

CONFLICT OF INTEREST - CLERGY, FAMILIES AND CHURCH WORKERS

Members of a clergy person's family are often parishioners or Voting Parishioners in the parish in which the clergy person is licensed or with in other parishes with in the diocese. As such they should be treated in the same way as any other Parishioner or Voting Parishioner. They should not expect nor be expected to fulfil any specific ministry as a result of their relationship to a member of a clergy within the Diocese or a specific parish.

A member of a clergy person's family may feel called to specific ministries within a parish or the diocese. Where this is the case they should be given the opportunity to exercise that ministry in the same way as any other parishioner or Voting Parishioner. Where these ministries require specific qualifications a member of a clergy person's family is expected to meet all the necessary qualifications.

While members of a clergy person's family are encouraged to exercise those ministries for which they feel called in some cases this may create an actual or perceived conflict of interest. For this reason a spouse of a Priest-in-Charge must not act as a Warden (see Licensing statute 2017).

While other family members of the Priest-in-Charge and assisting clergy may act as Warden it is strongly recommended the Bishop be consulted before the member of the clergy person's family is nominated as Warden or any other position of leadership with direct reporting to the Priest-in-Charge and Parish Council. All members of a clergy person's family may take up the roles of parish councillor, synod representative and Licensed Lay Minister as part of their vocation in ministry. However, it is strongly recommended the Bishop be consulted before the member of the clergy person's family is nominated for these roles.

Conflict of Interest for Church Workers

Paid church workers (other than clergy) must not be members of committees or parish council as there is a visible likelihood of a conflict of interest.

Bishop-in-Council has determined (November 2017) that where this situation exists, the individuals must either resign from their paid employment or from the committee or Parish Council of which they are a member, effective immediately.

Where such arrangements exist and are identified, the Diocesan Office through the Diocesan Secretary must be advised formally for any future queries or concerns.

The Parochial Statute 2017-2019 does not allow anyone in receipt of a salary or payment (emolument) for services and who is a paid Church Worker carrying out a role in the parish, to be on Parish Council. This requirement was also in the previous Parochial Statute.

The Parochial Statute 2017 – 2019 Schedule 1 Cl.5 states:

- No person holding any post of emolument from the parish shall be eligible for the offices of parish councillor. This rule may be waived by the Bishop at the request of the Parish Council and for good reason.
- Any warden or parish councillor being under contract to perform any work for the parish shall declare their interest and have no vote in related matters.

Conflict of Interest for Laity in Parish Settings

Wise practice advises that related family members appointed or elected on parish council or parish committees together may raise concerns about perceived conflicts of interest. This is observed and interpreted as a lack of autonomy or independence in making decisions; and, is less than helpful when people question how power and controls are applied, and how important decisions are made. If it becomes difficult for people on a committee or council to honestly and critically test alternative perspectives, or they find themselves unable to change practices when new ones are proposed or recommended, or there is active resistance to change, it begins to suggest there is a clique, a turn towards favoritism over-ruling good practices,. It highlights a potentially corrupted power base held by one or two strong figures, formally and informally, or reveals undue influence is being used because of relationships, benefits and a fear of consequences. All of these comments and others like them, point to real, actual and perceived inappropriate use of power and a lack of transparency.

In some circumstances, the parish priest and council members may feel it is not possible to have a completely independent committee or council due to a small and dwindling community, where there may be very few available laity willing and able to volunteer in the community.

In these situations, it is good practice to have the Conflict of Interest Policy actively noted and people reminded of their obligations in such circumstances. Standing for committees, ensuring the secret ballots take place and being alert to misunderstanding about the decision making processes are all good practices to avoid this perception or practice.

A proposed Statement on Conflict of Interest for use in meetings is as follows:

CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

There is a natural conflict inherent with the Members of the Council / Committee that all members of this group are either clergy or lay people directly involved in the life of the parish as leaders and Church Workers. Consequently, decisions taken in this forum will inevitably have an impact on their own ministry and work. Where that interest is specific and marked it should be declared.

An example is where a decision on a specific work matter/ employment/ budget/ personnel matter on behalf of their community is being discussed and the individual is either directly or indirectly involved in its generation and implementation and would be individually affected by the decision, this should be declared immediately and before the meeting commences.

Conflicts of Interest arising will be noted by exception.

All members of theCouncil / Committee are obliged by the Diocese's Governance Standards to declare a Conflict whenever it is identified or become concerned that it might exist.

Individual members of theCouncil / Committee and members of the leadership team and any staff attending the meetings are required to advise other members and the Priest-in-Charge if a conflict of interest is likely to occur, is occurring or is perceived to be likely, prior to the matter being discussed by theCouncil / Committee.

The member shall, at the direction of the Priest-in-Charge and the members of theCouncil / Committee, either leave the meeting or refrain from taking part in the debate and must abstain from voting until such time as the matter is resolved and it shall be noted in the minutes of the meeting.

The conflict of interest may relate to financial or other material matters in respect to any business carried out by the parish and members of theCouncil / Committee. At the direction of the Priest-in-Charge and with the agreement with the other members, the Conflict of Interest will be noted formally in the minutes.