



BEACONS  *of* **LIGHT**

Pastoral Planning for Our Third Century

CALLED TO BE CHURCH:

*A Guide for a Unified Family
Of Parishes Pastoral Council*

Revised and approved in 2022

INTRODUCTION



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

Pope Paul VI promulgated the dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, on November 21, 1964.¹ This document's greatest advancement is arguably its recognition of lay persons as valuable members of the people of God and of their co-responsibility in the life and the mission of Church. *Lumen gentium*, no. 33, states:

It is, therefore, the glorious task of all the faithful to work for the ever greater extension of the divine plan of salvation to all people everywhere and of every period. So then let every opportunity be given them to share zealously in the saving work of the church in accordance with their ability and the needs of the times.

In the times since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, pastors and their parishioners have had a wide range of experiences as they have matured in their understanding of church leadership and of shared responsibility. The 1983 Code of Canon law² introduced new direction and insight concerning the area of church leadership, shared responsibility, and collegiality, especially at the parish level. Canon 208 of the 1983 code states:

Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is genuine equality of dignity and action among all Christ's faithful. Because of this equality they all contribute, each according to his or her own condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ.

This call to shared responsibility explains the nature of the pastoral council in its relationship to the pastor. Canon 536 §1 of the 1983 code says:

If after consulting the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish. In this council, which is presided over by the parish priest, Christ's faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in the pastoral care of the parish, give their help in fostering pastoral action.

To wit, the purpose of the pastoral council is to explore and to study with the pastor matters of a "pastoral nature," i.e. those areas of parish life that touch the spiritual and the faith development of all members of the parish. Through the parish pastoral council, the pastor is able to discern matters more wisely, in order to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ in the parish.

OVERVIEW OF THIS DOCUMENT

The present publication is the result of a project originally initiated by Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk that involved a process of consultation and discussion with pastors and pastoral council leaders throughout the archdiocese. This project was completed in 1996 with a report that was studied by the Administrative Department Directors, the Council of Priests, and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. The archdiocesan publication, *Called to be Church: A Guide for Parish Pastoral Councils* (1988) was presented as a guide for parish pastoral councils in response to a number of recommendations that resulted from these discussions.

Since the original publication of this guide, the Church has provided additional legislation and guidance with regard to parish pastoral councils. Most recently, the Congregation for the Clergy issued an instruction entitled, *The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church*, which was subsequently approved by Pope Francis on June 27, 2020.³ In acknowledging the reality of change since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, this instructions states:

The ecclesiological reflection of the Second Vatican Council, together with the considerable social and cultural changes of recent decades, has resulted in various Particular Churches having to reorganise [sic] the manner in which the pastoral care of Parish communities are assigned. This has made it possible to initiate new experiences, enhancing the dimension of communion and implementing, under the guidance of pastors, a harmonious syntheses of charisms and vocations at the service of the proclamation of the Gospel, which better corresponds to the demands of evangelisation [sic] today.”⁴

To that end, Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr requested that the the original publication be revised and updated, in order to incorporate the product of the Church’s evolution and thought and direction regarding parish life, as well as the role of the pastoral council. This updated and revised publication offers:

1. Clarification of archdiocesan policy with regard to pastoral councils. Seven areas are specifically addressed, and each area provides a variety of guidelines that are in accord with the universal legislation of the Church, as well as with the particular laws, decrees, and instructions of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati relative to parish pastoral councils.
2. An opportunity for pastors and for pastoral council leaders to learn from what other parishes have found to be successful. At the end of each of the first six guidelines, there is a section entitled “Suggestions for Implementation,” which contains examples and best practices that parishes have utilized.

3. Different models of how parish pastoral councils have been structured; how they function; how membership has been determined; and, other ideas about forming successful parish pastoral councils.
4. A response to specific requests made during previous consultation processes, including: questions oftentimes asked about parish pastoral councils; how to conduct an effective council meeting; and utilizing and leading a consensus process.

This updated and revised publication also offers a summary of the Church's legislation and teaching with respect to the pastoral council, as well as seven useful guidelines. The remaining section offers twenty frequently asked questions and responses.

CONCLUSION



The focus of the pastoral council is on the universal mission of the Church. It provides a mission of service that is exercised in a spirit of collegiality, prayer, and discernment. It brings together the sharing of the gifts and the talents of dedicated clergy and lay members of the Christian faithful. 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 Family of Parishes, and the voice of the Lord is heard. It is greatly hoped that this revised and updated document, *Called to be Church: A Guide for Pastoral Councils*, will assist pastors and members of pastoral councils in carrying out this very important mission of the Church.

