



**Ongoing Pastoral Care of the
Parish of Gordon**

2019

1. Context

Bishop Paul Bird initiated this Commission to review the governance structure of the Parish of Gordon and to engage the Parish community in discernment of a preferred approach for the Parish moving forward. The Commission was undertaken by Vin Dillon and Sue Daly, supported by staff from the Ballarat Diocese.

The review process involved 3 distinct phases including a review of the lay-led Coordinator structure that operated over the past 5 years, exploration of potential options for the future governance of the Parish and discernment of a preferred structure based on a consultation process with the Parish community. The Commission adopted a transparent and accessible process that involved targeted interviews, structured surveys, regular updates and Parish consultation.

In considering the future of the Parish of Gordon it is useful to take account of the broader context for the Catholic Church in Australia. At a national level preparation is underway for the Australian Catholic Bishops' Plenary Council. The circumstances of the Church in Australia, including the patterns of change within the community, the issues confronting the Church in Australia, and the increase in entrusting responsibility and leadership of the Church's mission to laity, have prompted the Church to review the signs of the times, to listen anew to the Spirit, and to chart a course into the future.

At a Diocese level changes are occurring driven by a reduction in the availability of priests and decline in our rural populations. In follow-up to a 'Looking Forward' process undertaken by the Diocese we are now seeing multiple parishes merge into Ministry Districts with an increased focus on sharing scarce resources including priests. In June 2018, Bishop Paul Bird advised of the establishment of three new parishes in the Diocese as follows:

- St Mary Mackillop Parish, Western Border which encompasses the Parishes of Casterton, Coleraine, Edenhope, Hamilton and Harrow.
- Holy Family Parish, Northeast Mallee which encompasses the Parishes of Swan Hill, Sea Lake and the northern part of Quambatook parish
- Mary Glowrey Parish, East Wimmera which encompasses the Parishes of Birchip, Charlton, Donald, St Arnaud and Wycheproof and the church community of Boort.

At the same time the Catholic Church is subject to heightened scrutiny with respect to compliance with recommendations arising from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. In addition the administrative burden of compliance with legislation and emerging policies and procedures has never been more onerous.

It is clear that the Catholic Church will continue to face challenges in meeting expectations of parishioners into the future. Within the Ballarat Diocese it is projected that the number of priests available will continue to decline over time and that priest involvement in Celebrations of the Eucharist, Liturgies and Sacraments will decline. This Review has a three year outlook and so focusses on what is desirable and feasible looking ahead for a three year term.

This Report summarises:

- the approach adopted for the Commission,
- analysis of key findings gathered throughout the review process,
- an outline of the Parish communities’ preferred governance model for the future, and
- a series of recommendations for effective implementation of robust structures and processes required to support the preferred model.

2. Methodology

The following table summarises the key steps and timelines for the Commission process.

Activity	Timeline
Approach endorsed	June 2018
A series of 4 Parish Community Surveys addressed themes including: Sacramental, Pastoral/Community Building, Administration and Connections	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has worked well over the past five years? 	7/7/18 - 5/8/18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have been difficulties and challenges over the past five years? 	21/7/18 - 26/8/18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking to our future what structure(s) should we consider? 	11/8/18 - 9/9/18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking to our future what are you worried about? 	1/9/18 - 30/9/18
Interviews with individuals associated with the Coordinator model	12/9/18 – 15/11/18
Combined Parish Pastoral Council and Finance Committee consultation meeting	15/10/18
Parish Community Meeting – presentation of key findings	21/10/18
Interim Report circulated for feedback	12/2/19
Parish Community Meeting – to discern preferred governance model	24/3/19
Final Report	7/5/19

Throughout the Commission process communication with the Parish community was maintained via regular updates in the Parish bulletin.

3. Parish Profile

St. Patrick's Parish, Gordon was established in 1875 and incorporates a church in Ballan, Gordon and Springbank. In addition Parish schools are located in Ballan and Gordon. Our area consists of many small communities including Bolwarrah, Bunding, Millbrook, Mollonghip, Mt. Egerton and Mt. Wallace.

The Parish churches include:

- St. Brigid's – Ballan
- St. Patrick's – Gordon
- St. Michael's - Springbank

3.1 Census Population

	Population*	
	2011	2016
Ballan	2,774	2,985
Gordon	1,219	1,151
Springbank	385	111
Total	4,378	4,247

* Source: Total population from the Australian Bureau of Statistics

A key difference between the Parish of Gordon and other rural parishes across the Diocese is that it lies within the western growth corridor of Melbourne. Recent years have seen significant growth in the Ballan population in particular, (7.6% growth from 2011 to 2016) and this growth is likely to continue and potentially extend into Gordon over time.

