

Saint Elizabeth's Minsteracres

Parish Council Constitution

1. Our Vision

Through the inspiration of the Gospel we strive to promote the Kingdom of God.

We aim to offer a warm and united welcome to all. Sharing our responsibilities we will develop our love of God and each other through our celebration of the Eucharist. By teaching and example we will provide support and encouragement in our faith to all.

We will work in harmony with the Minsteracres board of trustee directors and the broader Minsteracres community towards a shared mission, recognising our responsibility to support the maintenance and continuity of this unique facility.

We will work closely with and participate fully in the Heavenfield Partnership; a united group of the Roman Catholic parishes in Bellingham, Haltwhistle, Haydon Bridge, Hexham, Minsteracres and Otterburn; supporting each other in the creation of a vibrant and evangelising community.

2. Aims

The aims of the parish council are:

1. To help the parish discern and determine its vision through discussion, reflection and pastoral planning, having regard for the broader diocesan vision and the role of the parish in the Heavenfield Partnership.
2. To establish close understanding and collaboration between the clergy and laity in working for the good of the parish in the light of the Gospel.
3. To identify and address the pastoral and spiritual needs of our parishioners.
4. To encourage the laity to assist the clergy in the effective management and organisation of the parish.
5. To assist all groups and organisations within the parish and guide them in working towards a common goal and understanding within the boundaries set by the parish council and the Minsteracres' board of trustee directors.
6. To foster and support ecumenical activities within the parish and surrounding district.
7. To ensure the needs of the parish are served by the creation of appropriate sub-groups working towards the delivery of our vision.
8. To raise parish awareness of wider social, environmental and ecological challenges and foster and encourage appropriate responses.

3. Role of the Parish Council

To assist and support the parish priest by providing an overview of parish life and activities, as well as supporting and co-ordinating the activities of other groups and organisations working in the parish. To this end the parish council will:

1. Provide a link between all other groups and organisations working in the parish acting as an arbitrator, if required, and providing a forum for ideas. To this end, the parish council should be represented on all sub-groups and organisations within the parish by the co-option of a council member on to each of these bodies.
2. Be responsible for developing guidelines and setting policies within the parish as necessary.
3. Liaise with the Minsteracres' board of trustee directors in representing the needs of the parish.
4. Ensure the effective communication of all relevant issues to the parish as a whole.
5. The parish council must be collaborative as the parish is not an isolated unit but exists within the Minsteracres facility and within the structure of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, particularly the Heavenfield Partnership. The council is not just concerned with promoting the good of our own parish but must have the Church as a whole at its heart.

4. Membership of the Parish Council

Membership of the parish council will be as follows:

1. The Parish Priest and Deacon are Ex-officio officers of the parish council although their attendance at meetings is not necessary to validate proceedings.
2. Six parishioners, who volunteer to stand, shall be appointed.
3. To assist the effective functioning of the council, the Parish Priest may appoint up to three additional members to the council for a period of one year. These appointed members will have full voting rights.
4. The period of office for appointed members shall normally be three years. Retiring members may stand for re-election or be re-appointed for another term.
5. Ideally, one third of the appointed members shall retire at the appropriate time each year. Retiring members may stand for re-election. (If volunteers are not forthcoming then retiring members should be decided by lottery).
6. In the event of a vacancy occurring on the council, the council may co-opt a representative to fill the vacancy until the next election.
7. To encourage participation in the council, parishioners may be invited to attend council meetings so that they might better understand the scope and work of the council. Such attendees will be encouraged to participate in council business but will not have voting rights.

5. Meetings of the Parish Council

1. Regular meetings will normally be held each month, excluding August, with ad-hoc meetings being held as required.
2. For any meeting to be quorate for decision-making purposes, at least two thirds of voting members must be in attendance for the full meeting.
3. Parishioners should be able to submit agenda items for council meetings through any council member.

6. Decisions

Normally decisions should be reached by consensus. Where there is division on an issue and a vote is required then the motion should have a proposer and a seconder. All members shall have an equal vote with any decisions made by simple majority. Where the votes are equal, the Chairperson of the meeting will have the casting vote.

7. Communication

The effective communication of the work of the council and other sub-groups and organisations is considered vital in the pursuit of a harmonious parish life. This communication will be actioned in the following ways:

1. An annual parish meeting will be held each year prior to any council elections which may be held to allow parishioners to question council members on the activity of the council and those of other sub-groups.
2. Prior to the above meeting taking place, the Chair will be responsible for the production of an annual report which should contain information on the current situation of parish life, the work of the council for the previous year, and a short statement on the work of each of the other parish sub-groups and organisations and their aims for the following year. This report should be circulated to parishioners in advance of the annual parish meeting.
3. A newsletter containing details of council activities and other elements of parish life should be produced by the council and circulated to parishioners at Christmas and Easter and any other appropriate time.
4. The minutes of the meetings of the Parish Council should be made available to parishioners. Council members should be prepared to discuss the minutes and any decisions made at meetings with any parishioner.

8. Officers of the Council

1. At the first meeting in each calendar year or as soon as practicable thereafter, the council will elect from its lay members a Chair and Deputy Chair who will serve in their roles for one year but at the end of their term of office may offer themselves for re-election. Ideally, no Officer should serve more than three continuous terms in a particular office
2. The council may appoint a secretary from outside the group, however that person will not have voting rights.
3. The Chair or in their absence the Deputy Chair shall also act as a representative of the council between meetings should urgent parish business need attention.

9. Election of Council Officers

1. If appropriate, elections for all vacant posts on the council (by retirement or resignation) shall be held on or around the feast of Christ the King.
2. Prior to any election, the parish should be informed of the number of council members requiring election and that elections are open to all parishioners aged 16 or older.
3. The Parish Priest is responsible for co-ordinating all election activities. This responsibility may be delegated to a respected member of the congregation or Minsteracres' community.
4. Parishioners seeking to stand for election must be nominated and seconded by other parishioners and must submit a pen portrait of themselves (of circa 100 words) which will be displayed in a prominent place along with those of all other candidates prior to the election.
5. Parishioners aged 16 and above will be eligible to vote.
6. The votes will be counted by the Parish Priest or his nominees and the parishioners standing for election shall be advised of the result as soon as possible with the parish being informed the following weekend.
7. If the number of candidates standing for election is less than or equal to the number of vacancies existing at the time then no election will be necessary and all candidates will be appointed to the council subject to the approval of the parish priest.
8. In those circumstances where the number of candidates nominated for election is only 1 greater than the number of vacancies, the number of council members may be varied to accommodate an extra member rather than hold an election. Council members appointed in this way will be considered to be normal elected members whose standard term of service will be three years

10. Constitutional Review

1. The constitution may be reviewed by the council at any time, but at least annually.
2. For amendments to be made to the constitution, a vote must be taken, the motion should have a proposer and a seconder and the vote must be unanimous or else the motion is rejected.
3. Any change to the constitution should be communicated to the parish by one of the established communication channels as soon as is practically possible.