



THE FRAMEWORK OF THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL

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Introduction

The Diocesan Pastoral Council consists of a central body, an executive and a number of working commissions. This framework document reviews the background to the reformation of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and outlines the function of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and its commissions. It also suggests a mode of interrelating among the commissions, the council and the executive.¹

Background

In 1992 Cardinal Daly announced his decision to form a Diocesan Pastoral Council. It was his view that the membership of the Council should be drawn from the members of Parish Pastoral Councils. At the time there were very few parishes that had a Pastoral Council so an Interim Diocesan Pastoral Council was formed. In 1996 Cardinal Daly changed the Interim Diocesan Pastoral Council into the Diocesan Pastoral Council. It was made up of a core group and regional groups. Two members from each of six regions were appointed by their region to sit on the core group. The core group met three times a year with the bishops. Each region was to hold a regional meeting before the core group meeting. A plenary session for all members was held annually. At no time was a constitution for the Diocesan Pastoral Council created.

In 2003 a decision was taken to replace the regions with groupings at vicariate level, thus changing the number of regional groups from six to fourteen. This transition did not function well leading to a decline in the effective working of the Diocesan Pastoral Council.²

In 2004 Cardinal Brady announced his decision to create a diocesan pastoral plan. In Lent 2005 a series of consultation meetings were held across the diocese to discuss the formation of an action plan to address the pastoral needs of the diocese. Following these regional meetings the findings of the consultation process were collated and summarised and priorities were identified. Fourteen priorities emerged and nine working groups were formed to address the main areas of need within each priority. The nine working groups were:

- faith formation;
- youth ministry;
- prayer and spirituality;
- meaningful liturgy;
- care for priests;
- developing the role and ministry of women in the Church;

¹ See the constitution of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, available on the diocesan website: <http://www.archdioceseofarmagh.com/archdiocese/diocesan-pastoral-council>

² history of the Diocesan Pastoral Council 1992-2003 by Mrs. Sheila McEaney (Secretary) is available on the diocesan website: <http://www.archdioceseofarmagh.com/archdiocese/diocesan-pastoral-council>



- family ministry and life issues;
- outreach to others – ecumenism and interfaith dialogue;
- parish pastoral councils, attending to diocesan and parish structures, leadership and training, diocesan / parish surveys.

To coordinate the work of the nine working groups Cardinal Brady created the Co-ordinating Group of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan. Ms. Helen Forde was appointed as co-ordinator of the pastoral plan, a role that has since been carried out by Dr Tony Hanna and Fr Andrew McNally of the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry.

With the pastoral energy of the diocese being funneled through the Co-ordinating Group of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan the Diocesan Pastoral Council became largely redundant. Meetings went from being infrequent to non-existent. The last plenary meeting of the original Diocesan Pastoral Council was held in November 2006. The last gathering of the members of that council was in September 2007.

In April 2008 Cardinal Brady and Bishop Clifford adopted the plan for Parish Reorganisation 2008-2011. The plan states:

The role of the Diocesan Pastoral Council in conjunction with the role of the Senate of Priests and the Co-ordinating Group of the Pastoral Plan will be reviewed in the latter part of 2009 and will be followed by the integration of Parish Pastoral Councils with the Diocesan Pastoral Council in 2010.³

To this end Fr Andrew McNally and Dr Tony Hanna of the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry have worked with Mr. Liam McCallion, Chairperson of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and Mr. Joe Purcell, Deputy Director of the Armagh Diocesan Pastoral Centre to draw up a draft constitution for the Diocesan Pastoral Council. The proposals were brought to the members of the coordinating group of the pastoral plan, the working groups and to the existing Diocesan Pastoral Council. *After appropriate changes were made, the Constitution was promulgated by Cardinal Brady on _____ 2010.*

The promulgation of the Diocesan Pastoral Council Constitution is an attempt to create a functioning and effective Diocesan Pastoral Council that, in collaboration with the Archbishop of the diocese and his auxiliary(s), is responsible for the pastoral mission and pastoral planning of the diocese.