THE FAMILY OF PARISHES & THE 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. It is "a place that brings people together and fosters long-term personal relationships, thereby giving people a sense of belonging and being wanted."⁵ The task of serving the faith community is the work of the entire Family of Parishes under the leadership of the pastor. Together with the parish staff, with members of the pastoral council, and with members of other parish commissions and committees, the pastor works in a spirit of unity and collegiality with such groups, in order to serve the mission of the Family of Parishes, of the archdiocese, and of the universal Church.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law indicates that a parish is identified as a community of the Christian faithful, rather than as a building or a series of structures.⁶ A Catholic parish is "a community gathered together by the Holy Spirit to announce the Word of God and bring new children of God to birth in the baptismal font."⁷

The parish "is envisioned as a response to a precise pastoral need, namely that of bringing the Gospel to the People through the proclamation of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments."⁸ Due to social and cultural changes over the past decades, however, the territorial configuration of Catholic parishes have been increasingly tasked with discerning and confronting new realities in our contemporary world, which range from an increased mobility and a digital culture, which has "expanded the confines of existence,"⁹ to a disproportionality between the number of priests to serve the number of individual Catholic parishes. To such an extent, a Catholic parish "is called upon to read the signs of the times, while adapting both to the needs of the faithful and to historical changes."¹⁰ In light of the ever changing realities of the Catholic parish experience, "the current parish model no longer adequately corresponds to the many expectations of the faithful,"¹¹ and, as a result, it has become necessary "to identify perspectives that allow for the renewal of 'traditional' Parish structures in terms of mission."¹²

In some cases, and in light of such new realities in our contemporary world, a gradual process of renewal of parish structures has occurred. A consideration of different forms of shared responsibility have emerged that involve the entire people of God. To that end, "new expressions have been added to those of Parish and Vicariates Forane, which are foreseen in the current Code of Canon Law, namely 'pastoral units' and 'pastoral regions.'"¹³ These expressions have, in effect, led to the creation and the establishment of new forms of pastoral organization within dioceses, according to the norm of law. Moreover, once a 'pastoral unit' or 'pastoral region' has been established in such a manner, "the Bishop will determine, as appropriate, whether each Parish should have its own Parish Pastoral Council, or whether it is better that this task be entrusted to a single Pastoral Council for all of them."¹⁴

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.

Regardless of the form of pastoral organization, all members of the Christian faithful are called to share in the mission which God has entrusted to them. In fact, “the whole community, and not simply the hierarchy, is the responsible agent of mission, since the Church is identified as the entire People of God.”¹⁵ To that end, among the Christian faithful of a Family of Parishes is a group which assists the pastor in the overall planning of his decision-making for the faith community. It is the pastoral council that assists the pastor in such decision-making. The pastoral council represents the Family of Parishes community, and it has the task of advising the pastor on important matters of pastoral activity. The function of the pastoral council is “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.”¹⁶

Among the variety of ways that the pastoral council carries out its purpose, there are some principal ways:

- By forming an effective group of persons who work in a spirit of prayer and discernment as a sign and a witness to the Family of Parishes that form the community;
- By making recommendations about the pastoral priorities and goals for the Family of Parishes through pastoral planning, including the creation, implementation, and reporting on the annual plan that is submitted to the archbishop;
- By serving as a vehicle of dialogue and communication among the pastor, the parish staff, the various core teams, commissions and organizations, and the Family of Parishes membership; and,
- By working with the various commissions of the Family of Parishes in a spirit of mutual cooperation for the good of the whole faith community.

In its most effective form, the pastoral council is the vehicle by which the pastor and the parish staff consider and test their own ideas with a group that represents the Family of Parishes community. The pastoral council is the official listening post by which the pastor listens to his people and the people listen to their pastor.

“The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration ... it is a community of communities”¹⁷

POPE FRANCIS

GUIDELINES



1. The pastoral council is a consultative body that assists the pastor in matters of pastoral activity, and it deliberates on matters of importance to the Family of Parishes.
2. The pastoral council works in a spirit of prayer and discernment as a sign and witness to the Family of Parishes.
3. Pastoral planning for the Family of Parishes is the principal activity of the pastoral council.
4. The pastoral council is the primary means by which the voices of the parishioners are represented.
5. All councils, commissions, and committees work in a spirit of mutual cooperation for the good of the Family of Parishes.
6. Selection for the pastoral council shall be determined in a manner which allows for the participation of the Family of Parishes community.
7. Each Family of Parishes develops its own pastoral council guidelines in accordance with the universal law of the Church and with the policies of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.



BEACONS  *of* **LIGHT**

Pastoral Planning for Our Third Century

FAMILIES OF PARISHES UNIFIED PASTORAL COUNCIL

Guidelines For Implementation

This document has been edited to reflect the unification of the parish pastoral councils into a Family Pastoral Council. The content of the 1996 publication has been retained intact whenever possible.



