



# **ACBC Response to Governance Review**

## **Parish 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 to undertake 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.<sup>1</sup> The bishops reflected on these and provided their response.<sup>2</sup> A list of the relevant recommendations is provided in *Appendix 1*, together with the bishops’ response to each.

This report is written in response to the recommendations concerning parish pastoral councils (PPCs), particularly Recommendation 77 which recommended that a study be commissioned to identify experiences of parish pastoral councils around Australia in order to develop models that could inform future councils. It is intended that this report complement a similar report on Diocesan Pastoral Councils, and it should be read in conjunction with it.

### 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:

1. A Literature Review on parish pastoral councils (PPCs) undertaken in 2021,
2. An Email Survey: In March 2021, the General Secretary of the ACBC wrote to all Australian diocesan bishops to ascertain what had been established in dioceses in relation to parish pastoral councils. Responses were received from 10 dioceses,
3. A Website Analysis: From July to August 2021, the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) undertook an investigation into 1,151 websites of Catholic parishes in Australia, with the aim of gathering information on PPCs,

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

4. Research findings reported in the *2019 Governance in Australia Survey* report,<sup>3</sup>
5. *Building Stronger Parishes* project,<sup>4</sup>
6. *National Church Life Survey* (2011 and 2016).<sup>5</sup>

Data for the *Building Stronger Parishes* project was collected between 2011 and 2015. The research uncovered some unique models of parish pastoral councils that are described in this report.

In 2011, 217 Catholic parishes participated in a national random sample of the *National Church Life Survey* (NCLS) which included a question asking Mass attenders to describe their views of parish pastoral councils. This sample size ensured a representative sample from every diocese. The question was repeated in 2016, with 195 Catholic parishes participating in the national random sample that year.

Data from the NCLS Operations Survey was also used for the current report. In 2016, the Operations Survey was completed by 149 parishes in the national random sample. There were nine questions included in the questionnaire about a range of issues relating to parish pastoral councils or similar groups operating in the parish.

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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> National Centre for Pastoral Research. *Building Stronger Parishes*, <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/building-stronger-parishes-research-project/>

<sup>5</sup> National Centre for Pastoral Research. *National Church Life Survey (NCLS)*, <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/national-church-life-survey-ncls/>

## The Parish Council in the Code of Canon Law and Official Church Documents

The requirement for parish pastoral councils (PPCs) 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).

In relation to parish pastoral councils, the Code of Canon Law 1983 (CIC) says in Canon 536:

§1 If the diocesan bishop judges it opportune after he has heard the presbyteral council, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.

§2 A pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by the norms established by the diocesan bishop.<sup>6</sup>

For the Eastern Churches, the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches 1990 (CCEO)<sup>7</sup> states in Canon 295 that:

In the parish there are to be appropriate councils dealing with pastoral and economic matters, according to the norms of the particular law of its own Church *sui iuris*.<sup>8</sup>

As such, while in the Eastern Churches, pastoral councils are required for each parish, in the Latin Rite Churches, the requirement for parish pastoral councils is at the discretion of the diocesan bishop once he has consulted with the presbyteral council.

Other canons and official Church documents have also been identified as being pertinent to PPCs, particularly in relation to the relationship between the pastor and lay parishioners. For example, Canon 212 of the Code of Canon Law 1983 states:

§1 Christ's faithful, conscious of their own responsibility, are bound to show Christian obedience to what the sacred Pastors, who represent Christ, declare as teachers of the faith and prescribe as rulers of the Church.

§2 Christ's faithful are at liberty to make known their needs, especially their spiritual needs, and their wishes to the Pastors of the Church.

§3 They have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred Pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the Church. They have the right also to make their views known to

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<sup>6</sup> The Canon Law Society Trust, *The Code of Canon Law in English Translation (Australian edition)*, trans. by 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), 97.

<sup>7</sup> We note that there is no official English translation of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches 1990. However, there is broad agreement in translated texts available on the internet. For any queries over the meaning of the canon, the original Latin text should be consulted.

<sup>8</sup> "1990 Code of Canons of Oriental Churches", John Gray, ed., <https://www.jgray.org/codes/cceo90eng.html>.

others of Christ's faithful, but in doing so they must always respect the integrity of faith and morals, show due reverence to the Pastors and take into account both the common good and the dignity of individuals.<sup>9</sup>

Canon 515 §1 describes the role of a parish and its relationship to the diocesan Bishop and parish priest:

§1 A parish is a certain community of Christ's faithful stably established within a particular Church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor.<sup>10</sup>

The qualities of members of the council are discussed in Canon 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...

§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.

While the discussion in Canon 512 refers to members of the diocesan pastoral council, Lucas, Slack and d'Apice remind us in the *Church Administration Handbook* that these qualities also apply to members of PPCs.<sup>11</sup>

*Lumen Gentium* suggests that through the parishioners, parish priests can investigate and discern the needs of the parish, as well as encourage the laity to make contributions in the service of the Church:

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.<sup>12</sup>

In his apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II wrote about the mission of the Church moving forward:

With its universal and indispensable provisions, the programme of the Gospel must continue to take root, as it has always done, in the life of the Church everywhere. It is in the local churches that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified—goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary

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<sup>9</sup> The Canon Law Society Trust, *The Code of Canon Law*, 35.

<sup>10</sup> The Canon Law Society Trust, *The Code of Canon Law*, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Lucas, Peter Slack and William d'Apice, *Church Administration Handbook* (St Paul's Publications, 2008), 180.

<sup>12</sup> Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), no.37, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

resources—which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.<sup>13</sup>

He called for a “spirituality of communion”<sup>14</sup> among believers to accomplish this mission:

A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God... [It] means, finally, to know how to ‘make room’ for our brothers and sisters, bearing ‘each other’s burdens’ (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.<sup>15</sup>

In *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II describes the unity of the people of God in the Church’s mission:

[The People of God] possess in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity. Because of the one dignity flowing from Baptism, each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained ministers and men and women religious, shares a responsibility for the Church’s mission.<sup>16</sup>

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis sets out the purpose and significance of the parish:

A parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.<sup>17</sup>

The International Theological Commission discussed the importance of including the lay faithful in decision-making processes in its document *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*:

In this perspective, the participation of the lay faithful becomes essential. They are the immense majority of the People of God and there is much to be learnt from their participation in the various forms of the life and mission of ecclesial communities, from popular piety and generic pastoral care, as well as their specific competency in various sectors of cultural and social life.

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<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter at the close of the great jubilee of the year 2000,” *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001), no. 29, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html).

<sup>14</sup> John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 43

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 43.

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the vocation and the mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world,” *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), no. 15, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_30121988\\_christifideles-laici.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html).

<sup>17</sup> Francis, “Apostolic Exhortation on the proclamation of the gospel in today’s world,” *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), no. 28, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

Consulting them is thus indispensable for initiating processes of discernment in the framework of synodal structures.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, a “Private Letter on ‘Pastoral Councils’” from the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy expounds on the canons regarding pastoral councils and provides direction on the importance and implementation of such a structure.<sup>19</sup> The Archdiocese of Los Angeles paraphrases the letter, saying:

Official Church documents state that the Pastoral Councils are to represent the people of God, but not in the legal sense. Rather, council members are representative in that they are a witness or a sign of the whole community. They make its wisdom present.<sup>20</sup>

Parish pastoral councils are seen to have several different purposes throughout the literature. While for some, the PPC is a leadership group for coordinating the life of the parish, others delineate that role from one that is focused solely on the pastoral needs of the parish, while yet others focus on the council leading the mission of the Church to bring Christ to the world.