3.2 Mass Count

The following table summarises Mass count figures for 2019.

	12th & 13 th May	12th & 13 th May	26 th &27 th May	2 nd &3 rd June
Ballan	125	81	117	153
Gordon	-	42	38	119
Springbank	79	-	-	-

Mass attendance figures for Ballan and Gordon are greater than average associated with preparation of 28 children to receive Confirmation and First Eucharist. Trends in Mass attendance are discussed further on page 7.

3.3 Sacramental Activity

The following table summarises sacramental activity at the Parish of Gordon from 2015 to 2018.

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Baptisms	27	12	19	32
Confirmation	47	27	N/A*	20
First Eucharist	47	26	N/A*	20
Marriages	4	5	3	1
Funerals	5	12	8	6

*Confirmation and First Eucharist was not undertaken in 2017

3.4 Parish Assets

In addition to the Churches and Schools, the Parish of Gordon currently has a convent at both Gordon and Springbank and until recently, a Presbytery at Gordon which has been sold.

3.5 Parish Finances

The planned giving income has remained relatively steady over the period 2014-2018 ranging between \$68,000 and \$73,000. This contrasts with the previous five years where the range was \$52,000 to \$58,000.

In six of the past ten years the Gordon Parish has operated at a financial loss. In two of these years the loss has been greater than \$20,000 with the highest deficit of \$38,922 in 2018. However, this included extraordinary expenditure of \$25,944 for works to prepare the presbytery for sale. It is intended that this amount will be recouped in 2019 following settlement on the presbytery. Taking this into account the operating loss for 2018 would have been \$13,978. Two years have yielded losses of between \$12,000 and \$14,000 and two years of around \$3,000. An analysis of these losses shows that capital and property costs are the major cause of these deficits. The sale of the Gordon presbytery will alleviate to some extent capital and property expenses while at the same time generating a small amount of income through the investment of the proceeds from the sale. This financial situation raises questions regarding the amount of property the Parish owns, the usage of that property and the cost of maintaining the property. A considerable amount of work has already been undertaken by the Parish Finance Committee with respect to asset management and this work will be a continuing focus to ensure the Parish is financially sustainable.

4. The Lay-Led Coordinator Structure

The Lay-Led Coordinator structure incorporated a Supervising Priest from outside of the Gordon Parish working in collaboration with a team of 3 Coordinators who were commissioned by the Bishop to provide coordination of:

1. Liturgical/Sacramental activities,
2. Pastoral and Community Building activities and
3. Administrative functions.

Based on feedback received through the review process the following themes were identified.

4.1 What has worked well

- **Sacramental**

The Parish community is well satisfied with the Sacramental provision as it existed under the Lay-Led Coordinator structure. Masses were celebrated in the Parish each weekend and parishioners are very appreciative of Father Shane's ministry. Father Gary looked after funerals and sacramental preparation and again his work is much appreciated. Retired priests were invited to the Parish for Mass with anointing and visits to the homes and hostels on a regular basis. There was regular communion to the sick and the housebound and to the hostel at Ballan. This was dependent on the commitment of a number of parishioners and their hard work is acknowledged. One of the three Coordinators has responsibility for the sacramental area but it has generally been as a support for those teams/individuals involved in ministry in this area of Parish life.

- **Pastoral/Community Building**

The majority of activities in this area relate to Ballan. The Celebration of the Word and Communion each Thursday has a community building dimension in addition to the spiritual component. The Lenten discussion groups are a positive experience for those involved. The Parish retreats have been a prayerful and community building experience. Ecumenical prayer services are organised for the people at the hostel once a month. The schools invite parishioners to activities. Some social events for seniors have been organised.

- **Administration**

The written responses indicate a high level of satisfaction with the administration of the Parish. A collaborative decision making model where parishioners were consulted prior to important decisions being made is the preferred approach. Frequent and transparent communication was fundamental to this. The high standard of work of the Coordinators was often mentioned. The Parish Secretary has a key role in ensuring efficient administration of the Parish. The Parish Directory is a helpful leaflet giving contacts for most Parish activities.

- **Connections**

The “*remarkable work*” carried out by the Coordinators in bringing the Parish together was acknowledged in a variety of ways.

“Lay-led Coordinator structure is very good”

“Coordinators have led the Parish well through the changes”

“Coordinators have been impressive and inspiring”

“The last five years have brought the Parish closer together through the commitment of the Coordinators”

The community celebrations over the past five years have been well attended and successful.

4.2 What have been difficulties and challenges?

- **Sacramental**

The issues that have been identified through the written responses are no different to most parishes in the Ballarat Diocese:

- Mass Attendances are dropping
- Too few doing too much as they get older. Existing volunteers are getting older and there is a lack of younger members to volunteer
- The absence of young families from the Sunday Eucharist except when involved in sacramental preparation
- If you take on a role it is forever.

