

Guidelines for the Parish Pastoral Council of St Agnes' Catholic Parish

Prepared for

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1 Vision and Mission

- 1.1 The Parish is a community of Christ's faithful, constituted in a Diocese, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a Parish Priest under the authority of the Bishop (cf. canon 515 §1). It is a community of faith that exists for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), that pursues holiness in the image of Christ, proclaims the Good News of salvation, serves one another, and reaches out to all those in need.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) of St Agnes' Catholic Parish is to promote and support the evangelising mission of the Parish, working in collaboration with the Parish Priest or duly appointed Administrator to foster the spiritual and pastoral life of all the Christian faithful. The Parish Pastoral Council enables the members of the Parish community to fulfil their baptismal calling to share in Christ's mission and to connect their needs and their strengths with the Parish's plans for the future.
- 1.3 The Parish Pastoral Council undertakes this planning in consultation with the Parish community, attending to the mandate of the Gospel, the communion of the Parish with the Diocese of Lismore, and by studying the pastoral realities of the Parish and the wider community. Through a process of dialogue, it then provides recommendations to respond to the spiritual and material needs of all God's people.

2 Role and Function of the Parish Pastoral Council

- 2.1 The Code of Canon Law (canon 536) states:
 - §1 If the Diocesan Bishop judges it opportune, after he has heard the presbyteral council, a pastoral council is to be established in each Parish over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the Parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.
 - §2 A Pastoral Council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by the norms established by the Diocesan Bishop.
- 2.2 As a consultative body, the Parish Pastoral Council has the right and duty to provide wise and constructive counsel to the Parish Priest to whom the pastoral care of the Parish has been entrusted by the Bishop. The Parish Priest carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying and governing, with the cooperation of others, such as presbyters or deacons, and with the active contribution of lay members of the Christian faithful.
- 2.3 As such, members of the Parish Pastoral Council are co-responsible for the ongoing life and mission of the Parish. A responsibility expressed in the following tasks:
 - 2.3.1 Investigate, consider, and propose practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works (canon 511);
 - 2.3.2 Initiate processes of Parish Pastoral Planning to support the pursuit of holiness, the proclamation of the Good News, and service to one another and those in need, including means of consultation and dialogue to establish or otherwise live out the vision for the

Parish community, pastoral priorities, strategies, actions and appropriate goals to advance the Church's mission;

2.3.3 Ensure regular evaluation of the progress of the Parish Pastoral Plan to enable better coordination of pastoral activity and consideration of new pastoral initiatives where needed.

2.4 Therefore, the Parish Pastoral Council of St Agnes' Catholic Parish should focus on fostering the pastoral life of the Parish in a strategic manner, rather than on the daily operations of the Parish which are the principle concern of the Parish Staff. Other groups, such as the Parish Finance Committee, have their particular roles and responsibilities that the Parish Pastoral Council must always respect and collaborate with for the common good of the Parish.

2.5 **Developing the Parish Pastoral Plan**

2.5.1 The primary task of the Parish Pastoral Council is to identify and reflect on the 'signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel' (*Gaudium et Spes* n.4) considering how the Parish can best carry out its mission within a specific context. It develops, with the Parish Priest, a Parish Pastoral Plan to identify the priorities and initiatives for action to strengthen this evangelising mission.

2.5.2 The Parish Pastoral Plan can be developed in response to these questions:

- i. What is our vision or mission as a Parish? For what purpose does our Parish exist?
- ii. What is the pastoral reality of our Parish? What do we know about our people, our demographics, the wider community and our current commitments and resources?
- iii. What are our priorities in moving toward a more missionary future?
- iv. What are our strategies to make these priorities come to life? How are we going to do it?
- v. What specific actions should we take to reach our desired outcome? When might we take these actions and who can best take them forwards in our Parish?

2.5.3 The Parish Pastoral Council can also play a helpful role at the time of a change in Parish Priest. When the term of a Parish Priest expires, the term of the Parish Pastoral Council also ceases. However, it is recommended that the incoming Parish Priest meet with members of the most recent Council within the first month of his term to be updated on the development and progress of pastoral activity in the Parish. The incoming Parish Priest can then consider the future shape of the Parish Pastoral Council and its membership, as well as existing and new opportunities to advance the mission of the Parish, recognising the co-responsibility of laity for mission.

3 Structure of the Parish Pastoral Council

3.1 Pastoral Council Guidelines

3.1.1 This Pastoral Council Guideline is a written record of the basic policies, procedures, and practices of the Parish Pastoral Council. It seeks to reflect the vision of the Parish and conform to the norms as set out by Canon Law.

