



DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA

Constitution of the DIOCESAN COUNCIL OF LAITY

As a key structures for developing and strengthening lay participation, our Diocesan Pastoral Plan involved establishing a Diocesan Council of Laity. Membership will be one lay representative from each canonical parish. Such a representative will usually be the lay chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council or its equivalent, or that person's delegate. The Council will meet twice a year with the Bishop to discuss, be consulted on and contribute to the planning of key aspects of the life and mission of the diocese.

(Diocesan Pastoral Plan, p. 36)

1. Like the College of Consultors, the Council of Priests and meetings of the College of Deacons, the Council of Laity is a consultative rather than executive body, but membership of the Council of Laity should be seen as an opportunity to participate actively, effectively and responsibly in the pastoral planning of the Diocese, working in partnership with the Bishop and his Priests and Deacons.
2. The Diocesan Council of Laity meets twice each year, on suitable Saturdays in March and November (or thereabouts).
3. The membership of the Council of Laity is one lay representative from each canonical parish (currently 55). Each member should see themselves as truly representative of and responsible to their parish community. Since every parish is required to have a forum for lay participation, the parish representative on the Council of Laity should be the chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council, Parish-in-Council or equivalent. Ideally, that chairperson should be elected by the parish forum. Each member of the Council of Laity represents the lay faithful of the parish community, and should seek the views of their community before attending a meeting of the Council.
4. A parish representative may continue as a member of the Council of Laity for as long as she or he is the chairperson of the parish forum, but it is recommended that no-one occupies such a position for more than five years.
5. Every parish should be represented at every meeting of the Council of Laity. If the official representative cannot be present, he or she is to send an alternate: the Secretary of the Council should be notified of this before the meeting.
6. The Bishop will be present at each meeting of the Council of Laity. If for some reason it is impossible for him to be present, he will send his delegate.
7. The Council of Laity elects a Chairperson from its number, who remains in office for two meetings. The role of the Chairperson is to chair the meetings of the Council, to liaise with the Bishop and Council Secretary regarding the agenda for each meeting and to ensure that any agreed decisions are followed up. A person may be re-elected as chairman for three consecutive years only, and may then be elected again only after a gap of three years. If the chairperson cannot be present for a meeting, the Council will elect a chairperson for that particular meeting. The Council Secretary will conduct such an election at the beginning of the meeting.

8. A secretary will be proposed by the Chairperson and appointed after approval from the Council of Laity. It is not required that the secretary be a member of the Council of Laity. If not a member, the secretary may participate in discussions but may not vote. She or he will remain in office for two meetings, and may then be re-appointed as often as willed by the Council. The Secretary's role is to take minutes of each meeting, to check those minutes with the Chairperson and Bishop, to distribute copies of the agreed minutes to all members as soon as possible – and certainly within a month - of the date of that meeting, and to notify members of the date and topic of the next meeting at least a month before that meeting, along with any relevant papers. All of this should be carried out in liaison with the Bishop's Secretary at the White House.

(Revision agreed at the Council meeting on 20.5.06)

9. The Chairperson and Secretary are the only officers of the Council. They liaise with the Bishop regarding the arrangements for each meeting.
10. The timetable for each meeting is normally as follows:

From 10.30	Arrive for registration and coffee
11.00	Meeting
12.45	Prayer
1.00	Lunch
2.00	Meeting
3.00	Close & Departures

Meetings will only continue after 3.00 p.m. if it has been agreed at the previous meeting that the topic for discussion requires a longer gathering. This will be the exception rather than the rule.

11. The format for each meeting will usually be:
- (a) Welcome, introduction and opening prayer
 - (b) Agreement of the Minutes of the last meeting
 - (c) Brief discussion of any matters arising from the last meeting, and report on any actions taken.
 - (c) Introduction of the main topic by the Bishop or a speaker appointed by him
 - (d) Group discussion
 - (e) Feedback from groups
 - (f) Response and thoughts from the Bishop
 - (g) Agreement on the topic for next meeting
 - (h) If time, an open 'Question & Answer' session with the Bishop
12. Each meeting of the Council of Laity will focus on one topic only, to be agreed at the previous meeting between members and the Bishop.
13. Representatives are to report back to their parish communities after each meeting in as effective a way as possible.
14. The Bishop or his delegate will report back after each meeting to the College of Consultors, the Council of Priests and the College of Deacons.
15. Any expenses incurred by the officers of the Council (postage, stationery, etc) should be sent to the Diocesan Finance Office for reimbursement. Any major expenses (over £50) must be agreed beforehand with the Diocesan Finance Office.
16. As and when such a gathering is judged necessary or useful by the Bishop, in liaison with the College of Consultors, the Council of Laity will hold a joint meeting with a representative group of priests, deacons and religious from the diocese. This will constitute any future Diocesan Pastoral Council.
17. The Council of Laity and its structures will be reviewed after the first two years, and then regularly on a three-yearly basis.

This revised version as amended at the meeting of the Council of Laity on 20th May 2006