

CALLED TO BE CHURCH:

A Guide for
Parish Pastoral Councils

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati

1998

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INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council called the faithful to renew themselves in an image of the Church as the People of God, a community in which all the baptized share in the mission and ministry which Jesus entrusted to the Apostles and through them to the members.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, addresses a particular call to the laity where it says:

"All the laity . . . have the exalted duty of working for the ever greater spread of the divine plan of salvation. . . Therefore may the way be clear for them to share diligently in the salvific work of the Church according to their ability and the needs of the times." (Chap. IV, "The Laity," #33)

In the last 30 years, pastors and their parishioners have had a wide range of experiences as they have matured in their understanding of church leadership and shared responsibility. The revised Code of Canon Law (1983) brought new direction and insight concerning the area of church leadership and collegiality, especially at the parish level.

For all the faithful, (laity, priests, deacons, religious, and bishops) work together exercising their baptismal call in "true equality with regard to dignity . . . in accord with each one's own condition and function." (Canon 208) This call to shared responsibility and the participation of the laity in the life of the church is manifested on many different levels in the Church. On the parish level, the Parish Pastoral Council is an important instrument of shared ministry.

Canon 536 of the Code of Canon Law explains the nature of the Parish Pastoral Council in its relationship to the pastor. Its purpose is to explore and study with the pastor matters of a "pastoral nature," that is, those areas of life in the parish that touch the spiritual and faith development of the parish members. Through the Parish Pastoral Council, the pastor is able to discern more wisely how best to fulfill the mission of Christ in this particular parish.

Overview of this Document

This present publication is a result of a consultation and discussion with pastors and parish pastoral council leaders throughout the diocese. This project was initiated by the Archbishop and completed in 1996 with a report that was studied by the Administrative Department Directors, the Council of Priests, and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. **Called to be Church: A Guide for Parish Pastoral Councils** is presented as a guide for parish pastoral councils in response to a number of recommendations that resulted from these discussions. It offers:

1. Clarification of diocesan policy on Parish Pastoral Councils (cf. pages 5-16). Seven areas are addressed, each suggesting a variety of guidelines that are in accord with church universal law and the laws and policies of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati relative to parish pastoral councils.
2. An opportunity for pastors and parish council leaders to learn from what other parishes have found successful. At the end of each of the first six Guidelines, there is a section entitled, "**Suggestions for Implementation.**" Contained therein are examples of what various parishes have found successful.

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3. Different models of how councils were structured, how they functioned, how council membership was determined and other ideas about forming successful parish pastoral councils. The **MODELS** section (pp. 17-23) is intended to address this request.
 4. Access to resource materials. The section in this Guide, **RESOURCES** (pp. 34-35), lists materials that are available through the archdiocesan media center, and other resources that various pastors and council leaders have found helpful.
 5. A response to specific requests made during this consultation process:
 - Questions often asked about parish pastoral councils.
 - How to conduct an effective council meeting.
 - What is consensus and how to lead a consensus process.

On page 4 is a summary of the Church's law and teaching on the parish pastoral council. Pages 5 to 16 offer seven guidelines for parish pastoral councils.

The rest of this manual contains the following: pages 17-20 offers several models for ways in which the parish pastoral council can be structured; pages 21-23 lays out eight models for membership selection; pages 24-33 offers twenty frequently asked questions and responses; and pages 34-35 offers a small list of resources about parish pastoral councils. There are four appendices (pages 36-42) to these *Guidelines*: Appendix A gives the canon law concerning parish pastoral councils and finance councils; Appendix B gives Archdiocesan policies and local legislation; Appendix C offers tips for conducting an effective and efficient parish pastoral council meeting; Appendix D offers a perspective on consensus.

Conclusion

The ministry of the Parish Pastoral Council is one of service, exercised in a spirit of collegiality, prayer and discernment, focused on the mission of the church. It brings together the sharing of the gifts and talents of dedicated clergy and lay people. Through their commitment to seek the truth through dialogue and prayerful discernment, the ministry of the church is active in all the components of the parish and the voice of the Lord is heard. It is hoped that this document, **Called to be Church: A Guide for Parish Pastoral Councils**, will assist pastors, parish council leaders and members in carrying out this important ministry for the church.

THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

A Summary

The mission of a Catholic parish is to be a community of persons united in the Lord to be God's people ministering to one another, as well as to those around them. The task of serving the parish community is the work of the entire parish under the leadership of the pastor. Together with his parish staff and the members of the parish's councils, commissions and committees, the pastor works in a spirit of unity with these groups to provide the ministries and programs that serve both the mission of the parish and the missions of the archdiocesan church and the universal church.

All the faithful of the parish are called to share in the mission which God has entrusted to them. Yet among the parish faithful is a group which assists the pastor in the overall planning and his decision-making for the parish. It is the Parish Pastoral Council. Representing the wider parish community, it has the task of advising the pastor on important matters of pastoral activity.

How does the Parish Pastoral Council carry out its purpose? These are the principal ways:

- By forming an effective group of persons who work in a spirit of prayer and discernment as a sign and witness to the parish community.
- By making recommendations about the pastoral priorities and goals for the parish through pastoral planning.
- By serving as a vehicle of dialogue and communication among the pastor, the parish staff, the various commissions and organizations and the parish membership.
- By working with the commissions of the parish in a spirit of mutual cooperation for the good of the whole parish community.

In its most effective form, the Parish Pastoral Council is the vehicle by which the pastor and his pastoral staff consider and test their own ideas and proposals with a group that represents the entire parish community. It is the official listening post for the local parish community - the pastor listening to his people and the people listening to their pastor.



**GUIDELINES
FOR
IMPLEMENTATION**

**THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IS A CONSULTATIVE BODY
THAT ASSISTS THE PASTOR IN MATTERS OF PASTORAL ACTIVITY,
AND DELIBERATES ON MATTERS OF IMPORTANCE TO THE PARISH.**

Parish councils were first established in the Archdiocese in 1966. The Second Vatican Council and the Sixth Synod of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati envisioned the work of the parish council to be parish renewal. Therefore, the purpose of a Parish Pastoral Council is to promote the spiritual growth of the parish community and to plan ways for the parish to carry out the mission of the church.

The responsibility for the mission of the church is a shared one. The clergy and the laity each having respective roles, each supporting one another. To help fulfill that purpose in the context of a parish community, the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the Code of Canon Law call for a structure which will assist the pastor in his pastoral ministry. This structure is the Parish Pastoral Council. The name "pastoral council" is recommended for three reasons:

1. It reflects more accurately in name its chief task of assisting the pastor "in fostering pastoral activity." (Can. 536)
2. It helps clarify how distinct the role of the Parish Pastoral Council is compared to the role and work of the Finance Council. The Parish Pastoral Council is charged with assisting the pastor in parish renewal and pastoring; while the Finance Council is responsible to "aid the pastor in the administration of parish goods." (Can. 537)
3. The Parish Pastoral Council *is not a governing board, nor does it make decisions* as boards of trustees, civic and/or business councils often do. Parishioners who bring such expectations to their participation on a Parish Pastoral Council may experience conflict about its role. The title of "pastoral council" can have a significant effect in orienting both the parish community and potential council members to the more proper and effective purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council.

Suggestions for Implementation

- The pastor and the Parish Pastoral Council might take a Saturday morning or an evening to set aside the regular business of the council and discuss *Called to be Church: A Guide for Parish Pastoral Councils*. Following this discussion, they ought to take this occasion to officially name their Parish Council the "Parish Pastoral Council," or "St. _____ Pastoral Council."
- The pastor might ask the Parish Pastoral Council to read an article or book from the Resource section of these Guidelines. The council might come together for an evening or a Saturday morning to discuss the assigned reading. Individual council members could be responsible to present the different chapters of a book or sections of an article and lead the discussion on their respective assignments.

*"Without counselors, plans come to nothing;
where counselors are many, plans succeed."
-Proverbs 15: 22*

**THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL WORKS IN
A SPIRIT OF PRAYER AND DISCERNMENT
AS A SIGN AND WITNESS TO THE PARISH.**

The task of providing spiritual direction and guidance for today's parish is a difficult one. The Parish Pastoral Council best assists the pastor in this work when it gives attention to the quality of its own prayer and spiritual development.

The work of the Parish Pastoral Council is best achieved through well-led meetings that are efficient and orderly. Yet the deliberations of the Council are done in the context of a faith community and for the purpose of advising the pastor on pastoral matters. As such, the council is challenged to conduct itself in a spirit of prayerful discernment, dialogue and consensus-building. Members are charged with discerning what the Holy Spirit is calling the parish to do at this time. They will become more effective when they develop into an effective work group, where the quality of relationships, a common sense of purpose, effective meeting procedures and the skills of dialogue and prayerful reflection are valued by both the pastor and the council members.

Suggestions for Implementation

- A Parish Pastoral Council may meet once or twice a year for an evening or day of prayer and formation. Council business is put aside, and time is spent in prayer, reflection (on a church document or pastoral issue), and in building an effective team of council members.
- Parish Pastoral Councils typically utilize an opening and closing prayer. A reading from the Scriptures, the Liturgy of the Hours, or some meditation might be used periodically. The council might stop to pray when "stuck" in its deliberations or before resolving a serious or controversial matter.
- Council members might rotate the responsibility of leading and ending the council meeting with a prepared prayer (or a brief prayer service).
- Some form of spiritual discernment for determining council membership might be used.
- A Parish Pastoral Council may use some method for seeking consensus on what it recommends to the pastor. All council members need to understand the process their council uses for arriving at consensus. [Refer to Appendix D for a "Perspective on Consensus."]

*"Ask the Lord to bless your plans and you
will be successful in carrying them out."
- Proverbs. 16: 3*

PARISH PASTORAL PLANNING IS THE PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY OF A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

Pastoral planning focuses on those things that pertain to a pastor's care for parishioners. It involves the act of visioning the kind of parish that best serves the needs of its members, as well as the larger community. Typically a Parish Pastoral Council identifies goals and objectives and recommends plans to achieve them. Since the arena of study and deliberation is the faith and spiritual lives of parishioners, time is often taken for adult faith formation, i.e., theological reflection on what the church teaches on mission of the church.

