

# Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Committees



Diocese of Clonfert



Meelick Cross

**“You and I,  
we who have been  
baptised into Christ  
and confirmed  
in his Spirit -  
we are the  
Church”**

(Bishop Michael Duignan)

Cover Photo - St Brendan and Companions.  
Shrine of Our Lady of Clonfert, Eyrecourt, Co Galway.

The word “Church” has its origins in the Greek word ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) which means a group of people called and assembled for a specific purpose. Before the word ever became associated with buildings or was used exclusively to refer to the clergy – it denoted the people assembled by Jesus Christ to bring his transformative good news to every human heart. In the true sense of the word – you and I, we who have been baptised into Christ and confirmed in his Spirit - we are the Church.

Taking this idea to heart and speaking of the Church as the People of God, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), while recognising their different roles, emphasised the joint responsibility of both clergy and laity when it comes to the Christian life.

The Code of Canon Law (1983) enshrines this in parish structures when it decrees that: “In every parish in the diocese, a Pastoral Council shall be established, if the diocesan Bishop, after consulting with the Council of Presbyters, so decides.” (C. 536, §1) In Canon 537 it states that “In each parish, there is to be a Finance Committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish.”

Building on work already accomplished in the past and the experience of Parish Pastoral Councils throughout the Diocese of Clonfert, these new *Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Committees* have been drawn up in consultation with the Council of Priests and the Parish Restructuring and Renewal Committee.

It is my hope that their publication will be an opportunity for members of current and future Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Committees along with our Priests to reflect on their particular mission and to become key players in the restructuring and renewal of parish and diocesan life that these days so urgently demand of us all.

Let us pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all involved.

*Come from the four winds, O Spirit,  
come breath of God; disperse the shadows over us,  
renew and strengthen your people.*

Bishop Michael Duignan  
Pentecost Sunday 2021

# Parish Pastoral Council

## 1.0. What is a Parish Pastoral Council?

1.1. A Parish Pastoral Council is a faith-filled consultative group through which priest(s) and people work together as partners in furthering the mission of Christ in their own parish. Through this partnership, a vibrant Christian community, rooted in baptism and marked by its faith, worship and service, is nourished.

## 2.0. Distinction between the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee

2.1. There is a clear distinction between a Parish Pastoral Council and a Parish Finance Committee. The Parish Pastoral Council is concerned with people and building up the faith, hope and love that cements them into a real, living and caring Christian community. Such an authentic Christian community always reaches out beyond itself to bring the good news of the Gospel to others, especially the poor and those on the margins of society.

2.2. A Parish Finance Committee is concerned with the prudent administration of parish finance and property for the sole sake of the Gospel in accordance with canon and civil law.

## 3.0. Areas of Concern for a Parish Pastoral Council

3.1. The following are some areas in which the Parish Pastoral Council might nurture and further the mission of the Parish.

- a) Promoting the prayer life and the faith life of the parish
- b) Evangelising outreach
- c) Familiarity with the Scriptures
- d) Adult religious formation
- e) Support for family life
- f) Support for the faith life of young people
- g) Parish liturgical celebrations and liturgical ministry
- h) Ongoing skills training and formation for those on the Parish Pastoral Council and for others in the parish



- i) Care of people - the poor, elderly, those with additional needs and those who live alone, etc
- j) Outreach to newcomers to a parish
- k) Outreach to those on the margins of the church and society
- l) Working to improve communication throughout the parish especially through the medium of a good, informative and attractively produced parish newsletter and social media platforms
- m) Bringing Catholic insights and action to social issues such as alcohol, drugs, poverty, housing, etc, which affect the life of the parish
- n) Developing appropriate parish policies regarding such issues as the times and number of Masses
- o) Building up good relationships with other Parish Pastoral Councils in the local area, the deanery and the diocese
- p) Pastoral care of the sick, those in hospital, the dying
- q) Supporting the implementation of safeguarding children/vulnerable adults policies and procedures

#### **4.0. How should a Parish Pastoral Council Function?**

- 4.1. While the role of the Parish Pastoral Council is consultative and advisory to the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) it is vital that true listening and genuine dialogue takes place at the meetings.
- 4.2. After one year in existence, the Parish Pastoral Council should engage in a formal review of the way it carries out its work.

