

Axminster, Lyme Regis and Seaton Parishes

Pastoral Council

Constitution¹

A. Purpose of the Pastoral Council

1. A parish is a stable community of Christ's faithful established within the diocese, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor. The Parish Pastoral Council is established to promote the baptismal calling of all the members of the parish in the planning and carrying out of the pastoral ministry of the parish, founded on an authentic sense of ecclesial communion.

2. The Pastoral Council, which is presided over by the parish priest, is made up of representatives of the parish community. Its primary function is to collaborate actively and in a spirit of mutual service with the parish priest in the development and planning of the pastoral care and apostolic effectiveness of the parish, including evangelical, catechetical and apostolic initiatives and the promotion of doctrinal formation and the sacramental life of the parish. This must be based on a shared vision, in harmony with that of the Bishop and the teaching of the Magisterium, of what the parish can be if all its members live to the full their baptismal vocation and mission, both as individuals and as a community.

B. Consultative Role of the Pastoral Council

3. The Pastoral Council is a structured means of dialogue within the parish community, which exists to explore and reflect upon pastoral needs and to recommend and help implement policies and programmes which will enable the parish to live out the demands of the Gospel in its daily life.

4. The Pastoral Council acts in an advisory capacity to the parish priest, who should consult it in any major matters concerning the pastoral life of the parish. Consultation is a life-giving exchange in the parish community. It is a means towards decision-making, based on consensus, whereby the parish priest, in reaching a reasoned response to the pastoral needs of the community he leads, enjoys the insights, points of view, experiences, expertise, knowledge and reflections of others.

5. In order to accomplish this, a spirit of open and positive dialogue should prevail at every meeting and every member should be encouraged to contribute to the discussion.

6. Although each member of the Pastoral Council will usually have an area of the pastoral life of the parish in which they have a particular interest, every member should have concern for the entire mission of the community. No one vision should dominate and no one interest should control the work of the Council.

¹ Paragraphs 1-12 are extracted verbatim from the Diocesan Framework Constitution dated 14 Oct 15. Subsequent paragraphs have been adapted from the Framework to meet our specific circumstances.

7. Although the Pastoral Council is not the appropriate forum to discuss issues regarding particular individuals, it is inevitable that some matters will be pastorally sensitive and occasionally personal. Therefore members of the Pastoral Council should observe the necessary confidentiality with regards to their discussions, unless specifically invited by the Parish Priest to share them with the wider parish community.

C. Making Formal Recommendations

8. Given the spirit of dialogue and collaboration between the Pastoral Council and the parish priest, decisions and plans of action will usually be arrived at by consensus. Indeed, every effort should be made to foster a common mind in the body of the Council. However, on rare occasions and regarding matters of major importance for the well-being of the parish, the Pastoral Council may feel the need to make formal recommendations to the parish priest concerning the pastoral life of the parish.

9. Where it is not possible to arrive at unanimity, a proposal or recommendation must be supported by at least two thirds of the members of the Council present at the meeting. However, once adopted, this becomes the recommendation of the whole Council.

10. It is for the parish priest to decide whether to act on a recommendation of the Pastoral Council. In the event that he decides not to implement a recommendation, he should explain to the Council the reasons for this.

11. In contentious matters, the parish priest may decide to refer the recommendation to the bishop for guidance.

D. Distinction between the Pastoral Council and the Finance Committee

12. Care should be taken to distinguish clearly the role of the Pastoral Council from that of the Parish Finance Committee. Whereas it is the responsibility of the Finance Committee to advise the parish priest on the practical material administration of the parish, the Pastoral Council's role is to determine the policies and priorities of the parish. These deliberations will naturally have an impact on the administration of the parish so it is important that a representative of the Finance Committee is a member of the Pastoral Council to ensure effective collaboration.

E. Membership of the Pastoral Council

13. Pastoral needs are best known, and mutual support best delivered, within the three congregations that meet routinely for Mass; and when a priest is the Parish Priest of more than one parish, each parish retains its right to separate Pastoral Council. In order to best support one Parish Priest, maximise efficiency, and reflect the practical consequences of having 3 churches and congregations, we have a single Pastoral Council which includes members who represent each of the 3 parishes. Members also represent those functions that are managed collectively across the 3 parishes (such as catechesis, communication and finance).

