Pastoral planning should be the key objective of a Parish Pastoral Council. A pastoral plan helps both priest and parish work toward a desired future that represents a more authentic witness to the reign of God in our local community. When the whole parish community owns a good pastoral plan then this mission of the Church is served visibly in a particular place and time. A good and comprehensive pastoral plan will always include parish adult faith formation. Making a pastoral plan is far from straightforward. Planning first of all involves reflection and discernment and it must be both practical but also draw on theory. It is about “who’s going to do what”, “why” “how” and “by what date”. It must be rooted in and engage with the specific context and make-up of a particular community at a particular time. Above all it must be an exercise in faith hope and love, “and the greatest of these is love” (I Co 13:13).

What are values, principles and goals of good pastoral planning?
The values, principles and goals of the gospel – compassion, inclusivity, justice, option for the poor, love of neighbour, trust in God and so on are the goals, principles and goals of good pastoral planning.
The spirituality of communion
The spirituality of good and comprehensive pastoral planning is the spirituality of communion. It involves the understanding that all of us in the Church and in our parish community make up the body of Christ, and whatever touches one of us touches all of us. It means inclusivity and openness to each person situation, recognizing their value, their unique gifts which they can bring to our community. It is focused on the interplay or not of roles and functions within the same body of Christ where we all are bound together in communion with one another. The spirituality of communion dictates that all our pastoral planning should be always a communal and participative process.

Know your community and context
Pastoral planning is not for a faint hearted or for a lone planner. To start planning we have to have all the relevant information at hand. All those who are going to be affected by the plans have to be invited to play a significant part in the process of discussion and discernment. The slogan for effective community exercise might be the following “If it’s about me, then not without me”

Pastoral Planning is...
• Reflective Of The Nature Of Church As Communion
• Essentially Collaborative, Collegial
• Essentially Communal In Both Aims And Process
• Pneumatalogical - Draws On gift of Wisdom bestowed as the Spirit wills
• Essentially Pastoral
• Never far from Social Outreach

How to do Pastoral Planning? How to plan adult faith formation in your parish?
Pastoral planning can be thought of in terms of five distinct steps. The same steps can be used to develop a whole of parish pastoral plan or to plan for just one area of parish life, such as parish adult faith formation. The steps are: (1) Reality Check; naming the current parish...
First step: Reality Check: Describe your parish reality or current situation. Answer the following question: What is already happening in your parish and in the wider community? You do not need to cover every detail but it rather means consulting with a variety of people to gain a clear overarching picture. Caution: Beware of cynicism! Sometimes it can be grounded in relevant and valid experience but it can also be destructive and crush fresh hope and generosity.

Second step: Developing a Statement of Vision. This vision must be shared and owned by the whole parish community. The vision is about what your parish is being called to become today. A statement of vision should be clear and simple. It should capture in one succinct simple sentence an overarching sense of where your parish wants to be heading or to align itself and what needs to happen to realise it. You need to ‘discern’ the vision and the process of discernment involves reflection, discussion and praying. It is a lengthy process and it cannot happen in few hours. You need to think about it from two different perspectives as it is about what people yearn for and what they reject. The vision statement has to come from the heart of your parish community to give the parish direction as it lives out the gospel. The vision statement is to become a benchmark which is in danger of being inundated with many issues that people believe to be important.

To make your vision a ‘living’ statement then it needs to be very brief so that it’s easy to remember. In a short phrase or sentence it needs to capture the essence of what the parish hopes it could be.

Examples of such a vision statement might be:
- ‘X Parish, being a sign of the Kingdom of God in the community’
- ‘Y Parish, becoming a community reaching out to all in Jesus’ name’
- ‘Z Parish, making the mystery of God’s love present in our village/town’

From this vision statement can flow statements outlining how the different areas of parish life (adult faith formation, liturgy, catechetics, outreach, youth, etc.) hope to help the parish achieve its vision.

Caution: This vision must be shared by the parish priest who is responsible for all pastoral activity.

Third step: Analysis - This is an important step. You can not achieve good results without a good analysis. Analysis is not a waist of time. It is intended to help us to understand what’s going on so that we’re better able to respond. It revolves around a few simple questions like: Why are things as they are and not as we hope they would be? Where are the signs of life in our community and our programmes/activities/projects? What resources and strengths do we have to help us achieve our vision? When it comes to adult faith formation the following questions have to be asked: What groups of adults are already involved in adult faith formation initiatives in the parish? Who is left behind? What are the programmes or initiatives in place already? What purpose do they serve? Are they successful?