In addition to the canons, commentaries and official Church documents, there are several excellent resources available to guide the creation, continuation and vitality of a pastoral council in the parish. Some suggestions for further reading are set out below:

- Cecilia Anning, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils*, 3rd ed. (Queensland, Australia: Faith & Life Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2007), [http://mullumbimbycatholic.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Handbook\\_for\\_Parish\\_Pastoral\\_Councils.pdf](http://mullumbimbycatholic.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Handbook_for_Parish_Pastoral_Councils.pdf)
- James A. Coriden, *The Parish in Catholic Tradition: History, Theology and Canon Law* (Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997)
- Trudy Dantis and Richard Rymarz, “Report 6: Planning”, *Building Stronger Parishes* (Fitzroy, VIC: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2015)
- Arthur X. Deegan, II, *Developing a Vibrant Parish Pastoral Council* (Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995)
- Ruth T. Doyle, Robert E. Schmitz and Mary Beth Cielo, eds., “Laity, Parish & Ministry,” Research Monograph #1, *Catholic Research Forum* (Winter 1998)
- Mark F. Fischer and Mary Margaret Raley, eds., *Four Ways to Build More Effective Parish Councils: A Pastoral Approach* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 2002)

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<sup>18</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no. 73, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html).

<sup>19</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, “Private Letter on ‘Pastoral Councils’” (Circular Letter *Omnes Christifideles*, January 25, 1973), no. 7, reprinted in James I. O’Connor, ed., *The Canon Law Digest*, Vol. VII: Officially Published Documents Affecting the Code of Canon Law 1968-1972 (Chicago: Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus, 1975), 280-288. Also published as “Patterns in Local Pastoral Councils” in *Origins* 3, no.12 (September 13, 1973): 186-190, <https://www.pastoralcouncils.com/bibliography/vatican-documents/postconciliar/circular/>.

<sup>20</sup> Archdiocese of Los Angeles, *Communion & Consultation: Pastoral Council Guidelines* (Los Angeles, CA: Office of New Evangelization, May 2019), 10, <https://lacatholics.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Pastoral-Council-Guidelines.pdf>.

- Brian Lucas, Peter Slack and William d'Apice, *Church Administration Handbook*, 2nd ed. (St Pauls Publications, 2018)
- Oonagh O'Brien and Julie Kavanagh, *Parish Leadership Groups: A Resourcebook* (Blackrock, Dublin: The Columba Press, 2001)
- Donald Tynan, *Collaboration, Priest and People Working Together in Parish Pastoral Councils: A Submission to Catholic Parish Leaders*, 7th ed. (2010).

## SECTION II: PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS IN AUSTRALIA

### Diocesan Guidelines for PPCs

In the 2019 *Governance in Australia Survey*, respondents were asked to indicate if each parish in their diocese was obligated to establish a parish pastoral council.<sup>21</sup> As Table 1 shows, 16 dioceses indicated that that was the case while 13 responded that there was no such obligation. Of the 16 dioceses which affirmed the statement, six dioceses had indicated in earlier sections of the survey that they had a diocesan pastoral council, while ten dioceses did not have one. Of the 13 dioceses where there was no such obligation, three dioceses had diocesan pastoral councils.

Table 1: Is each parish in your diocese obligated to establish a Parish Pastoral Council?	N.	% of total
Yes	16	55.2
No	13	44.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100</b>

In the April 2021 email survey to all Australian dioceses, six dioceses reported having current guidelines for PPCs. One diocese provided guidelines that had last been updated in 2005, and one provided draft guidelines which were currently in development. Only three dioceses had clear instructions that mandated PPCs. However, all ten dioceses which responded to inquiries reported the existence of parish pastoral councils in their region.

There was a reasonable amount of homogeneity among the diocesan guidelines for PPCs. Most talked about a maximum of 12 members on a council, which was composed of *ex-officio* members and members elected or selected from the parish. *Ex-officio* members usually included the parish priest, any assistant clergy or full-time pastoral associates, the parish school principal or their representative, and sometimes, a member of the Parish Finance Council. The membership term was usually two or three years, with members retiring after two consecutive terms. Most guidelines referred to staggering the membership terms to ensure continuity on the council.

There was also a strong emphasis on ensuring that prayerful and reflective discernment was undertaken, and council members were provided with ongoing formation. Regarding decision-making processes, while all the guidelines acknowledged the consultative nature of the council, most dioceses discussed having a “collaborative” process, where decisions had to be made by “consensus” rather than by vote or the decision of one person.

Several dioceses, including dioceses that did not otherwise provide PPC guidelines, provided references to further resources. A popular document referenced was: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Role and Function of the Parish Pastoral Council*. (2007):

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<sup>21</sup> Trudy Dantis and Stephen Reid, *Governance in Australian Survey 2019: A report to the Implementation Advisory Group* (Canberra, ACT: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, December 2019), 19.

<https://www.ppc.catholic.org.au/ppc2.html>. However, this resource appears to be no longer available online.

Some dioceses provided links to the following resources:

- The Archdiocese of Perth Parish Pastoral Council e-Handbook:  
<https://www.parishrenewal.com.au/>
- 10 Signs of a Vibrant Parish:  
<https://www.cam1.org.au/Portals/7/Programs/PARISH%20LEADERSHIP/10%20Signs%20of%20a%20Vibrant%20Parish%20Life%20-%20Handout.pdf>

### **Exemplar Diocesan/Archdiocesan Resources**

#### *Archdiocese of Brisbane – PPC Handbook*

<https://evangelisation-brisbane.myshopify.com/products/parish-pastoral-council-handbook>

An 81-page document discussing at length:

1. Parish Pastoral Councils within the Life of the Church
2. Role and Function of a Pastoral Council
3. Establishment of Pastoral Councils and Changeover of Membership
4. Operations of a Pastoral Council
5. Prayer and Formation for Pastoral Councils
6. Relationships of Pastoral Councils
7. The Brisbane Church: Promoting Pastoral Councils

#### *Diocese of Broken Bay – PPC Guidelines*

<https://www.bbcatholic.org.au/ArticleDocuments/1155/Proposed%20Broken%20Bay%20Guidelines%2013v01.pdf.aspx>

Guidelines issued by the Broken Bay Diocese to help parish pastoral councils and parishioners understand the nature and role of a parish pastoral council.

#### *Archdiocese of Perth – Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils*

<https://www.ndparish.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Constitution-for-Parish-Pastoral-Councils.pdf>

An 8-page Constitution document for PPC (prepared by the Archdiocese) - Mission, Role & Function, Objectives, Council Membership, Council Meetings, AGMs

## Parish Guidelines for PPCs

The 2021 analysis of 1,151 Catholic parish websites revealed that just over two-thirds (67%) had no information about PPCs on their website. Those that provided PPC information differed in how they named the council. More than half (55%) named it the Parish Pastoral Council, but others used terms such as Pastoral Council, Parish Council, Parish Pastoral Team, Pastoral Team, Parish Leadership Team, Interim Parish Leadership Team (IPLT), Parish Missionary Council, Interim Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Stewardship Committee or Parish Leadership Group.

Parishes provided various levels of information about their PPCs. Some only listed the PPC under their website's list of ministries, groups, teams or staff. Just over one-fifth included the name of the Council chairperson or secretary and relevant contact details. Some parishes included the list of all PPC members and provided information about the council itself. Several included a brief introduction or explained the PPC's purpose. Examples of these are as follows:

*The Catholic Church of the Nativity, Aberfoyle Park (Archdiocese of Adelaide)*

"The Parish Pastoral Council supports the liturgical mission of the Parish."

*Nambour Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Brisbane)*

"The Council meets monthly and provides support for the Parish Priest in setting pastoral priorities for the Parish."

*Berwick Catholic Parish (Diocese of Sale)*

"This council is responsible for pastoral planning so that St Michael's may carry out its mission."

*Floreat-Wembley Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Perth)*

"The Parish council, as it is more commonly referred to, operates broadly in line with the Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils as drawn up by the Archdiocese of Perth."

*Toongabbie Catholic Parish (Diocese of Parramatta)*

"This committee is made up of parish representatives who meet monthly with the Parish Priest to discuss the overall needs of the Parish."

