

Parish Council Handbook



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PARISH COUNCIL HANDBOOK HANDBOOK

CONSTITUTION

This constitution is based on Canon 536 of the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church

“In every parish of the diocese, a Pastoral Council shall be established, if the diocesan Bishop, after consulting with the Council of Presbyters, so decides. The pastor presides over the Pastoral Council. The Pastoral Council is composed of members of the congregation together with those of the parish staff who have pastoral care by reason of their office. The Pastoral Council assists in promoting pastoral action in the parish. “

“The pastoral council has only a consultative vote, and it is regulated by the norms laid down by the diocesan bishop.”

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1. Purpose of the Parish Council

The parish council seeks to work with the Parish Priest and parish team to enrich the quality of parish life by bringing alive the parish's vision for itself.

Its principal role is to:

- Provide support, guidance, advice and guidance to the Parish team.
- Lead, with the parish team, the transmission of the parish vision and mission
- Lead the ongoing development, review and evaluation of the parish plan
- Consider and develop initiatives which promote the translation of the parish vision into practice
- Represent views of the laity to the parish priest
- Advise the parish priest on any major decisions or changing circumstances within the parish or wider community which affect the life and well-being of the parish, leading consultation with the wider parish community where appropriate.

Mission Statement

We serve God by serving our Parish and the wider community in Sidcup by:

- Welcoming All
- Listening attentively
- Acting thoughtfully
- Taking responsibility
- Facilitating and supporting actions taken
- Being ecumenically positive
- Reflecting back to the community
- Being open to change
- Living witness to Christ in our every day lives

2. Membership of the Parish Council

Membership of the parish council is open to all parishioners of St Lawrence's Sidcup who are over the age of sixteen years. The parish council should reflect the diversity of our parish. A maximum of 12 members is recommended. Of these, one will be the Parish Priest and a member of the Parish team. The other members will be drawn from the laity of the parish.

One or more individuals may be invited to attend a parish council meeting when additional or specialist advice and information is needed

To appoint new members to an existing PC there may be a process of appointment or election. The Parish Priest:

Tells the parish that new members are to be appointed to the PC and Invites the parish's involvement through prayer and nominations of suitable candidates

EITHER: The parish priest works with appropriate people to discern who should be appointed taking account of the parishioners nominated and any other with suitable gifts for this ministry.

OR: The parish is invited to elect members from the list of nominees, to which the parish priest may choose to add further names

Terms of Membership

The aim should be for the parish council to remain unchanged for 4 year period. After 4 years, at least one third of the membership should change. No member should serve more than three consecutive terms.

Qualities and skills needed by the parish council members

All should be practising Catholics who participate regularly in the parish Sunday Mass. Members should seek to represent the parish as a whole, not act as representatives of particular parish groups/organisations. They must be able to contribute effectively to the work of the PC and be willing to give the commitment required from a parish council member.

Qualities

- An ability to listen
- An ability to articulate accurately what one has heard
- A desire for spiritual growth
- An openness to study and reflection
- An eagerness to help the parish articulate its vision and direction.

Skills

- An ease in working in groups
- An ability to inspire and lead others
- A willingness to delegate responsibilities
- An ability to "follow through" after making a commitment
- An ability to make decisions
- An excitement about the parish
- Availability of time and focused energy



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3. Roles and Responsibilities within the Parish Council

Parish Priest is both member and President

- While he does not chair the parish council, the Parish Priest is the president. By presiding at the meeting of the parish council the parish priest brings the authority of the Bishop to the work of the council.
- As parish priest he bears the ultimate responsibility for decisions regarding pastoral ministry and the overall mission of the parish. In rare cases he may choose not to follow the advice of the parish council (Code of canon law 536) but as a member of the PC he will not readily ignore their advice because he has participated in the prayerful process of making the decisions.
- He shares his understanding of the pastoral needs of the parish, including his hopes and aspirations for the future. He also enables the members of the council to exercise and develop their own gifts and together, they recognise and affirm the many gifts and ministries within the parish community.

Appointment to the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary roles is by election by the members of the parish council.

Chair

The role of Chair is key. He or she must be able to work with the parish priest, and also have the confidence of the whole parish council. Although the Chair is elected to serve for a four year term, he or she may resign after one year.

The role of the Chair is to:

- Establish a relationship of mutual trust and respect with the parish priest and develop an understanding of his aspirations for the parish.
- Run the parish council meetings effectively, ensuring that everyone has a chance to contribute.
- Ensure significant time for prayer and formation is included at meetings to maintain the pastoral focus of the council.
- Provide encouragement and support for council members.
- Establish communications channels within the parish. These channels should ensure that the PC is in two-way communication with parishioners and all groups within the parish.
- As outgoing Chair, oversee the election process for the Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary roles.



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Vice-Chair

The role of the Vice-Chair is to support the Chair and occasionally deputise for him or her – this is a good development role. The appointment of Vice-Chair should be for four years.

Secretary

The role of the Secretary is to:

- Produce and distribute agendas (plus any preparatory reading), at least one week prior to the meeting
- Organise meeting place and resources for the meeting, to include refreshments
- Ensure actions and decisions are recorded and circulated to the parish council members within ten days of the meeting, ensuring that a brief summary is made available to the parish.

Executive Group

There will be an executive group, consisting of the Parish Priest, Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary. They will be responsible for:

- agreeing the agenda of each meeting including matters identified by:
 - individual parish council members
 - individual parishioners
 - parish groups and organisations
 - the deanery
 - the wider community (e.g. Churches Together)
- dealing with any urgent business matters which may arise between the parish council meetings and ensuring that such matters are reported to the next parish council meeting
- the ongoing formation of the PC

Sufficient time needs to be set aside for prayer and reflection, and its priority understood. Responsibility for leading prayer should be taken by different people through the life of the PC, and a range of individual approaches encouraged.

4. Parish Council meeting effectiveness

The elements that enable the PC to work well together are:

- Facilitating Environment – arranging the meeting space so that it enables the active participation of the whole group. All members should be able to see and hear each other.
- Good Agenda – this is planned and distributed ahead of time with any reading material that is required. There should be an allocated time for each item.
- Focusing on a limited number of pastoral issues prevents frustration.
- Indicate the group member who is responsible for the agenda item
- Succinct Minutes – PC minutes should record the issues addressed and the agreed outcomes. This includes agreed actions, who will carry them out and by when.
- Accountability – the PC should support each other in their ministry particularly by holding each other accountable to commitments that are made, calling those who have missed meetings, undertaking to work with each other rather than alone. The PC is also accountable to the Archdiocese, Deanery and Parish communities.

Frequency of parish council Meetings

Meetings will be held every six to eight weeks.

Parish Council Communication with the Parish

Members of the PC should be accessible and as well-known to their fellow parishioners as possible.

Ensuring effective, timely and regular communication with the wider parish community will also be a priority for the PC. To achieve this the parish should be kept informed of the membership of the parish council, be advised of dates for meetings, and be given the opportunity of contributing to the agendas. Parishioners will be given a summary of the outcomes of the parish council meetings in the parish magazine, on the parish website and noticeboard.

Evaluation of parish council

The members of the parish council will meet in a prayerful context at an annual Half-Day of Reflection.

The PC will also account for its work annually by arranging an annual parish meeting to review and reflect on the working of the PC in the life of the parish, and to explain their proposed plans for the future.

Change of Parish Priest

Normally, to ensure continuity in the life of the parish, the PC will continue its work during the period of transition. The PC will welcome, support and help the new Parish Priest as he settles into his new role; and be ready to adjust, adapt or review its work and membership in consultation with parishioners, to meet any change of emphasis or new direction.