



GUIDELINES FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

PO Box 1937, Wellington
+64-4-496 1759

Updated August 2021

We, the Catholic People of the Archdiocese of Wellington
follow Jesus Christ by:

celebrating and sharing faith,
growing in community,
caring for our common home,
and working for justice and peace

Lord Jesus Christ
you have gathered us together
to put our gifts at the service of your Kingdom.
May we answer your call to discipleship
by listening to each other with respect and reverence
discerning the needs of our parish
fostering a sense of mission
enabling participation in our parish community
reviewing our lives and ministry
promoting dialogue and good communication
opening our hearts and minds more fully
to the action of your Spirit in our lives.

Foreword by Cardinal John Dew

The theme of the Archdiocesan Synod in 2017 was “Go you are sent...”

The Synod was a discernment process, listening to the Spirit and to one another as we sought to understand where God is leading us... we needed prayerful, listening participants. Imagination was also important, as it is a powerful way in which the Holy Spirit can introduce us to new ways of understanding and acting. These are the attributes that will help our Parish Pastoral Councils to be Spirit led in their decision making.

These Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils are recommended to all priests, lay pastoral leaders and parish council members, so that we can be the Church Jesus calls us to be. I also suggest to Pastoral Councils that you introduce some study of [Evangelii Gaudium](#) into your meetings, because it will provide context and support for your leadership role.

I warmly recommend this booklet “*Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils*” and ask that you use this to help you plan for the future. Our Synod recommendations will only become reality when parish pastoral councils are committed to making the Synod Outcomes a reality in local church life.

I ask you to use these Guidelines in conjunction with the 2017 Synod Outcomes.

With every good wish and blessing



John A Cardinal Dew
Archbishop of Wellington
November 2017

Cardinal John Dew’s Pastoral Priorities 2017

Go you are sent...

- to the peripheries of society
- to develop a spirituality of service
- to find leaders
- to build community
- to deepen your bicultural relationship

Contents

	Page
1. Parish pastoral council – who are you?	5
- A team	
- Is there an ideal parish pastoral council member?	
- How many are you?	
2. Why have a parish pastoral council?	6
- What do you do?	
- Why have a pastoral plan?	
- What is in your pastoral plan?	
3. How do you operate	8
- Four types	
- Advisory body	
- Number of meetings	
- New members	
- Pros and cons of elections	
- Installation	
- Prayer and effective meetings	
- Who makes the decisions?	
- Focus on pastoral issues	
4. What is the priest/s lay pastoral leader/s role?	11
5. How to stay in touch	12
- With each other	
- With your parishioners	
- With your local church	
- Other	
6. Parish Finance Committee and School Board of Trustees	13
- Finance Committee	
- School Board of Trustees	
7. How to stay in top form	14
- Evaluation	
- How to get new members	
- Formation and training	
8. Where to get more information	17

Parish Pastoral Council - who are you?

A team

- *Community* - you are a team of parishioners.
- *Mission* - you take special responsibility for what your parish is and does.
- *Vision* - in consultation with the parishioners you plan where you should be going as a parish and how to make that happen.
- *Service* - you inspire other parishioners and draw on their talents and gifts.

Is there an ideal Parish Pastoral Council member?

Every person is unique. Every person brings her or his gifts and weaknesses. It is the variety that makes for a team. It makes for a better team if each member, in their own way, tries to:

- be a person of *prayer*, striving for personal holiness and holiness of the council
- understand what it means to be *Church today* so that despite diverse opinions and backgrounds, you remain united and at peace with one another
- be consistent and *punctual* in attendance at all meetings and send an apology if absent
- be adequately *informed* before making decisions take time to pre-read meeting materials/documents
- *listen* to other views with goodwill and do not start a discussion with your neighbour when someone else is talking
- concern yourself with the *full mission* of the parish rather than limiting yourself to the areas you are particularly interested in
- be someone who is willing to participate in *formation* for the position
- *take full part* in discussions and do not be afraid to say what you think
- be *generous* in accepting your share of follow-up tasks
- be *open* with people if you have a concern, talk to the person in question
- be *involved* in the parish and keep in touch with parishioners and liaise with parish groups when required.

