

## DIOCESE OF MARQUETTE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL Guidelines

*The Parish Pastoral Council seeks to provide consultation to the pastor in formulating and making known the mission of the parish and pastoral ministry.*

*This is accomplished through recommendations regarding: the parish vision for the future; the general directions, priorities, goals and objectives, long and short range plans; and the promotion of communication and understanding within the parish, between parishes and with the diocese and universal church.*

*The council committees provide specific focus in the Church's various ministries and develop expertise in those areas. The committees are the council's working arm and deal with details necessary to establish the various ministries and to carry them out.*

***Committees are** accountable to the pastor and have a formal relationship to the pastor and the Parish Pastoral Council. They also have an informal close working relationship with the staff, whereby ideas, information and advice may be shared.*

*Although members are appointed primarily for their expertise, recommendations of the committees must also reflect Gospel values. The spirit behind the Parish Pastoral Council and all the parish committees must always be the spirit of the Gospel and its objective, the spiritual ministry of the parish.*

The pastoral letter, "Fully Alive in '95," mandated an active, organized Parish Pastoral Council in each parish. The following guidelines are highly recommended for implementation by pastors and their people.

### **PURPOSE AND FUNCTION**

The purpose and function of a Parish Pastoral Council is often difficult to explain, primarily because of the different lived experiences of those who are involved in the Church. Quite often, those who make up the council and committees are lay people who are used to different models of decision making than those used in the Church.

When it comes to the decision-making models and the role of consultative bodies, lay experience in other fields conjures up visions of boards of directors and/or legislative bodies. Although appropriate in the worlds of business and government, these models are inconsistent with the Church's mission and the role of advisory bodies as envisioned in Canon law. While the Church needs to use many of the principles learned in business, or in democratic governing bodies, the Church itself is not simply a business or a democracy that can change its constitution by a vote of the majority.

On the other hand, documents of the Second Vatican Council and the revised Code of Canon Law carefully note the necessity of developing collegial relationships between the pastor and the laity in discerning and caring for the faith community's pastoral needs.

Numerous canons deal with this aspect of parish life and the development of Parish Pastoral Councils. One canon defines the parish as a faith community entrusted to a pastor. Another notes that the pastor is the shepherd of the community and shares in the bishop's ministry of teaching, sanctifying and governing (with the laity's cooperation and assistance). A third canon states the Christian faithful are called through their baptism to share in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and royal office in their own manner. Lastly, Canon 536 enables pastoral councils to be established and the Christian faithful to help in fostering pastoral activity and advise the pastor.

Considering all this, a Parish Pastoral Council's basic purpose and function is to assist the pastor by providing recommendations regarding:

- parish vision for the future;
- evaluation of pastoral ministries and their effectiveness in meeting parish needs;
- general directions, priorities, goals and objectives, long and short range plans, and;
- communications and understanding within the parish, between parishes, the diocese and universal Church.

In summary, a Parish Pastoral Council and its subordinate consultative bodies<sup>1</sup> serve the vital function of representing the wisdom of the community in the process of participating in the decision making of the pastoral leadership. Through listening, evaluating, and recommending they help meet the parish needs efficiently and effectively.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

As with the committees, a Parish Pastoral Council's size should be large enough to allow for the needed expertise and small enough to be efficient and effective. Anywhere between 8 and 12 members is seen to be adequate.

Council membership is considered to be a ministry and, therefore, certain qualities are necessary for those who serve on the council. Essential to any ministry is that it is a response to the Lord's call, is for the sake of others not oneself or one's personal point of view, and is arrived at through a process of discernment.

The theology of "call" expressed in the Scriptures does not imply that one is an expert, that one is popular, wants the job, or even is holier than others. Jesus told His disciples, "It was not you who chose Me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit". (John 15:16)

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<sup>1</sup> **Parish Pastoral Council subordinate consultative bodies:** The Education, Worship and Christian service subordinate bodies have traditionally been referred to as commissions while the remaining groups, Stewardship, Evangelization, etc., have been referred to as committees. For the sake of simplicity, "committee" is used as the generic term for both commissions and committees throughout this document.