Accordingly, it is proposed that the work carried out by the Co-ordinating Group of the Pastoral Plan will be transferred to the Diocesan Pastoral Council. In this new structure the work that was previously carried out by the nine working groups will be carried out by the Diocesan Commissions and the work of the Co-coordinating group will be carried out by the executive and the main body of the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

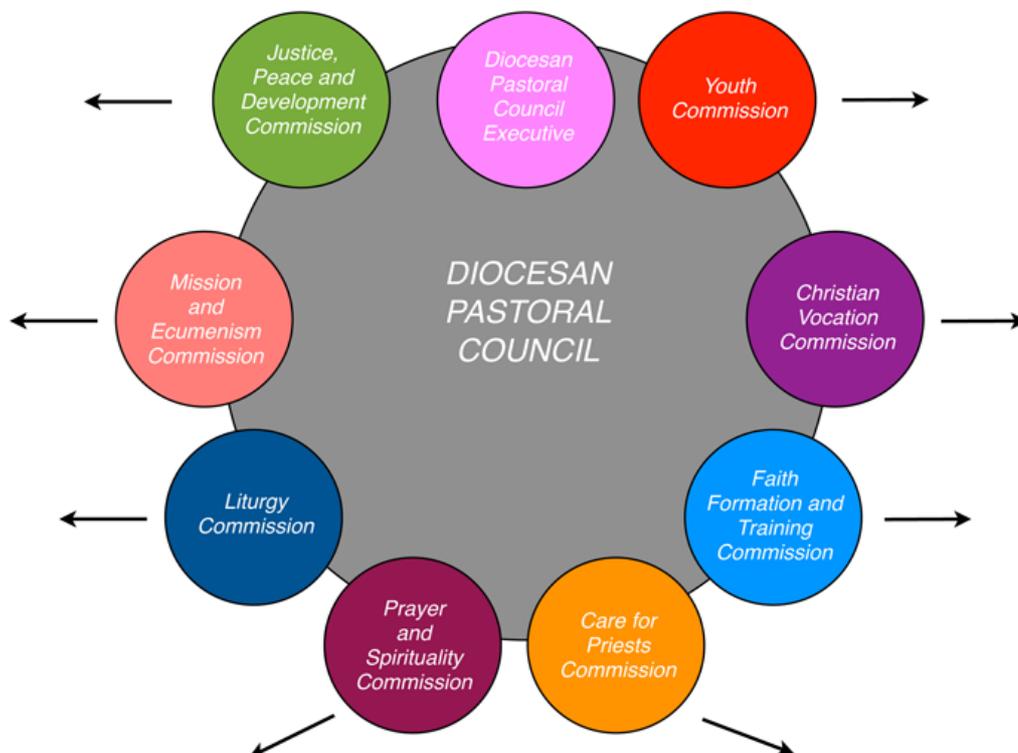
³ Clustering, Rationalisation, New Parish Structures And Ministries: Moving Toward Parish Reorganisation In The Archdiocese Of Armagh 2008 - 2011 - Outline Of The Way Ahead p. 10. See: <http://armagharchdiocese.org/images/stories/pdf/prwayahead.pdf>.



The Diocesan Pastoral Council

The Diocesan Pastoral Council made up of permanent members who form the executive and renewable members who make up the body of the pastoral council. In all it has about 70 members.⁴ The Diocesan Pastoral Council also has a number of working commissions for pastoral planning within the Archdiocese. The initial commissions are:

- Mission and Ecumenism Commission
- Prayer and Spirituality Commission
- Youth Commission
- Justice, Peace and Development Commission
- Christian Vocation Commission
- Faith Formation and Training Commission
- Liturgy Commission
- Care for Priests Commission.



⁴ For the exact makeup of the membership of the Diocesan Pastoral Council see the *Constitution of the Diocesan Pastoral Council*. It is available from: <http://armagharchdiocese.org/images/stories/pdf/draftdpccconstitution.pdf>



The Work of the Diocesan Pastoral Council

The Diocesan Pastoral Council is the body that makes sure that everything is going in the same direction with a clear sense of purpose. It is the task of the Council to explore the values and essentials of the diocese as a whole. The Council might declare; *No matter what we do we will..* (an example might be: *No matter what we do we will care for the most vulnerable in our midst* or *Whatever else we do we will be sure to celebrate the liturgy meaningfully*). The Council formulates, promotes and maintains the stated aim of the Archdiocese. This is the primary task of the Diocesan Pastoral Council. The other tasks follow from it.

Another task for the Diocesan Pastoral Council is to establish a theme or a common direction for the year. For example, if the theme for the year was “fostering a sense of belonging” this would give focus to the work of each of the commissions and other groups in the diocese. Each commission, in its planning would then ask: *how does what we are planning foster a sense of belonging within parishes and among the people of our diocese?*⁵

The Diocesan Pastoral Council is the glue that holds the commission structure together. It therefore supports and fosters the work of the commissions. The membership of the Council has links with the parishes, the pastoral areas, the priests, the religious orders and many of the Church based organisations in the diocese. This gives the membership a two-way role. One is to assess what is happening in their local context and bring that feedback to the commissions. The other is to promote the work of the commissions in their local context.

The Diocesan Pastoral Council also serves as a link between the commissions and fosters close interaction among them. It can identify where commissions are working well and where they need help and support.