*Doncaster Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Melbourne)*

"(The council) [p]rovides counsel to the Parish Priest in his role as leader of our parish. They also consider suggestions from parishioners and propose and develop pastoral activities for our parish."

A little under one-quarter of the websites included detailed information on the roles, functions and responsibilities of the parish pastoral council.

## Vision, Mission and Purpose

Seven per cent of the parish websites included information about the vision, mission or purpose of their PPC. Some examples are outlined below:

### *Hawthorn Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Melbourne)*

“The Hawthorn Catholic Parish strives to be a Christian Community focused on Jesus, helping all through worship celebrate God’s presence and expressing our faith through outreach, service and justice.”

### *Elizabeth Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Adelaide)*

*Vision:* “In order to embrace the present and prepare for the future members are called and commissioned to assist the Parish Pastoral Team identify and empower all the baptised to leadership in the parish and wider community.”

*Mission:* Members live out this vision by assisting the Parish Pastoral Team to:

- discern how to lead the baptised to take up this call to leadership.
- deepen their own understanding of contemporary Catholic theology.
- study the pastoral realities of the Elizabeth community.
- develop a pastoral plan of action centred on the key areas of pastoral life.
- reach out and invite all into union with the inclusive Catholic community.
- reflect on the local pastoral realities in the light of the Diocesan and Universal Church.

### *The Catholic Parish of Alstonville & Wardell (Diocese of Lismore)*

“The purpose of the Pastoral Council is to further the work of the Church by fostering the spiritual growth of parishioners and leading them to respond actively to their universal call to mission.”

### *Riverton Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Perth)*

“It (Parish Pastoral Council)’s aims are to:

- DISCERN the spiritual and personal needs of the people in the Parish and establish goals and priorities to respond to these needs.
- CO-ORDINATE the various activities and foster the development of real community within the Parish.
- LIAISE with the whole of the Parish.”

### *Glen Iris Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Melbourne)*

“The objectives of the Council can be summarised as:

- Enhance the sense of community and support in the parish.
- Promote discussion on issues facing our Catholic faith in the twenty first century.
- Provide a means of ensuring cohesion, co-operation and sharing between the various groups working within the parish.

The Council will seek to achieve these objectives by:

- Facilitating periodic discussion events on faith, social and cultural issues facing the Church community
- Improving communication to parishioners and between Parish groups
- Facilitating integration between the Parish school community and the wider Parish
- Promote a range of focussed and affordable social activity such as wine and cheese nights, and parish dinners.”

## Membership

### *Selection of members*

Fifty-one parishes included details on the composition of the council and how members were selected.

- **Nomination by parishioners** was the most common way of electing members for the council. Parishioners were invited to recommend other parishioners for appointment to the parish pastoral council. The council was a balanced mix of members who were nominated and elected by the parish at large, those elected by the council members themselves, and those appointed by the parish priest.
- **The representative model** was the second most popular method for selecting members where members were chosen to represent particular ministries or groups within the parish to ensure that the council had broad representation that reflected the make-up of the parish.
- Three parishes indicated that they used a **gifts and skills model** for selecting council members. In this scenario, the parish priest or the council invites parishioners to be members by reason of their knowledge, competence or expertise. Particular talents which could add value to the council are considered.
- A further three parishes indicated using a **volunteer model** where parishioners were encouraged to provide the council with an expression of interest in joining the PPC.
- The remaining parishes used a **hybrid model** which used a combination of the various selection methods.

### *Membership term*

Thirty parish websites provided information on the membership term of PPC members. Of these, nearly three-quarters had a membership term of two years, while the remainder had a three-year term. The majority allowed members to serve a maximum of two consecutive terms after which members had to stand down for at least one term. Three parishes allowed members to serve for three consecutive terms.

## Meetings

Around 19 per cent of parish websites included the PPC meeting schedule in some form. For example: “The Council meets monthly”; “The Council meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month”; “The PPC meets 10 times a year”.

Only six per cent of parishes included an invitation on the website for parishioners to raise matters with the council. However, it is acknowledged that this information may be addressed in other ways in parishes that did not include this information on their website.

Fifteen parishes uploaded the minutes of the PPC meetings to their websites, while a further six invited parishioners to contact the council for a copy of the meeting minutes. Seven websites included downloadable PPC annual reports and finance reports from Annual General Meetings, and a further ten included downloadable copies of pastoral plans.

## Exemplar Parishes

Several parishes displayed detailed information about the council which demonstrated transparency and excellent engagement with the parish community. These are listed below, along with some of the contents available on their site:

*Yass Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn)*

<http://staug-yass.org.au/wp/about/parish-groups/parish-pastoral-council/>

- PPC Charter – A two-page document describing the vision, role, commitment, membership (selection and tenure of members), proceedings and reporting
- PPC Member Duty Statements – Separate documents explaining the responsibilities of Chairperson and Social Justice, Youth, Ecumenism, Formation, Liturgy, Welfare and Social, and Maintenance representatives
- PPC Meeting Schedule 2021
- Meeting Papers (Minutes) since 2019

*Toowoomba Cathedral Catholic Parish (Diocese of Toowoomba)*

<https://www.stpats.org.au/parish-pastoral-council.html>

Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines – A 4-page document explaining the pastoral setting, the role of the council, term of office, new members and vacancies, responsibilities of all members, office bearers, meetings, the decision-making process: consensus, sub-committees, communication with the parish, a review of guidelines, details of members with photos and current matters before the PPC.

*Para Hills / Modbury Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Adelaide)*

<https://paramodcath.com.au/pastoral-council/>

Aim of the PPC, members, minutes of PPC meetings, and PPC principles – A 3-page document listing the vision, role, aims, principles and a list of all the groups in the parish.

*Nambucca Valley Catholic Parish (Diocese of Lismore)*

<https://www.nvparish.org.au/278-2/>

Detailed guidelines for the PPC, role, membership, nominations, nomination form, term of office, vacancies, responsibilities of members, members list, meetings, decision-making processes, communication and guidelines review process.

*Harristown Catholic Parish (Diocese of Toowoomba)*

<http://www.stanthonysparish.com.au/documents/groups.html>

Meeting details and a 4-page guidelines document including membership, representation, formation, term of office, elections, nominations, responsibilities of the council, role of the executive, procedures, sub-committees, dealing with vacancies, and the constitution.

*Five Dock Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Sydney)*

<https://www.allhallows.org.au/pastoral-council/>

Meeting frequency, PPC Constitution and a 3-page document that lists the purpose, council structure, election, procedures, reimbursement of expenses, AGM, SGM, quorum, voters, life of the constitution and changes to the constitution.

*Blackburn South Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Melbourne)*

<https://blackburnsouth.org.au/parish-pastoral-council>

- Meeting minutes (2020)
- Parish Core Values
- Roles of PPC
- Profile of Members (servant leadership, co-responsibility, hospitality),
- Membership, operations, member term, conduct of meetings, key tasks, members, PPC handbook by the Archdiocese of Brisbane, 1-page document on PPC code of conduct, and accomplishments in 2018, 2019 and 2020

*South Woden Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn)*

<http://www.mhoc.org.au/ministries/parishcouncil/>

Members list and detailed guidelines, including establishment, purpose, objectives, membership, term of office, number of members, selection process, organisation, roles, meetings, scope, authority, characteristics, relationship with the PPC, maintenance of guideline document and the Parish Pastoral Plan 2021-2023.

