

COMMUNITY ELDERS

VISION The Holy Spirit is calling the Church today to empower the ministries and charisms of the whole People of God. These Gifts of the Holy Spirit are poured out through Baptism and Confirmation. Some ministries are more central than others to the building up of the Body of Christ but all are to be equally valued. Ordained Ministry is to encourage, co-ordinate and unify these many Gifts in the building of a Mature Church where all members are valued equally. In the light of the long-term future without a resident priest, the Parish of St Nicholas of Tolentino moves with hope and faith to the future as a thriving Eucharistic Community of inclusion and Evangelisation. Community Elders will be animators and have oversight of the life, ministry, spirituality and mission of the community, building this 'mature of Body of Christ' (Eph 4: 11-16), in collaboration and partnership with the non-resident priest who will serve the parish, the leadership of the Community Elders and the Parish Pastoral Council.

THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY ELDERS

1. Servant leadership and 'governance' of a synodal parish.

Jesus at the Last Supper bent down and washed the feet of His disciples - the task of the humblest servant or slave in the household. He models all leadership in the Church and so Community Elders ('CE') are to live his servant-leadership. The servant ministry of the CEB requires vision, prayerfulness and commitment to the Eucharist combined with an understanding of this 'New Way of being Church': this 'Synodal Way' involves all voices shaping decisions. It asks of the CE an attitude of humble service, faith in lay ministry and leadership, openness, flexibility, creative and respectful listening to the community, a willingness to learn and the capacity to fulfil the ministry over a few years. They are called to be servants of the growth and development of the parish's life and mission and so must not become an 'elite group of the privileged and powerful' in the parish. They are brothers and sisters in profound equality with every other member of the parish community. The Community Elders Body ('CEB') does not replace the vital role of the Parish Pastoral Council as the elected forum representing the voice of the entire diverse, inclusive parish community, and therefore a good working relationship between the two bodies is essential. Some overlap of membership is likely.

2. Areas of Oversight Responsibility:

The CEB will have shared oversight and responsibility for all aspects of the parish's life and mission, informed by the Parish Pastoral Council and other synodal and working groups. CE's are not expected to 'do everything', but to have awareness of all that happens in the parish and to ensure that people (perhaps teams) and resources are in place to enable each aspect of the parish's life and mission to be sustained, and developed in accordance with CEB and PPC agreed policies. Each CE will have particular responsibility for one or two of the areas:

a. Sacramental and Spiritual life of the parish: - Prayer and worship are essential to the nurturing of the communion and mission of St Nicks. The CEB will oversee the provision and planning of Liturgies and other forms of communal prayer, and the shared

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exploration of Scripture. Good communication and collaboration with lay leaders (eg Liturgy planning Group) and the non-resident (part-time) priest is essential. CEB will seek to encourage and deepen relationships of Communion among the diverse and dispersed congregation.

b. Catechesis: while not necessarily being catechists themselves, CEB will support the team of parish catechists and the quality provision of the catechetical needs of the community (see document on Catechesis).

c. Keeping the parish's focus on Mission: Mission is the fundamental call and function of the Church as 'missionary disciples of Christ' (Pope Francis). St Nick's is called to be 'Good News to the Poor'. CEB needs to engage the community with new calls/needs of mission to the Inner City and beyond ('See, Judge and Act' - the 'Pastoral Cycle'), as well as maintaining and developing existing 'missions' and outreach projects such as the Parish School and its staff and families, the Food Bank, Borderlands Charity, the Ministry of the parish office etc. CEB will need to have a clear awareness and understanding of how the Church plant is being used day to day in the service of mission and why.

d. Pastoral Care: this includes building a welcoming and inclusive community, reaching out to Catholics who no longer come to Mass, to the elderly and housebound, hospital visits, families and marriage support, children and young people including the Catholic schools that serve them, listening to distress and pain, the healing ministry, the ministry of 'Presence' among the parish community and in the Inner City. The Pastoral care of a geographically dispersed worshipping community brings challenges, eg provision of communion for the housebound, The Ministry of the Parish Office will need to be developed to provide quality listening to those in distress.

e. Communications: In an increasingly synodal parish the CEB will foster effective means of communication, serving the deepening of Communion within the parish community of many diverse working groups and sub-communities. This will include: synodal structures and practice that shape discernment and decision-making; sharing the development of the St Edmund of Abingdon Pastoral Area, both clergy and laity; with the Diocese (Bishop, Curial Offices, the parishes); with Ecumenical and Inter-faith networks; the local community and the wider city.

f. Care for the Parish Plant: Our buildings are at the service of both the parish community and the wider community, serving our Mission. Therefore the CEB will need to have oversight of the Security, maintenance, cleaning, access and administration of our buildings, including the presbytery. Essential will be structures of good communication with other users of the plant. In the absence of a resident priest in the presbytery there will be issues of access and availability to be addressed.

g. Finance: The CEB will support the work of the Parish Finance Committee, liaise with the Legacy Management Group, share in Financial decision-making, and ensure adequate fund-raising initiatives to enable the continuation of the parish's life and mission.