How many are you?

The parish pastoral council team is made up of

- Parishioners:
 - we suggest eight or more parishioners in larger parishes, five or more in smaller parishes
 - at least two who are young adults; try to reflect the parish's cultural diversity
 - members of the pastoral leadership team (priest/s, lay pastoral leader/s)

Why have a Parish Pastoral Council?

Parishes have parish pastoral councils because your parish is not a collection of separate followers of Jesus Christ. You are made up of different parts, but you are one body: the Body of Christ. You are the People of God called to work together and continue the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.

*In the Archdiocese of Wellington you are also **required** to have a pastoral council.* According to Canon Law 536, pastoral councils are to be established in each parish if the diocesan bishop considers it opportune.

The requirement that each parish in the Archdiocese of Wellington is to have a parish pastoral council, dates from the 1970s. The Archbishop reaffirmed the requirement in 1989 and again in October 1998 saying that such a council is:

- essential if the parish is to develop
- if it is to meet the spiritual, liturgical, pastoral and social needs of its people
- if it is to be evangelising
- if it is to play the part in the mission of the local and universal Church.

What do you do?

You are responsible for the “big picture” in and of the parish. Pope Francis recalled, the purpose of such a Council “should not be ecclesiastical organization but rather the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone”.¹ You work with the pastoral leadership team (priest/s and lay pastoral leader/s) to plan and foster pastoral activities. Your main functions are to:

1. *agree on a pastoral plan*
2. *collaborate with offers to bring the plan to fruition*
3. *evaluate the results.*

Why have a pastoral plan for your parish?

The mission of your and every parish is this: to love and imitate Christ and to make Him known to others.² Your parish plan is a description of how you will do this in the time and place you find yourself.

¹ Instruction “The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church”, of the Congregation for the Clergy, 20.07.2020, n.110

² Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n.29

Plans can be short-term (1 year) and long-term (5-10 years). They are most effective when they are living documents, regularly reassessed, adapted and evaluated. It is important that accountability, transparency and unity are fostered in everything you do.

When developing a pastoral plan you will listen to the needs of parishioners and, since the parish exists to be missionary, you will also listen to the needs of those outside the parish.

*The question at the heart of a pastoral planning process is not “what will we do?”
But “what is the Holy Spirit leading us to do?”³*

It is a given that every parish is unique. It is a mistake to believe that a parish’s uniqueness is so complete that it cannot make use of archdiocesan resources or the experiences of other parishes. Parishes which become so caught up in their uniqueness fail to make use of outside help.

The ADW Church Mission Team is happy to assist you with pastoral planning.

What is in your pastoral plan?

Your parish is an integral part of the local church, the Archdiocese of Wellington. Pope John Paul II writes: *It is in the local churches that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified.*⁴

In the Archdiocese of Wellington this is done first of all through archdiocesan synods. The synod decisions will therefore give you important guidance in formulating the pastoral plan of your parish.

Your pastoral plan will cover both “maintenance” – looking after what is – and mission – moving towards new horizons. As we all endeavour to share the Good News, we support and strengthen each other, and to quote Pope John Paul II, *reach people, mould communities and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.*⁵

Areas of pastoral concern include:

- faith formation and spirituality
- liturgy and worship
- proclamation and outreach
- social justice and charity
- work with Catholic schools and young people
- pastoral care for groups with special needs
- parish operations and communications.

³ *Synod Outcomes, 2017.* p.30

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n.29

⁵ *Ibid* n.29

How do you operate?

Four types

Parish pastoral councils operate in different ways and have different structures. In the Archdiocese of Wellington they come in four types. All four types have advantages and disadvantages. Your parish may wish to experiment to find out what type suits you best.

