

St. John Fisher, North Harrow

Parish Council Constitution

Introduction

1. This constitution provides for the establishment of a Parish Council (hereafter referred to as “the Council” through which members of the congregation of the Parish of St. John Fisher, North Harrow, Middlesex will support the Parish Priest in the administration and functioning of the Parish in accordance with the Parish Priest’s responsibilities under Canons 519, 520, 521 and 536 of the Code of Canon Law in accordance with Canon Law.
2. The role of the Council shall be to assist and support the Parish Priest in the management and administration of the Parish, in all Parish activities, promoting the Catholic faith and fostering the intellectual and social life of the Parish in accordance with Canon Law.
3. In its operation, the Council shall at all times, through the guidance of the Parish Priest, follow the aims and requirements of the Archbishop and Archdiocese of Westminster.
4. The Parish Finance Committee is established in accordance with Canon 537 of the Code of Canon Law. The Parish Priest shall be the ex-officio member of the Finance Committee.

Administration

5. On matters other than Finance, the Parish shall be administered by:
 - (i) the Parish Priest or Parish Administrator or Priest-in-Charge (hereafter referred to as “the Parish Priest”).
 - (ii) the Council.
 - (iii) the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the Council, providing assistance and support on a day-to-day basis.

Membership

6. The Council shall consist of the following members:
 - (i) the Parish Priest, the Assistant Priest(s) and any Pastoral Worker(s) appointed by the Parish Priest.
 - (ii) six members elected by the parishioners (to be eligible to stand for election or to vote in the election parishioners must be 16 years of age or over on the date of the election).
 - (iii) three representatives appointed by the Parish Priest.
 - (iv) any co-opted members.
 - (v) the Chairman of the Finance Committee.
 - (vi) the Chairman of the Property Management Sub-Committee.
 - (vii) the Child Protection Officer.
 - (viii) a Minutes Secretary, to be appointed as set out in clause 8, who shall not be entitled to vote.

At its first meeting following the Annual Parish Meeting (hereafter referred to as “the APM”), the Council shall elect a Chairman and Vice-Chairman from amongst its members.

The Parish Priest

7. The Parish Priest shall be the only permanent member of the Council. The Council does not have the power to remove or exclude him from membership.

Minutes Secretary

8. A Minutes Secretary shall be appointed by each newly elected Council.

Elected Members

9. Parishioners shall elect, by Ballot, where necessary, six of their fellow Parishioners to represent them on the Council. Elected members shall serve on the Council for a period of 3 years. An elected member may serve for only two consecutive terms of office, after which he/she must leave the Council for one term before being eligible to seek election. After the expiry of their term of office, an elected member may seek re-election under the procedure set out in paragraph 26 –31 below.
10. At the first election held after the adoption of this Constitution, the six elected members polling the highest number of votes (or the six nominated if there is no poll) shall serve for an initial period of three years, after which they may seek re-election for a normal period of three years.
11. The Parish Priest, after consultation with the Chairman, shall, at his discretion, have power to fill by co-opting, any vacancy occurring among the six elected members of the Council. Any Parishioner so co-opted will serve on the Council for three years.

Representative Members and Parish Groups

12. Any group functioning in the Parish to promote its spiritual, educational, social or financial life may seek to have a representative on the Council. There shall be a maximum of three such representative members. Their appointment, or termination of appointment, shall be decided by the Parish Priest after consulting the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council. Any representative member so appointed must be a current, registered member of the Parish congregation.
13. Groups of any kind undertaking activities within the Parish may do so only with the approval of the Parish Priest. All such groups shall provide to the Chairman of the Council written reports of their activities not less than seven days before each Council meeting or on such occasions as are agreed with the Chairman of the Council.

Co-opted Members

14. From time to time, the Parish Priest in consultation with the Council may co-opt members of the Parish to serve on the Council while they are carrying out specific functions within the Parish. The period of service of such a co-option shall be at the

discretion of the Parish Priest but should be confirmed at each APM. Any co-opted member shall have the same voting rights as other Council members.

