

Saint Patrick's Catholic Church
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Dear Parishioners

You will be aware that the Cardinal, through his Graced by the Spirit programme, has been looking at the arrangement and organisation of parishes within the Diocese. One of the key expectations of parish life for the future is that parishioners themselves will be far more involved in the day to day running of their parishes, not all of which will have a resident priest.

At the beginning of February, the Cardinal published his 'White Paper' with his proposals for the future. The paper, called "Community and Mission: Pastoral Priorities for the Diocese of Westminster", is available on www.rcdow.org.uk and a summary was distributed at Mass a while back. (Copies of the summary are still available at the back of the Church.)

The White Paper does not set out any decisions regarding any parish within the Diocese; but says that there will be an 'audit' of each parish towards the end of this year and that decisions regarding structure will be taken gradually over time and after full consultation with all communities involved. In order to plan for St. Patrick's response to this anticipated programme, a Core Group has been meeting since last Summer and it has now come up with proposals to ensure that St. Patrick's remains a vibrant community empowering the whole Parish to be active in the Lord's ministry.

Our Cardinal has also made it clear that each parish in the diocese should have a Parish Council in some form or another. The Core Group has therefore proposed that a Parish Community Council be formed comprising the parish priest, nine elected parishioners and one or two co-opted members. The Parish Community Council would be responsible to the parish priest for the organisation of the parish, the provision of liturgy and worship and the administration of the church and parish buildings and assets (together with the Finance Committee). It would also be responsible for enabling the development of the parish community and its involvement with the Diocese and wider community outside St. Patrick's.

It is important, at this point, to state that the Parish Community Council is not intended to supplant or replace the individual contributions made by so many people in the parish to the life of St. Patrick's. Its function is to be the central focus and co-ordinating body for the parish so as to ensure that all our individual efforts are co-ordinated so as to create and sustain the vibrant community that is St. Patrick's.

Members of the Parish Community Council would be elected for periods of three years at a time although the first members would retire in staggered intervals in 2008, 2009 and 2010 so that the Parish Community Council will always be renewed by fresh blood. No person would serve on the Parish Community Council for more than six years so as to encourage everyone in the parish to play their part in directing the life and ministry of the parish. A full draft of the Rules for the Parish Community Council is fixed to the notice-board at the back of the Church and also on the parish's website: www.st-patricks-wapping.org.uk Copies are also available from the Presbytery.

At each of the Masses over next weekend, a member of the Core Group will be speaking about the proposals and several other members of the Core Group will be available after each Mass that weekend to discuss the background and the proposals with all members of the parish in order to seek your views and feedback. It is then planned to ask for final feedback by Saturday 10th June so that the proposals can be modified and finalised in the light of your comments.

The current plan is that we should hold the first elections to the Parish Community Council at a parish meeting from 8.00 to 9.00 p.m. on Thursday 20 July so that the Parish Community Council can take office in August.

It is proposed that anyone seeking to stand for election to the Parish Community Council should first notify the parish priest and obtain his confirmation that there are no objections to that individual's candidature. All candidates would be then be notified to the parish at least 14 days in advance of the proposed election date. If only nine or fewer parishioners put themselves forward, then all would be appointed, without election, to the Parish Community Council.

The timetable and details of the election for the Parish Community Council will be finalised after the closure of the consultation period on Saturday 10 June. I would encourage all parishioners to think about placing their individual gifts at the disposal of the parish and putting themselves forward for election to the Parish Community Council – if not this year, then in future years.

In the meantime, should any member of the parish wish to discuss the proposals or what being a member of the Parish Community Council would involve, please feel free to speak to me—or to any of Ellen Carroll (tel 020-7481-3780), Angela Harris (tel 020-7265-0425) and Chris Roberts (tel 020-7481-3217) who have served as members of the Core Group.

I would stress that the Cardinal has not formulated any plans or proposals as regards St. Patrick's; but, as indicated above there will be an 'audit' of the parish's needs and resources towards the end of the year so it is important that the Parish Community Council is in place to lead the parish's response to that.

In conclusion, a big thank you to the Core Group who have responded so generously to attending the meetings to plan the above process. As the community of the baptised here at St Patrick's we thank the Lord that we can serve one another and His Kingdom in the and so many ways so that our Catholic witness can grow from strength to strength.

With every blessing.

Fr Digby Samuels
Parish Priest

NB Further information about the Cardinal's Graced by the Spirit programme and the White Paper may be obtained from www.gracedbythespirit.org and www.rcdow.org.uk respectively.