Specific issues that relate to the Gordon Parish include:

- Too few opportunities for Reconciliation
- More celebrations of an Anointing Mass - maybe once per three months
- Mass times could be more varied
- The organization of the sacramental program needs to be the Parish’s responsibility so it is more coordinated
- No altar servers
- Challenging to find Special Ministers to go to homes
- The challenge of meeting the expectations of both the Visiting Priest and the Supervising Priest with regard to the organization of the sacramental program
- People who have been involved in ministries have not been appreciated
- The nature of the Sunday Eucharistic celebration - it is passive with little opportunity to share thoughts and reflections.

- **Pastoral / Community Building**

From the written responses the connection between the Parish and the schools is identified as being problematic. Disappointment is expressed at the lack of interaction between the Parish and the

schools. This is not confined to being a Gordon Parish issue. It is quite universal. Coordination of school masses is a challenge due to priest availability.

- **Administration**

A seeming lack of volunteers to take on the role of Parish Coordinator was viewed as a major challenge. A reason for this which was offered by a number of respondents was the manner in which issues were raised, conflict resolved and decisions made. In moving away from resident Parish Priests who have the knowledge, experience and authority to make decisions, parishes such as Gordon face a significant challenge in determining how conflict is resolved and decisions made.

“before any new people would put their hands up to volunteer as Coordinators, it would be necessary to clarify what conflict resolution procedures and back up are in place should / when the need arise in the future. Otherwise are we just giving people responsibility without authority???”

“The Coordinator system worked well to begin with but due to unnecessary pressures placed on the Coordinators by some parishioners in the last two years has brought about our current position.”

“Decision making is always going to be an issue without a leader”

A lack of communication was identified as a challenge both through the surveys and in the interviews. Disappointment was expressed concerning the lack of follow through on priorities such as the vision statement renewal.

- **Connections**

In addition to the team of Coordinators - the two primary decision-making groups in the Parish are the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee. Some responses identified this structure as being cumbersome and detrimental to well-considered yet efficient decision making. With 3 Coordinators, 2 Representatives from each community for both the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee along with the school principals – at any point in time a total of 17 individuals have been engaged in these key functions. It has been proposed that whatever model is adopted this structure could be streamlined.

5. Analysis of Findings

The responses of the Gordon Parish Community have been reviewed under four themes as follows:

- Sacramental Life
- Community
- Administration
- Decision Making Processes

5.1 Sacramental Life

For most Gordon parishioners who attend Sunday Mass regularly their greatest desire is for the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist in the Gordon Parish to be accessible, consistent and of high quality. In addition they would like the sacraments to be available ie Baptism, First Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation and

Marriages as required. Specific liturgies which they would like to continue included Funerals and Anointing Masses plus the taking of the Eucharist to the sick and housebound in private homes and to the Nursing Hostel. The preparation of children to receive the sacraments is also important.

The generous committed work of a number of parishioners in ensuring the Masses on Sunday are well prepared was widely acknowledged and this commitment will most likely be sustained into the foreseeable future (i.e. 3 years).

Mass attendance figures across the decade 2008 - 2018 in the Gordon Parish have varied between high points of 200 (2008) / 180 (2014) and the low points of 120 (2017) / 135 (2018). It is recognised that the Gordon Parish numbers may be inflated by the attendance of Bungaree parishioners at the Springbank and Gordon masses. Of note is that in 2018, of the four neighbouring parishes (Bungaree, Creswick, Daylesford & Gordon) the Gordon Parish has the highest attendance level - Bungaree: 42, Creswick: 80, Daylesford: 80, Gordon: 135. Whilst it is recognised that Mass attendance figures are a rather inexact science these figures support the need for three Masses per weekend in the Gordon/Bungaree parishes over the next 3 years.

5.2 Community

The Ballan community gathers every Sunday for Mass and there is also a regular gathering for prayer on Thursdays. Gordon gathers on three out of the four Sundays a month while Springbank gathers on a monthly basis except during a month which has five Sundays when there is a second Mass that month. It was not surprising therefore that the majority of responses to the surveys came from the Ballan community and spoke positively of that community. Ballan has the additional focus of the hostel and the provision of communion to the residents. In addition, both Gordon and Ballan have the school which is an additional avenue for focus and involvement, although there is a universal desire for greater school and Parish interaction. When Springbank has the monthly Mass there is a good attendance and a strong sense of community. There have been positive comments from priests who have supplied at Springbank on the sense of community especially relating to the 'cuppa' after Mass.