You can decide on your own type because parishes work best if they can choose how to do things. Sometimes the pastoral leadership team (priest/s and lay pastoral leader/s) decide what sort of pastoral council the parish will have. They may be influenced by earlier experiences in other parishes.

The four main types of parish pastoral council are:

- *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 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.

Each type brings its own expectations and ways of operating. If you are not clear about the type chosen, you may find a big difference in expectations among council members. This may make it difficult to develop fruitful relationships.

Advisory body

The parish pastoral council is the primary consultative body that assists the pastoral leadership team (priest/s and lay pastoral leader/s) by exercising advisory responsibility especially in the area of pastoral planning. It enables parishioners to accept and to share more fully the task first of continuing the Church's work in the parish and neighbourhood; second, of helping to call forth and affirm the many gifts and competencies needed to meet the pastoral needs of God's people; and third, of more effectively permeating the whole area with the presence of Christ.

Pastoral councils have a responsibility to ensure that plans are carried out and to frequently evaluate what is happening in the parish alongside its conformity to the gospel. Planning and then expecting the priest/s lay pastoral leader/s to do the work is not proper planning.

Listening to the parish community provides the basis for the growth and development of the parish. Pastoral council members need to have an overall awareness of the concerns and ideas for pastoral development in the parish. Consultation with the parish provides an opportunity for everyone to feel involved.

Planning includes doing whatever is necessary to make it possible for plans to become a reality.

When there is authentic collaboration between the parishioners, Parish Pastoral Council, Priest/s and Lay Pastoral Leaders the mission of the church comes closer to reality. The most vibrant parishes have many people engaged in a wide variety of ministries. One of the tasks of council members is to identify and discern the gifts of parishioners and invite them to become more involved in the life of the parish and local community.

If your pastoral plan includes new activities, you may, occasionally, volunteer to do the new work, at least in the beginning. *It is better if this is the exception rather than the rule.* Your task is primarily to discern, to plan, to be aware of the overall picture, to enthuse and encourage, *all the baptised and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life.*⁶

If you are (regularly) unable to find people to do the activity planned, you will have to rethink your plan and ask yourself why people are not willing to be involved. Perhaps your plan is not right, or people have been approached in the wrong way. You may have to concentrate on nurturing a sense of parish ownership and involvement first.

Prayer and effective meetings

Your meetings differ from other business meetings. Pope John Paul II writes: *All pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness and to place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences.*⁷

We all need training in holiness: the key to this training is personal and communal prayer. All of our Christian life, including our meetings, are *distinguished above all in the art of prayer.*⁸

Prayer and faith sharing are an essential part of 'the real business' of the meeting. Spending 10-15 minutes at the beginning of each meeting ensures we stay grounded.

Precisely because you are not an ordinary business meeting and people do not get paid for their attendance, you will want to have effective meetings.

Calling for agenda items and circulating the agenda before the meeting, in good time to enable members to prepare for the meeting.

If the meeting gets stuck on an agenda item, it is more effective to delegate responsibility to an ad hoc group to deal with it, reschedule it on the next month's agenda, or call an extra meeting.

⁶ *ibid* n.46

⁷ *ibid* n.30

⁸ *ibid* n.32

Number of meetings

Together you decide how often you need to meet. Once a month is most common. *In addition to your regular meetings*, you may do well to have special meetings once a year for:

- involving parishioners and giving an account
- training and formation
- long-term planning
- evaluating and celebrating your work.

New members

You will want to be clear about how members are recruited, how the chair is selected, and how long members of your pastoral council, and chair, are expected to serve.

A term of two to four years is common with the option of extensions of one or two terms. It is helpful to have a regular turn-over with a proportion retiring each year to ensure continuity.

It can happen that members of parish pastoral councils are pressured to stay on because replacements cannot be found. This is counter-productive in the long run: parishioners may become reluctant to accept nomination.

Also if the same people stay on the council for too long, it may discourage the involvement of other parishioners.

