BALLARAT DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL STATUTES

1.1 Shaping the future

The Council helps shape and evaluate the Diocese's strategic direction through a synodal process of listening, dialogue and discernment, ensuring that decisions reflect the voice of the People of God and support the Bishop's leadership.

Each meeting shall commence with a prepared, intentional prayer designed to foster a spirit of synodality and enhance the Council's deliberations and dialogue. A designated Prayer subcommittee, appointed by the Council, shall be responsible for preparing and leading this prayer at each meeting.

1.2 Communication and Collaboration

The Council maintains **open, structured and ongoing communication** with key diocesan bodies and partners to ensure alignment, transparency and shared mission. This collaboration is essential for fostering trust and co-responsibility across the Diocese.

Meetings to be held four times a year, a mix of in person (across the diocese) and online meetings.

PROCESS:

To make communication meaningful and actionable, the Council adopts a **multi-layered approach**:

Listening

- **Identifying Key Issues:** Actively gather insights from parishes, schools, ministries and community groups to understand emerging pastoral needs and opportunities.
- **Commissioning Research:** Initiate studies and surveys to provide evidence-based understanding of diocesan realities, including demographic trends, faith engagement and social challenges.
- **Reference/Working Groups:** Ex officio or delegated representatives from key pastoral areas (e.g. Social Justice, Youth, Aboriginal Ministry, Caritas, Safeguarding, Archives) bring the pastoral reality and insights of their specific area. Collaborative teams could also be established to address specific priorities, ensuring representation from diverse voices and expertise.

Dialogue

- **Exploring Pastoral Concerns:** Create spaces for open conversation on matters affecting the life and mission of the Diocese, fostering mutual understanding and co-responsibility**.**
- **Responding to Church-wide Initiatives:** Engage deeply with local, national and global developments, including outcomes:

- The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia: Implement recommendations that strengthen participation and mission.
- The Synod for a Synodal Church: Align diocesan practices with the global call for synodality.
- The 2024 Diocesan Assembly: Integrate outcomes into strategic planning and pastoral priorities.
- Light from the Southern Cross Recommendations: Apply governance principles that promote transparency, accountability and shared leadership.

Discernment

- **Proposing and Reviewing Strategic Plans:** Develop and evaluate a diocesan strategic plan that responds to current realities and anticipates future needs. Ongoing management of this strategic plan.
- **Organising Diocesan Events:** Facilitate gatherings that promote unity, formation and shared mission across the Diocese.
- **Fostering Unity and Trust:** Ensure that strategic decisions build confidence in diocesan leadership and strengthen communion among all members of the Church.

1.3. Reporting Requirements

- **Quarterly Strategic Updates:** Provide written reports summarizing progress on diocesan priorities, outcomes of listening sessions and key decisions.
- **Feedback Integration:** Include insights gathered from parishes, working/reference groups and agencies to demonstrate synodal listening in action.
- **Accessible Formats:** Distribute reports digitally and in print for wider accessibility.

1.4. Presentations at Meetings

- **College of Consultors & Zone representatives:** Present updates on pastoral priorities, governance developments and strategic initiatives.
- **Diocesan Finance Council:** Share financial implications of strategic plans and ensure transparency in resource allocation.
- **Representatives from Working Groups/Reference Groups, along with Diocesan Staff:** Host briefings to ensure all ministries work collaboratively toward shared goals.
- **Parish Pastoral Councils & Leadership Teams:** Offer clear communication on diocesan vision and invite feedback for local implementation.
- **DOBCEL:** Align educational strategies with diocesan mission.

1.5. Collaborative Forums

- **Joint Planning Sessions:** Organise annual or semi-annual gatherings with representatives from these bodies to review progress and set priorities.
- **Synodal Listening Events:** Create opportunities for dialogue across agencies and diocesan groups, ensuring diverse voices shape decision-making.

1.6. Digital Communication

- **Shared Online Platform:** Develop a secure portal for documents, meeting notes and feedback.
- **Regular Newsletters:** Highlight key decisions, upcoming events and opportunities for engagement.

This approach ensures that **communication is not just informational but participatory**, reinforcing synodality and supporting the Bishop's leadership through transparency and collaboration.

2. Self-Review

The Council commits to reviewing its role, effectiveness and fidelity to synodal principles every year. This process ensures that the DPC remains responsive to the needs of the Diocese and continues to embody a culture of listening, dialogue and co-responsibility.

A structured, synodal review process includes:

2.1. Synodal Listening and Feedback

- Community Consultation: Invite feedback from parishes, working/reference groups, agencies and other stakeholders through surveys, listening sessions and focus groups.
- Inclusive Participation: Ensure voices from diverse communities—including clergy, laity and those on the margins—are heard and valued.
- Transparency: Share findings openly with the Diocese to build trust and accountability.

2.2. Internal Reflection

- Council Retreat: Hold a dedicated annual retreat for prayerful discernment on the Council's mission, achievements and areas for growth.
- Benchmarking: Compare current practices against synodal principles and governance best practices (e.g., Light from the Southern Cross recommendations).
- Role Clarity: Review whether the Council's responsibilities remain aligned with diocesan priorities and the Bishop's leadership needs.