The three communities of Ballan, Gordon and Springbank are not particularly integrated. Although all three communities would strongly identify as being part of the Gordon Parish there is a sense they operate independently of each other but can rely on each other when there is a need for support and assistance.

The Parish Vision Statement describes the type of community the Gordon Parish is striving to be:

'That all parishioners and visitors are welcomed as family and nourished as the Body of Christ'

It has been identified in the consultation process that the Vision is overdue for a refresh and that it could present a stronger commitment to evangelisation.

In the past there have been some instances involving interactions between individuals or at Parish meetings where conflict has not been well managed resulting in hurt and division. A number of parishioners and past Coordinators shared stories where the views of individuals were not respected and conflict situations escalated without clear resolution. Any Governance model requires robust processes for addressing conflict

situations in order to prevent escalation and the potential for a Bullying and Harassment claim against the Parish.

5.3 Governance & Administration

The day to day administration of the Parish has operated smoothly. Both the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee ensure the pastoral and administrative requirements of the Parish are attended to. The Parish Secretary role is a coordinating point and attends to administrative tasks.

A key challenge for any parish relying on a series of rotating personnel to fulfil key roles (Coordinators, Parish Pastoral Council members and Finance Committee members) is effective transfer of knowledge and induction of incoming people. This issue will require specific attention regardless of the Governance model pursued.

The issue of ongoing Parish leadership poses a significant concern for parishioners. The establishment of a supervised, community-led Parish model in 2013 with a team of three Coordinators was viewed as a strong positive for the Parish community. During the first four years the Parish was very proud of the manner in which it operated. This model has run into difficulties during 2017/18. The biggest concern is there are not parishioners who are available to take on the role.

The Diocese has expressed a concern that not all of the issues relating to compliance legislation are being met. Work has been progressed to identify and address these issues. Where there are outstanding omissions, these need to be identified and acted upon. In ensuring that compliance activities are undertaken in a proactive manner, consideration could be given to employment of a part-time Business Manager role, potentially shared with neighbouring parishes.

The supervised, community-led Parish model which was established in the Gordon Parish in 2013 has been successful and this is widely acknowledged by the community. It has faltered across the past eighteen months due to the inappropriate pressure placed upon the Coordinators by some individuals/groups in the Parish, withdrawal of support for the model from the Diocese and the absence of parishioners willing to take on the Coordinator role. At the present time it is unlikely that individuals will come forward to volunteer for the Coordinator role.

5.4 Decision-Making Processes

Like many smaller parishes, Gordon has faced, and will continue to face, some challenging decisions. Many of these revolve around a different Sunday Mass attendance profile, a Catholic population which is less connected to a Parish community and the future use of buildings which were built for a different era. Insurance and maintenance costs for these buildings present a financial burden which diminishes the resources and capacity for the Parish to be involved in more relevant ministries in today's society. This situation is compounded by the fact that a number of these buildings have a significant emotional attachment. In exploring potential governance options, the overall effectiveness of decision-making processes inherent in the model, including approaches for engagement of the Parish community, needs to be carefully considered.

6. Characteristics of a Vibrant Parish

Within the context of the Parish of Gordon the following considerations have been identified as important to vibrancy of Parish life:

- Weekend Mass celebrations
- Local access to Sacraments
- Engaged Parish community – recognising the desire to maintain a sense of community in Ballan, Gordon and Springbank
- Parish ministries shared broadly throughout the community
- Focus on Pastoral Care and Community Development
- Spiritually nurturing with provision for faith development opportunities
- Clear leadership
- Provides for clear decision-making processes that:
 - engage the Parish community in key decisions
 - are accepted by the Parish community (especially when decisions are unpopular)
- Efficient and effective administration
- Effective communication between the leadership group(s) and the community
- Opportunities for induction and leadership development
- Strong sense of connection with the Diocese.

Additional considerations with regard to the potential for implementation of a successful governance structure include:

- Community confidence with respect to Decision-Making processes
- Realistic expectations of individuals to undertake key roles
- The option is feasible in terms of attracting suitable personnel for key roles
- The option can be sustained into the foreseeable future (ie 3 years in the first instance)
- There are clear roles that readily sustain compliance with legislative and policy requirements at both Parish and Diocese levels
- The option is affordable.

7. Preferred Governance Model

An Interim Report summarising key findings of the Commission and describing potential governance options was released to the Parish community for feedback on the 12th February 2019. In follow-up to this a final Parish meeting was convened at Donegan's Farm on Sunday 24th March to discern the Parish communities preferred approach to governance of the Parish for the foreseeable future. This meeting was attended by 36 parishioners.