#### **5.0. One Parish Pastoral Council in each Parish**

- 5.1. It is the policy of the Diocese of Clonfert that each parish has one Parish Pastoral Council only.
- 5.2. The following are some of the reasons for having a policy of one Parish Pastoral Council per parish:
  - a) It creates a unity of purpose in a parish. The sharing of resources, facilities and talents ensures that work will be done in an effective and efficient way.



- b) Planning for the future is one of the Parish Pastoral Council's main functions. This cannot be done properly in a fragmented parish.
- c) The issues that a Parish Pastoral Council deals with are usually broad and general in nature e.g. provision of adult religious education, youth ministry, social issues, supporting family life etc. A small church area on its own may not have the resources to respond to these issues.
- d) It will help reduce the duplication of work.

5.3. While this document envisages one Parish Pastoral Council and one Parish Finance Committee per parish, over time and in accordance with evolving circumstances, it is likely that such structures may evolve into wider bodies to serve groups of parishes.

5.4. Parish Pastoral Councils shall not constitute themselves as any legal body under civil law eg Company, etc.

## 6.0. Membership of a Parish Pastoral Council

- 6.1. The Parish Pastoral Council is to consist of no less than six people and no more than twelve people including:
  - a) The Priest(s) responsible for the parish.
  - b) The Parish Safeguarding representative.
- 6.2. The Parish Pastoral Council is to be representative of the entire parish community, of all social classes, and age groups and of women and men. It is recommended that at least two members be under the age of 30.
- 6.3. The term of a Parish Pastoral Council is four years. On completion of their second consecutive term, members are ineligible for immediate reappointment but may be reappointed after four years have passed.
- 6.4. The Parish Priest and members of the Parish Pastoral Council should plan for, identify and support people who may in due course be encouraged to become valuable members of the Parish Pastoral Council.

6.5 The Parish Pastoral Council shall cease once the office of Parish Priest becomes vacant. In such circumstances, the Bishop may ask the current Parish Pastoral Council to remain in place until a new Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) is appointed. The new Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) may decide to continue with the present Parish Pastoral Council until its term has been concluded or constitute a new Council on taking office.

## **7.0. Election of a Parish Pastoral Council**

7.1. The Parish Priest in consultation with the outgoing Parish Pastoral Council should decide on how the election will be organised. This should take into account the number of people to be elected and the necessity of having representation from the entire parish faith community.

7.2. A meeting of Parishioners should be held with the purpose of electing members to represent the entire faith community to a maximum of six elected members.

7.3. Once the elected members of the Parish Pastoral Council are in place, the Parish Priest should call a meeting to begin the process of co-opting extra members to a maximum of 3 extra members. These members can be selected for a number of reasons: a particular talent or artistic ability or membership of an unrepresented pastoral group e.g. young people, choir members, Eucharistic Ministers, Ministers of the Word, gender balance, etc.

7.4. The Parish Child Safeguarding Representative is an ex-officio member of the Parish Pastoral Council during their respective terms of office.

7.5. It is desirable that members of the Parish Pastoral Council be formally commissioned according to the diocesan rite for this purpose.

## **8.0. Officers of the Parish Pastoral Council**

8.1. The Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) will preside over meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council. He is not the Chairperson.