*Brunswick West Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Melbourne)*

<https://bmcatholicmission.org.au/new-page>

- Pastoral Council guidelines (a six-page document listing the preamble, purpose of the council, role, principal task, composition, responsibilities of members, office bearers, executives, election process, term of office, meeting procedure, parish pastoral plan, and details about communication with other parishes)
- New member nomination form

*Gungahlin Catholic Parish (Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn)*

<https://www.holyspiritgungahlin.org.au/our-parish/parish-pastoral-council/>

- Why have Parish Pastoral Councils?
- Role
- Parish Pastoral Council Nomination
- Org Chart explaining the role of the PPC
- PPC News (summaries of meetings since 2018)
- 2020 Parish Pastoral Council Members
- Chairperson (name, contact email/number)

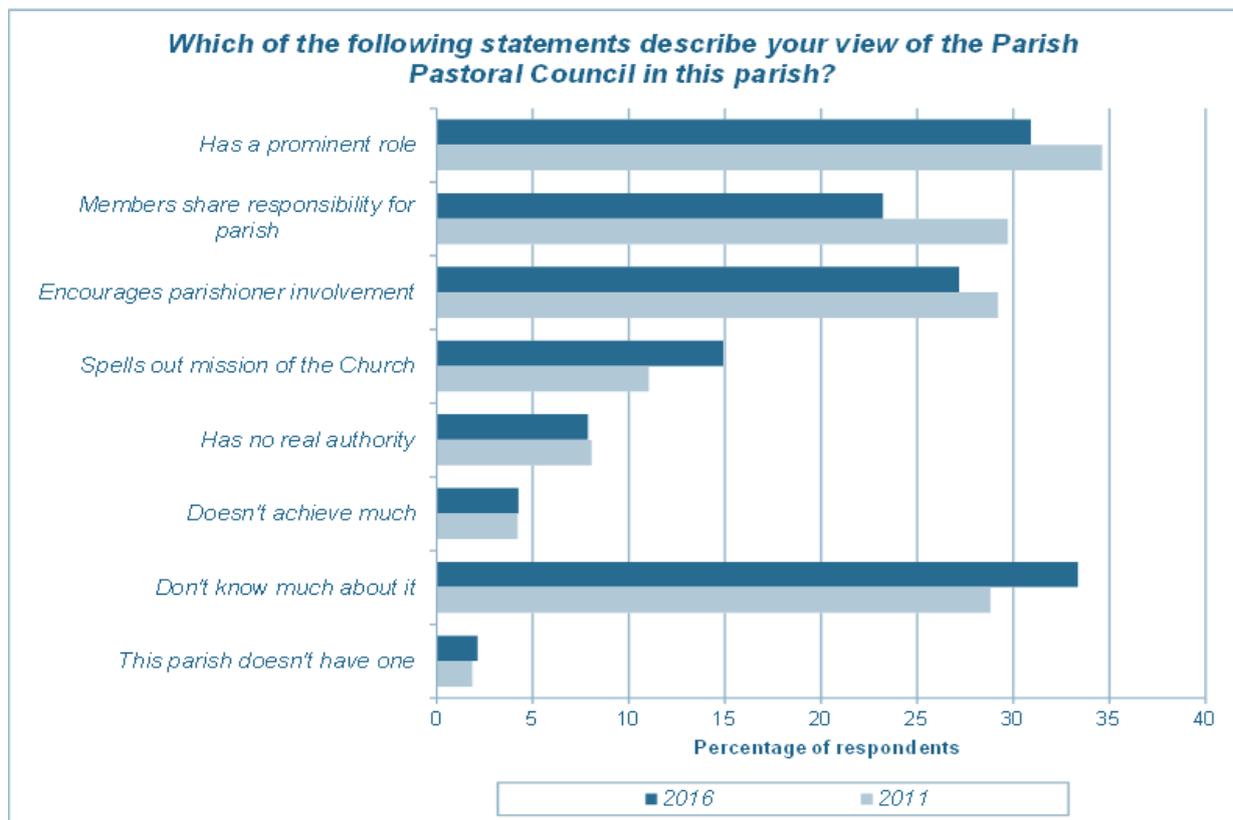
## SECTION III: PERCEPTIONS OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS IN AUSTRALIA

### Mass Attenders' Views of PPCs

In the 2011 and 2016 National Church Life Surveys, Mass attenders were asked to describe, from a list of eight statements, their view of the parish pastoral council in the parish in which they were completing the survey. This question was commissioned by the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life (Laity) and was completed by 2,591 attenders in 2016 and 2,779 attenders in 2011. Just under three per cent of respondents in both surveys were not Catholic. Figure 1 shows the results from both surveys.

In 2016, about one-third of attenders (31%) indicated that their Parish Council had a prominent role in parish leadership. Twenty-seven per cent reported that their Parish Council encouraged all parishioners to get involved in parish life, while another 23 per cent indicated that Parish Council members shared responsibility for parish life. One-third of respondents (33%) did not know much about the activities of their Parish Council, while around two per cent indicated that the parish did not have a Parish Council.

**Figure 1. Mass Attenders Views of the Parish Pastoral Council in their Parish**



*Percentages add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one option.*

## Parish Leaders' Views of PPCs

The NCLS Operations Survey is designed to be completed by one person, usually the parish priest or other parish leader, in each parish which participated in the National Church Life Survey.

Question 135 in the 2016 Operations Survey asked parish leaders to indicate if there were clear written terms under which their parish pastoral council operated. As Table 2 shows, around 65 per cent of parishes reported that this was the case.

Table 2: Do clear written rules exist at this parish about how the parish pastoral council or other groups operate (e.g., how decisions are made, voting rules, quorum for meetings, etc.)?	N.	%
Yes	94	65.3
No	43	29.9
Don't know	7	4.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100</b>

Parish leaders were also asked if their parish had a culture that encouraged lay people in leadership roles to attend training opportunities. Seventeen per cent indicated they had a very strong culture of encouraging training, 41 per cent said they had a strong training culture, while 42 per cent reported having a weak training culture (see Table 3 below). Thirty-seven per cent indicated that they had the budget to support lay leaders to attend training opportunities.

Table 3: Does this parish have a culture of encouraging lay people in leadership roles to attend training opportunities, whether offered here or elsewhere?	No. of parishes	% of total
Yes, a very strong culture	24	16.9
Yes, a strong culture	58	40.8
No, a weak culture	60	42.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>100</b>

A further question asked whether the parish had offered any form of significant training for lay people in leadership or ministry roles. The findings revealed that music ministry training was the most common training offered by a third of all parishes, while pastoral care training was offered by 29 per cent. Thirty-nine per cent of parishes indicated that there had been no significant training offered to them in the parish in the previous two years (see Table 4).

Table 4: In the past 2 years, has this parish offered significant training in any of the following areas for lay people in leadership or ministry roles? Please only include training offered at or by this parish - not training offered elsewhere. (Mark ALL that apply)	No. of parishes	% of total
Teaching/preaching	3	2.2
Music ministry	45	33.1
Children's ministry	31	22.8
Youth ministry	23	16.9
Small prayer, discussion or Bible study group leadership	30	22.1
Pastoral care	39	28.7
Administration	30	22.1
Church leadership, management or governance	15	11.0
Mission/outreach	12	8.8
Community development or community organising	4	2.9
Other training	17	12.5
No significant training offered here in past 2 years	53	39.0

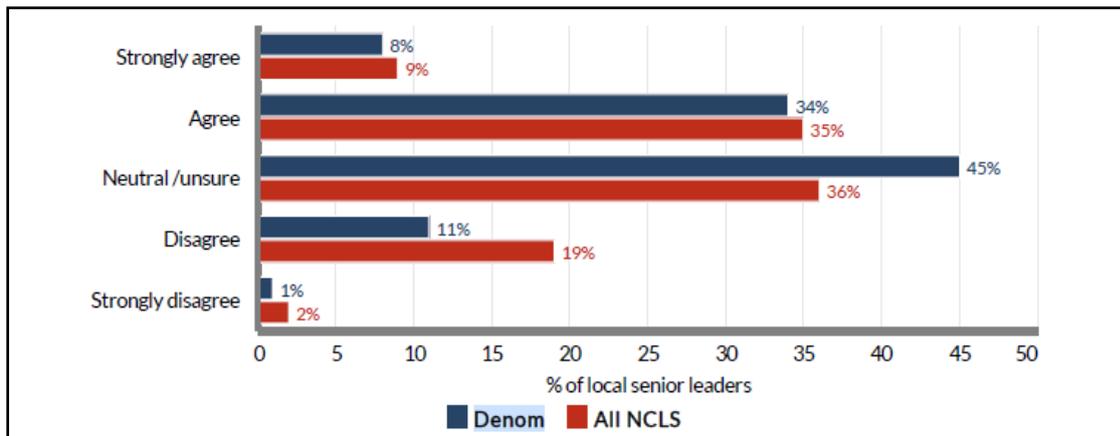
Total parishes = 136

### Council Teamwork and Effectiveness

The functions and effectiveness of the parish council or similar group are potentially important to the overall leadership and health of the parish. In the 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, parish and church leaders were asked their opinions on whether the church council had clear methods for monitoring the parish's progress against goals and whether they worked harmoniously together as a team. It also asked for a rating of the effectiveness of their parish pastoral council.