Parish pastoral planning is a structured process that includes five components:

- Articulating a vision of where the parish should be going.
- Deciding a method to assess the needs and issues of the parishioners.
- Identifying pastoral priorities or goals that address the needs of the parish.
- Proposing concrete actions and programs that achieve the pastoral goals.
- Determining the personnel, financial and physical resources needed.

Parishes that have pastoral plans typically set them in terms of three to five years. Each year the Parish Pastoral Council determines for the year a set of pastoral priorities. This plan ideally unites the council, commissions and committees in a shared vision of how the parish strives to carry out its mission to the parish and community it serves.

As indicated above, Synod '71 called each Parish Pastoral Council to assist the pastor in promoting the spiritual renewal of the parish. Parish renewal, like personal conversion, is always about change and newness. Pastoral planning works at identifying what that "newness" might look like for this parish.

Suggestions for Implementation

Parish pastoral planning is based on the standard steps utilized in the art and science of strategic planning. A parish that engages in pastoral planning for the first time will usually follow these or similar steps in the process:

1. *Affirm* or identify the parish **PURPOSE**. This is a brief statement that captures the purpose and the values important to the parish. There are common elements that constitute the mission of all Catholic parishes.
2. A *reading* or **ASSESSMENT** of the needs of the parish, as well as the problems and issues in the community environment in which the parish serves. This may take place through the use of a parish needs assessment or some form of listening to the parish membership. A parish survey, a parish assembly (town meeting), small group discussions, phone calls to a randomly selected group of parishioners, or some combination of the above are alternative methods for gathering the perceptions, needs, concerns, hopes and fears of parishioners.

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3. *Developing* a sense of direction or a **VISION** of the future. Things change in all parishes. Some parishes experience significant demographic changes over time. Some priorities are achieved successfully; new needs surface. The arrival of new resources, new skills or expertise among staff and volunteers make it possible to address new (or old in renewed ways) ministerial needs. All of which make it possible for "new futures."
 4. *Setting* long range **GOALS** that map out the general direction the parish intends to pursue as it strives to achieve its purpose. This step also includes the determination of specific objectives and strategies.
 5. Once the general direction and objectives are determined by the Parish Pastoral Council, the work of *developing* specific **ACTION STEPS** and a **RESOURCE ANALYSIS** is done by other groups in the parish. The pastor and members of the parish staff develop the concrete programs and plans for implementing the general direction established by the Parish Pastoral Council. Commissions that represent the major pastoral priorities of the parish, e.g., Worship, Education, Religious Formation, Youth Ministry, etc., develop plans to recommend to the pastor or to parish staff members. The Finance Council develops recommendations concerning the the personnel, physical and financial resources needed to carry out the pastoral plan.

On-going Pastoral Planning Where a Pastoral Plan is Already in Place

Parish Pastoral Councils that have established a three or five year pastoral plan - and have gone through these or similar steps - typically engage in ongoing pastoral planning in the following way:

- Each year, the Parish Pastoral Council evaluates how successful the parish has been in carrying out the pastoral plan. This typically takes place at the end of one council's term.
- Each year (usually at the beginning of the new council's term), the Parish Pastoral Council either reaffirms the pastoral goals for the year (already set forth in the plan) or readjusts the pastoral goals to meet changing needs or circumstances in the parish.
- In planning the overall agenda for the council year, the Parish Pastoral Council may devote a Saturday or Sunday afternoon to a planning retreat - and determine both the issues and priorities that need to be addressed and estimate when the council will be addressing them.
- Parishes may engage in periodic involvement of the parish membership to get feedback on how the parish is meeting parishioners' needs. An annual parish assembly or town meeting, parishioner phone calls, or informal conversations at parish events between members of the parish pastoral council and parish members are some of the ways Parish Pastoral Councils keep in touch with the people the parish serves.

*"Where there is no vision,
the people perish."*

- Proverbs 29: 18

THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IS THE PRIMARY MEANS BY WHICH THE VOICE OF THE PARISH MEMBERSHIP IS REPRESENTED

The Parish Pastoral Council is the vehicle to ensure that parishioners have a voice in how the parish serves them. In its most effective form, it is the place where the pastor can share his concerns, discuss difficult pastoral problems, test new ideas and initiatives for the parish, and get practical advice from a group of people who live in and represent the parish community. Through the Parish Pastoral Council, the pastor and a group of parish leaders search for a wisdom about what is best for the parish. It is a wisdom that experience tells us best comes about when people who share a common purpose and a common set of values dialogue with one another.

Since neither the pastor, individual members or groups of parishioners are all-knowing about what parishioners expect of their parish, the Parish Pastoral Council provides the forum for all ideas to be heard. It is through active listening and the exchange of ideas that the diverse views of the parish community become refined to reflect the needs and concerns of the parish as a whole.

Pastors also find that this structured mechanism for interchange often helps them grow and develop as the servant leader of the parish. Representing the many views of the parish community, the Parish Pastoral Council can both support and challenge the pastor. Such a dialogue helps everyone.

To maintain the ongoing communication between parish leadership and the parish community, it is important that the Parish Pastoral Council give attention to two things:

1. Publish some form of minutes or a report of its meeting and make them available to the entire parish after each council meeting.
2. Provide periodic opportunities for parishioners to give input to the council.

Suggestions for Implementation

- The parish bulletin can be used to inform the parish of the meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council. Simultaneously, it can remind parishioners of the ways for making their ideas and feelings on pastoral issues known. This can be done by calling a council member, writing a letter, or in some cases speaking at council meetings.
- When an issue comes before the Parish Pastoral Council and the council does not know what the people of the parish think, it may schedule listening sessions, an open meeting, phone surveys, written surveys at Masses or talk informally with people at parish functions to get a basic grasp of the parishioners' perspectives.
- An annual Pastoral Assembly or an annual report can be used to review the successes of the year and listen to future needs in order to improve the planning process.
- Some parishes routinely have council members call a certain number of parishioners before each council meeting. Typically they use a standard set of questions developed by the pastor and/or council for this purpose.

"Let our leaders represent the whole assembly.." - Ezra 10,14

**ALL COUNCILS, COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES
WORK IN A SPIRIT OF MUTUAL COOPERATION
FOR THE GOOD OF THE PARISH.**

The Parish Pastoral Council's function is a ministry of service. The council assists the pastor in helping all parishioners participate fully in the life and mission of the parish. It seeks to foster a sense of unity within the parish by calling all commissions and ministries to work together for the good of the parish.

How the various commissions, committees and/or ministries relate to the Parish Pastoral Council will vary from parish to parish. Nonetheless, each parish will develop its own Guidelines in accordance with the following:

1. Canon 537 of the Code of Canon Law requires that each parish have a Finance Council. The purpose of the Finance Council is to aid the pastor in the administration of temporal goods in order to carry out the mission of the parish. Its function is distinct from the Parish Pastoral Council.

The pastor consults the Parish Pastoral Council on pastoral matters, on the development of a pastoral plan, and for the identification of pastoral priorities, policies and goals. In contrast, the Finance Council advises the pastor and the Parish Pastoral Council regarding the financial implications of their respective policy decisions (*Document on Temporal Affairs*, p. 4).

2. The pastor, in consultation with the Parish Pastoral Council, determines the pastoral priorities for the parish. A major pastoral priority or priorities shall be represented by a commission. Ordinarily, the commissions represent one or more of the following areas of parish ministry:

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Communications | • Parish Life |
| • Community Outreach | • Pro-Life |
| • Ecumenism | • Religious Education/Formation |
| • Education | • Social Justice |
| • Evangelization | • Worship |
| • Family Life | • Youth Ministry |
| • Mission Outreach | |

3. Each commission will determine the number of members and the committee structure it needs to fulfill its purpose. This may vary according to the size of the parish. A commission is usually composed of five to 15 at-large members, including a parish staff representative. At-large members may be elected by the parish and/or appointed by the pastor. Staff members are chosen by the pastor.
4. All commissions are ultimately accountable to the pastor. Each commission, however, will work with and give counsel to a parish staff member whose responsibility encompasses the area of ministry represented by that commission.
5. Where there is a parish school, a Parish Education Commission is to be established. (Synod '71) Because the administration of schools has become increasingly complex and time-consuming, it is important that the Education Commission work closely with the pastor and school administrator. The Education Commission keeps the Parish Pastoral Council informed about its policy recommendations and activities either through the pastor, the school administrator or an Education Commission liaison who sits on the Parish Pastoral Council.

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6. All the commissions recommend policies and programs that are consistent with the pastoral priorities established by the Parish Pastoral Council.
 7. Committees are established by commissions with the approval of the pastor. They help their respective commissions develop and carry out programs that promote parish goals.
 8. Each commission will determine how it will communicate effectively with the Parish Pastoral Council. In order to assist the pastor in fostering the mutual cooperation of the commissions and committees, the Parish Pastoral Council stays informed of each commission's functions and activities.

Suggestions for Implementation

- The Commissions are to be composed of representatives from the parish. The commission members may be elected by the parish community at the same time new Parish Pastoral Council members are elected. Whether elected or appointed, commission members should have or be willing to develop a certain working knowledge about the ministry area of their commission. Every effort should be made by the Parish Pastoral Council to assist the pastor and/or commission chairs in finding people with the abilities, talents and interest in serving on the commissions.
- Each commission has a chairperson who is responsible for the organization, coordination and promotion of the commission's work. The liaison relationship must be set up with the Parish Pastoral Council or the pastor, depending on the parish's Guidelines.
- The parish is responsible for the lifelong formation and education of its members. For that reason there is not to be an advisory structure for the school that is separate from the Parish Education Commission. Rather, this is to be a single Commission that addresses all the education concerns of the parish (cf. Post Synodal Task Force on Education, page 2).

*"For as in one body we have many parts,
and all the parts do not have the same function so we,
though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another."
Romans 12,4*

SELECTION FOR THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL SHALL BE DETERMINED IN A MANNER WHICH ALLOWS FOR PARTICIPATION OF THE PARISH COMMUNITY

The process by which parishioners are selected for the Parish Pastoral Council is very important. Most parishes throughout the diocese have an annual nomination-election process. This process usually produces a good mix of dedicated and effective council members who serve their parishes well. The process allows for participation of the parish community, and usually produces a fairly representative group of men and women, old and young people to provide a "voice of the people."