3.1.2 These Parish guidelines should be periodically reviewed after any major change in the Parish (e.g. the amalgamation of two Parishes or the appointment of a new Parish Priest) or at least every three years to ensure they continue to reflect the mission of the Parish.

3.2 The Executive of the PPC

3.2.1 The Executive of the Parish Pastoral Council of St Agnes' Catholic Parish shall consist of the Parish Priest plus office bearers. Office bearers should include the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Secretary of the Council.

3.2.2 The role of the Executive is to review the effectiveness of Council meetings, organise the agenda for each meeting, invite input from each member of the Council, and arrange for the distribution of the agenda, minutes and any other relevant material at least one week prior to the meeting. The Executive also coordinates the business of the Council between meetings and organises formation opportunities for the Council members as required.

3.3 Sub-Committees

3.3.1 Sub-committees (or short-term working groups) can be established by the Parish Pastoral Council for specific purposes for a definite duration. These sub-committees should include at least one member of the Parish Pastoral Council.

4 Membership

4.1 Size

4.1.1 The recommended number of members for a Parish Pastoral Council is eight (8) to ten (10) members, with up to twelve (12) including *ex officio* members.

4.1.2 *Ex officio* members are best determined by the Parish Priest at the local level. These might include representatives from St Agnes' Parish Education, SACAL and SAA and the Company Secretary; but should not include the Parish Staff whose primary responsibilities are the daily operations of the Parish. However, parish staff or others can be invited to attend a Parish Pastoral Council meeting following discussion by the Executive and on the approval of the Parish Priest, if their presence and input supports the work of the Parish Pastoral Council. This is the exception rather than the norm.

4.2 Process of Selection

4.2.1 Membership of the Parish Pastoral Council may be determined in various ways but should include a process of consultation and discernment. It might include: a process of recommendation by Parishioners followed by formal nomination; a ballot may be used; or the Parish Priest may choose to appoint some members. The Parish Priest in

collaboration with the local community is able to decide the best way to select members of the Council.

4.2.2 Once determined, the selection process should be made clear to the Parish community. A clear outline of each stage of the process, relevant dates and information on eligibility for membership of the Parish Pastoral Council should be made widely available.

4.2.3 Whichever method is chosen and where possible, the number of appointed and *ex officio* members should not outnumber the number of elected members.

4.3 A casual vacancy on the Parish Pastoral Council may be filled by invitation from the Parish Priest in consultation with the Executive.

4.4 **Attributes of Members**

4.4.1 The Parish Pastoral Council members should be people focused on the overall vision of the Parish, with the practical skills to form, strategise and articulate concrete and practical plans to fulfil the parish vision. Therefore, members of the Parish Pastoral Council should not narrowly represent any one group or ministry within Parish life. A membership that reflects various cultures, ages, locations and interests of the community of the faithful should be sought where and when possible. Given the responsibility of the Parish Pastoral Council to provide advice to the Parish Priest concerning the whole Parish community and for Parish-wide pastoral planning, each Parish Pastoral Council member should consider the needs and gifts of all Parishioners in its advice, not simply the interests of any one group.

4.5 **Eligibility**

4.5.1 Parish Pastoral Council members should possess at least some of the following qualities.

- i. A commitment to the practice and nourishment of the Catholic faith, the Parish community and its mission.
- ii. An ability to collaborate and consult with others for the mission of the Church.
- iii. Good communication and interpersonal skills, including listening.
- iv. An openness to ongoing formation and learning.
- v. Demonstrated integrity and spirit of stewardship.
- vi. A capacity to think strategically toward the development of Parish Pastoral Plans.
- vii. A respect and commitment to the unity of the Parish and its works of mission.

4.6 **Quorum**

4.6.1 A quorum is consisted by a simple majority and must include the Parish Priest or his delegate.

4.7 Term of Office

4.7.1 Membership on the Parish Pastoral Council should be no longer than four (4) years, ordinarily consisting of a two year term which is renewable for a second two (2) year term if determined by the Parish Priest.

4.7.2 Each Parish Pastoral Council member should receive a letter of appointment for a term of office, stating the date of appointment and expiry.

4.7.3 To facilitate continuity, at least half the Parish Pastoral Council members should be asked to continue for a second term. Any member who serves on the Council for consecutive terms should be asked to stand down for at least one (1) term.

4.8 Prayer and Formation

4.8.1 Members should commit themselves to prayer, study and formation as a Parish Pastoral Council. Prayer should be an integral part of meetings and should complement the purpose of each meeting. Formational events such as annual retreat days or reflection evenings are also recommended.

4.9 Conflict of Interest

4.9.1 Members must disclose an actual or potential conflict of interest as soon as it arises. The nature of the conflict of interest should be minuted. Members may be asked to exit when the matter that the conflict relates to arises and their entry and exit from the meeting is to be minuted.