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3. Support and Training for CEB

- a. The role of the CEB and its members is tried and tested in some parts of the world, but appears to be new and untried in the Church in the UK. It is however not an 'experiment' but a Spirit-inspired initiative to sustain and develop St Nick's as a Eucharistic Communion of Mission and Evangelisation. There will be mistakes along the way, but we are called to learn from them and be faithful to the Vision inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- b. The formation of the CEB and CE's will be supported by the non-resident priest who according to Canon Law will be the designated parish priest. His supportive guidance is essential and key to his role of service of the lay-leadership expressed by the CEB. Courses offered by the Diocese and the Church nationally and ecumenically need to be accessed by the CEB and others in the parish. In addition appropriate training for the specific roles of CEB members will be organised and paid for if required.
- c. The work of the CEB will be supported by the full-time paid Pastoral Co-ordinator who will be appointed. The Pastoral Co-ordinator together with the part-time paid Parish Administrator will 'share the burden' of the Ministry and Mission of the parish, being line managed by one of the CE's. The diocese provides HR training and support.
- d. To respond to the challenges and demands placed on the members of the CEB, Group Supervision and/or Spiritual Direction will be provided as CEB determine is needed.
- e. Out of pocket expenses (including 'hospitality') will be met from parish funds.
- f. DBS checks will be required according to current government rules.
- g. A Grievance/Dispute process will be provided, ready to be used if or when needed

4. Criteria of Selection

- a. The Church is most the Church when gathered for the Eucharist, teaches Vatican II. The Eucharist is the energy for mission and the sacred meal that unites us in Christ as a Communion of Love and Faith. Therefore commitment to regular participation at Parish Mass will be essential - Sundays, and also (as work and family permit) occasional weekdays and special celebrations.
- b. CEB members will need to have the capacity to give time and energy needed to fulfil the Ministry of the Elders. It is recognised that capacity will vary from CE to CE according to family and work commitments, with some being able to give more hours than others. Each member's gifts and availability however are equally valued. It is expected that CE's can offer between 8 hours to 20 hours per month. Meeting together as the CEB group must be a priority for all and some CE's will meet with (or be part of) the Parish Pastoral Council, the Parish Finance Committee and the Legacy Management Group. CE's need to be available to and approachable by the parishioners. The CEB as a whole needs to have an awareness of all that happens within the life and mission of the parish in order to exercise oversight.
- c. The parish community as a whole needs to be able to recognise and value the maturity, gifts and wisdom of the CE's. Both the strength to challenge as well as to affirm and the humility to be challenged and learn will be needed by CE's.
- d. Each CE will need the ability to balance effectively family, work and ministry.

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- e. All servant-leadership roles require a certain resilience, inner security and the ability to cope with stress and at times multiple demands.
- f. CE's need to work together as team with a single focus - serving the development of the parish's spirituality, life and mission. This will require good Relational skills and commitment to collaborative and synodal ways of working together as a CEB team and with the Parish community, the Pastoral Area, and the Diocese as a whole. There needs to be a commitment to equality between men and women, young and old and all forms of diversity in the parish family expressed by the ability to listen to all.
- g. CE's will need an understanding of and commitment to the nature, charism and mission of St Nicks Parish, especially to the disadvantaged and those on the margins both of the Church and of society.

5. Selection Process Membership of the CEB is a calling by the parish after communal discernment by way of synodal practice. Such discernment will require considerable prayer and conversation by as many of the parish community as possible. It is not an election, unlike membership of the PPC but must be no less transparent. Being a CE is a Ministry, not simply a task. This process will need to be discussed and agreed by the PPC and the Joint Meeting of the PPC, PFC and LMG. The CEB will need to comprise of a mix of charisms, gifts, skills, personality, knowledge, attitudes and expressive of the rich diversity of the St Nick's community. After a prolonged period of prayerful discernment and selection the CEB members will be Commissioned by the Bishop, the community and representatives of the Pastoral Area.