GUIDELINE 1

The pastoral council is a consultative body that assists the pastor in matters of pastoral activity, and it deliberates on matters of importance to the Family of Parishes.



Pastoral councils were first established in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in 1966. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and the Sixth Synod of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati (1971) envisioned the work of the pastoral council to be parish renewal. Therefore, the purpose of the pastoral council is to promote the spiritual growth of the Family of Parishes community, and to plan ways for the Family of Parishes to carry out the mission of the Church.

The responsibility for the mission of the Church is a shared responsibility. The clergy and lay members of the Christian faithful have respective roles and support each other in a spirit of co-responsibility. To help fulfill that purpose in the context of a faith community, the documents of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and the 1983 Code of Canon Law call for a structure that will assist the pastor in his pastoral ministry, which is the 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 action”¹⁸;
2. It helps to clarify how distinct the role of the pastoral council is compared to the role and the work of the parish finance committee. The pastoral council is charged with assisting the pastor in parish renewal and pastoring; while the finance committee is responsible “to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish.”¹⁹ Such notwithstanding, however, the archdiocesan *Document on Temporal Affairs*, as particular law for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, does indicate a consultative responsibility of the pastoral council as it pertains to some specifically circumscribed matters of a financial nature.²⁰
3. The pastoral council is not a governing board, nor does it make decisions like boards of trustees, civic and/or business council. In fact, deliberations entered into, or decisions taken by a pastoral council, which has not been presided over by the pastor or which has assembled contrary to his wishes, are invalid, and hence null and void.²¹ Members of the pastoral council who bring such expectations to their participation on a pastoral council may experience conflict about its role. The title of “pastoral council” can have a significant effect in orienting both the community of the Family of Parishes and potential pastoral council members to the more proper and effective purpose of the pastoral council.



SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- The pastor and the pastoral council might dedicate a Saturday morning or an evening to set aside the regular business of the council and discuss this revised publication of *Called to be Church: A Guide for Pastoral Councils*. This discussion might appropriately afford the occasion to announce the Family Council to parishioners.
- The pastor might ask the pastoral council to read a document, article or a book. Members of the pastoral council might gather together to discuss the assigned reading. Moreover, individual council members might be responsible to present different sections or chapters of the assigned reading and to lead a discussion on it.

*“Without council plans go wrong,
but with many advisors they succeed.”²²*

PROVERBS 15:22

GUIDELINE 2

The pastoral council works in a spirit of prayer and discernment as a sign and witness to the Family of Parishes.



The task of providing spiritual direction and guidance for today's Family of Parishes is a difficult one. The 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 pastoral council is best achieved through well-led meetings that are both efficient and orderly. Yet, the deliberations of the pastoral council are done in the context of a faith community, and for the purpose of advising the pastor on pastoral matters. As such, the pastoral council is challenged to conduct itself in a spirit of prayerful discernment, dialogue, and consensusbuilding. To that end, members are charged with discerning what the Holy Spirit might be calling the Family of Parishes to do at a given time. They will become more effective when they develop into an effective work group. In such a group, the quality of relationships, a common sense of purpose, effective meeting procedures, and the skills of dialogue and prayerful reflection are valued by the pastor and by the members of the parish pastoral council.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- A pastoral council may meet once or twice a year for an evening or a day of prayer and formation. During such a time, council business should be put aside so that members can spend time in prayer, reflection (on a church document or a pastoral issue), and in building an effective team of members;
- Pastoral councils typically utilize an opening and a closing prayer. A reading from the Sacred Scriptures, the Liturgy of the Hours, or some meditations might be used periodically as an opportunity for faith formation. The pastoral council might also consider suspending its deliberations or its attempt to address a serious or controversial matter, so that members might have the opportunity to engage in prayer and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit regarding the particular matter.



- Pastoral council members might rotate the responsibility of leading and ending the meeting with a prepared prayer, reflection, or a brief prayer service.
- While it is customary for some parishes to utilize an election process to determine membership, it would be appropriate to incorporate some form of spiritual discernment for determining membership.
- A pastoral council may use some method for seeking consensus on what it recommends to the pastor. All members must necessarily understand the process used for arriving at consensus.

*“Commit your work to the LORD,
and your plans will be established.”*

PROVERBS 16:3

GUIDELINE 3

Pastoral planning for the Family of Parishes is the principal activity of the pastoral council.