Out of a concern that council elections turn out to be no more than a "popularity contest," some pastors have experimented with a variety of approaches, using either one or a combination of methods such as open nominations, a discernment process, or appointment.

However the parish determines council membership, it is very important that the parish community understand the purpose and functioning of the Parish Pastoral Council and the method by which their parish determines council membership.

Parish Pastoral Council membership includes those who have voice and consultative vote on matters that are addressed by the council. The pastor and, in many parishes, some or all members of the parish staff participate in council meetings. Neither the pastor nor any parish staff members vote because he and the parish staff are responsible for receiving the council's recommendations and deciding on their implementation.

Parishes differ in the composition of their Pastoral Councils. Each parish must determine the size of its own Council. For example, a Council may include as few as six members and as many as twenty-five.

Suggestions for Implementation

- Participation by the parish community may occur at the beginning of the selection process when nominations occur and/or at the end of the process when new council members are elected.
- The pastor and/or the council may provide an annual orientation process for candidates, new council and commission members. This formation program usually includes such things as an overview of all the parish commissions and ministries, the role and function of the council, the consensus method used, how council meetings are organized, etc.
- Each parish may set forth in its own local Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines how the council members are selected (when, how and by whom). Generally, the pastor along with a committee of the council will serve as an ad hoc Selection Committee to plan, conduct and oversee the process for the selection of council members.

*"As each one has received a gift,
use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace."
I Peter 4,10*

**EACH PARISH DEVELOPS IT OWN
PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL GUIDELINES
IN ACCORD WITH ARCHDIOCESAN POLICIES .**

Local Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines give direction and clarity to the functioning and operation of the parish's Pastoral Council. Each parish should have some form of guidelines for all its councils and commissions. The Guidelines are to be drawn up in accordance with the archdiocesan policies. The following elements may be included in the local guidelines.

A SUGGESTED FORMAT

1. NAME

- The name of this parish organization shall be the Parish Pastoral Council of _____ parish.

2. PURPOSE STATEMENT AND FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL

- The parish's statement of Guidelines for the Parish Pastoral Council shall include a statement of purpose and functions. The local guidelines are to state how the council fulfills its consultative purpose through the principal functions of spiritual formation, pastoral planning, representing the people of the parish, pastoral policy development and communication.

3. MEMBERSHIP

- **The Guidelines will specify how the membership is constituted, when, how and by whom.** Ordinarily, the Parish Pastoral Council is comprised of the following:
 - A. Those who share in the pastoral care of the parish by virtue of their office participate in the work of the Parish Pastoral Council. According to canon law, the pastor presides over the council. In many parishes, some or all of the parish staff meet with the Parish Pastoral Council. However, staff persons serve as resources to the council providing their particular ministerial expertise.
 - B. Commission Representatives. Some parishes utilize the model of council that calls for someone from each of the parish's commissions to serve as a member of the Parish Pastoral Council.
- **The parish will publish the criteria for membership on the Parish Pastoral Council.** In general, the membership of the Parish Pastoral Council should reflect the demographic make-up of the parish. This representative principle must be balanced with the qualities and skills desired in its members.

Criteria:

- being a baptized Roman Catholic in good standing with the Church
- being a supporting member who has been confirmed
- being an active participant in parish life

Many parishes will list additional qualities as desirable in council members. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- willing to participate in an orientation and/or formation process
 - willing to listen and respect the ideas of others
 - able to consider the needs of the *whole* parish
 - willing to give time to prepare for and attend meetings
 - willing to meet with parish members to solicit their ideas and input
 - able to serve in a consultative capacity
 - committed to work in a spirit of prayer, dialogue, consensus-building and planning
- **Members of the Parish Pastoral Council shall have a limited term.** Terms are determined by local guidelines. Ordinarily, terms are for three years, with no more than two terms in succession without an absence of at least one year. Terms are usually staggered so that a certain portion of the council membership rotates each year.
 - **The size of the Council shall be determined by the parish based on its size and needs.** Seven to 15 members is the usual range. The size should be small enough to allow for a sense of community among the members and yet large enough to reflect a good representation of the parish community. The size may also be affected by the number of commissions the parish has.

4. OFFICERS

- **There shall be an executive committee responsible for developing an overall working plan for the year and for preparing an agenda for each meeting.** Ordinarily, the executive committee includes the pastor, the council chairperson, vice chairperson and, in some cases an administrative secretary. The members of the executive structure may vary according to local customs and needs.

The officers usually meet prior to scheduled meetings to prepare the agenda. The agenda should be sent to council members in advance of the meeting. Ordinarily, matters for the agenda are submitted by the pastor and members of the council. Parishioners who wish to have matters taken up by the council should contact a member of the council.

The administrative secretary usually prepares the agenda and submits it to the chairperson for approval. Copies of the agenda and minutes of the previous meeting should be sent to council members prior to the next meeting. The agenda and minutes are made available to parishioners. The format of the minutes might include summaries of the major discussions, all recommendations passed, actions to be taken, and persons or groups delegated to act.

The executive committee works to ensure that prayer and study are part of the council's deliberations. This committee also determines what meeting processes will be utilized (small group work, brainstorming, advance work sheets, the consensus method, etc.).

“Through Jesus Christ, the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him, you are also being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Ephesians 2,21

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role of the Pastor:

- a) The pastor meets with the executive committee responsible for the agenda.
- b) He presides at all Parish Pastoral Council meetings and actively listens and participates in the council's discussions and deliberations. Ordinarily, he delegates to the chairperson the task of chairing the council meeting.
- c) When appropriate, he will assist the council in its deliberations by sharing relevant information or his own perspective on the issue being discussed.
- d) As pastor, he is the final authorizer of any course of action recommended.

Role of the Council Chairperson:

- a) Meets with the pastor and the vice-chairperson to organize and coordinate the agenda and plans any group processes to be used at the council meeting.
- b) Chairs the meetings of the executive committee meetings.
- c) Normally chairs the regular and any special meetings of the council.
- d) Makes sure that the council meeting agenda is sent out a week before the meeting.
- e) Is the recipient of any agenda items from council members, staff or other individuals, commissions or organizations within the parish.
- f) Participates as an active member of the council in all its discussions.
- g) Assumes the role of chairperson to stimulate and involve all members in the discussion and facilitates the council in formulating its goals and methods for achieving them.
- h) Leads the council in an annual evaluation of the council's proceedings and effectiveness.
- i) Assists in preparing the next chairperson to succeed him or her.
[See Appendix C for additional ideas on "Chairing an Effective Council Meeting."]

Role of the Vice Chairperson:

- a) Meets with the pastor and the council chairperson to develop the meeting agenda.
- b) Chairs the council meeting if the chairperson is absent; or should the chairperson want to temporarily assign the chairing of the meeting in order to participate more fully in the discussion.
- c) Assists the chairperson in conducting the council's work.

Role of the Administrative Secretary:

- a) Is usually responsible for the preparation and distribution of the council agenda prior to the council meeting.
- b) Is responsible for recording the minutes of regular and special meetings. [It is recommended that minutes be focused on: 1) discussion summaries; 2) resolutions/recommendations; and, 3) action steps to be taken.]
- c) Maintains roster and attendance records of council members.
- d) Makes necessary physical arrangements for meetings; secures requested statistical information for the council; is responsible for ongoing updating of council documents, and for the distribution of information and correspondence.
- e) Keeps on file records of the council's history, development, minutes, resolutions and names of members.
- f) Serves as directed by the council in the administration of council matters.
- g) May be appointed (or hired) by the council for whatever term the council decides. In the latter case, the administrative secretary is not a voting member of the council.

6. MEETINGS

- **The Parish Pastoral Council determines its annual calendar of meetings prior to the Fall of each year** (or the first meeting, depending on the council calendar). Meetings should be held regularly; in most cases this would be once a month. The executive committee should determine when is the best time to schedule regular meetings. It should also assess when there is no need for a regularly scheduled meeting and if a special half-day or weekend would be better depending on the matters to be settled.
- **Local Guidelines will designate when parishioners who are not members may attend council meetings and under what rules and proceedings they may participate. Usually all meetings are open unless, for cogent reasons, the Council needs to meet in Executive Session.**
- **Meetings should be run in an efficient and orderly fashion.** The executive committee should determine whether Robert's Rules of Order (or some abbreviated version) are helpful for the council meetings. Some parishes have found that in using a consensus model of deliberation, parliamentary procedure is unnecessary.

7. COMMISSIONS

- **The Guidelines are to name all the parish commissions, their purpose and responsibilities, and how they relate to the Parish Pastoral Council.** In many parishes, the commissions are established by the Parish Pastoral Council and they apprise the council of their activities through the commission representative on the council, or through members-at-large who serve as liaisons to the various commissions of the parish. Each Commission should have guidelines, similar to those for the Parish Pastoral Council.

8. AMENDMENTS TO THE GUIDELINES

- **The Guidelines are to describe clearly the process for amending the guidelines.**



MODELS

Model A

COUNCIL OF MINISTRIES I

The Purpose of the Council:

1. To assist the Pastor in promoting parish renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council and the Sixth Synod of Cincinnati.
2. To foster dialogue among the clergy, administration and people of the parish; and to broaden their understanding of the parish and its operation.
3. To counsel the Pastor and Staff in developing goals and programs that carry out the parish's 5-year Pastoral Plan.

Functions:

1. To represent all the people of the parish.
2. To share in decision-making for the parish by evaluating issues and making recommendations on matters of pastoral importance.
3. To recommend pastoral priorities and goals for the parish according to its needs (spiritual, social, temporal) and the means available to meet the needs.
4. To assist the Pastor in delegating responsibilities to appropriate commissions, committees and parish organizations.
5. To address various pastoral issues, consider them carefully, and propose actions to address them.
6. To provide for communication, coordination, and cooperation among the Commissions and Committees of the Council, the organizations in the parish and the parishioners.
7. To provide representation to appropriate Archdiocesan organizations.
8. To review priorities periodically and evaluate their relationship and relevance to the mission of the parish; and to annually set goals and objectives.