4.9.2 Declarations will be sought annually from all members and maintained in a Conflicts of Interest Declaration Register.

4.10 Resignation

4.10.1 Any member of the Parish Pastoral Council may resign by giving written notice of this intention to the Parish Priest. The resignation shall operate from its acceptance by the Parish Priest.

4.10.2 Should a member miss four (4) consecutive meetings without good reason, the member is deemed to have resigned.

4.11 Termination

4.11.1 Dismissal of a member for a serious reason may be effected by the Parish Priest after consultation with the Executive of the Council.

5 Relationships

5.1 Bishop

5.1.1 As established by canon 536, Parish Pastoral Councils are governed by the norms established by the Diocesan Bishop and presided over by the Parish Priest. During episcopal visitation, the Bishop may meet with members of the Parish Pastoral Council to learn of the present and future mission, hopes and challenges of the Parish. Members may also assist in the preparation for such a visit.

5.2 Diocesan Pastoral Council

5.2.1 A Diocesan Pastoral Council is an advisory and consultative council to the Bishop, over which the Diocesan Bishop himself presides, and in which specially chosen clergy, religious and lay people participate. The role of the Diocesan Pastoral Council is to investigate and weigh pastoral undertakings and to formulate practical conclusions regarding them (cf. *Christus Dominus*, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops 27). A Diocesan Pastoral Council may helpfully take into account the experience and input of Parish Pastoral Councils within the Diocese.

5.3 Pastoral Team

5.3.1 The Parish Pastoral Plan, developed by the Parish Pastoral Council, is shared with the Parish Staff and Pastoral Team through the Parish Priest. The Parish Staff are employees of the Parish while the Pastoral Team is a leadership group that might also include volunteers formally recognised by the Parish Priest as taking a leadership role in the mission of the Parish.

5.4 Parish Finance Committee

5.4.1 The Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee are distinct structures. Canon 537 of the Code of Canon Law mandates that every Parish is to have a Parish Finance Committee. The responsibility of the Parish Finance Committee pertains to the temporal affairs of the Parish, whereas the scope of the Parish Pastoral Council focuses on the encouragement of the pastoral and evangelising activity of the Parish community.

5.4.2 It is recommended that the Company Secretary as an ex officio member, be present on the Parish Pastoral Council, to ensure communication and coordination between all governing bodies.

5.5 Parish Groups

5.5.1 Whilst the Parish Pastoral Council provides support and encouragement to existing Parish groups, it does not have a specific or directive role in the life of those groups.

6 Meetings

6.1 Frequency of Meetings

6.1.1 It is recommended that the Parish Pastoral Council meet at least four (4) to six (6) times a year. In addition to these regular meetings, the Parish Pastoral Council may choose to convene for formational purposes (e.g. to strengthen the identity, spirituality and unity of the Council), to develop specific skills, or to discern and develop the form and content of the Parish Pastoral Plan.

6.2 Records

6.2.1 Minutes should be kept for all Parish Pastoral Council meetings and held at the Parish office. Copies of appointments to the Council, correspondence, documents related to the selection process for members including elections, local guidelines or statutes, and any policies of the Parish Pastoral Council should also be maintained at the Parish office.

Hardcopies and/or backup copies of the above should be maintained at a secure, off-site location.

6.3 Periodic Review

6.3.1 An annual review of the workings and progress of the Parish Pastoral Council should be undertaken by the Parish Priest or Executive, with input from Council members and Parishioners. It is encouraged that the activities and progress of the Parish Pastoral Council be shared regularly by the Chairperson and/or Executive to ensure transparency and communication between the Council and the wider Parish community.

7 Supportive Resources

7.1 There are a number of resources available to support the establishment, renewal and work of Parish Pastoral Councils.

7.1.1 Some of the resources available include:

- a. Anning, Cecilia. *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Councils*. Brisbane: Catholic Education Office, 2007. See especially pages 21-37.
- b. Fischer, Mark F. *Making Parish Councils Pastoral*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011.
- c. Fischer, Mark F and Raley, Mary Margaret. *Four Ways to Build More Effective Parish Councils: A Pastoral Approach*. New London, CT: Twenty Third, 2007.
- d. Gubish, Mary Ann and Jenny, Susan. *Revisioning the Parish Pastoral Council*. New York, NY: Paulist Press International, 2001.
- e. Pickett, William. *Concise Guide to Pastoral Planning*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2008.
- f. Snoddy, Debra, Campbell, Jim and McNally, Andrew. *Parish Pastoral Councils: A Formation Manual*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2011.
- g. Zech, Charles et al. *Best Practices in Catholic Pastoral and Finance Councils*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2010.



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