Figure 2 shows the responses of local senior leaders (usually, parish priests in Catholic parishes) to the question "Our council has clear methods for monitoring our church's progress against our goals." Results for the Catholic Church ('Denom' in blue) are compared to church leaders from all Christian denominations across Australia ('All NCLS' in red). The majority of leaders, both in Catholic parishes (45%) and across Australia (36%) were unsure if their church councils had clear methods to monitor progress. However, 42 per cent of leaders in Catholic parishes and slightly more across Australia (44%), agreed to some extent that their parish council was successful with its methods to monitor progress.

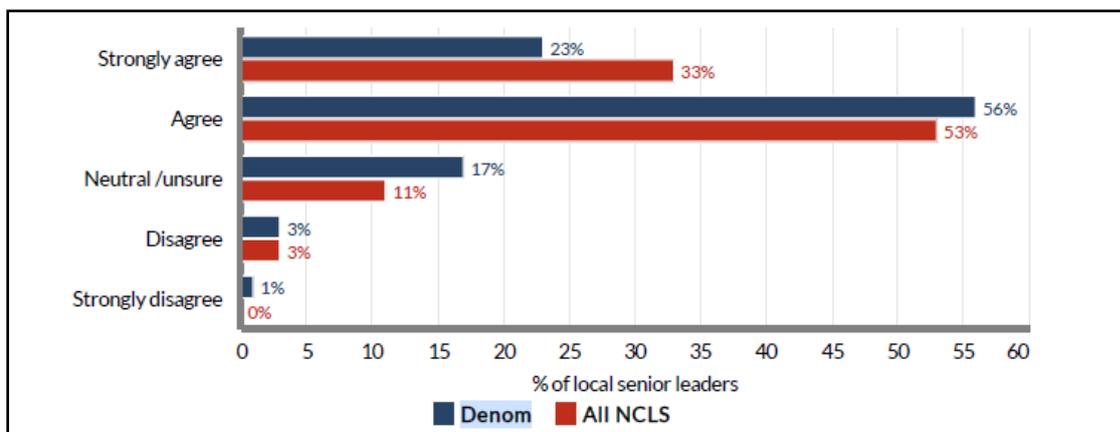
**Figure 2: Church council has clear methods to monitor progress: Leader views**



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154, All NCLS n = 2,214).

Figure 3 shows the responses of senior leaders to the question "Our council works harmoniously as a team". The majority of leaders from Catholic parishes (79%) agreed to some extent that their parish pastoral councils worked harmoniously as a team, while 17 per cent were unsure.

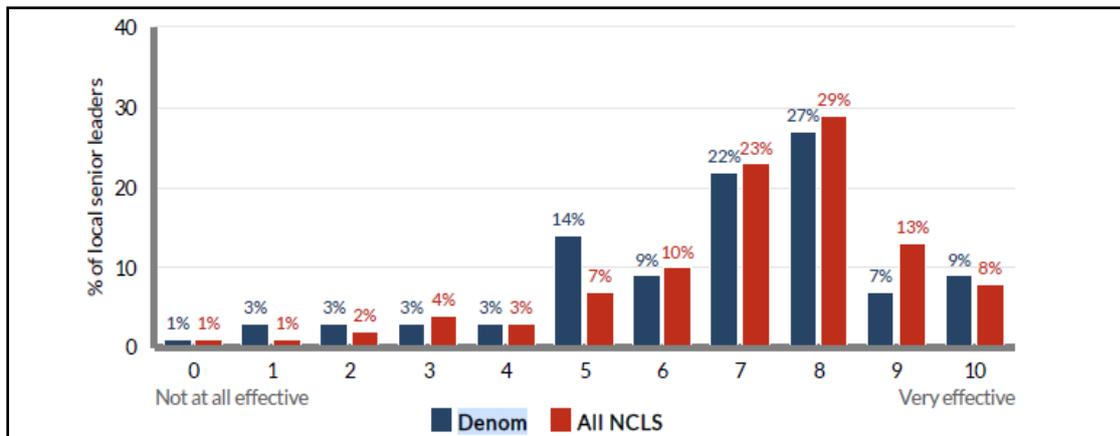
**Figure 3: Church council works harmoniously as a team: Leader views**



Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).

Leaders were also asked to rate how effective they considered their church's council to be on a scale from 0 to 10. Results are shown in Figure 4 for the Catholic Church (in blue) with a comparison to leaders across all denominations across Australia (in red).

**Figure 4: Rating of church council effectiveness (0-10): Leader views**



*Source: 2016 NCLS Leader Survey, local senior leaders (The Catholic Church in Australia n = 154; All NCLS n = 2124).*

In Catholic parishes, most senior leaders rated their parish council's effectiveness highly, with 43 per cent rating it eight or above, and a further 31 per cent rating it 6 or 7 on the scale. Effective leadership in parishes is not only a matter of the staff employed or the priest, but also about how the parish council operates. The perceived effectiveness of the council is also an issue that can impact parish leaders in their own sense of effectiveness, as well as affecting their stress levels or sense of their own sustainability in ministry.

## SECTION IV: OVERSEAS PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

While research within Australia provided extensive information, we also examined several overseas pastoral councils whose information was available online, to broaden our understanding of how such councils were formed and operate. The list of parishes and/or diocesan guidelines for PPCs that were examined included:

### Canada

1. St Mary's Parish, Ottawa Archdiocese, Canada
2. Regina Archdiocese Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils, Canada

### Ireland

3. Elphin Diocese Information on Parish Pastoral Councils, Ireland
4. Kilmore Diocese Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils, Ireland

### New Zealand

5. Auckland Diocese Parish Pastoral Council Information, New Zealand
6. Wellington Archdiocese Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils, New Zealand
7. Palmerston North Diocese Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils, New Zealand

### The Philippines

8. Christ the King Parish, Greenmeadows, The Philippines
9. Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Tacloban, The Philippines

### Singapore

10. Christ the King Parish, Singapore

### United Kingdom

11. St Paul's Parish, Cantley, United Kingdom
12. Downside Abbey Parish, United Kingdom
13. Lancaster Diocesan Norms & Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils, United Kingdom
14. St Teresa of Avila Parish, Southwark, United Kingdom
15. St Columba's RC Church, Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh, United Kingdom
16. St Mary Magdalen Parish, Willesden Green, United Kingdom
17. St Simon Stock Parish, Archdiocese of Southwark, United Kingdom

### United States

18. Los Angeles Archdiocese Manual for Parish Pastoral Councils, United States

## Vision / Mission

Several parishes articulated a vision and/or a mission for their church which helped to direct the works of the PPC. These were as simple as “One in Love and Service” as described by the Christ the King Parish in Singapore,<sup>22</sup> or included more detailed Vision and Mission statements, as described by the Downside Abbey parish in the United Kingdom:<sup>23</sup>

### Parish Mission Statement

[Parish] exists as a worshipping community to proclaim and live out the Gospel of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to help its members to develop, as far as humanly possible, their own personal relationship with God.

