

Review Report for St Agnes' Catholic Parish

Prepared for

Fr Paul Gooley

Parish Priest of St Agnes' Catholic Parish, Port Macquarie

By

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Background

In August 2021, Fr Paul Gooley, Parish Priest of St Agnes' Catholic Parish, Port Macquarie, engaged Mr Daniel Ang, Director of the Sydney Centre for Evangelisation in the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, to conduct a review of the constitution, membership, and the work of the Parish Pastoral Council of St Agnes' Parish.

This review was formally announced by Fr Paul in the Parish bulletin of 14-15 August, 2021.¹

The review was prompted by Fr Paul's desire to further strengthen the life and mission of the parish and informed by the feedback received from parishioners and groups within the Parish on this mission and the role of the Parish Pastoral Council within it.

This report takes into consideration:

- the vision of the Parish;
- the four priority areas defined in its mission;
- its core values;
- parishioner feedback on the need for and role of the Parish Pastoral Council;
- existing structures and ministries within the Parish, past and present guidelines of St Agnes' Parish for this advisory body;
- best practice for Parish Pastoral Councils as recommended in contemporary Catholic literature;
- the pastoral experience of the reviewer;
- the advice and responses from parish consultations held on the 20 October 2021, on the draft of this report; and
- the provisions of Canon Law and the future strategic vision of the Parish in its development under the governance of the Parish Priest.

Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this report is: to provide recommendations to Fr Paul Gooley for the strengthening of the Parish Pastoral Council of St Agnes' Catholic Parish; to ensure it can support the essential missionary nature of the Parish; and, is governed by suitable guidelines including recommendations regarding its focus of work, membership, and ongoing renewal.

In addition to recommending provisions for the sound operation of the Parish Pastoral Council, this report also recommends the way in which such a body can be placed within the structures of St Agnes' Catholic Parish and its various pastoral ministries, corporate bodies and Parish team.

Other recommendations are also provided to ensure the Parish Priest and Parish Pastoral Council are well represented in the communications of the Parish.

¹ Available at: <https://stagnesparish.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/14-15-August-Assumption-of-the-Blessed-Virgin-Mary.pdf>

Recommendations

Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines

It is recommended that the existing guidelines for the Parish Pastoral Council be renewed with the following considerations, so that the purpose, the membership and processes surrounding this consultative body are strengthened.

1. **Closer alignment of the vision and mission of the Parish Pastoral Council with the vision and mission of St Agnes' Catholic Parish.** The Parish serves the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31) and dedicates itself to four areas of mission: the pursuit of holiness in the image of Christ; the proclamation of the Good News of salvation; service of one another; and, outreach to all those in need.
2. **Clearer definition of the relationship of the Parish Pastoral Council to others** including to the Parish Priest with whom it collaborates, the Bishop of the Diocese, any existing Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Parish 'Pastoral Team' and the Parish Finance Committee. With regards to incorporated identities, it is recommended that their relationship to the Parish Pastoral team is best represented in the organisational chart of the Parish, as the relationship of the Parish Pastoral Council to these bodies and their boards is ordinarily via the Parish Priest as the head and governor of the community of faith.
3. **Strengthening of the stated purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council** to note that it enables the members of the Parish to more fully share in Christ's mission and to connect their needs and their strengths with the Parish's plans for the future. The Council does this by engaging with the Parish community, undertaking pastoral planning, and by providing recommendations to the Parish Priest on ways in which the Parish might respond to these spiritual and material needs.
4. **Definition of the role and function of the Parish Pastoral Council with respect to the provisions of Canon Law** which outlines the core function of this consultative body, including its specific role to "investigate, consider, and propose practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works" (Canon 511).
5. **Appropriate definition of Executive Members of the Parish Pastoral Council** within the guidelines and the option of subcommittees be highlighted.
6. **Revision of the size of the Parish Pastoral Council.** 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. Where possible, and at the discretion of the Parish Priest, it is also recommended that the number of appointed and *ex officio* members should not outnumber the number of elected members. The *ex officio* members could include representatives from St Agnes' Parish Education, St Agnes' Care and Lifestyle and St Agnes' Assist Boards and Company Secretary, or others identified by the Parish Priest to be suitable for the Parish Pastoral Council by virtue of their position.
7. **Note in the guidelines that Parish staff or others can be invited to attend a Parish Pastoral Council meeting** following discussion with the Executive and on the approval of the Parish Priest, if their presence and input supports the work of the Parish Pastoral Council. This should be stated as an exception rather than the norm.