Membership

The Parish Pastoral Council consists of 14 voting members elected (Cf. **Selection Procedure I**, p. 21) by the parish (8 members- at-large and 6 who represent each of the six parish commissions). Each serves a term of three years. The Pastor and some or all of parish staff meet with the Council but do not vote.

Commissions:

Christian Outreach, Communications, Education, Finance, Laity, and Liturgy.

Meetings:

The Parish Pastoral Council meets monthly. Meetings are limited to two hours. The June meeting is a social and a time to celebrate the contribution of out-going members and welcome new members.

The Council year begins with:

1. A two-hour orientation meeting with new Council members with the Pastor and the Council Chairperson; and,
2. An Evening of Reflection for the new Council.

Parishioners have input to Council deliberations in the following ways:

- An annual parish assembly.
- All Council meetings are open meetings.
- Council members periodically make random phone calls to parishioners before a regularly scheduled meeting.

COUNCIL OF MINISTRIES II

The Purpose of the Council:

1. To represent the people of the parish community in the process of making evaluations and recommendations that will help the Pastor and pastoral staff, as the primary administrators of the parish.
2. To make recommendations for the improvement of the quality of parish life and the effectiveness of parish services and policies.

Functions:

1. To present opinions and evaluations as part of initial input to the consultative process of decision making.
2. To discuss and analyze any data gathered (demographics, surveys, etc.)
3. To discuss the merits of proposals, alternatives and recommendations.
4. To generate alternatives.
5. To prioritize alternatives or recommendations.
6. To bring up matters of concern relating to the effect pastoral administration or policy is having on the parish.
7. To recommend courses of action on the strength of the information available.

Membership:

The Parish Pastoral Council consists of eight members who are determined through a discernment process (Cf. **Selection Procedure IV**, p. 22). Each serves a term of three years. Six members serve as a liaison to one of the parish commissions. The Pastor and some or all of parish staff meet with the Council but do not vote.

Commissions:

Communications, Evangelization (School and Religious Education), Fellowship, Social Outreach, Worship, and the Finance Council.

Meetings:

Council meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month, except June and December.

The Council begins its year with:

A Day of Prayer and Formation. At this time, the Council spends time in prayer, begins to form as a team, sets goals for the year, and discerns its officers for the year.

Parishioners have input to Council deliberations in the following ways:

- Three times a year, Council members are available at Sunday Liturgies and parish events wearing badges of identity.
- Periodically (every year or so), the Parish Pastoral Council administers a written survey.
- Council meetings are open for parishioners to observe. Parishioners can submit agenda items to Council members.

Model C

COMMISSIONS REPORT TO PASTOR

(No School)

The Purpose of the Council:

The Parish Pastoral Council is the principal organization whereby parishioners, through their elected representatives share in the life of the parish by means of consultation, i.e., planning, evaluation and recommendation.

Functions:

1. To pray, dialogue and develop as an effective team of councilors.
2. To represent the wisdom of the parish community.
3. To surface, through a variety of means, the hopes, dreams and beliefs of the parish community.
4. To assist the Pastor in developing a vision of broad direction for the parish.
5. To recommend policies on pastoral matters and set goals (at the beginning of each year).
6. To evaluate the quality of parish life and of programs offered.
7. To advise on the use of parish resources in meeting real parish needs.
8. To assist the Pastor in critical decisions that affect the unity of the parish.

Membership:

The Parish Pastoral Council consists of eleven members, ten nominated by the parish and elected by the existing Council (Cf. **Selection Procedure II**, p. 21) and one member appointed by the pastor, in consultation with the Council. The term is two years. The Pastor and three parish staff members are ex officio, nonvoting members.

Commissions ("Ministry Teams"):

For example, Community Outreach, Temporal Services, Worship, Evangelization, Youth, Finances, Religious Education and Family Life. They are responsible for specific program planning and for the implementation of activities that are based on the direction and pastoral priorities set by the Parish Pastoral Council. The Ministry Team Coordinators are accountable to the Pastor and pastoral staff, and through them keep the Parish Pastoral Council informed of their plans and activities. In June of each year, the Parish Pastoral Council members and the Ministry Coordinators meet for the annual goal setting meeting.

Meetings:

Council meetings are held monthly, except for July and December.

The Council begins its year with:

A Formation Day to achieve the following:

1. Prayer and reflection on the ideas of servant leadership.
2. Formation of the group into an effective team centered in prayer.
3. Set goals for the coming year.
4. Discernment of Council officers.

Parishioners have input to Council deliberations in the following ways:

- An annual parish assembly.
- All regular Council meetings are open meetings.

COUNCIL AS PASTORAL PLANNERS

The Purpose of the Council:

The purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council is to constitute the primary consultative voice of the parish community. It offers the Pastor practical advice based on its collective knowledge and experience of the parish and its members.

Functions:

1. To prayerfully discern the needs of the parish community.
2. To develop an effective parish pastoral plan.
3. To administer the annual parish pastoral assembly.
4. To periodically evaluate progress toward agreed parish goals and objectives and update the plan.
5. To serve as a vehicle of dialogue and communication with all the parish committees.
6. To make recommendations to the Pastor on matters relating to the parish mission and the pastoral plan.

Membership:

The Parish Pastoral Council consists of fifteen members. Ten voting members are elected by the parish (Cf. **Selection Procedure III**, p. 21), staggering the terms so that there is an annual turnover of not less than three elected members. Members shall serve a three year term and be eligible for one immediate consecutive term. The Pastor and no more than four are ex officio and/or appointed, nonvoting members.

Commissions:

The Council has two standing committees -- a Pastoral Planning Committee and a Finance Committee. Normally and as appropriate, these committees shall convene in those months when the Council does not meet in plenary session. Otherwise, the Council works through committees that represent the pastoral priorities of the parish, e.g., education, worship, etc. These latter committees work independently of the Parish Pastoral Council, yet keep the Council informed of its work through either the Pastor or the parish staff person who works with the committee.

Meetings:

The Parish Pastoral Council meets every other month in each work year. Special meetings are called as needed.

The Council begins its year with:

An off-site weekend (Friday night- Saturday) Planning Retreat. The goals are:

1. Pray together.
2. Orient new members.
3. Review the results of the Pastoral Assembly.
4. Set goals for the year.
5. Adjust the Parish Pastoral Plan (if needed).
6. Begin to form a new council leadership team.

Parishioners have input to Council deliberations in the following way:

- The annual parish assembly, when Council reports on its work of the past year, and gathers input for future planning.



**SELECTION
PROCEDURES**

SELECTION BY ELECTION

I. Members-at-large and commission representatives elected by parish.

1. A three to five person Nominating Committee is appointed by the council chairperson. This committee includes a member of the Parish Pastoral Council.
2. The Nominating Committee advertises the notice of nominations, job descriptions and the opening of nominations at least two months before the election date.
3. The Pastor and Committee determine the eligibility of the nominees, based on criteria determined by the Parish Pastoral Council.
4. The Committee contacts the nominees to determine their willingness to serve and their qualifications. This information is made known to the parish at least two weeks prior to the election.
5. The parish community elects the new at-large council members the third Sunday of May. There are eight members-at-large, consisting of four men and four women, serving a three-year term, selected on a staggered basis, some each year.
6. Commission representatives on the council (6) are elected by the parish as needed.
7. Ex officio, nonvoting members include the Pastor, the Pastoral Associate, the Administrative Secretary and the Parish Business Manager.

II. Members selected by current Council.

1. An orientation meeting will be held each March for all parishioners interested in becoming council members. They can be nominated by parishioners or self-selected.
2. An ad hoc selection committee is appointed by the Parish Pastoral Council Chairperson as needed, to screen and recommend candidates.
3. The selection of ten council members shall be by consensus of existing council with input from the parish staff. One additional member is appointed by the pastor.
4. The Ministry Team Coordinators are appointed by the Pastor in consultation with the Parish Pastoral Council.
5. The Pastor and the three parish staff members are ex officio, nonvoting members.

III. Members-at-large elected by parish.

1. A Nominations Committee is appointed by the Pastor and the Council Chairperson.
2. Notice of council openings, job descriptions of member-at-large positions and information about up-coming council elections are advertised in the parish. It is the parish custom that demographic representation is important to the nomination process.
3. The slate of candidates, accompanied by brief biographical sketches, is advertised in the parish bulletin prior to the election.
4. The Parish Pastoral Council elections are held during the month of May.
5. The Pastor and any Parish staff who meet with the Council do not vote.

SELECTION BY DISCERNMENT

IV. Selection by a Discernment Process involving the nominees.

1. Each Spring the parish at large is asked to submit names of persons they feel would benefit by and be a benefit to the worship, faith life and ministry of the parish. All eligible parishioners whose names have been submitted will be invited to attend a series of informational meetings designed to educate about all facets of parish life. At the end of the series, this group will participate in a discernment process in which they will determine which facet of the parish is best suited to their time and talents.
2. As a result of the discernment process, two or three new members will be determined for the Parish Pastoral Council. The rest of the participants will be assured of having the opportunity to fill some other commission or ministry committee position.
3. The council chairperson and the Pastor will have full responsibility for coordinating and supervising the discernment process. They may delegate this responsibility with consensus of the council.
4. The council consists of eight voting members determined through the discernment process. The Pastor and the parish staff are nonvoting members.

V. Election by parish, following discernment of nominees by current Council.

1. In the Spring, the current Parish Pastoral Council goes through a discernment process to surface names to be presented to the parish. This is based on the talents, skills and expertise needed in light of the purpose and functions of the council. Parishioners are invited to submit names to the council as well.
2. In September, elections take place in the parish.
3. After the parish election, the Pastor appoints an additional member.
4. The Parish Pastoral Council consists of eleven voting members (ten elected and one appointed member). The Pastor and parish staff are nonvoting members.

VI. Three discernment processes.

The pastor or council chairperson explains the role and importance of council to the congregation, asks the congregation to reflect on the qualifications (list is published) for council membership, and asks members of the congregation to submit the name of someone the person feels will represent his/her interests as a council member. There are three alternative models for completing this process.

1. Those named most frequently are then approached by the Pastor or chairperson, and asked if they are willing to serve. If not, the pastor goes to the next name on the list until the number of council members needed for the year has been selected. Or
2. From the list of names generated by the parish community, the Pastor, the parish staff and the council prayerfully discern 15 members and ask if they are willing to serve. Or
3. The congregation is asked to gather in prayer that the Holy Spirit will work through the selection process. Names are then selected by lot from among those eligible to serve on council and their willingness to serve ascertained.