Pastoral planning focuses on those things that pertain to a pastor's care for parishioners. It involves the act of envisioning the kind of Family of Parishes that best serves the needs of its members, as well as the larger community. Typically a pastoral council identifies goals and objectives, and it recommends plans to achieve them. Since the area of study and deliberation is the faith and the spiritual lives of the parishioners, time is often allocated for adult faith formation, i.e. theological reflection on what the Church teaches about its own mission. Pastoral planning for the family of parishes is a structured process that includes five main components:

1. Developing and articulating a vision of where the Family of Parishes should be going. While this is the focus of Phase 2 of Beacons of Light, an initial discussion of vision is appropriate during Phase 1;
2. Identifying pastoral priorities or goals that address the needs of the Family of Parishes, addressing the principles and parameters of Beacons of Light;
3. Proposing concrete strategies, actions, and programs that achieve the pastoral goals; and,
4. Determining the personnel, the financial, and the physical resources that are needed.

Each year, the pastoral council identifies a set of pastoral priorities for the year. This plan ideally unites the pastoral council and other parish entities in a shared vision of how the Family of Parishes strives to carry out its mission to the parish and to the community that it serves.

As previously indicated, the Sixth Synod of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati (1971) called each pastoral council to assist the pastor in promoting the spiritual renewal of the parish. Parish renewal, as with personal conversion, is always about change and "newness." Pastoral planning works at identifying what that "newness" might look like for the larger faith community.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

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

1. *Affirm* or identify the **PURPOSE** of the Family of Parishes. This is a brief statement that captures the purpose and the values that are important to the parish community. There are common elements that constitute the mission of all Catholic parishes;
2. A *reading* or an **ASSESSMENT** of the needs of the Family of Parishes, as well as of the problems, challenges, and issues in the community environment in which the Family of Parishes serves. This assessment may take place through the use of a needs assessment or some form of listening to the members of the wider faith community. A survey, an assembly (a.k.a. a town hall meeting or an open forum), 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, the needs, the concerns, the hopes, and the fears of parishioners;
3. *Developing* a sense of direction or a **VISION** of the future. Things change in all parishes. Some Families of Parishes experience significant demographic changes over time. Some priorities are achieved successfully, while other needs are recognized. The arrival of new resources, new skills or expertise among pastoral staff members and volunteers make it possible to address ministerial needs in a renewed way;
4. Once the general direction and the objectives are determined by the pastoral council, the work of *developing* specific **ACTION STEPS** and a **RESOURCE ANALYSIS** is done by other entities in the Family of Parishes. The pastor and the members of the pastoral staff develop the concrete programs and the plans for implementing the general directions discerned by the pastor and the pastoral council. Various entities that represent the major pastoral priorities of the Family of Parishes (such as the worship committee, education committee, religious formation, youth ministry, etc.) develop plans to recommend to the pastor or to pastoral staff members. The parish finance council(s) also develops recommendations concerning the personnel, the physical, and the financial resources that are needed to carry out the pastoral plan.

ON-GOING PASTORAL PLANNING

Pastoral councils that have established a pastoral plan, and that have gone through these or similar steps, typically engage in ongoing pastoral planning in the following way:

- Each year, the pastoral council evaluates how successful the Family of Parishes has been in carrying out the pastoral plan. This assessment typically takes place at the end of one pastoral council's term;
- Each year, typically at the beginning of a new pastoral council's term, the pastoral council either reaffirms the previously identified goals for the year, or it readjusts the pastoral goals to meet changing needs or circumstances in the Family of Parishes;
- In planning the overall agenda for the council year; the pastoral council may devote time to a planning retreat, to determine the issues and the priorities that need to be addressed, and to estimate when such issues and priorities will be address; and,
- Families of Parishes may engage in the periodic involvement of the parishioners to solicit feedback with respect to how the Family of Parishes is meeting the needs of the wider faith community. An annual assembly, phone calls to parishioners, and informal conversations at parish events are some of the ways that members of pastoral councils keep in touch with the people of the Family of Parishes.

“Where there is no prophecy, The people cast off the restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.”

PROVERBS 29:18

GUIDELINE 4

The pastoral council is the primary means by which the voices of the parishioners are represented.



The pastoral council is the vehicle to ensure that parishioners have a voice in how the Family of Parishes serves them. In its most effective form, it is the place where the pastor can share his concerns, discuss difficult pastoral issues, test new ideas and initiatives for the Family of Parishes, and get practical advice from a group of parishioners who live in and represent the larger and wider faith community. Through the pastoral council, the pastor and a group of parish leaders, united in a common purpose and a common set of values, engage in dialogue and search for wisdom to identify that which is best for the Family of Parishes community.

Since neither the pastor nor the individual members of the pastoral council are all-knowing regarding the expectations of the parishioners, the pastoral council provides a forum for all ideas to be heard. It is through active listening and through the exchange of ideas that diverse views of the wider parish community become refined to reflect the needs and the concerns of the Family of Parishes as a whole.