2.3. Reporting and Action

- **Comprehensive Review Report:** Prepare a detailed report summarizing feedback, evaluation outcomes and recommendations for improvement.
- **Presentation to the Bishop and Key Bodies:** Share findings with the Council of Priests, College of Consultors and other diocesan leadership groups.
- **Action Plan:** Develop a clear roadmap for implementing changes, with timelines and accountability measures.

2.44. Ongoing Synodal Formation

- **Formation Sessions:** Offer training for Council members on synodal leadership, governance and collaborative decision-making.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Use insights from the review to strengthen synodal engagement in all aspects of the Council's work.

This approach ensures the review is not just procedural but deeply synodal, fostering transparency, participation and shared responsibility.

3. Membership

3.1 Ex-Officio Members

- The Bishop
- The Vicar General
- The Executive Officer

3.2 Appointed Members

- Up to 12 members appointed by the Bishop, ensuring diversity and relevant experience.

- Appointments follow a process of engagement.

3.3 Additional Members

- The Bishop may appoint up to three additional members.

3.4 Terms

- Members serve for three years, renewable once with approval of the Bishop.
- Ex-officio members are not subject to term limits.

3.5 Executive Officer

- A member of the Pastoral Planning Panel serves as Executive Officer. (Could this be on a rotational basis – is this the best way)
- A minute secretary attends all meetings.

4. Member Attributes and Selection

4.1 Personal Qualities

Members must:

- Be active in the Diocese's Catholic community
- Demonstrate leadership and commitment to synodality
- Be available for all meetings
- Engage with their local parish or community
- Be at least 18 years old

4.2 Compliance

- Hold a current Working with Children Check (or be exempt, ie VIT registration)

4.3 Process of engagement

Applicants must:

- Address the required attributes
- Provide relevant background
- Nominate two suitable referees including an active diocesan priest

4.4 Selection Panel

Chaired by the Bishop and includes up to three other members:

5. Appointment and Commissioning

Members are formally appointed by the Bishop and commissioned at the annual Mass of the Oils (or at a time that is reasonable)

6. Vacancies and Resignations

- **Resignation**: Members may resign with one month's written notice to the Bishop.
- **Ineligibility**: Members who no longer meet criteria (e.g., relocation form the Diocese) may be asked to resign.
- **Removal**: The Bishop may remove a member at any time.
- **Casual Vacancies**: Filled for the remainder of the original term.

7. Executive Structure

- The Bishop appoints a Chair from among the members.
- The Executive includes the Bishop, Chair and Executive Officer.
- The Executive sets meeting protocols and the Council's work plan.

8. Conflict of Interest

Members must declare any conflict of interest, such as:

- Personal interests conflicting with Council duties
- Dual roles in other organisations
- Conflicting responsibilities

The Chair, in consultation with the Bishop and possibly the Council, will address any declared conflicts.

9. Vacancy of the See

If the Diocesan See becomes vacant, the Council ceases to operate. A new Bishop must re-establish the BDPC within one year of taking possession of the Diocese, as per Canon 511.

10. Amendments to the Statutes

- The Bishop may amend these statutes at any time.
- Amendments may also be proposed by a two-thirds Council vote but require the Bishop's approval.
- All changes must align with the universal and particular law of the Catholic Church and the **customs of the** Diocese of Ballarat.

11. Decision-making and Decision-taking

- While in all matters it is hoped that members will come to resolutions by consensus, there may be times when further discernment is required prior and then presented to the Bishop for final decision-taking (cf. can. 514 §1)
- If the Bishop is unable to agree to a decision proposed by the majority of the Council, it is expected he will, always respecting people's rights to privacy and confidentiality, explain to members of the Council his reasons for not accepting the proposed recommendation.
- Matters requiring the commitment of expenditure or other resources shall have a business case or detailed budget provided for the consideration of the Council prior to a recommendation for the Bishop.

12. Dispute resolution

Please consult the Diocesan Grievance Policy

12. Canon Law

- Can. 511 In every diocese and to the extent that pastoral circumstances suggest it, a pastoral council is to be constituted which under the authority of the bishop investigates, considers and proposes practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works in the diocese.
- Can. 512 §1. A pastoral council consists of members of the Christian faithful who are in full communion with the Catholic Church – clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life and especially laity – who are designated in a manner determined by the diocesan bishop.
- §2. The Christian faithful who are designated to a pastoral council are to be selected in such a way that they truly reflect the entire portion of the people of God which constitutes the diocese, with consideration given to the different areas of the diocese, social conditions and professions and the role which they have in the apostolate whether individually or joined with others.
- §3. No one except members of the Christian faithful outstanding in firm faith, good morals and prudence is to be designated to a pastoral council.

- Can. 513 §1. A pastoral council is constituted for a period of time according to the prescripts of the statutes which are issued by the bishop. §2. When the see is vacant, a pastoral council ceases.