Each of the following options were considered at this meeting:

- A Lay-Led Coordinator model
- A Single Lay Parish Leadership Team – combining pastoral and financial management
- A Lay Parish Leadership Structure – with key functions distributed between a Parish Pastoral Council and a separate Finance Committee
- A Pastoral Associate model
- A Shared Parish Priest model

Further information on these models is enclosed at Appendix A.

At this meeting the clear majority of participants converged on their preferred governance model which involves a Lay Parish Leadership Structure incorporating the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee. The preferred approach involves maintenance of both the Parish Pastoral Council and the Finance Committee as separate entities, while the role and function of these Committees would be revised to include functions previously performed by the Coordinators.

The Visiting Priest, the Supervising Priest and the Parish Secretary would operate as they have previously.

Advantages

- This model is a way for the Bishop to address the diminishing number of priests available for full-time parish ministry
- Decision-making is not the responsibility of three individuals but rests with a larger representative body
- Each community assumes responsibility for the operation of that community (eg. buildings & grounds, Sunday liturgies, community development) through their committee representatives and ministry volunteers
- This approach builds on the experience to date of a lay-led governance structure with responsibility shared with a supervising priest

Disadvantages

- Finance, maintenance and property issues could dominate the Leadership agenda
- No guarantee that parishioners will come forward to serve on the Parish Pastoral Council and Finance Committee
- No longer would Co-ordinators have specific oversight of one of the following areas of Parish activity:
 - Sacraments & Liturgy
 - Stewardship & Administration
 - Community & Outreach
- Members of ministry teams may feel they are no longer supported
- No clarity re who takes responsibility for follow-up actions at the Parish level

For this structure to be successful the following needs to occur

- The structure to be revisited by the Parish community and a pledge of support for the implementation of the model obtained
- The Diocese provides unequivocal commitment to the structure for a specified time
- The role and operating procedures for the Leadership Structure needs to be carefully designed and communicated to the whole Parish community
- Decision-making structures are clearly identified and documented
- Provision of annual induction and formation opportunities for the Committee members be resourced by the Parish and the Diocese
- Formation in positive conflict resolution skills and respectful dialogue is part of a mandatory induction program for new members

- Terms of Reference and operating procedures would need to be developed/reviewed to reflect the scope and function of this leadership model
- A key contact would need to be identified for liaison with the Diocese
- Designated key contacts be identified for Liturgy, Administration and Community/Outreach functions
- A designated nominee would need to be identified to monitor and support the Parish Secretary role
- The three communities would need to be committed to retaining their identities through community members' continuing commitment to take on leadership positions and ministry roles.

8. Recommendations

The following recommendations take into account the responses of the Gordon Parish Community during the Commission process.

1. Governance Model

- 1.1. It is recommended for the period 2019 - 2022, the governance of St Patrick's Parish, Gordon is delivered through a structure consisting of a Parish Pastoral Council and a Parish Finance Committee working in partnership with the Supervising Priest as required by Canon Law.
- 1.2. Further, it is recommended that this model be supported by establishing an Executive Team comprising the Supervising Priest, the Chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Chairperson of the Finance Committee. Terms of Reference for the Executive Team are to be developed and endorsed by the Executive Team and then shared with all Committee members and the broader Parish community.

2. Parish Pastoral Council

2.1. Role Clarity

It is recommended that Terms of Reference for the operation of the Parish Pastoral Council are revised and a draft circulated to the Parish Community for feedback. The Terms of Reference will include:

- Role of the Parish Pastoral Council
- Relationship of the Parish Pastoral Council to the Supervising Priest
- Membership
- Meeting Operation

2.2. Membership

It is recommended that the membership of the Parish Pastoral Council be:

- two community members from the Ballan community
- two community members from the Gordon community
- two community members from the Springbank community
- the principal of St Patrick's School Gordon and the principal of St Brigid's Primary School Ballan being ex-officio members on a rotating annual basis.

2.3. Appointment

It is recommended that the existing members of the Parish Pastoral Council continue until completion of their current tenure. It is further recommended that a transparent process for nomination and appointment to the Parish Pastoral Council be established. The period of appointment will be for three years, with the option of a second three year term after which a minimum period of 12 months break would be required prior to eligibility for re-appointment. Letters of Appointment signed by the Supervising Priest will state the commencement and conclusion dates.

3. Parish Finance Committee

3.1. Role Clarity

It is recommended that Terms of Reference for the operation of the Parish Finance Committee be revised and a draft circulated to the Parish Community for feedback. The Terms of Reference will include:

- Role of the Parish Finance Committee
- Relationship of the Parish Finance Committee to the Supervising Priest
- Membership
- Meeting Operation

3.2. Membership

It is recommended that the membership of the Parish Finance Committee be:

- two community members from the Ballan community
- two community members from the Gordon community
- two community members from the Springbank community.