Pastors also find that this structured mechanism for interchange and dialogue is helpful in promoting their own personal growth and in their development as the servant leader of the wider faith community. Representing the many views of the parishioners, the pastoral council can support the pastor, as well as to challenge him to consider various perspectives on any given issue.

To maintain the ongoing communication between the leadership of the Family and the Family of Parishes community, it is important that the parish pastoral council give appropriate attention to the following:

1. Publishing some form of pastoral council minutes, summary, or report of the meeting, and making them available to the entire parish after each council meeting; and,
2. Providing periodic opportunities for parishioners to provide input to the pastoral council.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- The bulletin and the website can be used to inform the parishioners of the meetings of the pastoral council. Simultaneously, these outlets can remind the parishioners of the ways for making their ideas and feelings on pastoral issues known. This can be accomplished by calling a member of the pastoral council, writing a letter, or, in some cases, speaking at council meetings. Some pastoral councils periodically include such an opportunity as an agenda item at a regular council meeting;
- When an issue comes before the pastoral council, it may choose to solicit feedback from the parishioners by means of listening sessions, an open meeting, surveys, or informal conversations with parishioners, in order to get a basic understanding of the perspectives of the parishioners;
- An annual pastoral assembly or a report can be used to evaluate and review the successes of the year, and to discern future needs of the Family, in order to improve the overall planning process; and,
- Some Families of Parishes have pastoral council members routinely contact a certain number of parishioners before each meeting. A standard set of questions developed by the pastor and/or the parish pastoral council are typically utilized to solicit input.

“Let our officials stand for the whole assembly.”

EZRA 10:14

GUIDELINE 5

All councils, commissions, and committees work in a spirit of mutual cooperation for the good of the Family of Parishes.



The pastoral council's function is a ministry of service. The pastoral council assists the pastor in helping all parishioners participate fully in the life and in the mission of the Family of Parishes. It seeks to foster a sense of unity by calling all parish entities to work together for the good of the entire Family of Parishes.

How the various commissions, committees, and ministries relate to the pastoral council will vary among different Families of Parishes. Nonetheless, each Family of Parishes will develop its own guidelines in accordance with the following:

1. The universal law of the Church requires that each parish have a finance committee.²³ The purposes of the finance committee is to assist the pastor in the administration of the temporal goods, in order to carry out the mission of the parish. Its function is distinct from the pastoral council. The pastor consults the pastoral council on pastoral matters, on the development of a pastoral plan, and for the identification of pastoral priorities, and goals. In contrast, the parish finance committee advises the pastor and the pastoral council regarding the financial implications of their respective policy decisions, *cf.* the revised archdiocesan *Document on Temporal Affairs*.²⁴
2. The pastor, in consultation with the pastoral council, determines the pastoral priorities for the Family of Parishes. A major pastoral priority shall be represented by a commission. Ordinarily, such a commission represents one or more of the following areas of parish ministry:

- Communications
- Community Outreach
- Ecumenism
- Education
- Evangelization
- Family life
- Mission Outreach
- Parish Life
- Pro-Life
- Religious Education and Formation
- Social Justice
- Worship
- Youth Ministry



3. Each commission will determine the number of members and the committee structure that is needed to fulfill its purpose. This may vary according to the size of the Family of Parishes. A commission is usually composed of five to fifteen at-large members, including a representative of the pastoral staff, who is chosen by the pastor. At-large members may be elected by the Family of Parishes and/or appointed by the pastor.
4. All commissions are ultimately accountable to the pastor. Each commission, however, will work with, and give council to, a member of the pastoral staff, whose responsibility encompasses the area of ministry that is represented by the commission.
5. Where there is a parish or Family school, an education commission is to be established, as per the Sixth Synod of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati (1971). 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 with the school administrator. The education commission keeps the 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 pastoral council.
6. All of the commission's recommended policies and programs should be consistent with the pastoral priorities established by the pastoral council.
7. Committees are established by commissions with the approval of the pastor. Such committees help their respective commissions develop and carry out programs that promote the goals of the Family of Parishes.
8. Each commission will determine how it will communicate effectively with the pastoral council. In order to assist the pastor in fostering the mutual cooperation of the commissions and of the committees, the pastoral council stays informed of each commission's functions and activities.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- The commissions are to be composed of representatives from the Family of Parishes. The commission members may be elected by the wider parish community at the same time new pastoral council members are elected. Whether elected or appointed, commission members should have, or be willing to develop, a certain working knowledge about the ministerial scope of their commission. Every effort should be made by the pastoral council to assist the pastor and/or the chairperson of the commission in finding people with the abilities, talents, and interest in serving as a member of the commission;
- Each commission shall have a chairperson who is responsible for the organization, the coordination, and the promotion of the commission's work. The liaison relationship shall be set up with the pastoral council or with the pastor, depending on the Family of Parishes' guidelines; and,
- The Family of Parishes is responsible for the lifelong formation and education of its parishioners. For that reason, there is not to be an advisory structure for the school that is separate from the parish education commission. Rather, there is to be a single education commission that addresses all of the education concerns of the Families of Parishes, *cf.* 'Post Synodal Task force on Education, p. 2.