Termination of Membership

15. Members of the Council shall, in exceptional circumstances, have the power to require the Chairman and/or the Vice-Chairman to resign that office. Such action may only be taken at a properly convened meeting of the Council after the reasons for seeking resignation have been discussed with the person concerned and with the Parish Priest. To be acceptable, such a resignation requirement would require a majority of two thirds of those present and voting on the matter at a meeting of the Council.
16. Any member wishing to resign from the Council should do so in writing to the Chairman of the Council and the Parish Priest.
17. Should any member (not including the Parish Priest) bring the Council or the Church into disrepute, the Parish Priest, or the Chairman in consultation with the Parish Priest, may request the member to resign from the Council. Should the member refuse to resign, all the facts of the issue shall be brought before the full Parish Council at the next appointed meeting. The member concerned shall have the opportunity to address the Council. Thereafter, and in the absence of the member, a decision shall be taken as to their future membership of the Council by the Parish Priest following consultation with the Council Members.
18. Members who fail to attend two consecutive meetings of the Council shall cease to be members of the Council unless the Parish Priest and the Chairman agree that there has been good reason for that member's absence.

Annual Parish Meeting (hereafter referred to as "the APM")

19. The Council shall give 28 days notice of the APM to be held each year. The Chairman or Vice-Chairman shall chair the APM.
20.
 - (i) Items for inclusion in the Agenda shall be notified, in writing, to the Chairman no later than 14 days before the APM.
 - (ii) Items for inclusion under Any Other Business must be notified to the Chairman 48 hours before the start of the APM and shall be admitted at the Chairman's discretion.
21. The agenda for the APM shall be prepared by the Chairman in consultation with the Parish Priest and posted on the notice board in the Church Porch 7 days prior to the APM and shall include, each year, a Financial Report for the preceding year.
22. All Parishioners attending the APM shall sign a register and only those Parishioners whose names appear on the Parish Register will be entitled to vote at the meeting.
23. Results of the election to the Council, beginning in May, shall be announced at the APM.
24. The Chairman shall ensure that the Minutes are recorded at the APM.

25. An Extra-Ordinary General Meeting may be requested by the Council or by 50 persons whose names are on the Parish Register. Any such request shall be made in writing to the Chairman giving the reason for the meeting. Not less than 28 days notice shall be given to the Parish of such an EGM.

Elections

26. In each year when vacancies arise on the Council, there shall be elections for new members of the Council. Only those Parishioners over 16 years of age and whose names are on the Parish Register are eligible to stand for election or to vote in those elections.
27. One month before the APM, the names of all existing elected members of the Council and Representative Members shall be posted in the Church Porch with an indication of those whose terms of office are coming to an end. Thereafter, those members of the Parish wishing to stand for election or re-election shall give notice of their intention by completing a nomination form for "Election to the Parish Council" (See Appendix "B"), each nomination must be proposed by and seconded by Parishioners whose names are on the Parish Register and countersigned by the nominee. All nominations must be received by the first Sunday of May.
28. On the Sunday prior to the APM at which the election will be completed, a list of valid nominations received shall be published in the Parish Newsletter and posted in the Church. If the number of valid nominations received exceeds the number of vacancies, Ballot Papers shall be made available at all Masses on that Sunday for completion. Each eligible Parishioner will be entitled to vote for a maximum of six candidates in the election. A postal vote shall be available for those members of the Parish who are absent, sick or house bound.
29. All Ballot Papers shall be completed and placed in the Ballot Box at the back of the Church at this time or placed in the Presbytery letter box no later than 7 p.m. on the day of the Ballot. Thereafter, the ballot papers and votes shall be counted by the Parish Priest and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the outgoing Parish Council or such persons as they delegate.
30. The elected candidates shall be those receiving the most votes in descending order. The results of the election shall be announced at the end of the APM.
31. The Chairman and the Vice Chairman of the outgoing Parish Council shall have the responsibility for organising the election in accordance with the Constitution and for announcing the results of the voting.