Some parishes have on their notice board the names and photos of the parish pastoral council members. You may wish to include the dates when they started and will finish their term. It will help your parishioners be aware that new people need to come forward on a regular basis to serve your parish in this way.

Pros and cons of elections

The usual way to get new people on your council is through elections. In *standard*, *link* and *executive* types of pastoral council, members are elected by the parish at large. In the *representation* type they are elected by existing parish groups and committees.

In some parishes, or in some years, elections do not take place. There may be a number of reasons for this, for example when not enough people allow their names to go forward or the existing parish council prefers to co-opt new members.

Open elections have the advantage of allowing all your parishioners a say. It strengthens their sense of ownership. The disadvantages are that elections are time—and energy—consuming, the election result may be unbalanced in terms of broad representation of age, cultural background and gender. Pastoral councils which have come about as a result of elections, may take more time to become cohesive teams.

Installation

As members of the pastoral council, you have accepted leadership responsibility in and for the parish. You may wish to formally install new members at a Sunday Mass so that parishioners can witness members' acceptance of service. This also inspires parishioners to keep you in their prayers. It is equally important to publicly thank those who are retiring from ministry.

Who makes the decisions?

Most pastoral councils like to work through consensus, at least in matters of greater importance. 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.* Consensus usually produces better results because everyone has had a chance to shape the final outcome and thus people are more committed to the decision. It is likely to be more time-consuming but can be a good investment for the future.

Sometimes decisions are made by a few people, for example, when the decisions must be made very quickly before the opportunity disappears or when they are about routine matters which do not need to be considered or changed at that moment.

Focus on pastoral issues

It can happen that your council becomes bogged down in an issue and this could be managed by delegating the issue to an ad-hoc group to propose solutions, allowing the council to move onto other items on the agenda.

One way of ensuring that you keep attending to the bigger picture is by defining areas of pastoral concern in the parish and have all of them always as an agenda item. You can also allocate members of your council to the different areas. Their task is to keep a watching brief and to propose or explore new initiatives. You can also choose that at each meeting you will consider one of the areas in more detail.

What is the priest/s lay pastoral leader/s role?

The pastoral leadership team is a full member of your council. Your council does not formulate policy independent of the pastoral leadership team. At the same time, they do not formulate parish pastoral policy independent of and outside the council.

As priest/s lay pastoral leader/s, they exercise the pastoral care of your parish community under the authority of the archbishop. In this they are assisted by lay members of your parish. Their role as priest/s lay pastoral leader/s on the council is like the captain of a team. They will listen with an open heart and an open mind to everyone's view and so will all your other members. Just like the other members, they are responsible for contributing to the debate.

They exercise their authority as leaders of the parish in the way of Jesus Christ, that is through service. Similarly, all other members of the parish pastoral council exercise their call to cooperate with them through service. All of you are to work collaboratively as an apostolic team - every member participating in discernment and decision-making.

The pastoral team will normally accept the agreed view or decision of the council. If the case should arise when they are convinced that a decision is against the teachings or guidance of the church, they must explain this clearly and give reasons for their opposition to the decision. The chairperson should allow for the issue to be raised and discussed again at the next meeting. If no resolution can be found after a number of meetings, you would do well to seek mediation.

How to stay in touch

With each other

As a team it is vitally important for you to stay in touch with each other spiritually and emotionally. This can be done by:

- praying together
- sharing your faith
- listening to each other with an open mind
- encouraging everyone to have their say
- taking shared responsibility for successes and failures
- supporting each other when the going gets tough
- celebrating achievements together.

With your parishioners

Parishioners are best served when the Parish Pastoral Council stays in touch with them, getting to know people and issues that may concern them. You can connect with them in a variety of ways such as:

- an annual parish meeting to report on work done and get feedback and new directions
- calling a parish meeting to discuss major new initiatives or changes in direction
- an annual parish survey to discover needs and resources
- a feedback suggestion box
- posting of minutes or reports from your meetings on your parish notice board
- regular reporting through the parish bulletin
- names, contact details and photos of all members of your council on the notice board
- inviting and encouraging many different people (age, background and cultural-wise) to serve in parish ministries
- have a gift discernment workshop (contact the ADW Church Mission Team).