### Our Vision for the [Parish]

- We want our Parish to be a community that enriches the lives of people, both parishioners and the wider world.
- We want our Parish to be a community of prayer and service.
- We want our Parish to be a community of welcome and fellowship.
- We want our Parish to celebrate its rich traditions and diversity, the talents and gifts of all its people, new and long established.

### Our Vision for the Pastoral Council:

- We want a team of people entrusted by the people of the Parish to work together and in support of our Parish Priests.
- We want a team that will seek in its decisions to find consensus and collaboration.
- We want a team that will strive to understand the needs and aspirations of our Parish.
- We want a team that will identify and support the work of the many people already serving our Parish.
- We need a team that can set a direction and priorities for new or expanded services and missions.
- We need a team that will work towards the realisation of our Parish vision.
- The Pastoral Council will need to be wholly accountable to the Parish and seek renewal of its membership on a regular and fair basis.

While the arch/diocesan guidelines examined did not mandate a particular vision or mission for each parish, several dioceses suggested that it was part of the role of the PPC to develop such statements. For example, the Diocese of Auckland stated in its guidelines that it was the job of the PPC to

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<sup>22</sup> “Parish Pastoral Council,” Catholic Church of Christ the King, Singapore, <http://www.christtheking.com.sg/about/parish-pastoral-council/>.

<sup>23</sup> Downside Abbey, “PPC Mission Statement 2018,” Stratton-on-the-Fosse, UK. <https://www.downsideabbey.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/PPC-Mission-Statement-2018.pdf>

develop a vision for the parish's preferred future. Furthermore, it added that the role of the PPC was to carry out the goals of the parish, based on those articulated in the Diocesan Pastoral Plan.<sup>24</sup>

## Membership

### *Selection of members*

Among the parish and diocesan guidelines examined, PPC membership was expected of those in certain roles, such as the parish priest. The remainder of the council was to be filled by representatives of the parish. Most diocesan guidelines did not direct a particular method for the selection of representatives, but suggested ways in which it could be accomplished. The Kilmore Diocese in Ireland particularly noted that “the process of electing a new PPC should be open, flexible and transparent”.<sup>25</sup>

Some of the ways in which representatives could be selected were as follows:

- **Application** – Members of the parish who wished to serve on the parish council completed an application form which would then be assessed by the parish priest, the previous parish pastoral council or a selection committee. One parish also required applicants to complete a strengths assessment to ensure the council had an appropriate mix of gifts and skills. Interviews with the applicants were also conducted.
- **Election** – Interested parishioners could be elected by the parish at a parish annual meeting or similar assembly. Some guidelines required a secret ballot, while others had a more open arrangement.
- **Proposal** – The names of interested parishioners could be proposed and seconded by other parishioners. All who received these two-part proposals would then be voted upon by the parish.
- **Discernment** – The parish was invited to engage in a process of discernment to ensure that the representatives would have the appropriate balance of gifts for pastoral leadership. In some parishes, discernment was undertaken by a steering group based on nominations.
- **Representation** – While most guidelines advised that the PPC should represent the ages, interests and cultural backgrounds of people in the parish, some models suggested that the representatives be specifically drawn from existing parish groups and committees.
- **Nomination by parish priest** – In some parishes, the parish priest nominated or co-opted members, sometimes in consultation with assistant priests, deacons or the present PPC members.

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<sup>24</sup> Catholic Diocese of Auckland, *Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines: 2020 edition* (Ponsonby, Auckland: Mission and Evangelisation Office, 2021), 9, <https://www.aucklandcatholic.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/PPC-guidelines-2021.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Kilmore Diocesan Pastoral Council, *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Kilmore 2016-2020* (Kilmore, 29 June 2016), 7, <http://kilmoredpc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Constitution-of-Parish-Pastoral-Councils-in-the-Diocese-of-Kilmore-2016.pdf>.

One Canadian parish stipulated that the PPC should be composed of more parish representatives than paid staff or clergy,<sup>26</sup> while the Diocese of Lancaster in the United Kingdom required that “*ex-officio* members should not exceed 40 per cent of the total membership”.<sup>27</sup> Other parish and diocesan guidelines suggested that in addition to the parish priest and parish representatives, membership should include some or all of the following:

- deacons, assistant priests or other full-time ministry staff of the parish,
- a member of the Finance Committee,
- a member responsible for youth ministry in the parish,
- a parish safeguarding representative,
- the head of the Catholic school in the parish,
- heads of parish ministry groups or committees.

Guidelines of several parishes required that members be at least 16 years of age, although Our Lady of Lourdes parish in the Philippines required members to be at least 18 years old, and St Columba’s RC Church in the United Kingdom stated that “all parishioners are eligible to become members of the parish council”.<sup>28</sup>

Many guidelines stipulated that there should be a certain number of PPC members who were young adults, or at least suggested that all age groups in the parish should be represented. While most membership information implied that members were individuals, both Regina Archdiocese in Canada and Christ the King Greenmeadows parish in the Philippines specified that members could be married couples.<sup>29</sup>

### *Term of office*

All the parishes and diocesan guidelines examined required a term of office between two and four years. Several also discussed the possibility of extension or re-election, with up to two consecutive terms being the maximum.

### *Formation*

Several parish and diocesan guidelines discussed both formation of the council members, as well as the council being responsible for ensuring the ongoing formation of the parish community. Some

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<sup>26</sup> Saint Mary’s Parish, *Pastoral Council Constitution* (Ottawa, April 2019), 8, <http://stmarysottawa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/St-Marys-Pastoral-Council-Constitution-V2.0.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Michael G. Campbell, *The Catholic Diocese of Lancaster Diocesan Norms & Constitutions for Parish Pastoral Councils* (Catholic Diocese of Lancaster, 8 December 2010), para 3.2, [http://www.lancasterdiocese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Constitution\\_\\_Diocesan\\_Norms\\_for\\_Parish\\_Pastoral\\_Councils.pdf](http://www.lancasterdiocese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Constitution__Diocesan_Norms_for_Parish_Pastoral_Councils.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> “Membership,” Parish Pastoral Council, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Tacloban City, Philippines, <https://www.ollourdesparish.org/parish-pastoral-council>; “Membership,” Parish Pastoral Council, St Columba’s RC Church, Edinburgh, UK, <https://stcolumbasrcedinburgh.org.uk/parish-life/parish-council/>.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel J. Bohan, *Archdiocese of Regina Guidelines: Parish Pastoral Council & Parish Finance Council. April 2010 Revision* (Regina, SK: Archdiocese of Regina, 21 April 2010), [https://archregina.sk.ca/sites/default/files/our\\_archdiocese/documents/Guidelines\\_for\\_Parish\\_Pastoral\\_Council\\_and\\_Finance\\_Council.pdf](https://archregina.sk.ca/sites/default/files/our_archdiocese/documents/Guidelines_for_Parish_Pastoral_Council_and_Finance_Council.pdf).

used a sub-committee which looked after formation matters and would then report back to the overarching PPC.

## Meetings

### *Frequency of meetings*

There was some variation regarding meeting frequency. Some PPCs met monthly, with a break over the summer months, others three or four times a year, while still others were only scheduled once a year—although sub-committees met more often. Overall, the consensus was that meetings should occur on a regular basis and the schedule of meetings should be included in the constitution of the PPC.

### *Importance of prayer*

Most parish and diocesan guidelines mentioned the importance of prayer as a part of the meeting of the council and as part of the private reflection of members. For example, the Wellington Archdiocesan guidelines stated that an ideal parish pastoral council member was “a person of prayer, striving for personal holiness and holiness of the council”.<sup>30</sup>

Several guidelines stipulated that the meetings should begin with prayer—often suggesting that it should be an extended time of reflection and scriptural meditation—and that “prayerful consideration”<sup>31</sup> should be the council’s preferred way of addressing matters. Some parishes also included statements to the effect that the PPC’s role should include promoting the prayer and faith life of the parish.

