

Parish Pastoral Councils' Review 2013-14

here's what you said...



Parish Pastoral Councils were established in the Archdiocese of Dublin by decree of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin in 2004 to 'become fruitful instruments for a renewal in **evangelisation, mission and service** in parish communities.'



'The **Parish Pastoral Council** is a faith-filled leadership group through which priests and people pray and work together as co-responsible partners in furthering the mission of Christ in their own parish.'

(Irish Bishops' Conference; *'Living Communion, Vision and Practice for Parish Pastoral Councils in Ireland Today'*, 3:1)

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Introduction

Over the last ten years, more than 5,000 committed and dedicated people have met regularly with their priests to consider the pastoral and spiritual needs of their communities and discern ways forward.

Parish Pastoral Councils (PPCs) have become important channels of communication within the diocese and they assist with the implementation of diocesan policy, e.g. child safeguarding. They are essential structures of participation and co-responsibility. They have an important role in helping parishes to fulfil the Mission of Jesus Christ.

2013-14 Review

In April 2013, PPCs were invited by the Office for Evangelisation and Ecumenism to take part in a Review, which had two aims:

- to help PPCs to monitor their own progress
- to gather an overall picture of the development of PPCs over the past 10 years

Fifty per cent of the PPCs in the Archdiocese responded to the invitation. The Review consisted of a facilitated conversation, using the leaflet, entitled 'How are you?'



Those who facilitated the Review experienced a huge amount of goodwill, faithfulness to the task and desire to serve. Most PPCs want to grow and develop so that they can make a real difference in their parish communities.

This is not to minimise the concerns, frustrations and challenges faced by PPCs in their efforts to understand their role.

Using this Booklet

This booklet endeavours to give a summary of what was said in the 2013–14 Review, and to offer some suggestions for each PPC to think about. PPCs are encouraged to use it as a workbook that will help them to be more effective in facing the challenges of the future. This booklet also includes a summary of recommendations made by the Review facilitators to the Archdiocese and its agencies (see page 18).

The full report ‘PPCs How are You?’ from which this booklet was devised, can be accessed from the Office for Evangelisation and Ecumenism.

here's what you said about...

Your Experience on a Parish Pastoral Council

- ❖ 'Serving on a PPC has been an enjoyable experience but also a steep learning curve.'
- ❖ 'It has subtly broadened my faith beyond individual spirituality.'
- ❖ 'It's hard to keep focussed on what the PPC is about and progress is so slow.'
- ❖ 'What can be achieved in an hour and a half a month?'
- ❖ 'It's good to be with people who are like-minded.
We gain strength from each other.'
- ❖ 'It is difficult to unite prayer and action; to have the mind of Christ.'
- ❖ 'We feel we are living out our own calling; not just 'helping Father''
- ❖ 'The challenge is to harness the energy in the community.'
- ❖ 'We try to be the eyes and ears of the parish.'
- ❖ 'Parish Pastoral Councils should be vital to parishes...
we are not there yet!'

think about...

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Using the 'How are you?' leaflet to do an annual PPC Review.
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Recruitment

- ❖ Parishes invested much energy and effort in setting up the first PPCs. Most now find it difficult to recruit new members. There is often a lack of clarity around the task and reluctance to commit to meetings because of busy lifestyles.
- ❖ PPCs struggle with trying to get a balanced group of 'visionaries and doers; young and old'. Members typically tend to be in the 50 plus age group. Many PPCs speak of unsuccessful attempts to recruit younger members.
- ❖ Parishioners in many places seem to have very little or no involvement in selecting new PPC members. Personal invitation does seem to yield results. This invitation typically comes from the priest. While most parishes see the necessity of renewing membership of their PPCs, it is tempting to delay or ignore this when things are going well.
- ❖ PPCs often ask themselves: 'How representative is our PPC?'

think about...