With your local church

You are not alone: you are an integral part of the Archdiocese of Wellington. It is helpful and stimulating to keep in regular touch with Archdiocesan ideas, works, offices and people.

You can do this by:

- being alert to what is on offer in terms of formation, training, assistance and resources
- keep up with developments in the local and wider church especially through WelCom, the [Archdiocesan website](#), and [Facebook page](#)
- keep in touch with the liaison person from the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council
- join in Archdiocesan initiatives
- share good news stories of parish achievements through WelCom
- **keep in touch with the ADW Church Mission Team at the Catholic Centre**
- **invite the Archbishop to visit the parish.**

Other

There are other 'groups' with whom you have much in common. One example is the neighbouring parishes. It is likely that your relationship with these parishes will become very important in the years ahead. There are times when you will have shared interests with other Christian communities in your area. In addition, there are service groups in your wider community of neighbourhood, suburb or town with whom you will want to be involved from time to time.

Finance Committee and Board of Trustees

Parish Finance Committee

Just as it is not the task of the finance committee to decide which pastoral programmes will get funding and which ones will not, the pastoral council does not deal with matters which are part of the finance committee's brief. For example, the maintenance or improvement of parish buildings and grounds is a matter for the finance committee. A Pastoral Plan assists the Finance Committee in budgeting for the identified needs of the parish.

If your parish does not have enough money to do all you wish to do, the pastoral council, not the finance committee, has the responsibility to set pastoral priorities.

For this you need a good understanding of the financial state of your parish. You may wish to meet with the parish finance committee once a year to exchange information, discuss matters of mutual concern, and talk through your pastoral priorities. Some parishes find it helpful to have a member of the Parish Finance Committee on their Parish Pastoral Council.

School Board of Trustees

You will want to cooperate with the Board of Trustees of the parish school/s so that students and parents are encouraged to participate in the life and the mission of the local church and its parishes.

The co-operation can take different forms. Some parishes have a Board of Trustees' member on their council, others have other ways of ensuring that the pastoral welfare of the people connected with the school is a regular part of the agenda.

Board of Trustees are to have Proprietor's appointees, usually four (in very small schools possibly two). They are nominated by the priest/s lay pastoral leader/s to the Archbishop. Before making nominations, the priest/s lay pastoral leader/s are encouraged to consult the pastoral council.

It can happen that the parish and school have different ideas over the use of the school premises. The Integration Agreement gives the Board of Trustees the exclusive right to occupy the school property of integrated schools. However, the Agreement provides that the parish may use the school premises outside school hours with the approval of the Board, whose approval will not be unreasonably withheld. It is reasonable for the parish to pay for any cost related to such use, for example for heating, lighting, and a reasonable amount of wear and tear.

How to stay in top form

The more you involve a large number of parishioners in the many small and large tasks which need doing, the more all parishioners will understand why it is important for your parish to have a good pastoral council.

Ways of keeping your council in top form are to:

1. regularly evaluate where you are going and how you are doing
2. have a regular turn-over of membership
3. spend time together in prayer and formation.

Evaluation

Sometimes councils treat evaluation as an optional and therefore rare undertaking. They think that they have no time for evaluation, without realising that evaluation saves time in the long run.

Experience shows that you achieve more in a shorter time if you have an effective method of monitoring and evaluating how your parish and pastoral plan are going. Evaluation is

essential, especially today when people are so busy and have so many demands on their time. The ADW Church Mission Team are available to assist with an evaluation process.

By and large, people like accountability. It reinforces that what they do makes a difference. It is good practice to evaluate your meetings either once a year or every three months.

For an evaluation to be a positive undertaking, it should always be:

- *collaborative*—all participants in a particular project should be equally involved
- *voluntary*—no one should be forced to be involved
- *balanced*—an evaluation is not a fault-finding mission
- *relaxed*—whatever the outcome, we are a community of disciples
- *forward looking*—how could we do it better?