- 8.2. The Chairperson is to be carefully selected/elected by the Parish Pastoral Council. His/her main function will be to facilitate the smooth running of the meetings.
- 8.3. The Parish Pastoral Council will select/elect a secretary who will take minutes of each meeting and notify the members of meetings at least one week in advance.
- 8.4. Each Parish Pastoral Council will forward the name, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the Chairperson, Secretary to the Diocesan Office, within a week of their selection/election.
- 8.5. Officers should, except in exceptional circumstances, retain their positions for the full term of the Parish Pastoral Council.
- 8.6. If elections of officers are deemed appropriate the following system of election will apply: Nominees shall be sought by proposal and seconding. They shall be voted on by secret ballot. If there are more than two nominees

there shall be a preliminary vote. Those two nominees receiving the highest number of votes shall be candidates in a further vote. The candidate receiving a majority of the votes shall be deemed elected. If there is only one nominee there shall still be a secret ballot. In order to be elected, a candidate must receive a majority of the votes cast.

## 9.0. General Functioning of the Parish Pastoral Council

- 9.1. The Parish Pastoral Council will meet a minimum of four times each year.
- 9.2. It is the responsibility of the Parish Priest to convene meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council.
- 9.3. Before each meeting the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law), together with the secretary and chairperson (executive committee) will prepare an agenda for the meeting.
- 9.4. A period of reflective, scripture-based, prayer should be included in each meeting.

- 9.5 If the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) cannot attend, then another priest nominated by him will preside. A meeting cannot make decisions without the presence of the Parish Priest unless in exceptional circumstances e.g. long-term absences due to illness and then with the permission of the Bishop.
- 9.6. Meetings should not last longer than one and a half hours.
- 9.7. A quorum will consist of half the members of the Council plus one.
- 9.8. Continuing membership of any member failing to attend three consecutive meetings without a reasonable explanation will be deemed to have resigned. The secretary will write to the member in question to inform him/her of this ruling. Vacancies will be filled by co-opting new members.
- 9.9. A short, agreed report will be issued to parishioners after each meeting of the Parish Pastoral Council eg a note in the Parish Newsletter, etc.
- 9.10. On-going formation will be of vital importance for all members of the Parish Pastoral Council.
- 10.0. Sub-Committees of the Parish Pastoral Council**
- 10.1. If necessary, sub-committees of the Parish Pastoral Council may be set up to assist in certain areas of parish life or certain issues that might arise from time to time.
- 10.2. Sub-committees may only be set up with the permission of the Parish Pastoral Council.
- 10.3. Sub-committees must elect a chair and secretary.
- 10.4. Co-opted members of sub-committees must be approved by the Parish Pastoral Council.
- 10.5. All sub-committees must issue a report on their work to each Pastoral Council Meeting.



Loughrea Cathedral



# Parish Finance Committee

Both the Code of Canon Law (c. 537) and the financial norms of the Diocese of Clonfert that underpin the governance of the charity *Catholic Diocese and Parishes of Clonfert* require that each parish has in place a properly constituted and functioning Parish Finance Committee.

## 1.0. What is a Parish Finance Committee?

1.1. The Parish Finance Committee advises and assists the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) in the prudent administration of the goods of the parish in a spirit of service to God and his people in accordance with canon and civil law. Parish goods include all financial assets including investments and bank accounts along with parish lands, buildings, equipment, religious artefacts, etc., as detailed in the parish asset register.

## 2.0. The Remit of the Parish Finance Committee

2.1. The remit of the Parish Finance Committee pertains to advice and assistance in managing the following areas:

- a) it shall help to ensure that there are adequate supervisions and controls in place for collections and handling of cash.
- b) it shall, with the assistance of a sub-committee, if desirable, assist in making projections of income and expenditure for the parish. Throughout the year, the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) shall, with the help of the Parish Finance Committee, monitor the income and expenditure of the parish in the light of the agreed budget or projections.
- c) it shall assist with putting in place for the parish a book-keeping system which conforms to best accounting practice and the diocesan norms regarding parish finances and accounts. The financial year for parishes shall be the calendar year to December 31st.
- d) it shall assist with keeping parishioners informed of the financial and asset portfolio of the parish through an annual report to parishioners. This report shall follow the standard provided by the Diocesan Office and shall be made available to

parishioners before end of April of the following year.