3.3. Appointment

It is recommended that a transparent process for nomination and appointment to the Parish Finance Committee be established. The period of appointment will be for three years, with the option of a second three year term following which a minimum period of 12 months break would be required prior to eligibility for re-appointment. Letters of Appointment signed by the Supervising Priest will state the commencement and conclusion dates.

4. Parish Pastoral Council / Parish Finance Committee Operation

4.1 Executive

It is recommended that at the commencement of each year an Executive consisting of a chairperson, deputy chairperson and secretary be established, one for the Parish Pastoral Council and one for the Parish Finance Committee. The Executive is to ensure that meeting agendas, minutes of meetings and other meeting documentation are well planned and distributed in a timely manner, and that discrete areas of responsibility (including ministry contacts) are allocated to individuals. This information needs to be included in the Parish directory which is to be updated as required.

4.2 Induction / Formation

It is recommended that all new members of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee participate in a formal induction program. Ongoing formation activities for each group are to be scheduled annually. These activities need to include:

- Pastoral development for Parish Pastoral Council members and
- ongoing formation in conflict management.

4.3 Planning

It is recommended that an annual planning calendar that outlines the key dates for each group be developed including activities associated with convening an annual Parish assembly to report on the year's activities and financial position. The annual planning calendar should be prepared in conjunction with the relevant Diocesan staff i.e. Parish Finance Committee – the Diocesan Business Manager; Parish Pastoral Council – the Diocesan Pastoral Development Coordinator.

5. Parish Documentation

5.1. Policies and Procedures

It is recommended that a review of policies and procedures for both the Parish Pastoral Council and the Finance Committee be undertaken to reflect changes associated with roles and responsibilities that were previously managed by the Coordinator roles. This should include a clear decision-making matrix to clarify the types of decisions to be made by each of the Committees, the types of decisions that need to be made in consultation with the Parish community and the types of decisions that need to be made in consultation with the Supervising Priest.

5.2. Induction Manual

It is recommended that an Induction Manual be developed and maintained in order to summarise key information and expectations for all existing and incoming Committee members.

5.3. Contacts Directory

It is recommended that the Parish Contacts Directory be updated annually following allocation of roles and responsibilities within the Parish Pastoral Council and the Finance Committee, in order to establish clarity of key contacts, roles and responsibilities. Additional updates should be undertaken as changes occur.

5.4. Parish Operating Plan

It is recommended that in consultation with the Parish community, a process be established for development and regular review (annually) of a Parish Operating Plan, which should shape the activities of the Parish Pastoral Council and provide a basis for feedback on Parish activities to community members via the Parish bulletin and at the annual Parish assembly.

6. Key Relationships

6.1 Supervising Priest

It is recommended that the current document on the role of the Supervising Priest be redrafted by the Parish Pastoral Council in conjunction with the current Supervising Priest and the appropriate Diocesan staff. This document would need to be approved by the Bishop. It would need to clearly state the frequency and types of communication that is required between the Supervising Priest, The Executive Team, the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee.

6.2 Visiting Priest

It is recommended that the current document on the role of the Visiting Priest be reviewed by the Parish Pastoral Council in conjunction with the current Visiting Priest and the appropriate Diocesan staff. It would need to clearly state the frequency and types of communication that is required between the Visiting Priest and the Parish Pastoral Council.

6.3 Parish Community

It is recommended that a strategy be developed by both the Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Committee which will lead to consistent, accessible and transparent communication to the Parish community of the work of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee (including regular financial reporting) with a clear process for questions/issues to be addressed.

6.4 Church Communities

It is recommended that one Parish Pastoral Council member and one Parish Finance Committee member from the Ballan, Gordon and Springbank church communities is responsible for the communication between the church community and the Parish Pastoral Council / Parish Finance Committee.

6.5 Parish Secretary

It is recommended that a designated member of the Parish Pastoral Council and/or the Finance Committee be responsible for the oversight of the Parish Secretary role through weekly contact and a quarterly review to identify goals, workload, priorities and support required.

6.6 School Principals

It is recommended that a key priority for the Parish Pastoral Council be the building of a strong relationship between the Parish and School communities.

6.7 Parish Ministry Teams

It is recommended that the Parish Directory be maintained to include current contact details for each ministry. Parish Pastoral Council members are to be allocated portfolio responsibility for particular ministries and ensure that the contacts for those ministries are regularly contacted to ensure the ministry is connected and resourced.

6.8 Diocesan Contacts

It is recommended that the Parish Pastoral Council Chairperson will be the point of contact for Diocesan staff on all pastoral matters. It is recommended that the Parish Finance Committee Chairperson will be the point of contact for Diocesan staff on all financial matters.