SELECTION BY APPOINTMENT

VII. Appointment by Pastor

1. The pastor explains the role and importance of the Parish Pastoral Council to the congregation at an August weekend masses. Parishioners are then invited to submit names for nomination.
2. The pastor then consults the current council about the names in nomination.
3. From this consultation, the pastor forms his own list. He then calls each person in that order. He asks if they are willing to serve and if they understand the role of the council.
4. The council consists of the ten members from the parish who are voting members, and the pastor and the deacon who are ex officio, nonvoting members.



**FREQUENTLY
ASKED
QUESTIONS**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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1. WHAT IS A PARISH COUNCIL ? WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Parish Pastoral Council is a consultative body consisting of people who represent the parish community. It forms a united body with the pastor in discerning how the parish can best carry out the ministry of the church. Working in a spirit of shared responsibility (as called for by the Second Vatican Council and the Sixth Synod of the Archdiocese) the council assists the pastor in developing pastoral goals and promoting spiritual growth and renewal in the parish. It works with the other existing groups in the parish who recommend specific policies and programs to the pastor.

The following list of activities represents what effective Parish Pastoral Councils do. No one council does all of them. It is understood that as a consultative body all insights of practical wisdom, resolutions or "best choices" are *recommended* to the pastor. Working in a spirit of collegiality, the pastor sees the Parish Pastoral Council more as a *we* than a *they* advising *us*. These represent activities that the pastor and council members do together, each respecting their rightful roles as determined by church law and the policies issues by the bishop.

- It prays and works together to discern the will of God on how best to serve the parish.
- It takes time to learn and study about its role, the parish and its needs, church and diocesan documents, and the skills utilized in its deliberations; e.g., listening, dialogue, consensus, etc.
- It prepares for meetings by studying the agenda sent in advance; or by reading any commission or parish staff reports or any other materials pertinent to any agenda item.
- It engages in pastoral planning, developing pastoral priorities and goals that carry out the ministry of the parish.
- It consults and knows the parish community so it can be the "voice" of the people, e.g., taking time at a council meeting to discuss the results of a phone poll taken before the meeting; bringing to the attention of the pastor concerns raised by parishioners.
- It helps the pastor analyze the pros and cons of matters related to the ministry of the parish; e.g., hiring a new minister; where to send contributions from the parish Mission fund; whether to create a new parish commission.
- It discusses how parish events (e.g., a parish picnic) can more effectively build a sense of community in the parish (a parish goal); and makes sure that the tasks of planning and organizing the event, is delegated to appropriate persons or groups.
- It discusses financial matters, often recommending approval of proposed budgets. (Administrative, financial or legal analysis is the proper work of the Finance Council.)
- It mediates a parish conflict, e.g., controversy over a sex education program in the school; a rift between the pastor and his parishioners; a dispute among commissions.
- It studies and discusses proposals from commissions and offers its evaluation on how each proposal promotes or does not promote the mission of the parish and/or how it does or does not fit in with the parish Pastoral Plan or the parish goals.
- It recommends to the pastor its "seal of approval" on programs recommended by commissions.
- It analyzes, discusses and makes recommendations about matters related to the mission of the parish; e.g., how it can impact the local civic community or neighborhood; promote greater ecumenism in the area. (If there is a commission for these areas, the council might identify a specific need and then delegate the task of studying the issue to the commission.)
- It imparts a practical wisdom on many matters (e.g., the use of buildings after receiving input from the Building and Grounds committee).
- It facilitates an annual evaluation of the past year's work of commissions and ministry groups.
- It communicates its work and deliberations through a published report and/or minutes.
- It meets with the diocesan Priests' Personnel Director to give input on the appointment of a new pastor.

The Parish Pastoral Council neither implements programs, nor assumes an expertise that is more appropriate to another parish group, nor involves itself in the administration of the parish.

2. ARE ALL PARISHES REQUIRED TO HAVE A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL?

In a word, yes. It is the policy of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati that each parish have a Parish Pastoral Council. Although Canon Law requires that each parish have a Finance Council and recommends that each parish have a Parish Pastoral Council, their work is complementary rather than competitive. As indicated elsewhere in these Guidelines, each council has a distinct role. The Finance Council as well as all other commissions and parish organizations work in mutual cooperation with the Parish Pastoral Council.

3. WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL?

Canon 536 stipulates that the pastor, who presides over the Parish Pastoral Council, those who represent the faithful of the parish and those who share in the pastoral care of the parish participate in a collaborative effort in fostering pastoral activity for the parish. The pastor, any ex officio members, and parish staff members who may be appointed by the pastor to meet with the council have voice in council deliberations, but do not vote or cast their position in whatever consensus method is used by the council.

Those parishioners who are elected and/or appointed by the pastor are the actual members of the Parish Pastoral Council. Strictly speaking, they have "voice and vote" on what is recommended to the pastor. The pastor and the parish staff implement what is recommended by the council. Though staff persons may be asked their opinions as resource persons and as professionals, knowledgeable on a given pastoral priority, they do not participate in the stage of the decision-making process that renders the best choice recommended by the members of the Parish Pastoral Council.

4. WHO PRESIDES OVER THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL?

Canon 519 stipulates that "the pastor is the proper shepherd of the parish entrusted to him, exercising pastoral care in the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share." In virtue of the office entrusted to him by the diocesan bishop, "the pastor presides" over the Parish Pastoral Council (Canon 536).

The presiding role of the pastor is understood in the context of the decision-making process. As developed in Question 8, this process involves a number of stages. For example, having studied and discussed the agenda item, the pastor and the council collaborate in identifying the "best choice" to resolve an issue or address some pastoral need or concern. As the one who presides over the Parish Pastoral Council, the pastor ratifies the best choice and is responsible for its implementation.

This official role does not preclude an elected member's conducting regular meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council. Most pastors in fact delegate this role to the council chairperson. In some cases, the pastor conducts the council meetings.

5. HOW IS THE COUNCIL AGENDA DETERMINED?

Various approaches are used to determine the agenda for council meetings. Ordinarily, the pastor meets with the council chairperson and vice chair to develop the agenda. Items on the agenda are usually submitted by the pastor, his parish staff as well as council members themselves.

6. WHAT DOES THE TERM CONSULTATIVE MEAN?

The Parish Pastoral Council is a consultative body. It gives sound advice which allows the pastor to draw upon a broader base of knowledge and a practical wisdom that lies within the parish community. Like other consultative bodies in the parish (the Finance Council, the Education Commission, etc.) it is not a legislative body in the sense of having the right to make rules which the pastor and the rest of the parish are compelled to follow. The final decisions are the pastor's. The Parish Pastoral Council's recommendations have no binding authority apart from him.

The word "consultative" must be understood in the context of the decision-making process. Taken out of that context, the term doesn't always convey the reality of parish life as called for by the Second Vatican Council and practiced by pastors. In the end, what often seems to matter most is not so much who has the final say but that the pastor and the council arrive at a wise and sound choice that serves the needs of the parish.

In effective decision making, there are stages in the process that contribute to a wise choice. Data is gathered or presented and evaluated by the group. The pros and cons of alternative solutions are analyzed. The potential resource implications are examined. The reasoning behind each member's position is heard. But how the "final resolution" is determined depends on the "consultative style" of the pastor. And the style may vary from issue to issue for the same pastor.

In some instances, the pastor will present a tentative decision or a proposal to the council with the understanding that he may change his mind depending on the input and wisdom of the council. In another instance, the pastor presents an area of concern or a situation, defines certain parameters, and relies on the council to analyze, discuss and make a recommendation that he will "live with" and formally ratify as the person responsible for the final decision. In other instances, proposals or topics are generated by council members or other commissions. In these cases, the pastor participates in the discussion, may or may not offer his own preferred position, and basically accepts -- as the final decider -- the recommendation of the council. In yet other instances, the pastor listens to the discussion and recommendation of the council, and then outside of the council meeting carefully and prayerfully weighs the council's input as he decides what to do. Each case represents a different way of consulting the council. Pastors of effective councils say that when the council does its homework and deliberates thoughtfully and respectfully, it goes against common sense not to accept the "practical wisdom" of the body representing the wider parish community.

Consultative implies a dialogue. It means that when a pastor decides against a recommendation backed by a consensus of the council, he would feel morally obliged to explain the rationale of the decision and be willing to enter into further dialogue about the decision.

Experience informs us though that a pastor who consistently presents final decisions and then simply entertains questions or "any other input" creates a situation whereby the "consultative" role of the council is not only demoralizing to its members, but it also underutilizes this parish resource. This kind of pastoral style reinforces the negative connotation that the term consultative sometimes has.

7. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL TO THE FINANCE COUNCIL?

The roles of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Finance Council are distinct. Each in its own way contributes to the mission of the parish. Each assists the pastor in his pastoral ministry.

The Finance Council has a unique relationship to the Parish Pastoral Council in that many of the proposals the Parish Pastoral Council recommends or approves have financial, legal or administrative implications. The deliberations of the Parish Pastoral Council often require the kind of analysis and expertise that is appropriate to the Finance Council. On the other hand, anything the Finance Council recommends to the pastor must be consistent with the mission of the parish and the pastoral priorities or goals that have been developed by the Parish Pastoral Council. These two councils must often work in close cooperation. They must not be seen as two "power" blocs or give the impression that one is more important than the other. Each council is to designate in its Guidelines how this cooperative (and complementary) relationship is to be carried out.

The Archdiocesan Document on Temporal Affairs offers the guidelines that govern the relationship between the Parish Pastoral Council and the Finance Council. (TAD, paragraphs 12 - 16)

8. HOW DOES THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL DELIBERATE AND BRING TO RESOLUTION ITS AGENDA ITEMS?

The Parish Pastoral Council does not "make decisions" in that it does not have that authority. However, if we look upon "decision making" as a process with a series of steps, we can see that whatever the council recommends, its members have to come to an agreement or consensus on what it considers to be the "best choice."