- e) it shall assist with preparing the Annual Parish Financial Report for the Diocesan Office.
- f) it shall assist the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) in compiling an up-to-date, comprehensive inventory of all parochial property, goods and equipment. A copy of this is to be kept in the parish and another lodged in the diocesan archives. It is to be updated annually at the same time as the parish report to the diocesan office.
- g) it shall advise the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) so as to ensure that the ownership of Church goods and all Church properties are safeguarded. Special attention is needed to ensure that adequate lease/licence/rental agreements and insurance is in place.
- h) it shall advise the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) on the acquisition and lease/sale or other disposal of assets – without prejudice to the provisions of current diocesan guidelines.

- i) it shall also advise and assist the parish in its fundraising policy.

### **3.0. Limits of the Remit of the Parish Finance Committee**

- 3.1. The Parish Finance Committee acts in an advisory capacity to the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law).
- 3.2. In accordance with Canon 532, the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) not the Parish Finance Committee, represents the parish in all legal matters.
- 3.3. The Parish Finance Committee shall not be an employer.
- 3.4. The Parish Finance Committee shall not be considered the legal owner of parish assets.
- 3.5. The Parish Finance Committee shall not constitute itself as any legal body under civil law eg Company, etc.

3.6. The Parish Finance Committee is, likewise, distinct and separate from the Parish Pastoral Council. However, a system should be put in place to ensure ongoing communication between these bodies.

3.7. Each year, a formal report should issue from the Parish Pastoral Council to the Parish Finance Committee and from the Parish Finance Committee to the Parish Pastoral Council.

#### **4.0. Necessity of the Parish Finance Committee**

4.1. Each parish is required to have in place one functioning Parish Finance Committee for the entire parish. (c. 537)

#### **5.0. Membership of the Parish Finance Committee**

5.1. The Parish Finance Committee shall consist of a minimum of three and maximum of four persons.

5.2. Members should normally have relevant qualifications, experience or proven wisdom in the area of finance, business, property management, etc.

5.3. The Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) presides over the Parish Finance Committee which should elect its own chairperson and secretary.

5.4. The term of a Parish Finance Committee is four years. On completion of their second consecutive term, members are ineligible for immediate reappointment but may be reappointed after four years have passed.

#### **6.0. Formation of the Parish Finance Committee**

6.1. The Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) is an ex-officio member of the Parish Finance Committee.

6.2. The Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) shall continue as a member of the Parish Finance Committee for the duration of his parish appointment.

6.3. The Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) in consultation with suitable lay advisers, as he may see fit, shall appoint three members to the Parish Finance Committee.

6.4. Care should be taken to ensure that members are representative of the "areas" of the parish.

### **7.0. Operation of the Parish Finance Committee**

7.1. The Parish Finance Committee is to meet at least three times a year.

7.2. The Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) or his delegate, is to be the Chairman of the Parish Finance Committee.

7.3. At its first meeting, the newly-appointed Parish Finance Committee shall appoint a Secretary, who shall keep the minutes of all meetings.

7.4. At its first meeting also, the members shall be given an accurate picture of the assets of the parish, including the current financial position. A copy of current diocesan norms regarding parish finance and property is to be made available to each member.

7.5. A quorum for meetings of the Committee is to be one half of the members and the Chairperson.

7.6. A meeting cannot be held without the Parish Priest (or equivalent in Canon Law) unless in exceptional circumstances e.g. long-term absences due to illness and then with the permission of the Bishop and the presence of the Bishop's delegate.

7.7. Members of the Parish Finance Committee are required to keep confidential matters discussed at meetings, unless otherwise agreed at a formal meeting by the Parish Finance Committee.

The Bishop is responsible for the authentic interpretation of these norms. We would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution to this document of work already undertaken in the Dioceses of Kilmore, Cork and Ross and Elphin.





## **Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Committees**

Diocese of Clonfert

[www.clonfertdiocese.ie](http://www.clonfertdiocese.ie)



Our Lady of Clonfert