7. Implementation of Recommendations

7.1 It is recommended that a small 'Transition Team' be established for a time-limited period to develop a plan and coordinate implementation of the recommendations above. This team should support the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee in adopting and embedding the recommendations to enhance clarity of responsibility for all administrative, financial and sacramental tasks necessary to support the mission, vibrancy, growth and sustainability of the Parish. Membership of this team should comprise:

- The Supervising Priest
- A representative from the Diocese
- Three representatives from the Parish with experience in Parish leadership.

Appendix 1 – Alternative Governance Options

Alternative governance options considered in the course of this Commission are summarised below.

1. Lay-Led Coordinator model

For the past five years the Gordon Parish has been led by a team of three Coordinators who were entrusted with the day to day pastoral care of the Parish. Each of the Coordinators had specific oversight of one of the following areas of Parish activity:

- Sacraments & Liturgy
- Stewardship & Administration
- Community & Outreach

The key focus of the role was to support and coordinate the various ministries that operate in a particular area. A role description had been developed for each Coordinator.

In addition, a Moderator was appointed from the coordinators. The principal function of this position was to be the central point of contact between the Parish and the Diocese.

Each of the Coordinators was appointed for a period of three years.

The Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee continued to function. A Supervising Priest and a Visiting Priest were appointed by the Bishop.

Advantages

This model is a way for the bishop to address the diminishing number of priests available for full-time Parish ministry. The model is provided for in the Canon Law of the Church (517.2). It is also a legitimate expression of an individual's baptismal call. In conjunction with the appointment of a Supervising Priest and a Visiting Priest it has enabled the Parish to continue to operate in an authentic and efficient manner without a resident priest. The appointment of parishioners to the coordinator roles rather than external appointments has resulted in the Parish having a real sense of ownership of and investment in the structure.

Disadvantages

The biggest challenge for this model is the small number of parishioners who are prepared to take on the Coordinator role. There are a number of reasons for this:

- A lack of confidence on the part of individual parishioners that she / he has the necessary skills and experience to undertake the role
- An inability to devote sufficient time for the role
- A lack of respect on the part of a few parishioners towards some of the past coordinators
- A misunderstanding by some parishioners of the parameters of the role
- The rolling three year appointment process can result in discernment fatigue in relation to the appointment of a new Coordinator.

For the role to be successful the following needs to occur

- The concept to be revisited by the whole Parish community and a pledge of support for the implementation of the model obtained
- The Diocese provides unequivocal commitment to the structure for a specified time
- Annual induction and formation opportunities for the Coordinators are provided and resourced by the Parish and the Diocese
- Decision making structures are clearly identified and documented i.e. which groups / individuals make which decisions
- A designated Coordinator would need to be identified for liaison with the Diocese

- Designated Coordinators would be identified for Liturgy, Administration and Community/Outreach functions
- A designated Coordinator would be identified to monitor and support the Parish Secretary role
- The three communities would need to be committed to retaining their identities through community members continuing commitment to take on leadership positions and ministry roles
- Formation in positive conflict resolution skills are regularly offered to groups / individuals in Parish leadership positions.

2. Single Parish Leadership Team Model

Description

This approach involves establishment of a single Parish Leadership Team incorporating the previous roles of the three Parish Coordinators, the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee. Membership would consist of:

- Two community representatives each from Springbank, Gordon and Ballan one of whom will act as the Coordinator of each community (6)
- Three members (preferably one from each community) who have financial expertise (3)
- Ex Officio - School Principal on an alternating basis (1)

The Visiting Priest, the Supervising Priest and the Parish Secretary would operate as they have previously. Within the parameters set by Canon Law and the Diocesan requirements, the Leadership Team would be the decision-making body of the Parish. A role description and operating procedures would need to be developed. In addition, a key point of contact with the Diocese would need to be established and a designated Parish leadership team member would need to be identified to monitor and support the Parish Secretary role.

Relative to the current interim arrangements there are no additional financial costs to the Parish for this model.

Advantages

- This model is a way for the Bishop to address the diminishing number of priests available for full-time parish ministry
- Single Leadership Team responsible for making the decisions
- Clarity for follow-up actions within each of the 3 Parish communities
- Each community led by a Parish leadership team member assumes responsibility for the operation of that community eg. buildings & grounds, Sunday liturgies, community development
- Brings finance and the pastoral life together in one focus
- May make the leadership role less daunting leading to more community members taking on the role.

Disadvantages

- Finance, maintenance and property issues could dominate the Leadership Team agenda at the expense of pastoral priorities
- No guarantee that parishioners will come forward to serve on the leadership team
- No longer would Co-ordinators have specific oversight of one of the following areas of Parish activity:
 - Sacraments & Liturgy
 - Stewardship & Administration

- Community & Outreach
- Members of ministry teams may feel they are no longer supported
- No clarity re who takes responsibility for follow-up actions at the Parish level.