The decision-making process might include this sequence of steps:

1. **Identifying the question**, area or problem for deliberation.
2. **Analysis or evaluation.** This may include perceptions or feelings of parishioners, expert analysis, financial, administrative, legal input, and/or other data related to the topic.
3. **Generating a proposal** or a number of alternative proposals.
4. **Discussion of the merits (pros) and risks (cons)** of each alternative. (The council might prioritize the alternatives.)
5. **Consensus testing** on the "best choice."
6. **The formal recommendation of a course of action** based on the strength of the information available and the analysis done in Steps 2 - 4.
7. **The formal decision** is made or ratified by the pastor.

9. HOW DO PARISHIONERS GIVE INPUT TO THE COUNCIL'S CONSULTATIONS?

Parishioners give input to the Parish Pastoral Council's consultations insofar as they are involved in the election or selection process for determining council membership. Parishioners also give input through the parish commissions that relate to the Parish Pastoral Council either through the pastor, a council liaison person, or a commission representative who is a member of the council.

During the course of the year, parishioners have input to the council to the extent that the parish utilizes one or a combination of the methods for listening to parishioners described in the MODELS section ("*Parishioners have input. . .*"). The parish Guidelines will spell out how parishioners give input to the council or what procedure they must follow to speak at a council meeting.

10. WHAT IF THE COUNCIL AND THE PASTOR DISAGREE OR THE PASTOR DOES NOT TAKE THE ADVICE OF THE COUNCIL?

First of all, disagreement is a normal part of life and any decision-making process. Pastors can be wrong; council members can be wrong. The ground rules that have been established will determine how disagreement is handled.

Ordinarily, when a council prayerfully deliberates and seeks to build consensus, it is the rare occasion when a pastor would not approve or ratify a council recommendation. However, the pastor must not follow any advice or proposal from the council that would be contrary to universal church law, diocesan policies, or civil law, or contrary to his own best pastoral judgment.

11. WHAT QUALIFICATIONS ARE NEEDED FOR EFFECTIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS?

The Parish Pastoral Council provides a service to the parish that is distinct in purpose and function from that which the parish staff and other groups in the parish provide. The pastor, the parish staff and some committees are the primary "doers." The pastor makes final decisions. The commissions require a specific expertise, e.g., financial, liturgical, educational, etc. Whereas, council members may serve the parish in some other capacity (a Eucharistic minister, a CCD teacher, run the Spring dance, etc.), as a council member they are called upon to develop and practice certain skills and attitudes that make for an effective Parish Pastoral Council. Some or all of the following qualities and skills are often listed by pastors at the time of the parish selection process for new council members.

Qualities, attitudes and skills that make for an effective Parish Pastoral Council Member:

- A prayerful person.
- Willingness to participate in an orientation process.
- Willingness to listen and be open-minded toward the ideas of others.
- Able to be attentive to, and consider the needs of, the whole parish.
- Dedication to the mission and spiritual welfare of the parish.
- Commitment to give time to attend meetings and to prepare sufficiently for these meetings.
- Willingness to accept and work with the consultative nature of a Parish Pastoral Council.
- Willingness to learn and utilize the skills and exercises of pastoral planning.
- Willingness to work with the pastor who is the spiritual leader of the parish.
- Commitment to work in a spirit of prayer, shared responsibility and consensus-building.
- A willingness to give of their practical wisdom, experience and expertise.

12. WHAT PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL MODEL SHOULD A PARISH ADOPT?

The answer to this question depends on a number of factors. These might include:

- What model best serves the size, composition and the nature of the parish.
- What the pastor is comfortable with.
- What model parishioners are willing to work with.
- What model other parishes have effectively adopted.

If the model presently being used is not working, the pastor and the council might step back to evaluate the situation. They might suspend ordinary council business, appoint a task force to study these *Guidelines*, talk to other parishes and then identify a model and set of guidelines that they think will be most effective in their situation.

13. WHAT IS THE IDEAL SIZE OF A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL?

The size of the council can range from seven to 15 members. The size should be small enough to allow for a sense of community among the members and yet large enough to reflect the diversity of the parish. The complexity of the council's agenda should also be a factor in determining its size.

14. HOW DOES AN EFFECTIVE COUNCIL ORGANIZE ITS WORK?

There are two dimensions to this question: how does a council organize its work for the year; and how does a council organize its agenda for any given meeting.

Parish Pastoral Councils that work out of a pastoral planning philosophy develop a three or a five-year pastoral plan. Each year, the council identifies a set of goals and objectives for the year. In general, the council work should be organized around these pastoral goals or priorities. New issues, problems or commission proposals will emerge as the year unfolds. If the Parish Pastoral Council facilitates a meeting of all commission heads at the beginning of the council year, it might organize its work based on the plans submitted by each of the commissions and ministries.

Each Parish Pastoral Council should spell out in its Guidelines how the council organizes its work and what a typical council agenda looks like.

15. HOW DOES THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL EFFECTIVELY WORK WITH THE COMMISSIONS OF THE PARISH?

The Parish Pastoral Council fosters a spirit of collaboration between and among the commissions of the parish. The way it exercises this responsibility varies according to the model established in the parish. Where commissions are set up to assist the Parish Pastoral Council, there needs to be a liaison person designated for each commission who will insure regular and accurate communication to the council about policies and plans in their specific area of parish life. Where commissions work independently of the council and report directly to the pastor or to a parish staff person, the council needs to clarify the relationship it has with the commissions. In either case, three strategies will facilitate a successful relationship and mutual cooperation in support of the parish's ministry, namely:

1. The Parish Pastoral Council, in consultation with the pastor, is responsible for developing the parish goals and policies that relate to the overall ministry outreach in the parish. It does not involve itself in the details of planning and implementing programs.
2. The council, along with the pastor, holds all groups accountable to the mission of the parish, the parish goals and any parish policies that relate to the overall good of the parish.
3. The council might conduct a process that includes a way to listen at the beginning of the new council year to the plans and intended programs of the the commissions and committees. The council usually has a mechanism to stay apprised of commission developments throughout the year (e.g. reports given at council meetings; written reports submitted to the council). It often facilitates an evaluation of commission accomplishments at the end of the year.

16. WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TRAINING FOR NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS?

Orientation and "training" is key to the effective functioning of a Parish Pastoral Council. All the research on successful volunteering suggests two things that are critical to the satisfaction and commitment of volunteers: support and training for the task to be done, and occasional thanks and appreciation. This question addresses the training dimension.

An orientation or training session for new council members should include the following:

- What it means for the Parish Pastoral Council to be a prayerful group.
- How the council functions in this parish.
- What it means to be a "consultative" body.
- What it means to do "pastoral planning."
- The organizational structure of the parish; that is, what parish staff and all the commissions and organizations do and how they relate to one another.
- The methodology for reaching consensus on council recommendations.

17. SHOULD THE CONSENSUS PROCESS BE USED FOR EVERY PROPOSAL THE COUNCIL ADDRESSES?

The Parish Pastoral Council strives to work in a spirit of consensus-building. The group seeks to reach a point where all feel they can support the proposal, even though some may not totally agree. Reaching consensus can be a time-consuming process. It requires that the council build good relationships and strive to be an effective work group or team. There is a willingness to listen to one another and to work together to find an answer or a best choice that reflects a wisdom larger than any one person's wisdom. It requires trust.

Some proposals are so well worked out or the best choice is so clear that a simple show of hands can achieve the consensus or support needed. On issues that impact the general well-being of the parish, are controversial, or when acceptance by the entire council is essential, a process similar to the one outlined for Question 8 will be most useful. In addition, the council might want to use one of the consensus ballots in Appendix D.

Some proposals or matters should never be brought to consensus -- or even to the council for that matter. These would include issues that require a technical expertise not present in the council, a matter that should be more appropriately decided by another commission or a parish staff member, or a matter that does not require an answer that represents what the parish community thinks.

There will be times when consensus is not reached. The parish should spell out in its Guidelines what the Parish Pastoral Council will do when consensus cannot be reached on an important matter. Some of the options are the following:

- If time is a factor, two-thirds or a simple majority vote can be taken.
- The pastor simply takes the lack of consensus under advisement, and decides the direction that needs to be taken.
- The proposal is taken back for additional work.
- More alternatives are examined.
- The issue is tabled until greater consensus can be built for the direction being proposed.

18. WHAT DOES THE TERM DISCERNMENT MEAN?

Discernment is a process of searching for a solution or making a decision that is in accord with God's will. Prayer and reflection are key to the process. Communal discernment is related to consensus-building. It includes steps not unlike the ones described in Question 8: prayerful reflection on the Scriptures, a religious document or meditation; discussion of all the data gathered that relates to the topic; discussion of the potential consequences of the proposed alternatives; and a resolution that has been generally accepted by all council members.

To utilize a discernment process when making decisions is to clearly acknowledge the belief that God is at work in our lives at all times -- not only when making decisions about major issues, but even when making practical decisions about electing council members or making the best use of buildings. Prayer can help the group stay focused on its purpose, as well as the needs or situation being addressed. At its best, prayerful discernment helps people form an attitude that frees the mind and spirit from vested interests and distractions. The ultimate goal is a decision that best reflects God's light and guidance.

19. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL TO WORK AS AN EFFECTIVE TEAM?

There are two dimensions to what it means for a Parish Pastoral Council to work as an effective team. The first dimension includes the following characteristics of an effective work group, operating in the context of faith and spiritual growth:

- All members of the group are committed to working together for a common purpose.
- People strive to listen and be open-minded to the ideas of others.
- People regard one another with trust and respect.
- The group uses a thoughtful decision-making process based on prayer and reflection.
- Communication is open and honest and disagreement is dealt with openly.
- Decisions are made by consensus.
- People enter into their work with a sense of shared responsibility.

