

Parish Councils – Diocesan Guidelines

1. Parish councils are not mandatory under canon law, but, as in our case, can be established at the request of a diocesan bishop. The council is a consultative body, which encourages, promotes and enables active participation by the lay faithful in the pastoral work of the parish, and its mission.
2. The pastoral council is presided over by the parish priest. No actions can be decided in his absence, or contrary to his wishes. A single council can exist for several parishes, if the parish priest has pastoral responsibilities for them.
3. The membership of the council should consist of those who have effective responsibility in the pastoral life of the parish, and who are concretely engaged in it. The meetings of the council should not be a place for the exchange of abstract ideas, but a source of information sharing, and addressing of real-life issues in the parish community with its resources and problems.
4. The parish council is one expression of Pope Francis' call for greater co-responsibility in the local Church. Its primary focus is mission – responding to the pastoral needs of the parish. These include.
 - Catechesis
 - evangelisation
 - spiritual nurturing
 - practical support
 - the needs of the sick and marginalised.
5. Parish councils are related to deanery councils, which the Archbishop has also called to be established in due course. Deanery councils will have a similar mission, but drawing more widely across deanery areas.

A suggested draft constitution is given below for discussion.

ARTICLE 1 – NAME This organization shall be known as the Parish Council of [Church Name, Location]

ARTICLE II – PURPOSES This parish council is a consultative body with several tasks. Broadly it seeks to cooperate with the parish priest, so that in a spirit of synodality all, according to their gifts, may contribute to the mission of the Church. As a parish in the Archdiocese of Birmingham, this council adopts the diocesan vision “to be a Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.”

ARTICLE III – MEMBERSHIP This parish council shall have a membership of [indicate number] persons, who serve ex-officio because of their responsibilities in the parish, or because they are appointed by the parish priest. Ex-officio members include: the parish priest, parochial vicars, permanent deacons, religious, staff representatives from the parish school(s), and chairperson of the parish finance council. [Indicate numbers] members. Men and women are appointed by the parish priest, after consultation with the parish or existing parish council, to reflect the makeup of the parish and to include any needed expertise or experience.

ARTICLE IV – ELIGIBILITY FOR OFFICE Membership on this council shall be open to Catholics who are in full communion with the Church.

ARTICLE V – TERM OF OFFICE Ex-officio members serve for as long as they are in their positions. Appointed members serve a three-year term, renewable once. After two consecutive terms, members must leave the council for at least one year.

ARTICLE VI – APPOINTMENT PROCESS

1. The terms of one-third of the appointed members shall expire each year. If another opening has occurred (for example, a member resigns after one year) someone shall be appointed for the balance of that term. That balance is considered a term of office, even if only for one year.
2. Each Spring [or some other time] the council members will be asked to suggest to the parish priest the names of people who might be considered for appointment to the council. The parish priest may also contribute names. Notice shall be given in the parish bulletin or website inviting people to submit their own or other people's names for consideration.
3. In May [or some other time] the parish priest announces the names of the people he has appointed, and they begin their services at the meeting in June [or some other time].

ARTICLE VII - OFFICERS OF THE COUNCIL

1. This council shall have at least three officers: The parish priest as its president and in his absence his nominee, a chairperson and a secretary.
2. Elections of council officers except the president who is not elected shall be held every year [indicate when precisely].
3. Officers serve a one-year term, renewable once for that office. The officers form an executive committee which plans agendas under the presidency of the parish priest.
4. The duties of each officer shall include the following:
 - a. The chairperson conducts all meetings, ensuring good order.
 - b. The secretary keeps the minutes of all meetings, distributes the minutes, notifies members of meetings and attends to other correspondence.
 - c. The roles of other officers if appointed need determination.

ARTICLE VIII – MEETINGS

1. This council shall meet [indicate frequency].
2. Meetings are open to all parishioners. Non-members who wish to speak at a meeting must first be recognized by the chairperson.
3. Unless there are sub-committees (cf. art. X) agenda items should include the four focus areas of the diocesan vision: (i) evangelisation (ii) formation (iii) liturgy and worship (iv) social outreach.

ARTICLE IX – VOTING AT MEETINGS When indicated by the president votes may be taken, though the results remain consultative.

1. All members have the right to vote, although they may abstain.
2. On matters for which a formal vote is deemed useful, one-half plus one of the members being present constitutes a quorum.
3. As much as possible, matters shall be decided by consensus.

ARTICLE X – COMMITTEES

1. This Council shall have committees as required.
2. Other committees and their tasks may include those corresponding to the diocesan vision: evangelisation, formation, worship & sacramental life, charity & social outreach.

ARTICLE XI – LIAISON The president or his nominee shall act as liaison reporting on meetings and activities when appropriate to the deanery pastoral council, the deanery conference and other interested persons.

ARTICLE XII – ADOPTION/AMENDMENTS

1. This constitution becomes effective when approved by two-thirds of the council members, after discussion at one meeting and after a vote at the next meeting.
2. This constitution can be amended by following the same process.
3. Each new member of this council shall be given a copy of this