Meetings of the Parish Council

32. The Council shall meet a minimum of 4 times per year. The Council meetings will normally take place in the months of February, May, September and November.
33. The Chairman shall ensure that: -
- (i) the Minutes of all Council Meetings are recorded and that the Minute Book is kept in a safe and secure place.
 - (ii) the Minutes record all those present and absent. The Provisional Minutes, agreed by the Parish Priest and the Chairman, shall be displayed on the notice board as soon as possible after a Council meeting.

- (iii) The Minutes are put before the next Council meeting for approval by the Council.
 - (iv) After elections copies of all previous Minutes are passed to on the new Chairman.
34. The Chairman, in consultation with the Parish Priest, shall prepare the agenda for each meeting of the Council. The agenda shall be available to Council members no later than 7 days prior to the meeting and shall be posted on the Church notice board during the weekend prior to the meeting.
35. The Chairman shall be responsible for keeping a record of all Elected Members, Representative Members and all co-opted members who shall be entitled to form part of the Council. The respective dates of their terms of office shall also be recorded.

Quorum

36. A Council meeting shall be deemed quorate if it shall consist of the Chairman or Vice-Chairman (or their nominated deputy) and any 6 members of the Council.

In cases of urgency, where the Parish Priest and the Chairman or Vice-Chairman are required to take actions or make decisions in the absence of a Council meeting, such actions or decisions shall be deemed valid. The Council must be informed of such decisions at the next Council meeting. The Chairman will endeavour to inform all members of the Council of any such significant emergency decisions.

Sub-Committees

37. The Council may from time to time appoint sub-committees to assist in the running of Parish activities. The Council shall appoint one of its members to be Chairman of any such sub-committee who will report to the Council in respect of such sub-committee.
38. The Parish Priest and the Council shall ensure that there is at all times, a Property Management Sub-Committee. The Parish Priest, the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the Council shall be ex-officio, members of the Property Management Sub-committee along with a further elected member who will be appointed by the Council.

Other members shall be co-opted following consultation between the Parish Priest, the members of the Property Management Sub-Committee and the Council.

The Committee's main responsibilities are detailed in Appendix "D"

Voting within the Parish Council

39. Any motion put before the Council shall be carried by a simple majority vote with the Chairman having the casting vote in the event of an equality of votes.

Voting within the Annual Parish Meeting

40. Any motion put before the APM shall be carried by a simple majority vote with the Chairman having the casting vote in the event of an equality of votes.
41. In the event of any dispute the Chairman shall be responsible for interpretation or application of the Constitution. The chairman's decision shall be final.

Amendments to the Constitution

- 42.
- (i) Any amendment of this Constitution must be supported by a two-thirds majority at a General Parish Meeting.
 - (ii) Any proposed alteration to the Constitution must be submitted to the Chairman of the Council, in writing, at least 6 weeks before any such meeting.
 - (iii) Any proposed changes to the Constitution must be supported by a minimum of 50 signatures whose names appear on the Parish Register. Any proposed alteration to the Constitution proposed by the Council must be supported by two-thirds of the Council members present and voting. Any such proposal must be recorded in full in the minutes of the Council meeting.
43. Any proposed alteration to the Constitution must be stated in full in the published agenda for the General Meeting.

Parish Property

44. Any Parish Group operating within the Parish and using the Parish property does so only with the express agreement of the Parish Priest and the Parish Council. Any such Group is expected to ensure that its activities are consistent with Catholic teaching and principles. In accordance with the duties imposed upon the Parish Council by Clause 2 of this Constitution it shall have the authority to make decisions regarding the terms and conditions, including termination, upon which those Groups use Parish property.