Since ministry is for the sake of others, a person is called because he or she has gifts to give others, rather than simply a personal need to be there. Discernment of the call to minister requires discernment of the gifts needed in a particular ministry. To desire to serve is not enough. An aptitude for the service is also needed.

## **QUALIFICATIONS**

Given the nature of the council, a member needs an awareness of the Church and its mission and openness to the Spirit. Members do not represent particular interests or segments of the parish, but participate in the pastoring of the entire community.

Members must be committed to prayer. They should be baptized and confirmed Roman Catholics in good standing with the Church, active participants in their parish life, and have an understanding of and commitment to the Church of Vatican II.

## **SELECTION OF MEMBERS**

Council members might be chosen in many ways. Given the nature of a Parish Pastoral Council, a process of selection seems better than simply the more familiar process of political election. This is based on the passage in the Acts of the Apostles relative to the "selection" of an apostle to round out the Twelve after the Resurrection.

Each parish selects a designated number of people, usually at least two for each position to be filled, who meet the above qualifications. They may be suggested by present council members, pastoral staff or by the parish at large. After confirming their willingness to serve, selection is made by a random drawing to fill the needed positions with those not drawn serving as alternates should there be a need. This would eliminate the appearance of competition, popularity contests, and emphasize the spirit of being called. It also tends to make talented parishioners more likely to allow their name to be considered. Many do not want to be part of an "election" process, with its stereotype of slogans, destroy the opposition, and having to have a "loser."

After candidates have been recommended and have accepted, but before the selection process, they would be required to attend a session designed to explain the role and purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council and its various committees. This would be an aid to the nominee's discernment process by clarifying and reinforcing the parish/Parish Pastoral Council's mission. Some members may also be specifically appointed by the council. This would be done to fill an unexpired term or to provide the council with a particular expertise, or to bring a particular age, cultural, or ethnic perspective to the council.

It would seem desirable that there be both continuity on the Pastoral Council as well as a certain degree of change in membership over time, so as not to overburden the same individuals, and also to bring fresh ideas and approaches to the workings of the Council. To this end it is recommended that there be staggered terms of about 3 years for members of the Council. Members could serve two consecutive terms and could be reappointed to additional terms after a period of time off the Council.

## **SELECTION OF OFFICERS**

The following offers some reflections on the issue of electing people to positions of leadership from within a group such as Parish Pastoral Council.

What about electing people to serve as Chairperson or Secretary? In a small and identifiable group, everyone is together as the election takes place. Although ballots work well in this situation, there are a number of things that should be taken into account.

The nomination process can be awkward, particularly in a small group. A common scenario would be like this: Someone is nominated verbally, then this person more or less demurs, saying that someone else could do the job better... The person is then affirmed and talked into accepting. Nominations are closed and the person is elected. A helpful way to avoid this could be as follows:

- 1) Before any nomination is given, it is important for the group to identify the qualities needed for this particular role. Unless this is done, the wrong person can be selected for the wrong reasons. For example, the most articulate person might be selected as Chairperson because that person participates extensively in the discussion at the meetings. But being articulate doesn't necessarily make for a good Chairperson. You need someone who has the specific ability to run the meeting, get detail work done before and after the meeting, and knows something about process. These qualities need to be identified and agreed upon before anything else is done.
- 2) After agreeing upon the qualities needed, ballots are passed out and the members of the group can vote for anyone they wish. There are no verbal nominations. A ballot is simply called for.
- 3) The results of the first ballot are announced to the group. If no one has a majority (which is often the case on the first ballot), a second ballot is taken in the same way. This first ballot is, in effect, a nomination process as it gives an idea of the wishes of the group. If someone feels they cannot accept the position that is being voted on, they would make it known at this time.
- 4) After the second ballot, the results are announced to the group. If no one gets a majority, then a third and final ballot is taken, but only between the two highest vote getters from the previous ballot.

This process can save a lot of time and avoid much of the awkwardness that occurs in a small group that is trying to select a person with the needed qualifications but doesn't want to offend anyone.

## **MEETINGS**

Although the frequency of Parish Pastoral Council meetings may vary from one parish to

another, they should be held on a regular basis and be governed by the respective parish foundation documents. Depending on parish needs, some parishes meet monthly during the fall, winter, and spring. Others, who focus more on the development and evaluation of parish mission, tend to meet less frequently and rely on the committees to be more active. Experience indicates that quarterly meetings of the entire council would be a minimum.