For this structure to be successful the following needs to occur:

- The structure to be revisited by the whole Parish community and a pledge of support for the implementation of the model obtained
- The Diocese provides unequivocal commitment to the structure for a specified time
- The role and operating procedures for the Leadership Team needs to be carefully designed and communicated to the whole Parish community
- Formation in positive conflict resolution skills and respectful dialogue is part of a mandatory induction program for new members.

3. Pastoral Associate Model

A salaried part-time Pastoral Associate position be established. This position might be shared with one or two neighbouring parishes.

A Pastoral Associate is a non-ordained person working in leadership in a Catholic parish. It would be a pre-requisite that the Pastoral Associate has relevant qualifications in theology and possess the necessary skills and resources to adequately minister to the community in which she / he serves.

A part-time Pastoral Associate in the Gordon Parish might provide leadership and support in some of the following areas:

- Liturgy Preparation
- Promoting the School / Parish connection
- Linking the Parish with Diocesan priorities
- Parish Community Development
- Administration support to the Parish Secretary particularly in the area of compliance

The Visiting Priest, the Supervising Priest and the Parish Secretary would operate as they have previously. This model retains the current Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee structures.

Advantages

- Would bring qualifications and expertise to the role
- Depending on the number of hours would be available to parishioners on a consistent basis
- If appointed across parishes could identify opportunities for resource sharing
- The Pastoral Associate would provide the key point of contact with the Diocese.

Disadvantages

- The Parish may not be able to afford a salaried position
- The Pastoral Associate may be viewed as an *outsider* who doesn't appreciate the dynamics and aspirations of the community
- Would not address the decision-making dilemmas.

For this structure to be successful the following needs to occur

- Sufficient finance to be available for the employment of a part-time Pastoral Associate

- The Pastoral Associate role must be understood by the Parish community and a pledge of support for the implementation of the model obtained
- The Diocese provides unequivocal commitment for the employment of a Pastoral Associate
- An appropriately qualified and experienced person is available for the role
- The three communities would need to be committed to retaining their identities through community members' continuing commitment to take on leadership positions and ministry roles.

4. Shared Parish Priest Model

This model involves one Priest assuming Parish Priest responsibilities for two or more parishes. This has been the case for a number of years in the Ballarat Diocese with a significant number of parishes. The draft Pastoral Planning Document of the Ballarat Diocese *Looking Forward* which was circulated in early 2018, models the scenario of one priest responsible for two or more parishes as the normal way for parish organisation into the future.

In June 2018 Bishop Paul Bird advised of the establishment of three new parishes in the Diocese:

- St Mary Mackillop Parish, Western Border which encompasses the Parishes of Casterton, Coleraine, Edenhope, Hamilton and Harrow.
- Holy Family Parish, Northeast Mallee which encompasses the Parishes of Swan Hill, Sea Lake and the northern part of Quambatook parish
- Mary Glowrey Parish, East Wimmera which encompasses the Parishes of Birchip, Charlton, Donald, St Arnaud and Wycheproof and the church community of Boort.

In this scenario the Gordon Parish would be linked with one or more neighbouring parishes under the leadership of one Parish Priest.

This model retains the current Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee structures. Membership will consist of:

- Two community representatives each from Springbank, Gordon and Ballan (6) for the Parish Pastoral Council along with an Ex Officio - School Principal on an alternating basis (1)
- Two community members from each community for the Finance Committee (6)

The Parish Priest would continue to be supported by a Visiting Priest.

A role description and operating procedures would need to be developed. In order to minimise the administrative burden on the shared Parish Priest, a key point of contact with the Diocese could be established and an individual could be identified to monitor and support the Parish Secretary role.

Advantages

- This model is a way for the Bishop to address the diminishing number of priests available for full-time parish ministry
- It provides an approach that is aligned with the Diocesan 'Looking Forward' strategy and allows for a fair and equitable distribution of resources across all parishes of the Diocese
- It provides opportunities to pool resources both financial and personnel, to further enhance each community's mission
- The Parish Priest is supported in Pastoral decisions and activities by the Parish Pastoral Council
- The Parish Priest is supported in Financial decisions and activities by the Finance Committee.

Disadvantages

- Members of ministry teams may feel they are no longer needed and withdraw their support
- Could escalate a fear that the Diocese *will take over* the Parish

- The Supervising Priest may be viewed as someone who has a limited presence in the parish.

For this structure to be successful the following needs to occur

- The three communities would need to be committed to retaining their identities through community members' continuing commitment to take on leadership positions and ministry roles
- Community members being open, creative and enthusiastic about the manner in which resources might be shared.