“For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

ROMANS 12:4-5

GUIDELINE 6

Selection for the pastoral council shall be determined in a manner which allows for the participation of the Family of Parishes community.



The process by which parishioners are selected for the pastoral council is very important. Most parishes throughout the diocese traditionally have had an annual nomination- election process. This process usually produces a good mix of dedicated and effective pastoral council members who will serve their Family of Parishes well. The process also allows for the participation of the wider faith community, and it usually produces a fairly representative group of men and women of diverse ages to provide a voice of the parishioners.

Out of a concern that such an election turns out to be no more than a “popularity contest,” some pastors have experimented with a variety of approaches, which use a combination of methods, such as open nominations, a discernment process, or appointment. Moreover, the pastoral council should “effectively represent the community of which is is an expression in its membership (priests, deacons, religious and laity).”²⁵

Pastoral council membership includes those who have a voice and a consultative vote on matters that are addressed by the council. The pastor, and some or all members of the pastoral staff, may participate in parish pastoral council meetings. Neither the pastor nor any pastoral staff members possesses a vote, because the pastor is ultimately responsible for receiving the recommendations of the pastoral council, and, if appropriate, deciding on the implementation of such recommendations.

Families of Parishes differ in the composition of their respective pastoral councils. Each Family of Parishes must determine the size of its own pastoral council. For example, such a council may include as few as six members and as many as twenty-five members.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- The participation of the members of the Family of Parishes may occur at the beginning of the selection process when nominations occur and/or at the end of the process when new pastoral council members are elected;
- The pastor and/or the pastoral council may provide an annual orientation process for candidates, new pastoral council members, and new commission members. This formation program usually includes such considerations as: an overview of all the commissions and ministries; the role and the function of the pastoral council; the consensus method used; how pastoral council meetings are structured; and, so forth;
- Each Family of Parishes may set forth its own local pastoral council guidelines that indicate how members are selected (when, how, and by whom). Generally, the pastor, along with a committee of the pastoral council, will serve as an *ad hoc* selection committee to plan, to conduct, and to oversee the process for the selection of new pastoral council members.

“As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

1 PETER 4:10

GUIDELINE 7

Each Family of Parishes develops its own pastoral council guidelines in accordance with the universal law of the Church and with the policies of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.



Local pastoral council guidelines give direction and clarity to the function and the operation of the pastoral council. Each Family of Parishes should have some form of guidelines for all of its councils and commissions. The guidelines are to be drawn up in accordance with the universal law of the Church and with the policies of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

A SUGGESTED FORMAT

1. Name

- The name of this parish organization shall be the pastoral council of the _____ Family of Parishes.

2. Purpose statement and functions of the pastoral council

- The Family of Parishes' statement of guidelines for the pastoral council shall include a statement of purpose and of functions. The local guidelines are to state how the pastoral council fulfills its consultative purpose through the principal functions of spiritual formation, pastoral planning, representing the members of the family of parishes, pastoral policy development, and communication.

3. Membership

- The guidelines will specify how the membership is constituted, i.e. when, how, and by whom.
 - A. Those who share in the pastoral care of the Family of Parishes by virtue of their office participate in the work of the pastoral council. According to the universal law of the Church, the pastor presides over the council.²⁶ In many Families of Parishes, some or all of the pastoral staff meet with the pastoral council. However, these staff persons serve as resources to the pastoral council by providing their particular expertise.



- B. With regard to core team or commission representatives, some Families of Parishes may choose to utilize the model of the pastoral council that calls for someone from each of the parish's commissions to serve as a member of the pastoral council.
- The Family of Parishes will publish criteria for membership on the pastoral council. In general, the membership of the pastoral council should reflect the demographic make-up of the family of parishes. This representative principle must be balanced with the qualities and the skills desired for members of the parish pastoral council.
 - A. Criteria
 - Being a baptized Roman Catholic, and in good standing with the Church;
 - Being a supporting members of the Family of Parishes, who has received the Sacrament of Confirmation; and,
 - Being an active participant in the life of the Family of Parishes.
 - B. Many Families of Parishes will list additional qualities that are desirable for members of the pastoral council. Such qualities may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Willing to participate in an orientation and/or formation process;
 - Willing to listen and to respect the ideas of others;
 - Able to consider the needs of the entire Family of Parishes;
 - Willing to give the gift of time to prepare for, and to attend, regular and special meetings;
 - Willing to communicate with members of the Family of Parishes to solicit their ideas and input;
 - Able to serve in a consultative capacity; and,
 - Committed to work in a spirit of prayer, dialogue, consensus-building, and planning.
 - Members of the pastoral council shall have a limited term. Term limits 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 of membership are usually staggered so that a certain portion of the membership rotates each year.
 - The size of the pastoral council shall be determined based on the size and the needs of the Family of Parishes. Seven to fifteen members is the usual range for the size of a pastoral council. The size should be small enough to allow for a sense of community among the members, and, at the same time, large enough to reflect a good representation of the Family of Parishes. The size may also be affected by the number of commissions that are operative in the Family of Parishes.