Fourth step: Working Together Towards Particular Goals

Consultation is about discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit in what we already do in the parish and on how to achieve our vision. There are two major components of discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit. We do this through prayer and through consultation because the Spirit moves clearly in the lives of all God’s people.

Consultation is hard work. It is not enough to simply call a meeting or issue a survey. Many people will not be interested. However, the parish council or pastoral planning group has to consult with the parish as widely as it can whenever appropriate, firmly believing the consultation will lead to a better decision being made regarding all areas of parish life and especially when it comes to adult faith formation.

The process of consultation has to be transparent and not to serve someone’s personal agenda. However consultation is the action of seeking advice and is not the same as taking a vote. The parish council or a planning group for adult faith formation still has the responsibility for making the final recommendation – the final decision always rests with the parish priest. The process should be done in a way that encourages parishioners to own that decision as well as puts some accountability on a planning group/parish Council.

From the video consultation we can expect to develop goals for main areas of parish life including adult faith formation and some strategies to achieve those goals. These goals must be clearly stated and be realistic and achievable. In the first year it is important not to be too ambitious. Setting a goal and then being seen to have achieved it will often bring more parishioners onboard. Goals are concrete steps towards the vision in a particu-
lar area of parish life. They are like markers along the journey towards the vision, or steps up a ladder - they are achievable. For example the goal for adult faith formation might be ‘To reach out those who adults who are looking for meaning in their lives and may be God and do not attend our parish’ or/and ‘To deepen Catholic faith and life in those adults who regularly attend Sunday service’. Once a goal has been named the detail of how to achieve the goal is worked out - these details are the strategies and they deal with questions of who is going to do what? How? When?

The council or adult faith formation planning group will lead the whole parish towards being involved in the mission of the Church, empowering parishioners to collaborate in different ways in achieving particular goals. ‘Collaborate’ means to work together, side by side, without one lording it over the other. That means empowering and encouraging people to use their gifts in the work of the parish, trusting them and ensuring they have the necessary resources, authority and opportunity to do what they are being commissioned to do. It also means trusting that God might use the efforts of the faithful in ways the parish council or adult faith formation planning group/committee had not planned for. It does not bring a contradiction although one of the aims of pastoral planning is control.

There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that “without Christ we can do nothing” (cf. Jn 15:5). (At the Beginning of the New Millennium) by Pope John Paul II - 6 January 2001

Pastoral planning seeks some measure of control in areas such as our resources, our environment, development and future of pastoral initiatives, programmes, events, etc.

However, one of the key elements of pastoral planning is trust. It works on all possible levels in the parish. For example, the parish council oversees many parish groups and committees, yet it should not seek to control them or micromanage their activities, rather it must trusts them to carry out their role for the good of the parish, supporting and encouraging them so that their efforts may be in harmony with the parish vision and the thrust of the council’s plans that flow from it. The same applies when it comes to adult faith formation planning group. We have to put our trust in people who run adult faith formation initiatives and programmes and to help them in ways they ask us to do so rather than doing a job instead of them. It is much easier ‘to kill’ any good initiative than to build the trust and empower people to carry on good work and to use their gifts and creativity.

Fifth step – Evaluation. Evaluation is important all along the way. Is the plan still on track, or have we been sidetracked? What has been happening that we didn’t expect? How are people coping with it all? How have we moved closer to achieving our vision? Once we have achieved our goals we will have changed our “current reality” - maybe a little, maybe a lot - and may need to reassess what our next steps will be.
“MISSION POSSIBLE” - SOME OF THE BASICS by A. Karaliute

Quite often we hear from parishes, ‘we tried many programmes however the same people come every time and we have run out of the options’. Very often this might happen when parish does not have overarching long term plan with goals and strategies. It is not enough to think that one off event of a programme will tick all the ‘boxes’.

The adult faith formation can only be effective within the overall pastoral plan of local church community; furthermore it must be ‘integrated with liturgical formation’ and coordinated with other parish initiatives and events (GCD 29). (or UK bishops) Therefore you have to start with a plan.

There are many programmes for adult faith formation on offer and you have to start with one. However one or two programmes will not meet all your goals although it is a good beginning and you must begin somewhere. Therefore be ready to start with one programme, add a few more every year, adopt and/or create your own. A number of parishes are doing this and already the fruits are visible. Many parishes are making the first small steps, but many others know that they need to start somewhere.

The best way to start any programme is to begin from “where people are at”. Your agenda should be dictated by those who you want to invite to explore their faith journey. Certain programmes attract certain people. You as a leader are very important. You have to know what can you offer and what you personally would like to do.

