are appointed for five years, but when this period has expired they may be appointed for further terms of five years.

§3 Persons related to the Bishop up to the fourth degree of consanguinity or affinity are excluded from the finance committee.

Can. 493 Besides the functions entrusted to it in Book V on 'The Temporal Goods of the Church', it is the responsibility of the finance committee to prepare each year a budget of income and expenditure over the coming year for the governance of the whole diocese, in accordance with the direction of the diocesan Bishop. It is also the responsibility of the committee to account at the end of the year for income and expenditure.

Can. 494 §1 In each diocese a financial administrator is to be appointed by the Bishop, after consulting the college of consultors and the finance committee. The financial administrator is to be expert in financial matters and of truly outstanding integrity.

§2 The financial administrator is to be appointed for five years, but when this period has expired, may be appointed for further terms of five years. While in office he or she is not to be removed except for a grave reason, to be estimated by the Bishop after consulting the college of consultors and the finance committee.

§3 It is the responsibility of the financial administrator, under the authority of the Bishop, to administer the goods of the diocese in accordance with the plan of the finance committee, and to make those payments from diocesan funds which the Bishop or his delegates have lawfully authorised.

§4 At the end of the year the financial administrator must give the finance committee an account of income and expenditure.

Chapter V: The Pastoral Council

Can. 511 In each diocese, in so far as pastoral circumstances suggest, a pastoral council is to be established. Its function, under the authority of the Bishop, is to study and weigh those matters which concern the pastoral works in the diocese, and to propose practical conclusions concerning them.

Can. 512 §1. A pastoral council is composed of members of Christ's faithful who are in full communion with the catholic Church: clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life, and especially lay people. They are designated in the manner determined by the diocesan Bishop.

§2. The members of Christ's faithful assigned to the pastoral council are to be selected in such a way that the council truly reflects the entire portion of the people of God which constitutes the diocese, taking account of the different regions of the diocese, of social conditions and professions, and of the part played in the apostolate by the members, whether individually or in association with others.

§3. Only those members of Christ's faithful who are outstanding in firm faith, high moral standards, and prudence are to be assigned to the pastoral council.

Can. 513 §1. The pastoral council is appointed for a determinate period, in accordance with the provisions of the statutes drawn up by the Bishop.

§2. When the see is vacant, the pastoral council lapses.

Can. 514 §1. The pastoral council has only a consultative vote. It is for the diocesan Bishop alone to convene it, according to the needs of the apostolate, and to preside over it. He alone has the right to make public the matters dealt with in the council.

§2. It is to be convened at least once a year.

Can. 536 §1. If, after consulting the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish. In this council, which is presided over by the parish priest, Christ's faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral care in the parish, give their help in fostering pastoral action.

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

Can. 537 In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to can.532. It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, and it is comprised of members of the faithful selected according to these norms.

APPENDIX 3: RELEVANT PASSAGES IN THE CODE OF CANONS OF THE EASTERN CHURCHES 1990 (*CODEX CANONUM ECCLESiarUM ORIENTALUM, CCEO*)

Article IV: The Pastoral Council

Canon 272 In the eparchy, if pastoral circumstances recommend it, a pastoral council is to be established whose responsibility it is, under the authority of the eparchial bishop, to investigate, ponder and propose practical conclusions about those things which regard pastoral works in the eparchy.

Canon 273 §1. The pastoral council, which is only a consultative body, consists of clerics, religious or members of societies of common life in the manner of religious, and, especially, of lay people designated in a manner determined by the eparchial bishop.

§2. The pastoral council is to be so established that, insofar as possible, it represents the Christian faithful of the eparchy in regard to the types of persons, associations and other endeavours.

§3. Along with these Christian faithful, if it is suitable, the eparchial bishop can invite others also to the pastoral council, even if they are of another Church *sui iuris*.

§4. No one except Christian faithful of proven faith, good morals and outstanding prudence are to be appointed to the pastoral council.

Canon 274 §1. The pastoral council is established for a term according to the prescriptions of the statutes which are to be given by the eparchial bishop.

§2. When the eparchial see is vacant the pastoral council ceases to exist.

Canon 275 It belongs to the eparchial bishop alone to convoke the pastoral council according to the needs of the apostolate, to preside over it and to publish the things which have been discussed in its meetings.

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