4. Officers

- There shall be an executive committee that is responsible for developing an overall working plan for the year, and for preparing the 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, or communicate, with each other prior to the scheduled meetings, in order to prepare the meeting agenda. The agenda should be sent to pastoral council members in advance of a meeting. Ordinarily, matters for the agenda are submitted by the pastor and the members of the pastoral council. Any member of the Family of Parishes who wishes to have matters taken up by the pastoral council should contact a member of the council. Attention to such a matter, however, should be discerned to consider if it is within the competency of the pastoral council to discuss, e.g. human resource and personnel matters, etc.
- The administrative secretary usually prepares the agenda and submits it to the pastor, as president, and to the chairperson for approval. Copies of the agenda and the minutes of the previous meeting should also be sent to the members prior to the next meeting. The agenda and the minutes are also made available to members of the parish family. The format of the minutes might include summaries of the major discussions, all recommendations, actions to be taken, and persons or groups delegated to act for the advancement of such recommendations.
- The executive committee works to ensure that the prayer and the study are part of the parish pastoral council's deliberations. This committee also determines what meeting processes will be utilized, such as small group work, brainstorming, advance work sheets, the consensus method, etc.).

5. Roles and Responsibilities

A. The Role of the Pastor

- The pastor meets with the executive committee responsible for the agenda.
- The pastor presides at all pastoral council meetings, and he actively listens and participates in the discussions and the deliberations. He might delegate to the chairperson the task of chairing the meeting.
- When appropriate, he will assist the deliberations by sharing relevant information or his own perspective on the issue at hand.
- As the pastor, he is the final authorizer of any course of recommended action.

B. The Role of the Chairperson

- Meets, or communicates, with the pastor and the vice-chairperson, in order to organize and to coordinate the agenda, as well as to plan any group processes to be used at the pastoral council meeting.
- Chairs the meetings of the executive committee.

- Normally chairs the regular, as well as any special meetings, of the pastoral council.
 - Makes sure that the meeting agenda is sent out a week before the meeting.
 - Receives agenda items from pastoral council members, members of the parish pastoral staff, or members of commissions or organizations, and members of the Family of Parishes.
 - Participates as an active member in all discussions.
 - Assumes the role of the chairperson to stimulate and to involve all members in the discussion, as well as to facilitate the formulation of the pastoral council's goals and means for achieving them.
 - Leads the pastoral council in an annual evaluation of its proceedings and its effectiveness.
 - Assists in preparing the next chairperson to succeed him or her.
- C. The Role of the Vice-Chairperson
- Meets, or communicates, with the pastor and the chairperson to develop the meeting agenda.
 - Chairs the council meeting in the absence of the chairperson, or in the event that the chairperson desires to temporarily assign him or her to chair the meeting, in order to participate more fully in the discussion.
 - Assists the chairperson in conducting the work of the pastoral council.
- D. The Role of the Administrative Secretary
- Responsible for the preparation and for the distribution of the agenda prior the the pastoral council meeting.
 - Records the minutes of regular and of special meetings. It is recommended that such minutes be focused on: (1) discussion summaries; (2) resolutions and/or recommendations; and, (3) actions steps to be taken.
 - Maintains the roster and the attendance of members.
 - Makes necessary physical arrangements for meetings; secures requested information for the pastoral council; regularly updates the documents of the pastoral council; and, ensures the proper distribution of information and of correspondence.
 - Maintains file records of the parish pastoral council's history, development, minutes, resolutions, and names of members.
 - Serves as directed by the pastoral council in the administration of council matters.
 - May be appointed or requested by the pastoral council for whatever term that is discerned by the membership. If the position of the administrative secretary is not held by a council member, then the administrative secretary is not a voting member of the pastoral council.