First step of adult faith formation is to “start where people are at”, which means that we have to listen to what they say and what they see in their lives, society and the church and the questions they bring. Openness to their situation will allow us to offer the opportunities where they would benefit the most. Therefore a starting point is to see the interests and needs of all people we can reach in the parish and beyond it and not only those who regularly come to the formation events. The next step is initiation into fullness of Christian life and this cannot be done without the faith community.

What do people want in your parish?
There are many ways to learn what the needs of the adult parishioners are and how they would like to get involved in faith formation programmes. Many parishes used different way to do so. For example, the simplest way is to offer the programme or formation event and to wait who will turn on the day. You can get very good results ir get disappointed. If you think about more comprehensive and long term approach, try to ask people first what they would like and only then plan the long term or short term programme.

There are a few ways how you can learn “where people are at” and what they would like. A simple parish survey and focus groups can serve the purpose very well for those who are interested in a comprehensive adult faith formation plan in their parish and not a one-off event.

Parish surveys
A parish survey is one of the ways to learn the needs of adult parishioners and ‘where they are at’. A parish team can prepared a simple questionnaire (Look at the Appendices) and ask people to fill it in. Questionnaires can be distributed in many different ways. For example all existing group leaders can distribute questionnaires to their group members. You can distribute questionnaires after or before Sunday mass. You can in the Parish Newsletter to introduce to the questionnaires and to explain it’s purpose.

The more parishioners who respond the better. After collating the results the parish team will learn which topics adults would like to explore, what kind of groups they would like to attend, the times when they are available and other important things. It might help the parish team to create a one year plan to respond to the needs of their parishioners. The plan consisted of different initiatives, such as and not limited to Advent and Lenten talks on social justice and ethical questions and the bible study. There are a number of sample surveys around. You will find a few in the Appendices.

Focus Groups
Some parishes try focus groups. What does it mean? It means that you invite ‘experts’ and people from different walks of life such as parish priest, catechist, parish council member, school teacher, single adult, young adult, married couple, separated/divorced catholic, parents of children, adult with disability, etc. and give them a few questions to discuss and to answer. In this way you can learn a lot and it is up to you what kind of suggestions you will take on board when planning. Please look in the Appendix to see how to run a focus group.

What if the parish has a programme for adult faith formation already running?
Very good! Look for ways to compliment it and to offer something for those who are not addressed by that programme or/and for those who would like to continue.
Offer some different aspects of faith formation. Remember, neither of programmes and events can serve all goals of the adult faith formation. Many programmes/events are needed to make your parish alive and strong. And this is not only about taking but also about giving back, not only about learning about your faith, but living it and serving others.

What if you can not offer what people want?
It is very possible that you will not be able to offer what people would like to have. Sometimes you can be limited by your own availability or expertise or resources, even money. Do what you can do. Look at your work as a little step towards the goal. Every little step matters! Some parishes go a long way in learning people’s needs especially those who are not involved in the parish life or even unbelievers. When planning outreach programmes they work together with, or ask for the advise from, other organisations within the community, people from the council, etc. You will not learn much about the needs of people outside the parish by asking those in the parish. Once again, be realistic and do what you can do. Plan big, expect big, be brave to leave your comfort zone and reach into unknown. However be realistic about how far you can go and that you need your parish to stand behind the project.

How to start planning the events and programmes?
Planning is important. It is like a road map. You need one.
- To start, know what the people need and want and bearing in mind the resources you have, decide how many events or programmes you would like to offer.
- Have a parish calendar in front of you. See the main feasts and events already in place, such as catechetical sessions, First Communion, parents meetings, school holidays. The best time to do something is Advent or Lent. But early summer can be a good time too. Mark possible dates.
- Gather a team and start planning an event or programme.

On your own or as a team?
To get things moving it helps to work as a team. It is difficult to work on your own. Working in a team offers more openness to other people needs, provides more expertise, and offers more time and fosters creativity. Try to find few people who could help you with planning and running the programme. Do not work on your own.

Who should be invited to the planning and organisational meetings?
Your team members can be invited by you, suggested by your parish priest or other team members. Think about people you know who can and are able to help you. Think about people for different types of ‘jobs’. For example you will need someone for hospitality or to open the doors, as well as those who will take other responsibilities, such as facilitating the event or the programme. Try to look for people with different gifts and talents, think who would have some time and energy to offer. However try to avoid very narrow minded or those who would like to promote just their own agenda. If you want the team to take full responsibilities and pride in what they are doing you must show that you respect and trust them from the outset.