## Planning Resources

Developing a pastoral plan was emphasised in guidelines of several parishes and dioceses. Some parishes suggested this could be as part of an annual formation workshop for PPC members. The plan frequently included the vision and mission of the parish as well as strategic plans for pastoral actions. Some diocesan guidelines suggested that the plan include a paragraph about the parish’s history, as well as describe the scope and role of the PPC within the parish community.

Most parish and diocesan guidelines specified a constitution for the PPC which set out the roles, expectations, meeting guidelines and other requirements for the success of the council. Other planning resources mentioned included diocesan guidelines for PPCs, diocesan pastoral plans, diocesan synods, financial records of the parish, annual financial statements, annual general

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<sup>30</sup> Archdiocese of Wellington, *Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils* (Wellington, October 2016), 5, <https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/PPC-Guidelines-for-Parish-Pastoral-Councils-2016-October-Website-PDF.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Catholic Diocese of Auckland, *Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines*, 10.

meetings of the PPC, other planning documents such as renovation guidebooks and regular reports from other parish groups.

In some parish and diocesan guidelines, special mention was made of the PPC's role in promoting care for the earth. This was seen as an extension of the mission set out in *Laudato Si'* as well as being a part of the stewardship role of the Church.

### Decision-making

While the role of the parish pastoral council was considered a consultative one as set out in the Code of Canon Law, the Most Reverend Daniel J. Bohan, Archbishop of Regina, Canada, noted that the concept of "consultation" as discussed in Canon Law was not as narrow a definition as that identified in his own country, where it referred to seeking another's advice but not being bound to act upon it or include it in the decision-making process. Instead, the term in Canon Law refers to the conscientious act of participation of the People of God:

Consultation can only make sense if it takes place within the context of faith, which constitutes the community of believers. The identity of the community celebrated at the Eucharist must remain intact when it gathers around a meeting table.

Consultation can only be carried out in the context of common discipleship. There are no degrees of discipleship, but we are all disciples of the one Lord. In this light, consultation is one disciple consulting with another seeking to tap into the diversity of gifts, roles and functions within the Church. Consequently, consultation strengthens the bonds of discipleship. Using St. Paul's image of the "Body of Christ," we all work together for the common good.<sup>32</sup>

While the final decision-maker is deemed to be the parish priest, PPCs are often called upon to propose, support or carry out decisions for the parish community. As such, the decision-making processes employed by the council are considered of key importance. Many of the parish and diocesan guidelines discussed a prayerful approach to decision-making, with a view to achieving a consensus among the members, rather than a majority vote. The Archdiocese of Wellington noted that "Consensus is different from agreement: consensus does not require that all of you agree but that those not in favour 'can live' with the decision".<sup>33</sup>

Other parishes noted that although the PPC was an advisory body, the advice of the council should not be taken lightly, and where the parish priest feels there is sufficient reason not to follow the advice of the council, these reasons should be shared with council members. Some parish or diocesan guidelines allowed for arbitration by an independent person, such as the Regional Vicar, if there were unresolved issues between the PPC and the parish priest.

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<sup>32</sup> Bohan, *Archdiocese of Regina Guidelines: Parish Pastoral Council & Parish Finance Council. April 2010 Revision.*

<sup>33</sup> Archdiocese of Wellington, *Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils*, 11.

A few guidelines discussed using informal voting methods, such as a show of hands, to indicate agreement with a proposal. Others used a more formal voting method but noted that the parish priest had the power to veto the decision.

Some PPCs set out rules for how regular evaluation of the council could be undertaken. These included seeking feedback from parishioners or from members of other parish committees. There were also suggestions of how the council might undertake a self-evaluation on a regular basis.

### PPC Relationships in the Parish

The most important relationship discussed was that of the parish priest and PPC members. For most parishes, the parish priest was an *ex-officio* member of the council, although some treated the council as separate from the parish priest but provided advice to him. Where the parish priest was a member of the council, most stated that he was the president, but that the chair of the council would be a lay representative. However, in one parish, the parish priest was the chair. Where couple membership was included, co-chairing by a couple was permitted.

Within the council, other roles were frequently mentioned. The most common were the vice-chairperson and the secretary of the council, although some councils also required a treasurer. In some instances, these positions were voted on by the council; in others, the chair nominated members for these positions.

Other common relationships of the PPCs were to the following individuals and groups:

- **Parish Finance Council** – Often a member of the finance council was included in the PPC, or a PPC member would be a representative on the finance council. Where there was no shared membership, regular reports and information sharing between both councils were considered necessary for the optimal running of the parish.
- **Parish ministry groups** – Some parishes had groups that were responsible for specific ministries within the parish (such as liturgy, youth ministry, evangelisation, community and ethnic chaplaincies). Consultation with these groups was considered vital to the PPC's success. Some groups required that representatives of each group be on the council, while others required regular reports or consultation through other means.
- **Assistant pastors, deacons and other parish staff** – While engagement with assistant pastors, deacons and other parish staff was considered useful, there was considerable variety in how this was achieved. Some required that these positions were *ex-officio* members of the PPC. Others suggested that it was the parish priest's role to engage with each of his advisors, of which the council was considered just one part of the whole.
- **Safeguarding representative** – Several parish and diocesan guidelines made mention of engagement with the safeguarding representative. Some included the safeguarding representative as an *ex-officio* member of the council, while others asked for regular reports or consultation through other means.
- **Neighbouring parishes** – Establishing cooperative relationships with neighbouring parishes was mentioned by some guidelines as a part of the role of the PPC. In some instances, this was

achieved through deanery-level pastoral councils, while for others it was a more informal relationship.

- **Local schools** – One parish mentioned having the leader of the local school as an *ex-officio* member of the council, while others mentioned receiving reports from the educational entities within the parish.

### Involvement of Parishioners

While the PPC members are representative of the parish community, many parish and diocesan guidelines consider further input by parishioners necessary. Some parishes opened PPC meetings to parishioners as observers, except where there were confidential issues discussed. Some only allowed parishioners to attend at the annual general meeting. Others did not allow parishioners to attend meetings but shared minutes or reports and/or allowed parishioners to address the PPC on issues. Some parishes suggested having a whole parish forum as a regular event to allow parishioners to discuss issues and to hear from the PPC on the work that had been done.

In some parishes, the election of PPC members was undertaken by the entire parish. In such cases, parishes discussed the involvement of parishioners in nominating suitable members, and in undertaking discernment as a parish as part of the election process. Other ways that PPC members were encouraged to engage with parishioners included through surveys, suggestion boxes, or informal interactions as part of regular church life.

Some guidelines indicated that the PPC was responsible for engagement with non-attending parishioners, and of conveying to them their value in the parish. It is not clear whether this referred to parishioners who had previously attended the parish, or whether it included members of the wider community living within the parish boundaries, nevertheless it largely depended on the mission plan of the parish.

## SECTION V: MODELS OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

There are several different models that can be used for parish pastoral councils. This section starts with discussing various approaches to structuring parish pastoral councils that have been used in Australia and overseas. It then sets out different models for parish pastoral councils based on those observed both in Australia and overseas, and on suggestions that have been made in relevant literature about such councils.

### Approaches to Structuring a PPC

Overseas, there were different approaches suggested to configure a parish pastoral council. The main functions of the council within a parish can affect its structure. Some councils are conceived to undertake pastoral planning, some to provide a conduit between the parish and the parish priest, some to coordinate parish ministries, and yet others to help organise programs.

