



## The Unified Pastoral Council: An Overview

"How necessary pastoral councils are!...The flexibility of the norm permits the adaptation considered apt for the concrete circumstances, as for example, in the case of multiple parishes entrusted to a parish priest, or those within pastoral units: it is possible in these cases to establish a single pastoral council for several parishes." (Congregation for the Clergy, *The pastoral conversion of the parish in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church*, 108)

"Every Family of Parishes will have a unified Pastoral Council, with other relevant consultative groups for specific areas of parish life."

-Parameter 11, Beacons of Light

"At the present time, the Archdiocese has discerned that the model of Families of Parishes under the leadership of a single pastor will be the new and normative form of pastoral organization within the archdiocese with the goal that the Family of Parishes will become a canonical parish in the course of the five years between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2027. Therefore, the Family Pastoral Council referred to in this document will become the parish pastoral council of the new parish when the parishes in the Family merge or are suppressed and a new parish is established." (Called to Be Church, revised edition, 2022)

### The Purpose of the Pastoral Council

- To constitute the primary consultative voice of the parishioners of the Family of Parishes. Drawing on their collective knowledge and experience, members of pastoral council offer the pastor practical advice in his canonical role of caring for the salvation of souls. The Council is charged with soliciting input and feedback from parishioners of each parish within the Family, especially regarding matters of pastoral significance for both the individual parishes and the Family of Parishes as a whole.
- "The Pastoral Council is a consultative body, governed by the norms established by the diocesan Bishop, to define the criteria of its composition, the methods of election of its members, its objectives and manner of functioning. In any case, in order not to distort the nature of this Council, it is best to avoid defining it as a "team" or "équipe", that is to say in terms that are not suitable to express concretely the ecclesial and canonical relationship between the Parish Priest and the rest of the faithful." (The pastoral conversion of the parish," 111)
- To foster discernment and dialogue among the clergy, the pastoral staff, and the members of the Family, as well as broaden their understanding of the Family, the stewardship of the God-given resources entrusted to its care, the creation of a missionary-discipleship orientation to its ministries and its operation.
- To provide advice to the pastor and to the pastoral staff in the development of ministry goals and of programs that carry out the Family's pastoral plan.
- To represent the members of the Family in the process of making evaluations and recommendations that will help the pastor, along with the pastoral staff, as the primary

administrator of the parish. "In light of this fundamental vision, the words of St Paul VI come to mind, "It is the function of the pastoral council to investigate everything pertaining to pastoral activities, to weigh them carefully and to set forth practical conclusions concerning them so as to promote conformity of the life and actions of the People of God with the Gospel," in the awareness that, as Pope Francis recalled, the purpose of such a Council "should not be ecclesiastical organization but rather the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone." (The pastoral conversion of the parish, 110)

### **The Functions of the Pastoral Council**

- To offer advice to the pastor by evaluating pastoral, spiritual and ministerial issues and making recommendations on matters of pastoral importance.
- To develop a pastoral plan for the Family under the leadership and authority of the pastor, and to evaluate progress of the plan annually.
- To recommend pastoral priorities and goals for the Family according to its needs (spiritual, social, and temporal) and the means available to meet such needs, especially as pertains to the six guiding principles and 31 parameters of Beacons of Light.
- To assist the pastor in delegating responsibilities to appropriate Family entities.
- To recognize pastoral issues, prayerfully discern and consider them, and to propose actions to address them.
- To provide for communication, coordination, and cooperation among the various core teams, commissions, ministries, and organizations within the Family.
- To provide representation to appropriate archdiocesan organizations as necessary.
- To assist the pastor in critical decisions that affect mission effectiveness, stewardship, and disciple-making objectives of the Family.
- While there may be the occasional need for the pastoral council to vote on items under discussion within the Family, this vote is only advisory to the pastor. The pastor is canonically entrusted with the pastoral care of the souls of the Family and with the final decision-making authority for the Family.

### **The Membership of the Pastoral Council**

- The pastor and parochial vicars are members of the pastoral council *ex officio*.
- Initially, the Family pastoral council may be comprised of members of all the existing parish councils and therefore the number of members may be quite large. Once members have completed their terms or have been discerned, the Family pastoral council consists of seven to fifteen voting members in addition to the *ex officio* members. See Models for Forming a Unified Pastoral Council [[Link here](#)] for options to consider. Members may be discerned through a prayerful process, elected by parishioners, or appointed by the pastor.
- Each member serves for a term of three to five years as determined and articulated in the Family pastoral council guidelines.

**The Core Teams or Commissions of the Family:**

- The core teams or commissions of the Family are formed by and work with the pastoral council at the discretion of the pastor.