Team expectations
Expect that some people will do a lot of talking but little work, some people will want to start a ‘grand design’ and to change the parish, the church and the rest of the world at once and some will not want any new things to happen. Pessimism and resistance to any change will lurk around every corner. Try to rise above that. Give your team a direction and purpose. The way you lead the team, matters. Think how you will motivate and enable people work together. Be conscious about your own personal agenda. What do you want to get personally from all of this and how much should you promote and acknowledge other talents? Allow other people to show what they can do and trust them. Allow other people to ‘shine’. There is enough space for everyone under the sun.

Remember, any single event, or programme or talk will not change the world, but it will go a long way towards it. Therefore people matter more than a single event or it’s success. If you are lucky, you will have one or two people who understand things in a similar way to you and you will work together very successfully. However, you should learn to accept other people who think and work in a different way and you have to use their gifts as well. The well-being of the team is as important as the event you are working on. Therefore you must lead the team abut also allow the team to lead you. Be as inclusive as possible, but remember that you will expect to keep healthy boundaries and stay on track.

What if team members change or stop being interested?
Sometimes people take on responsibilities but then their life circumstances change or they loose tinterst. If that happens, do not try to make them feel guilty or force them to finish their task. Be very grateful for their time and efforts and let them go. There are many called to the Lord’s vineyard to work, trust God and do not lose self-confidence or motivation. Look for other candidates.
and let them join the team.

**How to measure success of the event or the programme?**

Does it matter how many participants you have? Does it matter whether the participants liked or enjoyed the programme? Did they say they would like similar programmes to happen in the future? Would they recommend it to their family, neighbours and friends? All these questions are very important to answer. However try to set realistic goals. When organising a programme try to see it in the long term context - less of a sprint and more of a single lap in a marathon. The success of the programme can not be measured by the number of participants. If the programme was good, news travels by word of the mouth and it can travel a long way and next time it will be much easier to get the same people and others too. By doing the programme or event you as a leader and as a team will have learned a lot. Build on it. Adult faith formation is a journey. Do not get off the bus at the very first stop. If you need rest and take time to ‘comprehend’ the results, take some time. After a first attempt you will become a stronger leader with more experience and confidence.

**Specific programme/event requirements**

These are discussed in the sections devoted to the specific programmes in this prospectus. If it is a ‘tailor’ made parish programme of your own, you will know these requirements. Well-known programmes such as Alpha, Echoes and others have the requirements put in an explicit way.

**Advertisement**

As soon as you know the programme or event topic, speaker or facilitators, time and location, you have to start advertisement. Advertisement is very important. You have to take it very seriously and look for efficient ways to do it. When you have a plan in place, think who is your ‘target’ group and how can they be invited. It is not enough to have a poster on the parish information board. How it is made is very important and it must be clear and informative. More than any poster, a personal invitation works wonders. Think who could invite who. What are the other ways to invite people? The internet offers possibilities such as Facebook, flocknote and other social networks, e-mails, phone calls, newspaper advertisements, posters in your local pub, etc. With your team you should decide how and where you are going to advertise and the time scale

- who and will make a poster and what should be included and when
- what are the locations/places you are going to dis-
- play the poster
  - who will do all the leg work: to put posters, send them by post, etc.
  - who will write a text and put it into your Parish Newsletter
  - who will contact the diocese to advertise on the diocesan webpage
  - if you have a parish website or/and e-mailing list, you should advertise there as well.

Who will do that? Some people do not use the internet, and you cannot always rely on the parish information board either. How are you going to organise a ‘word of the mouth’ campaign? Who will tell who? Are you going to ask parish priest to remind people about the coming events at mass?

**Finances**

Money matters however even a little money can go a long way. Before starting any concrete planning on the particular event or programme ask yourself how much it might cost?

- Some basic expenses you might incur are as follows
- Refreshments or meal costs (depending on the programme)
- Hall rental if not in the parish hall
- Advertisement costs (paper, printing, postage, professional fees, etc.)
- Speaker or facilitator fees
- Miscellaneous

There are two ways of thinking. One is in an ideal situation when you can get as much money as you need and another, more realistic situation when you have to think about how to avoid expenses, what can you do without, and how to negotiate your way around things. There are many ways to make the costs as little as possible. For example, try to use all resources you have at hand already both human resources as well as material. For example, try to avoid rental charges but organise an event/programme in your parish hall or even in the church itself or maybe your parish school will offer their premises. When it comes to making posters and other advertisement expenses, look who could help with that. Many people have printers and computers at home. Maybe they can make and print posters? When it comes to IT literacy and help with the internet advertisement, look for someone in the parish who has necessary skills and is willing to help without a charge. There are different ways to get around speakers fees as well. Although speakers have to learn a living, many of them understand parish financial difficulties and offer their services for a minimal fee and sometimes just ask you to pay their travel expenses.
How to get the rest of the money? One way is to ask the event participants to pay. If they see the value for their money, most likely they will contribute. Can you ask your parish for some financial help? Can you find a local sponsorship? Maybe you can get some help from your local council depending on the nature of your programme? Many parishes find their ways even in very difficult financial situation. Finances should not obstruct any parish team from making a difference in their parish.