The Executive

The executive of the Council is at the service of the Council. It is responsible for steering the Council and the Commissions.

The executive coordinates and facilitates the meetings of the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

The executive monitors, evaluate and ensure the ongoing progress of pastoral planning in the diocese.⁶

It will have responsibility for the ongoing development and reformation of diocesan and parish structures.⁷

⁵ On occasion a theme for the year will suggest itself from a source outside the diocese. For example in the year 2008 - 2009 the Irish Catholic Bishops declared a year of vocation. At the same time Pope Benedict declared a Jubilee Year of the Apostle Paul.

⁶ It takes over this role from the Coordinating group of the Diocesan Plan.

⁷ While the Coordinating Group of the Diocesan Pastoral Council was in place much of the work with regard to diocesan and parish structures was carried out by the sub-group known as PALS. It was at the forefront of the formation of parish pastoral councils and the parish reorganisation plan. This work now falls to the executive, supported by the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry and by any sub-committees formed by the executive.



The executive has an important role in decision making in the diocese, when such responsibilities are delegated by the Archbishop. The executive decides who decides. The designated deciders then consult the relevant people, make the decision based on the consultation and then inform the relevant people of the decision that has been made. So, the executive does not make all the decisions delegated by the Archbishop but decides who are the right people to make the decision.

The Pastoral Council Commissions

The Diocesan Pastoral council has a number of working commissions responsible for the pastoral planning within their area of work. Commissions can be created by the Executive with the support of the Council and the approval of the Archbishop or directly by the Archbishop. Each commission is made up of a Chairperson and three other members appointed directly by the Archbishop. Two members from the Diocesan Pastoral Council are added to the Commission and remain Council members on the Commission while they remain members of the Council. A further four members of the Commission are chosen by those who are already Commission members.⁸

The Work of the Commissions

The commissions are the planning arms of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, responsible for pastoral planning within their area of work. Each commission's overarching question is: *Given our area of concern, what do we want to see in place in three years' time?* It is the task of the commission to answer this question as they set goals for their area of pastoral life. Each commission will be committed to learning from, building upon and supporting parish, pastoral areas, diocesan and voluntary organisational initiatives that are relative to their area of concern.⁹

Each commission for its area of concern will reflect on:

- What is happening?
- What is going well?
- What is missing?
- What more can be done?

⁸ For the exact makeup of the membership of the Diocesan Pastoral Council Commissions see the *Constitution of the Diocesan Pastoral Council*. It is available from <http://armagharchdiocese.org/images/stories/pdf/draftdpccconstitution.pdf>

⁹ For example, the Faith Formation and training Commission rather than starting from scratch would acknowledge the fact that there are very fruitful faith formation initiatives happening in the diocese. A sample of these include the work of Chokmah, *Soil for the Seed*, the *Life in Spirit* Seminars being offered by the Family of God community, marriage preparation being offered by Accord, courses in the Diocesan Pastoral Centre, parish based training of liturgical minister, the formation of children and young people in primary and post-primary schools etc. The commission does not need to reinvent the wheel. Rather it applies its four questions and does its planning based on the answers to those questions.



As well as supporting parishes, pastoral areas and diocesan and voluntary organisations, the commissions will bring a family perspective¹⁰ to bear on their planning, implementing and evaluating policies, programmes, ministries, and services as it is outlined by the committee on Marriage and Family of the US National Conference of Catholic Bishops.¹¹

The Concerns of the Commissions

Each Commission has its own area of concern. The area of concern gives each commission its own distinctive work. It is important for each commission to ask: *is this our task or does it more properly belong to one of the other commissions?* Where there is ambiguity it is helpful for the commissions to talk to each other, work with each other and support each other.

Faith Formation and Training Commission

Faith formation refers to all the activities that happen at home, in school and in the parish that help people to know, appreciate and live their faith. Central to this is the process of catechesis by which we form people in Christian identity so that they can live as disciples of Jesus. Training refers to the equipping of people for the ministries they carry out on behalf of the Christian community in parish, diocese and society. It is the task of the Faith Formation and Training Commission to initiate, promote, encourage and support initiatives within the diocese with regard to sacramental preparation, the Rite of Christian Initiation of adults, the catechesis of children, young people and families, the ongoing formation of adults and the training of people for ministry.

Mission and Ecumenism Commission

The mission of the Church is evangelisation, the spreading of the Gospel with the help of the Holy Spirit. Ecumenism involves understanding the relationships within and between different traditions, and promoting dialogue and peace.¹² The task of the Mission and Ecumenism Commission is to promote and support evangelisation and ecumenism in school, parishes and diocese.