The second dimension relates to a vision of pastoral leadership that espouses four beliefs:

1. Council members see themselves as leaders who give witness to a vision of what the church can be. To work together in the way described above is to witness to what we are called to be as church, especially when that common purpose is promoting the mission of Christ.
2. The quality of one's personal prayer life has direct implications for the work one does as a Parish Pastoral Council member. Whether it's taking five minutes out of your day to pray in preparation for the evening council meeting, or truly believing that the prayer invoked at the beginning of a meeting helps to set an atmosphere conducive to quality deliberations, prayer becomes just as important to the effectiveness of the Parish Pastoral Council as conducting an orderly meeting.
3. Prayer is more than the invocation or blessing which opens and closes meetings. It is an attitude that permeates how one conducts oneself at the council meeting and how one enters into the deliberative process. For example, it might be helpful to stop for five minutes for prayer and reflection, either when the discussion has bogged down, or right before choosing the best solution to recommend.
4. Discernment is a more appropriate tool for decision-making by a group working in a faith context. Prayerful reflection on the solutions to issues before the Parish Pastoral Council can be tested against the ultimate criterion of whether these solutions further the mission of Christ and promote Gospel values.

20. HOW MIGHT PARISH LEADERSHIP FORM OR RENEW A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL?

The following process is suggested for forming a new Parish Pastoral Council. A process very similar to the one explained here would be used to renew an already existing council that has become ineffective or is not consistent with diocesan Guidelines.

1. **A Public Announcement** is made that a Parish Pastoral Council will be formed. Interested parishioners, representatives from all the parish organizations and members of the parish staff are invited to a meeting. Catechesis on the nature of the church, shared responsibility, and the purpose and function of a Parish Pastoral Council is offered. Those attending are invited to name their hopes and expectations for a Parish Pastoral Council. Those who are further interested are invited to attend a training session about Parish Pastoral Councils.
2. **A Training Program** of four evening sessions is offered. The content of these sessions would be based on these Guidelines. Readings would be assigned to supplement this training. At the end of the training program, 10 to 15 persons from those who attended the sessions are discerned for a steering committee. Qualities looked for in committee members are these:
 - willingness to spend time praying and reflecting with others
 - time, enthusiasm, and interest for forming the Parish Pastoral Council
 - concern for the interests and pastoral needs of the parish as a whole, rather than just representing the interests of a particular group in the parish
 - the capacity to work harmoniously with others
 - a capacity for delegating to others
 - patience to tolerate the deliberative process involved in the formation of the council
 - willingness to make a commitment to a twelve to 24-month process
3. **The Steering Committee**, approved by the pastor and including representatives of the entire parish is formed. At a Sunday liturgy, the names are announced and a commissioning prayer is invoked to charter the group with the task of developing a Parish Pastoral Council. The Steering Committee develops the council by:
 - meeting regularly to pray and build community together
 - reading, studying, and reflecting upon **Called to be Church: A Guide for Parish Pastoral Councils** and the theology of shared responsibility
 - studying the parish situation to discern its needs
 - encountering and investigating the Pastoral Councils of other parishes
 - discerning the best form of council for the parish
 - writing up a set of guidelines for the council according to diocesan guidelines
 - calling forth the Charter Members of the Parish Pastoral Council
 - assisting the new Parish Pastoral Council in planning the first meeting
4. **Initial Guidelines for the Parish Pastoral Council** are developed and presented to the whole parish upon completion of the steering committee process and approved by the pastor.
5. **Charter Members of the Parish Pastoral Council** are called forth by the steering committee. These members may include a few steering committee members together with others gifted with the talents best suited for the work of the council and who represent the interests and pastoral needs of the parish community. The new Parish Pastoral Council uses the initial guidelines for at least a year. The guidelines are periodically evaluated and amended where needed (e.g., every five years).



RESOURCES

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Available from the Archdiocesan Media Center

VIDEOTAPES

- VC 796 *Pastoral Councils: Instruments of Visioning and Planning*, Dennis J. O'Leary. Meetings Internationales, held on May 2, 1991 in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The speaker reviews the historical development of parish pastoral councils since the second Vatican Council. He examines the role and functioning of a parish pastoral council and how it assists the pastor in revitalizing parish life through pastoral planning.

- VC 1209 *Parish Pastoral Councils* Published by ACTA Films, Chicago, IL, 1989. Can be purchased by calling 1-800-397-2282. ISBN 0-914070-63-0

This tape is divided into four sessions. The speaker discusses the purpose and function of parish pastoral councils in the context and understanding of church and parish. Also contains a presentation on skills needed for a collaborative model of decision-making.

- VC 33 *Parish Council - Voice of the People*, Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk. Published by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1984.

This video focuses on the distinction of roles in a parish: parish council (advisors and evaluators) vs. parish staff (do'ers). It is also accompanied by a 3-ring binder that contains articles by Dr. John Gutting on parish council process.

- VC 822 *Parish Council and Parish Leadership*, Greer Gordon. Published by Tabor Publishing, 1991. Can be purchased by calling 1-800-822-6701.

This video will enable a new or already functioning parish pastoral council to explore and deepen their understanding of church, mission, planning, leadership and spirituality within the parish.

Available from Publishers

BOOKS

- Cleary, William. *Psalm Services for Parish Meetings*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992.

An excellent resource of prayer services for beginning and ending parish meetings of all kinds. Permission to reprint materials from this publication for parish use is granted by the publisher.

- Deegan, Arthur X. Edit. *Developing a Vibrant Parish Pastoral Council*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995.

Contains articles by eleven authors who have either presided over, worked on or led training for Parish Pastoral Councils.

Howes, Robert G. **Creating an Effective Parish Pastoral Council.** Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991.

Presents a model of a Parish Pastoral Council based on the experiences of a priest of the diocese of Joliet who has served as a consultant to dioceses and parishes for twenty-five years. Model D in the Models section is based on Fr. Howes' ideas.

Gutting, John G. **Consulting the Wisdom of the Parish Community: An Alternative Vision of Council and Commission Effectiveness.** Published by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1982.

Presents a model of a Parish Pastoral Council based on years spent consulting with parishes and parish councils. Selection Procedure VI from the Models section is taken from this publication.

Laz, Medard. **Making Parish Meetings Work.** Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1997.

A step-by-step guide on how to plan for, conduct, and evaluate meetings on both the parish and diocesan levels. The book is written by a priest and pastor from the archdiocese of Chicago.

McKinney, Mary Benet, O.S.B. **Sharing Wisdom: A Process for Group Decision Making: A Guide to Being and Building Church.** Allen, TX: Tabor Publishing, 1987.

Contains a faith-filled approach to decision making. Includes focus questions for each chapter.

Olsen, Charles M. **Transforming Church Boards.** Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1995.

A challenging and insightful book which contains the wisdom and experience of working with church boards and councils from a broad range of Christian traditions.

Pilarczyk, Most Reverend Daniel E. **The Parish: Where God's People Live.** New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1992.

Contains insights and wisdom on the many dimensions of the parish, including a chapter on parish councils. Includes questions for reflection with each chapter.

Rademacher, William and Marliss Rogers. **The New Practical Guide for Parish Councils.** Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988.

Updated version, featuring new chapters on the meaning of consultation, the Council/committee system, as well as ways for Council members to grow in holiness. Includes discussion questions after each chapter.

Saint, Steven and Lawson, James R. **Rules for Reaching Consensus: A Modern Approach to Decision Making.** San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer & Company, 1994.

This handbook focuses on the necessary steps to follow in order for a group to master an effective consensus decision-making process. It includes tips for persons facilitating such a process.

OTHER RESOURCES

Church. The National Pastoral Life Center, 18 Bleeker Street, New York, NY 10012-2404.
A quarterly magazine for parish leaders and staff.

Today's Parish. Twenty-Third Publications, P. O. Box 180, 185 Willow Street, Mystic, Ct 06355.
A monthly magazine which contains a regular article on Pastoral Councils, as well as on other parish interest areas. Suggest bulk subscription for Councilors.

**CANON LAW
CONCERNING THE PASTOR,
THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL,
AND THE FINANCE COUNCIL**

Pastoral Responsibilities of the Parish Priest

Canon 519

The pastor is the proper shepherd of the parish entrusted to him, exercising pastoral care in the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share; in accord with the norm of law he carries out for his community the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing, with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful.

Canon 528

1) The pastor is obliged to see to it that the word of God in its entirety is announced to those living in the parish; for this reason he is to see to it that the lay Christian faithful are instructed in the truths of the faith, especially through the homily which is to be given on Sundays and holy days of obligation and through the catechetical formation which he is to give; he is to foster works by which the spirit of the gospel, including issues involving social justice, is promoted; he is to take special care for the Catholic education of children and young adults; he is to make every effort with the aid of the Christian faithful, to bring the gospel message to those who have ceased practicing their religion or who do not profess the true faith.

2) The pastor is to see to it that the Most Holy Eucharist is the center of the parish assembly of the faithful; he is to work to see to it that the Christian faithful are nourished through a devout celebration of the sacraments and especially that they frequently approach the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and the sacrament of penance; he is likewise to endeavor that they are brought to the practice of family prayer as well as to a knowing and active participation in the sacred liturgy, which the pastor must supervise in his parish under the authority of the diocesan bishop, being vigilant lest any abuses creep in.

Canon 529

1) In order to fulfill his office in earnest the pastor should strive to come to know the faithful who have been entrusted to his care; therefore he is to visit families, sharing the cares, worries, and especially the griefs of the faithful, strengthening them in the Lord, and correcting them prudently if they are wanting in certain areas; with a generous love he is to help the sick, particularly those close to death, refreshing them solicitously with the sacraments and commending their souls to God; he is to make a special effort to seek out the poor, the afflicted, the lonely, those exiled from their own land and similarly those weighed down with special difficulties; he is also to labor diligently so that spouses and parents are supported in fulfilling their proper duties, and he is to foster growth in the Christian life within the family.

2) The pastor is to acknowledge and promote the proper role which the lay members of the Christian faithful have in the Church's mission by fostering their associations for religious purposes; he is to cooperate with his own bishop and with the presbyterate of the diocese in working hard so that the faithful be concerned for parochial communion and that they realize that they are members both of the diocese and of the universal Church and participate in and support efforts to promote such communion.

Canon 532

The pastor represents the parish in all juridic affairs in accord with the norm of law; he is to see to it that the goods of the parish are administered in accord with the norms of the canons on administration.

The Parish Pastoral Council

Canon 536

1) After the diocesan bishop has listened to the presbyteral council and if he judges it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish; the pastor presides over it, and through it the Christian faithful along with those who share in the pastoral care of the parish in virtue of their office give their help in fostering pastoral activity.

2) The pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop.