Planning the Session

The meetings should ideally be between 1-1.5 hours long. Depending on the availability of people, plan the most suitable time and location for them.

- Consider the agenda. This format may be helpful: welcome, introductions, introduction to the goal of the meeting, agree some ground rules, questions and answers, plan for future meetings, wrap up (summary of the meeting/conclusion?).
- Setting and Refreshments matters. Choose a room with a cosy and friendly setting. The best way is to organise the chairs in a circle that all participants can see each other. Make name tags (if people do not know each other). Provide tea and coffee and a biscuit or other light refreshments.
- Don’t rely on your memory to recall what happens at the meeting; ask someone to take notes of the meeting (or record the session with either an audio or audio-video recorder).

Ground Rules

It’s important that all members or the group participate as much as possible; but it is also important for the session to move along and to generate useful information. It is good to agree a few, short ground rules that will encourage full participation and yet focus the group. For example:

- Keep focused on the question
- Maintain momentum and, at the same time, encourage every member to speak
- Do not allow one or two members to dominate the conversation and overshadow others.
- Consider using a round-table approach by going around the table, giving each person a minute to answer the question which has been raised.
- Get closure on questions

Facilitating the Session

Create an informal and friendly atmosphere and focus on collecting useful information

- Introduce yourself and explain the goals of the session. Explain that the session will be minuted or recorded.
- Carry out the agenda feeling the natural flow or dynamic of the session.
- Carefully word each question. Allow some time for people to think about the question and then facilitate discussion around the answers to each question, one at a time.
- After everyone has answered each question, carefully reflect back or summarise what you
heard.

- Close the meeting by thanking all participants for their time and useful input.
- Immediately after the session, make notes and write down any observations made during the session. Write down what you discovered during the session and how you are going to use that information for further planning of AFF.

LIFE CYCLES OF DIFFERENT GROUPS

(The materials for the following article are adapted those from the Parish Pastoral Councils in Australia, http://ppc.catholic.org.au/ppc/prayer.html)

Any group in the parish functions like a living organism. All of them tend to move through various stages of growth, blossoming in their effectiveness and then at times slowing down in their functioning, before new growth results once again or die off.

For example, initially, a parish may not have a Pastoral Council or/and Parish Adult Faith Formation Group so a decision to establish such a body may emanate from a variety of situations. These may include encouragement from the Bishop, a recommendation from parishioners gathered at a parish assembly or a positive experience with the same groups by a pastor or parishioners in other parishes.

After a planning group is established, its contribution to parish life might continue to evolve. Some of the possible stages may be described as follows:

**Developing:** The pastor and parishioners tentatively begin to work together, growing in understanding of their role and function, building their team work, planning and clarifying their goals and refining their meeting operations.

**Blossoming:** Gradually, the operations of the group become more streamlined, helpful strategies are developed to deal with challenges that arise, enthusiasm grows, the group becomes more of a faith-community and fruitful outcomes ensue.

**Slowing:** Even with the best of intentions, the pressures of life and the normal growth of a group can mean that there is some slowing of enthusiasm and perhaps a degree of loss of focus and direction. It may also happen that some members may have to resign because of changed life circumstances (and new members may replace them), and so the dynamics of the group change. This is the time when the observation may be made that the group become irrelevant or obsolete when in fact it is simply the strategies being used and the approaches being taken which need to be refreshed.

**Refreshing:** The group recognises the need to re-energise and re-focus and chooses to consider some basic aspects, including:

- Revisiting the role and function of the group in the context of the Mission of the Church and parish vision in particular.
- Setting aside time for further relationship building.
- Recording all the projects and issues which have been considered by the group in the previous year. The size of the list can be quite surprising and encouraging.
- Reviewing of meeting operations e.g. what are we doing well at meetings? What could we do better? This gives an opportunity to all members to offer constructive suggestions.
- Reviewing and updating the group plan and goals.
- Renewing: Every group that wants to survive has to consider and work on the careful process for finding new members and sharing leadership responsibilities. Then, the cycle of development continues.