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Putting together a team to review your recruitment process.
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Training and In-Service

- ❖ Almost every PPC mentioned the difficulty of trying to work out what was expected of them when they joined. New members said that they 'are often thrown in at the deep end.' Existing PPC members are often unaware of the kind of experience they provide for those joining.
- ❖ Information and training are crucial for new members, but these are often lacking. New members have to learn 'as they go along'. Without some basic faith development or knowledge of theology, members often feel inadequate.
- ❖ Workshops are found to be helpful in 'seeking direction', especially those concerning faith development, group dynamics and dealing with disagreement/conflict. Members feel the need for an annual retreat, a morning/afternoon of reflection or a planning day. Training and formation need to be ongoing.
- ❖ 'Courses like 'Faith For Life' and 'Pathways' give you 'confidence', a 'deeper meaning in your faith' and 'a willingness to change.'

think about...

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Your training and in-service plans for this year.
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Prayer

- ✦ Those PPCs who have experienced prayerful meetings speak about the difference it makes:
 - 'It grounds the meetings.'
 - 'It assists the process of discernment.'
 - 'It relaxes the Council and creates an atmosphere of spirituality.'
 - 'It gives the nourishment to keep us going.'
- ✦ However, few PPCs have developed an atmosphere of prayer that pervades meetings and helps them with discernment. There is little or no reference to prayer in some PPC meetings. Most PPCs simply say an opening and closing prayer without any reflection.
- ✦ PPCs depend upon someone in the group being able to initiate a well-prepared experience of prayer. It really helps if the President leads by example in helping to create a prayerful atmosphere. It also helps if the Chairperson allows a specified time for prayer at the beginning or in the middle of the meeting.


think about...

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Making a commitment to 15 minutes well-prepared prayer and reflection at each PPC meeting.

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Managing Meetings

 PPC members suggested that effective and enjoyable meetings depend on having:

- ☐ An agenda that is not too full.
- ☐ Good chairing.
- ☐ A group that is not too big/small – between 10 and 15 members.
- ☐ Meetings that finish on time – 1.5 to 2 hours.
- ☐ A pleasant environment.
- ☐ A seating arrangement where people can see each other.
- ☐ A 'business-like' but not a 'business' style of meeting.
- ☐ A social aspect that nurtures life, energy and friendship.

think about...

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Using this checklist to evaluate your own meetings.



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Relationships

- Most PPCs enjoy good relationships. People support and encourage each other. They enjoy each other's company and talk about qualities such as trust, co-operation, good community spirit, dedication and commitment. ...'It's good to be with people who are like-minded. We gain strength from each other.'
- However, where relationships do break down, especially between the priest and another member(s) of the PPC, there is uncertainty about how to move forward towards resolution of the conflict.



think about...

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Ways of developing your team.
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Positive ways of managing conflict when it occurs.
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Initiatives Undertaken

✦ The following give a flavour of what PPCS have been doing over recent years:

- Producing a Parish Newsletter.
- Conducting a Parish Survey.
- Organising a Parish Mission/Retreat.
- Bringing together parish groups and ministries.
- Setting up Liturgy, Baptism teams and Funeral Ministry.
- Establishing Social Justice and Hospitality Groups.
- Fostering links with young people through: Youth Masses, links with schools etc.
- Discussing the Murphy Report and developing Child Safeguarding policies.
- Undertaking initiatives connected with the International Eucharistic Congress and The Year of Faith, e.g. Pilgrim Walks.

think about...

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How you research the needs in your community and
how you decide on priorities.

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Planning

- ❖ 'We discuss a wide range of issues but we don't have a longer-term, bigger plan... We find it difficult to come to conclusions, to prioritise, put flesh on ideas and to take concrete steps.'
- ❖ Most Pastoral Councils now recognise their focus should be pastoral. However, the concept of being a reflective planning group has not yet taken root.
- ❖ There is still a tendency towards 'doing' short-term projects in an attempt to feel productive and to be seen by the parish to be effective.
- ❖ Some parishes have not done the groundwork for planning by researching people's needs. However, a few PPCs now take part in an annual review and planning day with the parish, where they consider the needs and prioritise for the year ahead.

think about...