8. **Establishment that the values of the Parish be the basis of, or at least enter into, the criteria for eligibility of membership** as it is essential that those who are to be recommended, nominated or appointed to the Parish Pastoral Council exhibit those qualities that the Parish desires in all of its members. The consequence is that those who do not demonstrate such values can be excluded from consideration for membership of the Parish Pastoral Council.
9. **Close alignment of the desired attributes of Parish Pastoral Council members with the purpose of this body**, which is to focus on the overall vision of the parish, rather than the interests of individual Parish groups. 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, given it is the responsibility of the Parish Pastoral Council to provide advice to the Parish Priest concerning the whole Parish community and Parish-wide pastoral planning.
10. **Term of office for members of the Parish Pastoral Council is initially set to two years**, with that term being renewable for a four- year term. To facilitate continuity, approximately half of the Parish Pastoral Council members could be asked to continue for a third term.
11. **Inclusion of provisions regarding potential or real conflicts of interest, resignation and termination of membership of the Parish Pastoral Council** in the Parish guidelines for the purpose of transparency and in the interests of due process.
12. **Particular articulation in the Parish Pastoral Council guidelines regarding the meetings themselves** including their frequency, the number of members required for a quorum, records of the meetings, and periodic review of the workings and progress of the Parish Pastoral Council so it serves its purpose according to the values and vision of the Parish.
13. **The agenda of the Parish Pastoral Council** meetings can include as a standing item an update from the Parish Priest on the works of the incorporated entities of the Parish, noting it is the role of the Parish Pastoral Council to provide advice to the Parish Priest for his consideration while the governance responsibility for the incorporated entities lies with their associated Boards.

Positioning of the Parish Pastoral Council

14. As outlined in Recommendation 2, it is advisable **that the Parish organisational chart represent the relationship of the Parish Pastoral Council with regards to the two incorporated entities of the Parish**. It should be made clear that the Parish Pastoral Council is accountable to the Parish Priest as a consultative body, operates in relationship to the Parish Finance Committee which also reports to the Parish Priest, and has a relationship to the ministries and groups of the parish.
15. **The organisational chart should demonstrate the relationship between the Parish Priest, the Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Finance Committee, and the Parish Team.**

Other Recommendations

16. **Offering of regular and consistent opportunities for formation to the Parish community, Parish Pastoral Council members and board members of the incorporated entities, if not already in place.** Formation should be aligned with the vision of the Parish, the theology of communion, and the theology and practices of evangelisation to ensure that the works of the Parish are closely aligned with the worshipping community, and that the incorporated works of the Parish are understood as a part of the mission of the Parish.
17. **Consideration be given to formation, preaching on and witness to the many forms of participation in the parish and Church,** noting the distinction between *ministry* in service of the Church *ad intra* and the fundamental call to *mission* that is made to all the baptised and which is the goal and end of all ministry, including of the Parish Pastoral Council. That is, such structures serve the participation of all the laity in Christian life in the world and participation in the Church should not be reduced or collapsed to participation in an advisory body to the Parish Priest.
18. **Consideration of parish liturgies and occasions of healing** for all those within the parish, as opportunities to pray together as a parish, to seek the consolation, mercy and forgiveness of God and to experience the parish as a community of disciples united in humble service of the Lord with a genuine spirituality of communion. Ongoing reflection on Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* ('At the Beginning of the New Millennium') is recommended as the basis of formation, reflection and prayer.
19. **Inclusion of a general message and pastoral report from the Chair of the Parish Pastoral Council in annual reports of the Parish.** This is to ensure the visibility and communication of the Parish Pastoral Council in the annual report of the Parish.
20. **Inclusion of a clear profile, the vision and the message of the Parish Priest on the Parish website** and that these be accessible from the home page of the St Agnes' Catholic Parish website. This to ensure clear visibility and communication of the governance of the Parish Priest for the community of faith and its works.