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Why have a Parish Pastoral Council?

For the Church to have relevance in today's circumstances, continuing efforts are required to find new ways to assist parishioners to connect their daily experience with their faith and their efforts to live that faith each day. When Pastoral Councils approach their task within the context of the mission of the Church and the parish, their focus should reflect an understanding of the hopes and concerns of parishioners. Whatever actions are recommended, it is important that they be presented in ways that:

- give meaning to people's lives and value to what they are already doing
- become life-giving rather than an added burden
- respect and value the efforts and experiences of the past
- seek to build the parish community
- offer a sense of empowerment and hope.

From such a perspective, Pastoral Councils are challenged to be attentive to the realities of life within society and constantly to search, together with the community being served, for where God may be leading.

St Erconwald's parish mission

St Erconwald's, Walton, has had, for many years the following as its mission statement:

“Grow in faith, love and community”

St Erconwald PPC is committed to deepening its understanding of what it means to live out this mission and to explore in depth the unique characteristics of our faith community at St Erconwald's Walton. We will regularly reflect on our mission, reviewing how we support the parish to grow. As followers of Christ, guided by his Holy Spirit, we are called to be missionary disciples. In the words of St John,

'By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you have loved one another.' (John 13:35).

Purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council

The Pastoral Council consists of the Parish Priest together with a group of parishioners.

Its principal roles are to:

- Listen to parishioners and act as a source of support, promoting communication between the parish groups, parishioners and the parish priest.
- Provide support to the parish priest.
- Lead, with the parish groups, the transmission of the parish vision and mission.
- Lead the ongoing development, implementation, review and evaluation of the parish. strategic plan, ensuring the parish's sustainability beyond the term of the PPC/in the event of any change of parish priest.
- Develop, implement and improve parish initiatives that assist parishioners in their continuing efforts to live as effective Christians in society, that promote the translation of the parish's mission and vision into practice and that are in line with the plan and priorities established.
- Maintain oversight and co-ordination of support functions in the parish; growing income, business cases, safeguarding our future.
- Represent views of parishioners.

In order to fulfil its role, the Pastoral Council will:

- Deepen our own knowledge and witness of faith as a team.
- Search out and respond to the hopes, ideas, needs and concerns of parishioners.
- Grow in knowledge and awareness of what is already happening in the parish.
- Encourage and support the good work of existing groups within the parish.
- Evaluate carefully information gathered in order to contribute towards the making of decisions that reflect the values of the gospel, the teachings of the Church and the parish mission and goals.
- Set long-term and short-term pastoral goals for the parish.
- Provide opportunities for parishioners to grow in their relationship with God and with each other.

Function of the Pastoral Council

The functioning of the Pastoral Council will develop over time.

Membership

Process of selection

As this is the first PPC at St Erconwald's, Fr Ruslan made the decision to invite members, rather than seek nominations and elections. This has allowed for a broad representation and vision from across our parish community. A process for establishing membership/terms of office, currently envisaged to be for a period of three years, and bringing new members on board will be established in due course.

We welcome a diversity of ages, gender, ethnicity, backgrounds, experiences and cultures that truly represent our community and parish life. Membership is open to any parishioners who express a desire and willingness to serve the parish and wider community in living out its mission and vision. Appropriate safeguarding procedures will be put in place.

A maximum of 10-14 members is recommended.

The PPC will, at a minimum, include the Parish Priest, a Chair, and a Secretary. The parish secretary will contribute in person/prior to meetings as needed.

Responsibilities of all members

- Attend the regular meetings of the PPC as much as possible.
- Provide input to PPC matters, whether in person or in writing if attendance is not possible.
- Develop a spirit of enquiry and the ability to listen to and understand the issues affecting the lives of parishioners.
- Provide prayerful support and encouragement for other members of the PPC.
- Actively participate in the implementation of finalised plans of action.
- Actively seek the input from parish groups for whom they are the focal point on the PPC.
- Embrace opportunities for personal faith development and for gaining skills to assist with effective participation in the PPC's activities.
- Represent the Council when required, e.g. at other parish, deanery or diocesan meetings.
- Actively be available to fellow parishioners.

Qualities and skills

- An eagerness to help the parish articulate its mission/vision and direction.
- An excitement about the parish.
- Availability of time and focused energy.
- An ability to listen and work with others.
- A desire for spiritual growth.
- An openness to study and reflection.

Chair

The role of Chair is key. He or she must be able to work with the parish priest, and also have the confidence of the whole parish pastoral council.

The role of the Chair is to:

- Establish a relationship of mutual trust and respect with the parish priest and develop an understanding of his aspirations for the parish, meeting with him regularly.
- Ensure significant time for prayer and formation is included at meetings to maintain the pastoral focus of the council.
- Provide encouragement and support for council members.
- Establish communications channels within the parish. These channels should ensure that the PPC, parishioners and all groups within the parish can actively communicate with each other.
- Run the parish council meetings effectively, ensuring that everyone has a chance to contribute.
- Liaise with the Secretary to coordinate meeting follow-up.

Communications strategies

- Monthly updates in the newsletter, or more frequently as required, in liaison with the Secretary
- Annual all-parish meeting
- All-parish surveys where appropriate
- Regular meetings/communications of chair and focal points with the various parish groups.
- Contact through the parish's social media channels.
- Any others deemed useful.

In additional, informal social events will be encouraged.

Secretary

The role of the Secretary is to:

- Invite parishioner/PPC member agenda items prior to each meeting.
- In liaison with the Chair, produce and distribute agendas, plus any associated documents, ideally at least one week prior to the meeting.
- Organise meeting place and resources for the meeting.
- Circulate meeting minutes for approval to Chair and PPC after each meeting, recording action items and decisions.
- Ensure that the parish receives an update after each meeting/at appropriate times via the most appropriate mechanism (eg newsletter/website).
- Agree meeting dates and advise the parish office of these dates for the newsletter.

Executive group

To liaise in between meetings, the parish priest, Chair and Secretary will be responsible for:

- Agreeing the agenda of each meeting, including matters identified by parishioners, PPC members, the deanery, external groups.
- Dealing with any urgent issues that may arise between meetings.
- The ongoing formation of the PPC.

Term of office

At present it is suggested that this be for a period of 3 years. The process for changing membership will be determined during the first term of the new PPC.

Frequency of meetings

1 x per month, except for August, with separate meetings/parish liaison meetings, etc taking place as needed.

Sufficient time needs to be set aside for prayer and reflection. Responsibility for leading prayer will be taken by different people through the life of the PPC.

May 2023

Date of next review

June 2024

References

St Lawrence, Sidcup. Parish Council Handbook

<http://www.stlsidcup.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/PC-Handbook-reviewed.pdf>

Handbook for St Barts Parish Council, St Albans

<https://parish.rcdow.org.uk/stalbanssouth/wp-content/uploads/sites/191/2020/10/Handbook-for-St-Barts-Parish-Pastoral-Council.pdf>