14. Under the presidency of the Parish Priest, the Pastoral Council includes all other serving priests, deacons or religious working within the parish. Lay members include one representative from each of Catechesis, Communication and Administration (Buildings & Finance) groups, and 2 members from each of the 3 parish congregations - who represent and find local coordinators for safeguarding, property, building, health

and safety, servers, readers, music, welcoming, flowers, cleaning, and any other geographically-based parish matters. The designated volunteer co-ordinators are represented by the Pastoral Council but may be called together across parishes by the Parish Priest when required.

15. Lay members are volunteers appointed by the Parish Priest and may represent more than one function, resulting in the Pastoral Council numbering between 8-14 people. Despite having specific representational functions each member has responsibility for considering the best interests of all, and shares collective responsibility for all that the council does. The term of office for members shall be three years. It is advisable that no member should serve more than two consecutive terms.

16. For a serious reason, the parish priest may remove a member of the Pastoral Council, after having consulted the bishop.

F. Officers

17. The Parish Priest shall appoint the chairperson, from within the lay members, whose term of office will be for three years, renewable once. There must be a close liaison between the parish priest and the chairperson of the Pastoral Council, who may also represent a parish or function, or have no other responsibilities.

18. The secretary of the Pastoral Council shall be appointed by the parish priest, and may or may not also be one of the members.

G. Meetings

19. The Pastoral Council shall meet at least four times a year. Most will be ordinary meetings, but one meeting annually will be open to all parishioners (known as Parish-in-Council).

20. Because of the unique nature of the Council, a short period of each meeting shall be given over to prayer and reflection on an appropriate passage of the Scriptures.

21. A quorum shall consist of half the members of the Council. There can be no meeting without the parish priest unless he has given his explicit consent.

22. The parish priest may call an extraordinary meeting of the Pastoral Council after consulting the chairperson.

23. After ordinary meetings, the secretary will draft Notes that record just key announcements and decisions, safeguarding the confidentiality of discussions leading to those decisions. Once the Notes of a meeting have been approved by the chair and parish priest, a copy will be posted on the Three Parish website and published in the next edition of the Three Parish News. Parish representatives will also put a paper copy in each church.

H. Preparation of the Agenda

24. Any member of the parish may submit items for consideration for the agenda. These items should be submitted to the secretary at least two weeks before the date of the meeting.

25. The agenda for an ordinary meeting of the Pastoral Council shall be prepared by the parish priest and chair and shall be circulated to the Council members at least one week before the meeting is due to take place.

I. Parish-in-Council

26. In order to review and renew its vision and priorities, the whole parish will be invited to gather in Council at an open meeting once a year, normally in the autumn period.

27. The parish priest will preside at this meeting.

28. The meeting of the Parish-in-Council will provide a forum in which all parishioners can put forward their ideas for future initiatives of the parish and also have an opportunity to meet with the members of the Pastoral Council.

29. The chairperson of the Pastoral Council will present a report of the work of the Pastoral Council over the last year.

30. All parish groups (Axmister, Lyme, Seaton, Catechesis, Communication and Administration) will be invited to submit a brief written report of their activity over the last year to the meeting of the Parish-in-Council. These reports should reach the Secretary at least two weeks before the date of the meeting.

31. Minutes of the Parish-in-Council meeting will be published in the Three Parish website and the next edition of the Three Parish News, and parish representatives will put a paper copy in each church.

32. The results of the Parish-in-Council meeting will be considered at the next ordinary meeting of the Pastoral Council.

J. Constitution and Dissolution of the Pastoral Council

33. The Constitution must be approved by the bishop, or the parish priest as his representative, before the Pastoral Council is formally established.

34. The Council is to be consulted regarding amendments to the Constitution. All amendments must receive the approval of the parish priest and the bishop.

35. The Pastoral Council may be dissolved by the bishop or by decision of the parish priest in consultation with the bishop. When the office of parish priest becomes vacant, the Pastoral Council is automatically dissolved until appropriate steps are taken by the new parish priest to re-establish it. The membership of the new Council will not necessarily be the same as the previous one.