6. Meetings

- The pastoral council determines its annual calendar of meetings prior to the Fall of each year, or prior to the first meeting, depending on its calendar. Meetings should be held regularly, which, in most cases, is 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 whether a special half-day or weekend session would be better depending on the issue to be considered.
- Local guidelines will designate when members of the Family of Parishes, who are not members of the pastoral council, may attend meetings, and under what rules and proceedings they might participate. Usually all meetings are open unless the pastoral council needs to meet in an executive session.
- Meetings should be run in an efficient and orderly fashion. The executive committee should determine whether *Robert's Rules of Order*, (manual of parliamentary orders) or some abbreviated version, would be helpful for meetings. Some Families of Parishes might find that in using a consensus model of deliberation, parliamentary procedure is unnecessary.

7. Commissions

- The guidelines are to name all of the core teams or commissions, their purpose, their responsibilities, and how they relate to the pastoral council. In many Families of Parishes, the commissions are established by the pastoral council, and they apprise the pastoral council of their activities through a commission representative on the pastoral council, or through a member-at-large who serves as a liaison to the various commissions of the Family. Each commission should have guidelines that are similar to those for the pastoral council.

8. Amendments to Guidelines

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

“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

EPHESIANS 2:19-22



ENDNOTES



¹ Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, November 21, 1964: AAS 57 (1965) 5-67. English translation from Norman P. Tanner, S.J. Ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London and Washington: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990) 2: 849-900.

² *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus* (Vatican City: Libreria Edictrice Vaticana, 1983). English translation from *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 3rd edition, ed. Ernest Caparros et al. (Montreal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2020). All subsequent English translation of canons from this code will taken from this source unless otherwise indicated.

³ Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction “*The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church*,” June 27, 2020.

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.* no. 16.

¹² *Ibid.*, no. 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* no. 59. This paragraph continues, “In any case, the individual Parishes within the grouping, since they retain juridic personality and capacity, must maintain their own Finance Councils.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 38.

¹⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, I, 16 §1 (1966).

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 28 (2013).

¹⁸ C. 536

¹⁹ C. 537: “In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to can. 532. It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, and it is comprised of members of Christ’s faithful selected according to these norms.”



²⁰ For instance, *The Document on Temporal Affairs*, no. 53 states, “The expenditure by a parish of over \$5,000.00 for repairs (except in case of emergency, for capital improvements, for equipment or for contributions for a charitable purposes [sic], must be submitted to the pastoral council for consultation. An expenditure of over \$25,000.00 for such purposes must be submitted to the pastoral council and receive its consent ...”

²¹ Congregation for the Clergy *et aliae*, Instruction “*On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest*,” art. 5 §3, August 13, 1997.

²² Bible. The Holy Bible. Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006). All subsequent translations will be taken from this source unless otherwise indicated.

²³ Canon 537: “In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to can.532. It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, and it is comprised of members of Christ’s faithful selected according to these norms.”

²⁴ For example, the revised *Document on Temporal Affairs* states that “the basic function of the Finance Committee is to provide necessary research and financial planning. The ultimate responsibility for policy, priority decisions, fund raising, approval and implementation of budgets shall rest, not with the Finance Committee, but with the pastor in consultation with the Parish Council” III, A, 13).

²⁵ *The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church*,” no. 112.

²⁶ *cf.* Canon 536 §1.

APPENDIX 1

A PERSPECTIVE ON CONSENSUS

A consensus has been reached when:

- All the members of the pastoral council have had every opportunity to influence the position that will be recommended to the pastor by the pastoral council;
- All the members of the pastoral council are able to support the position being taken even though some members may believe that it is not the best position possible.
- Those members of the pastoral council who have raised objections have had their concerns adequately addressed, and such members have been assured that no fundamental value is being compromised in the direction being proposed.
- All the members of the pastoral council can publicly support the decision as if it were the preferred choice of the pastoral council.

A consensus recommendation made by the pastoral council is a resolution that all the persons involved in the discussion can “live with.” It is not necessarily unanimous agreement. It should also not be equated with a “majority vote.” Achieving consensus on difficult or on complex matters takes time. It requires openness, as well as trust and mutual respect among the members of the parish pastoral council. It is a method that need not be used for every 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 all participants 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 involve, 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 with which everyone is “happy.” The goal is to find the best solution, even though it might not be the first choice of each member. Approach differences of opinion as an opportunity to understand difficult assumptions, to gather additional information, to clarify issues, and to challenge the pastoral 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 pastoral council might use one of the consensus ballots on the next page.
5. In the event that the pastoral council cannot reach consensus, it would be wise to have a backup plan, e.g. a majority vote; postpone the resolution; development of a new proposal; or, the pastor may simply decide the issue on his own.



A CONSENSUS BALLOT

(Two Samples)

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.

A.

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 I would recommend that the parish entity that is presenting this proposal consider the following point(s). I do not consider it necessary for the proposal to be brought back to the pastoral council after the above recommendations have been considered (weak yes).

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

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

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

**B.**

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 to 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 is 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 it can be conceived 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 to satisfy my concern lest a fundamental value is betrayed.