



Models for Forming a Unified Pastoral Council

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

-Parameter 11, *Beacons of Light*

"The theological significance of the Pastoral Council is inscribed in the constitutive reality of the Church, that is, in her being 'the Body of Christ,' that generates a 'spirituality of communion.'"

-*The pastoral conversion of the parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church,* Congregation for the Clergy, 2020

The Primary Objectives of a Pastoral Council are:

- to constitute the **primary consultative voice** of the parishioners of the Family of Parishes. It offers the pastor practical advice in his canonical role of caring for the salvation of souls that is based on its collective knowledge and its experience of the parish and its members. "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 parishioners 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 parishes** in the process of making evaluations and recommendations regarding both individual parishes and the Family of Parishes as a whole, which will help the pastor who is the primary leader of the Family, along with the pastoral staff. "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)

With the above as values, there are many variables to be considered such as:

- Does each parish currently have a pastoral council? How were the members selected? How have they functioned in the past?
- Is the pastor entirely new to the Family, or was he previously assigned to or more of the parishes and therefore knows some leaders?
- How many parishes are in the Family?
- Does the pastor feel there will be significant benefit in retaining individual parish councils for a time, or can the unified council be formed and function soon?

Potential Models for Forming a Unified Pastoral Council, with Pros and Cons

- All members of the individual parish councils meet as the unified Pastoral Council, allowing people to discern their future participation and establishing a timeline for discernment of roles on the council, core teams/commissions, and other leadership roles in the Family, while maintaining equal representation of all parishes on the Family Council
 - Pro: Current parish leaders are retained
 - Pro: Reduces risk of disengaging previously involved leaders
 - Con: Size of group will require planning
 - Con: Some current members could have agenda
- Individual parish councils continue to meet separately. With the pastor, the council members discern representatives to the unified Family Council, which meets separately from the individual parish councils.
 - Pro: Gives pastor time to become familiar with previous leadership structures
 - Pro: Ensures that each parish deliberates decisions that have bearing on that parish
 - Con: Clear expectation of transition to Family Council needed
 - Con: Extends the time the pastor will have multiple council meetings each month
- Individual parish councils meet once or twice to discern 2-3 members who will be part of the new unified council. Once all members of the unified council have been determined, they begin to meet as the unified council and the individual parish councils no longer meet.
 - Pro: Council members are involved in discernment
 - Pro: Ensures those who are selected through discernment understand the expectations of Family council
 - Con: Discernment process will be duplicated by the number of councils involved
 - Con: Might delay the work of the Family Council
- A new unified council is formed “from scratch,” using a Family-wide discernment process to identify members of the Family Council, while ensuring equal representation of parishes on the Family Council
 - Pro: Could help all in Family to understand the role of the council
 - Pro: Could result in new leadership emerging
 - Con: Pastor may not know enough people for this to be possible
 - Con: Time necessary may preclude this option at this juncture