



Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines

Diocese of St. Paul

PREAMBLE

A) From the Second Vatican Council

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (par. 37) states:

Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative. Attentively in Christ, let them consider with fatherly love the projects, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity. Furthermore, let pastors respectfully acknowledge that just freedom which belongs to everyone in this earthly city. A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders: in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders. The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the laity, can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfill its mission for the life of the world.

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (par. 10) states:

As sharers in the role of Christ the Priest, the Prophet, and the King, the laity have an active part to play in the activity of the Church. Their activity is so necessary within Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness... Offering an obvious example of the apostolate on the community level is the parish inasmuch as it brings together the many human differences found within its boundaries and draws them into the universality of the Church. The laity should accustom themselves to working in the parish in close union with their priests, bringing to the church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which should be examined and resolved by common deliberation. As far as possible, the laity ought to collaborate energetically in every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their local parish.

B) Several Canons of the New Code apply the teachings of Vatican II

Among them:

1. Canon 208: Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of 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.
2. Canon 228 £2: Lay people who are outstanding in the requisite knowledge, prudence and integrity, are capable of being experts and advisors, even in councils in accordance with the law, in order to provide assistance to the Pastors of the Church.
3. Canon 519: The parish priest is the proper pastor of the parish entrusted to him. He exercises the pastoral care of the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, whose ministry of Christ he is called to share, so that for this community he may carry out the offices of teaching, sanctifying and ruling with the cooperation of other priests or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of Christ's faithful, in accordance with the law.
4. Canon 536 £1: If in the view of the diocesan bishop and after consultation with the priests' senate, it is found opportune, each parish shall set up a pastoral council. This pastoral council shall be presided over by the parish pastor and its function shall be for the faithful to contribute to the promotion of pastoral action together with all those who carry official responsibility for pastoral work in the parish.
£2: The pastoral council has only a consultative voice and is subject to the norms established by the diocesan bishop.

C) Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium* (par. 28) both encourages and warns us:

“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. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.”

“This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few.”

D) Bishop's Directives concerning Parish Pastoral Council:

Following the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council, the directions of the Code of Canon Law, other Church documents and our past experience in our Diocese, it is of the greatest importance that parish pastoral councils be established in every parish of the Diocese.

The pastor, in virtue of his mission and as a delegate of the Bishop of the Diocese, has pastoral and administrative responsibilities specific to him and which he cannot renounce. Nevertheless, he will exercise those responsibilities in complete collaboration with the pastoral council, seeking the advice of its members and associating them actively in the apostolate projects of the parish.

DECREE of the Diocesan Bishop concerning the mandatory establishment of Parish Pastoral Councils.

1. Parish Pastoral Council

A. Purpose

The Parish Pastoral Council is a vital component of every parish. The wisdom, experience, and gifts of council members help the pastor to become a better leader, foster the growth of the members' own Christian vocation, assist the parish in becoming a more mature Christian community, and ultimately to help to advance the universal mission of the Church.

The Parish Pastoral Council assists the pastor in defining and working towards the parish mission and vision. This mission and vision is a response to the call of St. John Paul II for a New Evangelization which his successors have repeated.

B. Roles and Responsibilities

i) Parish oversight

Parish Pastoral Councils are presided over by the pastor. A pastoral council gives the pastor support, recommendations, and assistance, regarding the pastoral needs within the parish. A pastoral council is consultative and advisory in nature. If the pastor is absent then it cannot be considered a meeting of the parish pastoral council.

ii) Meetings

The Pastor will convoke all meetings. The Pastor must be present at all Parish Pastoral Council meetings.

- Meetings should be regularly scheduled.
- The agenda needs to be set before the meeting, with suggestions sent to the pastor by the day before
- While the pastor may chair the meetings, he may also have a chairperson take on this role, i.e. run the meeting
- There needs to be a secretary/recorder. (The parish secretary may or may not be appointed to the Pastoral Council for this task at the pastor's discretion.)
- Minutes of meetings will be recorded and stored in permanent storage.

iii) Subcommittees

The Parish Pastoral Council may consider the establishment of subcommittees. The purpose of each subcommittee will be determined clearly.

All subcommittees will be provided with roles and responsibilities

- Examples of relevant subcommittees could include: evangelization, outreach to shut-ins, youth, family ministry, Developing a Safe Parish Community, etc. Other possible subcommittees which deal more directly with the temporal goods of the parish (e.g. maintenance and cemeteries) should be part of the Parish Finance Council. However, a fundraising sub-committee flows from the concerns of both councils.
- Sub-committee membership is not limited to Council members; other parishioners should be called upon as well.
- Minutes of meetings will be recorded and stored in permanent storage.

C. Membership

The Pastor chooses the members according to the following criteria:

- All members must be practicing adult Catholics in good standing who belong to the parish.
- Clergy and religious assigned to pastoral ministry in the parish as well as lay pastoral staff are ex-officio members. (i.e. youth ministers, catechists, but not purely administrative staff)
- Members should be selected by discerning their fittingness, skills needed, and the ability and willingness of candidates to participate fully in the work of the Parish Pastoral Council.
- The suggested total membership is five to eight including ex-officio members. In small parishes, the membership may be less, but not less than three total.
- Members are not to be chosen due to their leadership in other parish associations (e.g. CWL, Knights of Columbus, etc.) as this becomes more of a parish parliament than a parish pastoral council. (The parish may choose to have an annual general meeting in which the leadership of parish associations present their past work and future plans to the parish pastoral council and parish at large.)
- Membership is limited to one member per household.

- Seminarians assigned to the parish are to attend the Parish Pastoral Council meetings as observers.
- Parishioners, especially Parish Pastoral Council members are free to suggest other parishioners who may be fitting Parish Pastoral Council members.
- While it is possible to have an election for some of the members of the pastoral council, this is not recommended because:
 - Campaigning before the election can be divisive in the community.
 - Elections tend to be merely popularity contests rather than discernment processes.
- The term of office for members is three-years, which is renewable. After six years, members must step down for a one year before serving again as a Parish Pastoral Council member. Ideally, members' terms are staggered.

D. Change of Pastor

- At the change of pastor, the parish pastoral council no longer exists as such. However, the new pastor should meet with the previous pastoral council members either individually or as a group to get to know them and their work.
- If the new Pastor selects members of the previous Parish Pastoral Council to continue to serve on the council, the term of office still applies.
- By the end of the pastor's first year, a new pastoral council must be in place with the members chosen at his discretion.

E. Working relationship with Parish Finance Council

- The Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council are independent of each other, as they have distinct responsibilities. This independence will be manifested by way of them having different members and different meeting times. However, the Parish Pastoral Council needs to be aware of the financial situation of the parish. There are two ways of ensuring this:
 - A Parish Finance Council member may be a member of the Parish Pastoral Council and report to the PPC meetings.
 - The Parish Finance Council should present a financial report semi-annually to the Parish Pastoral Council

F. Special Circumstances

1. Special circumstances that call for dispensation from any of the above require written permission from the local ordinary, e.g. Bishop or Vicar General.