The Finance Council

Canon 537

Each parish is to have a finance council which is regulated by universal law as well as by norms issued by the diocesan bishop; in this council the Christian faithful, selected according to the same norms, aid the pastor in the administration of parish goods with due regard for the prescriptions of Canon 532 (i.e., The pastor represents the parish in all juridic affairs in accord with the norm of law; he is to see to it that the goods of the parish are administered in accord with the norms of Canons 1281-1288).



APPENDICES

ARCHDIOCESAN POLICY CONCERNING THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

- In every parish there must be a Parish Council (AO 22).
- Guidelines for the Parish Council are to be prepared by the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council (AO 23).
- The pastor is given principal responsibility for the leadership of the parish by the Bishop in trust for the people of God (1983 **Official Interpretation of Parish Council Guidelines**).
- The pastor and pastoral staff share the decision making process in the parish by consulting the parish community through the duly constituted consultative bodies such as the parish council (1983 OIPCG).

The following refer to the Temporal Affairs Document

- The Parish Council by a vote of two thirds of the membership, may appeal the decision of the pastor, after hearing his reasons for the decision. The Appeal Board shall consist of the Director of Financial Services, who shall act as Chairman; the local Dean; a lay designee appointed by the dean (if the dean is the pastor in question, the Archbishop shall make the appointment); and the chairperson of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, or his/her designee (**The Temporal Affairs Document**, 16).
- The expenditure by a parish of over \$1,000.00 for repairs, except in case of emergency, improvements or equipment must be submitted to the Parish Council. An expenditure of over \$10,000.00 for such purposes must have the approval of the Parish Council and the written approval of the Director of Financial Services (**TAD**, 53).
- (For the contracting of a loan) the Finance Committee of the Parish Council shall first make a realistic projection of the ability of the parish to service the proposed indebtedness, and the Parish Council's approval of the loan is required (**TAD**, 54).
- An extra or second collection for some specific parish purpose is not forbidden, at the discretion of the pastor after consulting with the Parish Council, . . . (**TAD**, 76).
- No fund-raising activity, including socials, shall be undertaken by a parish society without consultation with the Parish Council and the approval of the Pastor (**TAD**, 80).
- Each year prior to June 1, the pastor, working with the Parish Council, the Parish Education Commission and the Finance Committee shall prepare a budget for the entire parish operation, including the school, for the next fiscal year (**TAD**, 97).
- To carry out this work (i.e., a building process), a project *Steering Committee* will need to be established by the pastor, with the advice of the parish council . . . (**TAD**, App. 2).

TIPS FOR CONDUCTING AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL MEETING

Before the Meeting, the council chairperson should:

1. ***Develop the meeting agenda*** (with the Executive Committee) and mail it a week before the council meeting. Using verb statements for agenda items clarifies the "purpose" of the meeting and helps council members prepare more effectively for the meeting. Some examples:
 - To update on plans for a parish renewal program
 - To evaluate the growing problem with youth gangs
 - To get the council's recommendation on the top three pastoral priorities for the year
 - To achieve consensus on whether to build a new gym

2. ***Review the items on the meeting's agenda with the pastor.*** Determine in advance whether the agenda items are for information sharing, discussion, recommendation or for a consensus process. In order to accomplish everything on the meeting agenda in the time set aside, it may be helpful to suggest a time period for each agenda item that you will follow as the chair.

3. ***Determine the time frame for the council meeting.*** (Some councils meet for up to two hours per meeting; others set no specific time to conclude and meet until the agenda has been completed.) Most councils find that setting a time to adjourn not only helps focus discussion, but also respects the personal time of council members.

For meetings where major issues are discussed, or when a wider parish group attends, a longer time or no specific hour to conclude could be established at the outset of the meeting. This would be done to facilitate greater dialogue, especially on complex issues or matters of great impact on the parish.

4. ***Make sure the meeting space is set.*** (Most parishes have a customary day, time and place for council meetings. If not, establish these for the year.) A meeting space that allows for council members to sit around a table or set of tables enables people to face one another. Such a set up tends to facilitate a better dialogue among members.

5. ***Depending on the tradition in the parish, decide what, if any, refreshments will be served.*** Refreshments are not necessary, but some find it adds to the sense of fellowship at council meetings.

The Council Meeting

1. ***Begin the meeting on time.*** Have extra copies of the meeting agenda. If there is to be a detailed discussion or idea-generation, consider having an easel, a flip chart and markers available to facilitate such discussion.

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2. ***Open the meeting with a prayer, spiritual reading, reflective meditation or some other centering activity.*** This can be led by the pastor, one of the parish staff, or a lay member of the council. Many parishes rotate the leading of prayer among the council members. A prayerful beginning, i.e., seeking the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit on all the council considers, can set a tone for the meeting that fosters respectful listening and dialogue.
 3. ***Review and approve the minutes of the last meeting.*** Minutes, or the official record of the meetings of the council are an effective way of tracking the progress, the resolutions and recommendations of the council.
 4. ***Introduce any guests who are in attendance for the council meeting.*** It is important that the guests or parishioners attending know when in the meeting they will be invited to speak. If any guests are presenting material to be considered by the council, it may help to advance these agenda items to the beginning of the meeting. Once the presentation is made, the chair thanks these persons for their input. (Guests are usually free to leave after they have presented their ideas. If they wish to stay, however, they may continue to observe the council meeting, but do not comment on other issues.) Some councils reserve a regular time slot at the end of the meeting for comments from parishioners who are attending the meeting.
 5. ***Facilitate the meeting agenda.*** There are four things that can facilitate an effective discussion of agenda items:
 - People know what kind of closure is expected for each agenda item; i.e., information update, general discussion that leads to a sense of where the council stands on a topic; a simple recommendation to the pastor, or consensus on the best alternative.
 - All members of the council are encouraged to participate in the discussion. It may be necessary at times to draw out the more quiet members, or to go around the table to make sure that everyone offers an opinion or point of view (making sure never to "force" anyone to speak).
 - Keeping the discussion moving and not drifting off the subject. It often helps to set a general time frame for each agenda item.
 - The council chair should never dominate the discussion, but should speak after the rest of the council members have spoken.
 6. ***Review the results of the meeting.*** List any resolutions or recommendations that have been made, and any assignments for actions that need to be taken as a result of what happened during the meeting or to prepare for the next council meeting.
 7. ***Close with a prayer.*** Thank all for participating and adjourn the meeting.
 8. ***Speak to persons who have tasks to carry out as a result of the meeting.*** Make sure people understand their assignments, and make sure you as chair know what they need to carry out their assignments.
 9. ***Make sure the meeting room is put back in order.***
 10. ***Confer with the recording secretary about the minutes of the meeting.*** Clarify the procedure for getting minutes prepared and made available to the parish community.

A PERSPECTIVE ON CONSENSUS

Consensus has been reached when:

- All the members of the Council feel that they have had every opportunity to influence the position that the council decides to recommend to the pastor.
- All the members of the Council are able to support the position being taken even though some members may feel it is not the very best decision possible.
- Those Council members who have raised objections have had their concerns adequately addressed and they have been assured that no fundamental value is being compromised in moving in the direction being proposed.
- All the members of the Council can publicly support the decision as if it were the first choice of the Council.

A consensus recommendation made by the council is a resolution that all the persons involved in the discussion can "live with." It is not necessarily unanimous agreement; not should it be equated with a majority vote. Achieving consensus on difficult or complex matters takes time. It requires openness, trust and mutual respect among the council members. It is a method that need not be used for every topic or any topic or any issue that a council addresses. The Parish Pastoral Council should have available a number of ways to bring closure on what it recommends to the pastor.

In leading a consensus process, the chairperson might follow these guidelines:

1. Involve everyone in the discussion. All "voting" members should voice their position when testing for consensus.
2. Take sufficient time to discuss all relevant information, the issues involved, the pros and cons of alternative positions, and the potential implications for the possible courses of action.
3. Avoid settling for a "watered-down" position that everyone is "happy" with. The goal is to find the best solution, even though it might not be each member's first choice. Approach differences of opinion as an opportunity to understand different assumptions, gather additional information, clarify issues, and challenge the council to explore better alternatives.
4. Testing for consensus can be done in a number of ways. For simpler issues, it may suffice to call for a show of hands. When dealing with more difficult matters, the council might use one of the consensus ballots on the next page.
5. In the event the Council cannot reach consensus, it would be wise to have a backup plan; (e.g., a majority vote; postpone the resolution; a new proposal is developed; or the pastor may simply decide the issue on his own).

A CONSENSUS BALLOT (Two Samples)

Please check one:

_____ Yes, I am in favor of this proposal as it stands.
(strong yes)

_____ I am generally in favor of this proposal but would recommend that the Commission/
(weak yes) person presenting this proposal consider the following point(s). I do not consider it necessary for the proposal to be brought back to the group after the above recommendations have been considered.

_____ I am somewhat in favor of this proposal but I would like to see the following changes
(neutral) made before I give my support. I would like the proposal brought back to the total group after these changes have been made.

_____ I am generally opposed to this proposal for the following reasons. If great urgency or
(weak no) expediency makes it impossible to draft another proposal for our next meeting, I will allow temporary implementation of this proposal with the understanding that a new proposal will be developed and presented as soon as possible.

_____ No, I do not accept the proposal as it stands. The following are my reasons and/or my
(strong no) suggested alternative proposal(s).

Comments:

--From CHRIST CALLS US TOGETHER, p. 44, Diocese of Cleveland. Used with permission.

Please indicate how you rate each proposed alternative. Rate each option on its own merits.

- A. _____ Our deepest values and beliefs call us to move in this direction. Should the group fail to adopt this option, I would expect them to hear me out and satisfy my concerns lest a fundamental value be betrayed by omission.
- B. _____ I support this option with great enthusiasm.
- C. _____ I like this option; it's a good way to achieve our goal.
- D. _____ I am generally opposed to this option.
- E. _____ I would have great difficulty living with this option. If I can be convinced that no fundamental value is being compromised, I could support it in deference to a larger wisdom within the group.
- F. _____ I believe this option violates our deepest values and beliefs. I expect the group to hear me out and satisfy my concern lest a fundamental value is betrayed.

Note: Both ballots may be filled out and handed in to the chairperson, who records the results on a flip chart. Or they may be tallied on a flip chart based on a show of hands.