The Diocese of Auckland suggests there are two major approaches to the function of a pastoral council, although elements of both approaches could be used:

**1) An Envisioning and Planning Council** - This council assists the parish priest in intentional pastoral planning to undertake the mission of Christ from within the parish. This approach places emphasis on prayerful discernment of pastoral priorities. It involves parishioners in shared leadership, consensus decision-making and management by setting goals and objectives.

**2) A Co-ordinating or Linking Council** - This is a representative body of leaders from the committees, ministries or organisations in the parish. The body meets regularly with the parish priest to share information (usually through reports) and co-ordinates significant activities in the parish. Councillors may be elected or selected from the parish and may be allocated roles of special responsibility for co-ordinating areas of pastoral concern. However, in their planning and decision-making role on the PPC they represent the whole parish.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast, the Archdiocese of Wellington sets out four main types of PPCs:

- **Standard**—members are elected from among and by parishioners at large. Together they look at all pastoral concerns.
- **Link**—each member takes special responsibility for one of the many areas of pastoral concern.
- **Representation**—members come from existing parish committees and groups and represent their interests.
- **Executive**—members not only plan but also carry out (execute) all the work.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Catholic Diocese of Auckland, *Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines*, 10-11.

<sup>35</sup> Archdiocese of Wellington, *Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils*, 8.

In Australia, in addition to some of the more traditional styles of parish pastoral council, the *Building Stronger Parishes* project uncovered some more unique ways in which parishes had undertaken to meet the same need:<sup>36</sup>

- **PACT – Pastoral Action Coordination Team**

The Montmorency parish in Melbourne used a team called *PACT (Pastoral Action Coordination Team)* to assist the groups in the parish to work together. The team was made up of the leaders of the parish groups and met once a month to share news about the activities in which they were involved. The aim of the group was to combine resources to support those in need within the parish community. This avoided any overlapping of assistance, and it also helped the parish team gain access to the neediest people in the community. Groups were able to support each other and work towards meeting parish needs in the best way possible.

- **Integrated Community**

Mary of Galilee Church at Aldinga was one of the Mass centres of Willunga Parish in the Archdiocese of Adelaide. The Aldinga community was comprised of the church, the school, the op shop and the Centrecare building. Together they formed what is called the “Galilee community”. The Parish Priest had developed a structure to promote lay leadership in the community. There was a single council (the Galilee Council) formed to oversee the needs of the community. The “Galilee Council meeting” was attended by the parish priest, school principal, members of the Centrecare group and the op shop. All decisions considered the interests of the whole community, rather than treating the school, church and the Centrecare group as separate entities.

- **A Parish Meeting Night**

Kings Park parish in Melbourne held a monthly “Parish Meeting Night”. The Parish Meeting Night is an alternate idea for parishes which do not have a formal parish council. Held once a month, the Meeting Night was a time when all parish groups came together to have their monthly meetings. The Meeting started with prayer for 15 minutes with members of all groups participating together, followed by a time (usually up to an hour) when each group met separately to discuss its own business. The parish priest was always present at the Meeting and was able to attend to small matters in different groups that warranted his attention. The leaders of the parish groups met about 3-4 times a year in a separate meeting to discuss any urgent matters arising.

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<sup>36</sup> “Planning,” *Building Stronger Parishes*, National Centre for Pastoral Research, <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/project/planning/>.

## Suggested Models for Parish Pastoral Councils

Below are several different models for structuring a parish pastoral council. These can be used individually, or facets of each can be combined to form a hybrid model. The important factor is that the form of the parish pastoral council meets the needs of the parish and the community within which it is located.

### 1. GATHERING OF DISCERNERS

In this model, the primary focus of the PPC is to reflect prayerfully upon and consider the needs of the parish, often supplemented with reports and other data provided by groups within the parish. Members for the PPC may be selected based on their relevant gifts and skills, or their expertise in certain areas such as accountancy or law. The focus of this PPC is to discern the vision and mission for the parish, which would then be handed over to others to implement.



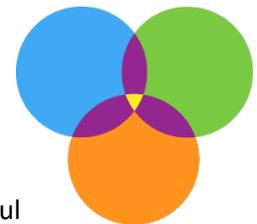
### 2. PARISH FORUM

In this model, the PPC is composed of several sub-committees or working groups which have responsibility for particular areas or activities. These could include youth ministry, liturgy, families or infrastructure. In this model, the sub-committees meet more frequently throughout the year, then come together in a larger forum—sometimes with the whole parish in attendance—on a less frequent basis, such as once a year.



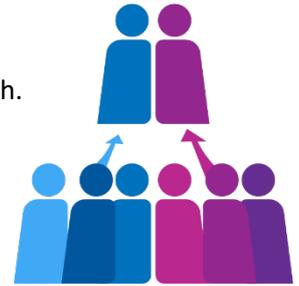
### 3. COMMUNITY OF COMMUNITIES

The Community of Communities model is made up of members who are direct representatives of the parish groups in which they serve. For example, a PPC could be composed of members who represent ethnic chaplaincies, the St Vincent de Paul Society, or youth groups in the parish. Unlike the parish forum model, the parish groups are not sub-committees of the parish pastoral council but operate separately to the council.



#### 4. REPRESENTATIVE MODEL

The Representative model focuses on representation of the diversity of the parish. This may be achieved by requiring that there are quotas of men and women, different age groups, or different ethnicities represented on the council. The focus is that the members of the PPC represent the parish congregation and are expected to be in regular communication with the parish members to be the parish priest's 'eyes and ears' in the parish.



#### 5. PEAK PLANNING BODY

In this model, the PPC is very much focussed on the planning functions of the parish. They are responsible for the development and promotion of the vision and mission for the parish. This executive style of council ensures that these 'big picture' functions are the driving force for all activities of the parish community.



#### 6. COMMUNITY BUILDERS

While some councils focus on representing the parish community, others conceive the parish pastoral council as being one which fosters the parish community. They are able to identify the gifts and skills among members of the parish and direct them to service of the community in the best way possible. They discern the needs of the parish members and coordinate community activities, such as parish picnics or retreats.



#### 7. MISSIONARY MODEL

Most traditional models of parish councils focus inward on the attending members of the parish and its day-to-day needs. However, some PPCs primarily focus on the missionary activities of the parish. They see the vision and mission of the parish as one that focuses outwards to the wider community and the world around them, and the council's activities are driven by this view.



## CONCLUSION

Parish pastoral councils are of great value to the operation of a parish. This report has presented research findings related to PPCs from many different sources, beginning with references to the Code of Canon Law and other relevant Church documents. Parish and diocesan guidelines for PPCs were investigated across Australia, Canada, New Zealand, The Philippines, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States. The information gathered has provided insights on PPC vision and mission statements, membership, term of office, planning resources, frequency of council meetings, relationships between the council and other groups, the importance of prayer in the establishment and running of the council, decision-making processes, the involvement of parishioners with the council and other matters. Several parish websites were identified as being exemplars based on the breadth of PPC information that was available. Data gathered for previous research projects carried out in Australian parishes highlighted the perspectives of Mass attenders and parish leaders on the functioning of their PPC.

Based on these findings, the report examined several ways in which a parish pastoral council can be constructed and described seven models: Gathering of Discerners, Parish Forum, Community of Communities, Representative model, Peak Planning Body, Community Builders, and Missionary model. This information assembled furnishes a greater understanding of the aspects and functions of a parish pastoral council and provides direction for those seeking to set up such a council to suit their local circumstances.

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

### Recommendations related to Parish Pastoral Councils

#### Recommendation 74

That each diocesan bishop mandate parish pastoral councils in the parishes of his diocese.

#### **BISHOP'S RESPONSE:**

Agreed in principle. Mindful of the identity and needs of the local Church and what is required by the Code of Canon Law, each diocesan bishop will consult the council of priests in relation to the establishment as normative of parish pastoral councils. It is anticipated that the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia might address the life and mission of parishes, including the particular contribution of 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.

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