How to get new members

It is not unusual for parishes to have difficulty in finding new people willing to serve on their pastoral council. The reasons are many. In very small parishes, with few new people moving into the area and young people moving out of the region, it may well be impossible to have a regular turnover.

The key to finding new people is to be clear about why your parish needs a council, what it is for, how it functions, how much time is expected of members, what difference your council makes to your parish and actual examples of the difference previous pastoral councils have made.

Usually, people are willing to offer their time if they know:

- what the council is for - “is it worth my time?”
- how knowledgeable they need to be - “will I understand what they are doing?”
- how much time is involved - “do I have the time for this?”
- for how long they must make the commitment - “will I be able to get out of it?”
- how the council operates - “how often and on what day does it meet?”
- how it fits in with the pastoral leadership team, staff, existing groups - “what difference can it make?”
- what previous pastoral councils have achieved - “are we moving in circles?”
- how they will be appreciated, supported and affirmed - “will I be thanked for what I do?”

It helps if all parishioners, and not only prospective members, have a good understanding of your council.

You can achieve this by writing terms of reference for your council so that all know the expectations, talks from the pulpit, items in the parish bulletin, notices on the notice board, regular reports, celebrating achievements, annual parish meetings, publicity about council members and ways to contact them, regular posting of minutes on the notice board.

Formation and training

Teams work better if the members are clear about what it is that is expected of them and feel confident that they can do it. *It is highly advisable that you set aside a minimum of a (half) day each year for formal formation and training.*

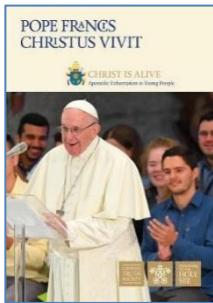
Formation includes both spiritual formation and training in skills. The ADW Church Mission Team is available to provide such formation and training.

Formation and training are an important step in achieving effective, spirit-led leadership.

Where to go for more information

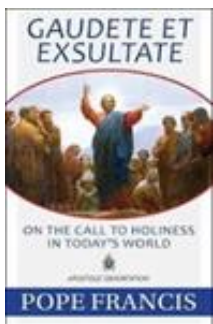
Church Mission, Director: Chris Duthie-Jung, PO Box 1937, Wellington
Ph 04-496-1759, email: c.duthie-jung@wn.catholic.org.nz

Helpful websites: Archdiocese of Wellington www.wn.catholic.org.nz
 NZ Catholic Bishops' Conference www.catholic.org.nz
 Official Vatican site www.vatican.va
 Archdiocesan Synod Outcomes [Synod Outcomes](#)



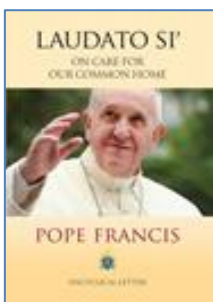
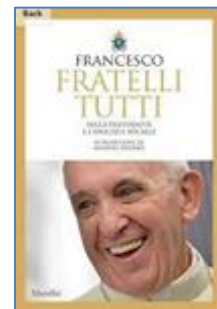
Christus Vivit - Christ is Alive!
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Evangelii Gaudium The Joy of the Gospel
(A blueprint for parishes)
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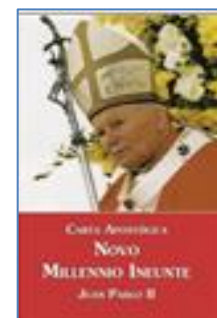
Gaudete et Exsultate - The Call to Holiness
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Fratelli tutti
- Fraternity & Social Friendship
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Laudato Si'
- Care for Our Common Home
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Novo Millennio Ineunte
- Entering the Third Millennium
(an apostolic letter giving directions for pastoral planning)
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Ecclesia in Oceania
- The Church in Oceania
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Sacrosanctum Concilium
- Sacred Liturgy
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