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Putting together a realistic plan at the beginning of each year.
This can be reviewed at the end of the year. Using 'SMART' goals will help you (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Based).

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The Mission Statement

- ❖ One PPC suggested: 'Every group needs to ask the question: 'What is the vision that unites us?'
- ❖ A large number of PPCs are unaware of the existence of the Mission Statement that each parish was initially asked to include in their Guidelines.
- ❖ Only a small number of PPCs have recognised that the Mission Statement can guide their work.
- ❖ A couple of parishes said they use their Mission Statement as a prayer at the beginning of meetings.
- ❖ One parish said that it was only when they began to work out a vision for their parish grouping that they became more aware of their own Mission Statement.
- ❖ It is important to remember that the Mission Statement describes the mission of the parish, not that of the Pastoral Council.

think about...

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Revisiting and re-activating the Mission Statement of your Parish.
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Communication with the Parish

- ❖ Good communication is viewed as essential by most of the PPCs. However it's an area with which they all struggle, i.e. flow of information to parishioners and an effective means of receiving feedback from them.
- ❖ Many PPCs are still asking, 'Do parishioners know us?' Do they have any idea about the role of the PPC?
- ❖ Some feel that people only contact them to complain.
- ❖ Strategies used to raise the profile of PPCs include:
 - Being visible by 'fronting activities'.
 - Use of parish newsletter.
 - Use of Social media.
 - Speaking at Masses.
- ❖ Parishioners are helped enormously to understand the role of the PPC when they are engaged in reviewing and planning through parish assemblies, AGMs etc.
- ❖ PPCs usually come to recognise quite quickly that they have to clarify their own vision and purpose before they can communicate this to their parishes.

think about...

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Reviewing and improving your communication strategy.
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Outreach

- ❖ 'Outreach is the most difficult activity to achieve. There is no way of assessing results.'
- ❖ In almost every PPC great concern was expressed about falling Mass attendance, and about evangelisation, but everyone was unsure about what action to take in response to these challenges.
- ❖ Reaching out and making contact with those who no longer attend Church emerged as the major challenge facing the Parishes.
- ❖ While there is a great desire among PPCs to be agents of evangelisation, this concept is understood in a different way by each Pastoral Council; and very few have any idea how to go about it.
- ❖ Many see the task as simply getting people back to Church.
- ❖ Some believe social media can help; others feel that 'sacramental moments are opportunities for connectivity when people put a foot in the door'.

think about...

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How your parish could begin to 'put everything into a missionary key' ('*Evangelii Gaudium*') as Pope Francis has encouraged us to do.

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Faith Development

- ❖ Deepening the faith of parishioners is seen as a major challenge. As one PPC said: 'PPC members will have to take a bigger and more active role in building the faith'... We need to be concerned with faith rather than be too worried about parish location or even loss of priests. There is an urgent need for baptised Catholics to be 'awakened' in faith and to 'encounter the love of God in Christ Jesus'.
- ❖ A number of PPCs recognise that development in faith is a 'gradual' process and starts with themselves.



think about...

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The various ways of nourishing and supporting the faith of parishioners at different stages of their lives.

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Connecting with Young People

- ❖ Every PPC expressed concern and sadness over the absence of young people in our Church. Most admit they do not know where to begin to connect with young people. Some parishes have actively tried to recruit them on to the Council but few have met with any success.
- ❖ PPCs are beginning to realise that ministry to young people involves intense, skilled and committed accompaniment.



think about...

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Innovative ways of connecting with the young people
in your community.

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Working Within Parish Groupings

- ❖ The majority of PPCs are still in the very early stages of working together with their neighbours.
- ❖ The idea of coming together seems to bring with it a certain amount of concern and speculation about what is going to happen in the future.
- ❖ Anxiety seems to dissipate once contact has been made, and relationships established with other PPCs in a parish grouping.
- ❖ PPCs are willing to collaborate with their neighbours but the reality is that there is limited time, energy and appetite for more meetings.

think about...