¹⁰ At the foundation of a family perspective are four elements that touch the very heart of contemporary family life. Bringing a family perspective to bear in ministry means keeping these four elements in mind when planning, implementing, and evaluation policies, programmes, ministries and services. The four elements are, according to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops:

- The Christian vision of family life based on marriage - the family has unique identity and mission that permeate its tasks and responsibilities
- The family as a developing system - the family is not a collection of individuals, but a living and developing system whose members are essentially interconnected
- Family diversity - the influence of societal trends and diversity in structure, economic status, special needs, and ethnic and religious heritages affect the roles and activities of families today
- The partnership between families and social institutions - partnerships need to be formed between families and the institutions that share family responsibilities.

¹¹ For more information on using a family perspective in ministry see *Creating a Vision of Family Ministry in the Archdiocese of Armagh: Policy of the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry*, pp. 10-11. It is available on the diocesan website: <http://www.armagharchdiocese.ie/images/stories/pdf/familypolicy.pdf>

¹² Taken from the website of the Irish School of Ecumenics: <http://tcd.ie/ise/study/mphil-degrees/ecumenics/index.php>



Prayer and Spirituality Commission

Prayer and spirituality are at the heart of what the Church does, whether it is the Church of the home, the parish or the diocese. Through a life of prayer we grow as disciples of Jesus, by our spirituality we connect faith to life and life to faith. The task of the Prayer and Spirituality Commission is to help the Christian people of the diocese develop their own understanding of prayer and encourage the development of a Catholic spirituality. The commission is to create prayer initiatives, organise Christian meditation groups and spiritual retreats.

Youth Commission

Ministry with and to young people takes place in many forms throughout the Archdiocese - in homes, schools, parishes, youth clubs, pilgrimages - anywhere people of faith recognise the gift of the Gospel and the gift of young people. The task of the Youth Commission is to work in partnership with young people, Church and interested agencies to ensure that young people are encouraged and affirmed on their journey of faith. It does this by offering leadership training and through school, parish and diocesan initiatives.

Liturgy Commission

Liturgy is the public coming together of people to worship the God of Jesus, moved by the Holy Spirit. The task of the Liturgy Commission is to be aware of the liturgical needs of the parishes in the diocese; listen, support and advise parishes regarding liturgical matters; promote and plan practical initiatives for sacramental celebrations; provide resources to individuals and to parishes and to network with other agencies in the diocese.

Justice, Peace and Development Commission

The social teaching of the Church insists that the Church must serve those in need and redress the causes of poverty, suffering, injustice and ecological destruction. The task of the Justice, peace and Development Commission is to promote the social teaching of the Church and support local and global efforts to end poverty and promote peace and justice.

Christian Vocation Commission

Through Baptism, all of us are given a vocation from God to ministry and mission. For most, this will be through the vocation to marriage, for some through the vocation to the single life and for others to the vocation to priesthood, diaconate and the religious life. We need to be aware of the richness of each state of life and be mutually supportive of each vocation. The task of the Christian Vocations Commission will be to affirm the dignity of each of the states of life, promote vocations to each calling, call forth their special charisms, affirm and support their interdependence and provide ongoing resources to sustain them.

Care for Priests Commission

Pastores Dabo Vobis (on the formation of priests) speaks of the spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual well being of priests. Caring for the priests and bishops of our diocese was identified by the people of the diocese as essentially important. The task of the Care for priests Commission is to address issues concerning the spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual welfare of the clergy, educating priests with regard to caring for their health and ensuring that priests receive the care they need at any particular time.



Council Meetings

An important part of the work of the Diocesan Pastoral Council is to support the work of the Commissions. Council meetings are designed to enable this to happen. There are to be three Council meetings each year: one before Easter, one before summer and one before Halloween. The meetings are planned for and prepared by the executive.

As a part of each meeting the Commission is to give a report to the Council. This provides for three things:

- It allows the Commissions to speak about what they are doing;
- it enables the Commissions to outline what they need the Council members to do in their pastoral areas during the next months;
- and it provides the Council members the opportunity to feedback to the Commissions on what they were asked to do in their pastoral areas during the last few months.

A minimum of three members of each Commission are to attend Council meetings.

To maximise the fruitfulness of Council meetings they are to allow sufficient time for prayer, study, reflection and business. The autumn meeting will be from 10.45am - 4.30pm on a Saturday. The Spring meeting will be from 1.45pm - 6pm on a Sunday. The post Easter meeting will be on a weekday evening from 7.15pm - 9.30pm.

The times and frequency of Commission meetings are to be decided upon by the Commission members. The executive meets on at least three occasions in the year in preparation for the Council meetings and at other times deemed desirable by the executive.