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The benefits of PPCs working together. What initiatives might you share, e.g. around adult faith development and connecting with young people?

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here's what we suggest...

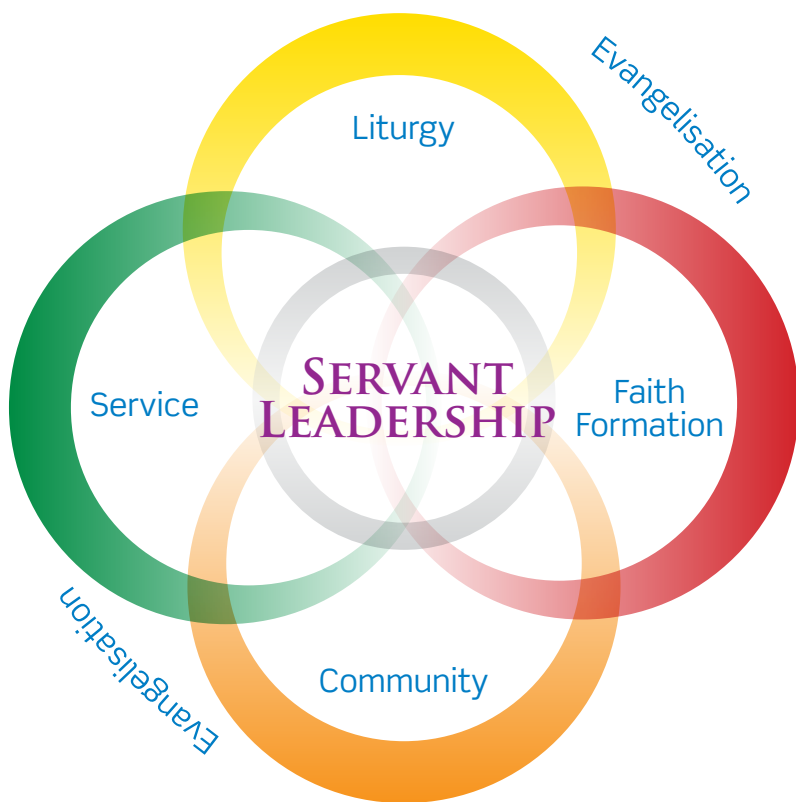
Recommendations: Proposals to Meet the Challenges

In response to what was heard from PPCs across the Archdiocese, the review facilitators recommend the following:

- ✦ The role, function and status of PPCs to be reviewed by the Archbishop to ensure they are equipped to serve the Church of the future
- ✦ The experience of the Presidents of PPCs to be heard – and supported with training and in-service
- ✦ Each of the 5 Pastoral Areas of the Diocese to provide ongoing support and guidance for PPCs, including an annual induction day for new members
- ✦ Each Parish to set up a special working group or expanded Parish Team to oversee the renewal/ongoing maintenance of the PPC
- ✦ A summary of this booklet to be sent to every PPC

- Each PPC to review its communication strategy and consider appointing a communications officer
- Each PPC to familiarise themselves with 'The Joy of The Gospel' (Evangelii Gaudium) and 'Share The Good News' (the National Catechetical directory)
- Each PPC to review how all aspects of parish life reflect evangelisation, mission and service and to set 'SMART' goals in relation to these
- All PPCs to prioritise adult faith development and the faith formation of young people
- Each parish grouping to consider establishing a sub-group to co-ordinate adult faith development
- The Office for Evangelisation & Ecumenism to make the 'Faith For Life' course available to as many people as possible.

PATHWAYS TO PARISH VITALITY



The early Christian Community remained faithful to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, to prayer...

the believers were together and had everything in common...

*they sold property and possessions to give
to anyone who had need.*

(Acts 2:42–45)

Don't forget that support is always available.
A phone call or email will access help
from your Area Team or from the Office for
Evangelisation & Ecumenism.



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