Council decisions must ultimately be approved by the pastor. This does not set up a polarity (i.e. veto system) when the pastor is part of the decision making process, seriously respects the consultative process and explains adequately why he and the parish staff cannot implement a recommendation of the Parish Pastoral Council.

Decisions may be arrived at in many different ways and all of them may be used at one time or another. The preferred decision making process for major issues in the Church, however, is consensus. Decisions arrived at through consensus will, ultimately, be stronger and more apt to be supported by all than those arrived at through parliamentary procedure and a majority vote.

For every meeting of the council and the various committees, a complete set of minutes should be kept and stored as permanent additions to the parish records.

## **COMMITTEES**

The provision of pastoral care and ministry to a faith community is often a complicated process. Depending upon the parish's size and complexity numerous staff may be employed; several formal councils, committees may be created, along with many clubs, organizations and societies. Up to 18-20 of these groups may exist in some of the larger parishes.

## **PARISH STAFF**

By Canon Law, the Pastor is charged with the pastoral care of the faith community. In the exercise of this ministry, it may be necessary to seek the assistance of others who are skilled in various specialized areas. Persons assisting the pastor may be other clergy, men or women religious or lay persons. It is ultimately the pastor's responsibility to hire, terminate, supervise, and manage the staff. Formal staff members should be justly compensated for their ministry and work in accord with Canon law and the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral on the Economy. Parishes may also have volunteers performing staff functions.

## **TYPICAL STRUCTURE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

The following is a brief outline of the more typical organizational structure within the parish and desirable relationships. The outline is not all-inclusive however; it is intended to help set the tone for staff/council/committee collaboration.

## **PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL**

Officially the council's role is to be consultative to the pastor and assist in the pastoral care of the parish. The council does not serve as a board of directors or a legislative body. Focused on mission and not management, the council is an invaluable resource to the pastor and to the parish.

Within the Diocese, all parishes must have a Parish Pastoral Council, which relates to the following committees. Councils may not be dissolved without the Bishop's approval. Councils are charged with the review of all recommendations of the committees that affect the parish as a whole

## **COMMITTEES**

Five standing committees are the norm for pastoral activity within our diocese although additional ones may be formed. The first three often referred to as commissions, are seen to roughly parallel the three-fold mission of Christ, i.e. Priest, Prophet and Servant King (see footnote, page 2). Evangelization and Stewardship are initiatives focused to affect all the ministries of the parish. A representative from each standing committee should be available to the Parish Pastoral Council.

All committees are ultimately accountable to the pastor. Each committee, however, will work with and give counsel to a parish staff member whose responsibility encompasses the area of ministry represented by that committee.

All committees recommend policies and programs that are consistent with the pastoral priorities established by the Parish Pastoral Council. Each committee will determine how it will communicate effectively with the Parish Pastoral Council which must be kept informed of each committee's functions and activities in order to foster mutual cooperation.

Generally, the committees are:

Worship Committee - Sometimes referred to as the Liturgy or Spiritual Life Committee, this group sees that the parish's liturgical life is vibrant and that various liturgical celebrations build up a prayerful community of believers and demonstrate excellence in worship.

The Worship Committee also develops, promotes and coordinates Morning and Evening Prayer, other liturgical celebrations, devotions and prayer services, prayer groups, retreats and other means by which the parish offers its members opportunity for spiritual growth and development as individuals and as a parish community. Music, art and environmental aspects of the worship space, are also this group's responsibility.

Education Committee - This committee deals with all the parish's education and formational activities. Focus should be comprehensive and consider the needs of young, adult and elderly parishioners.

All parishes are to have an education committee as a committee of the Parish Pastoral Council. The structure of the Education Committee will vary according to the

circumstances:

- 1) A parish without a school has an education committee as a committee of its Parish Pastoral Council.
- 2) A single parish with a school may have: a) one Education Committee/Board which serves the parish wide education effort (Religious Education and Catholic School) or, b) two committees, one serving parish religious education and a second serving as a school board.
- 3) Each parish participating in an area school has an education committee and has parish representation on an Area School Board.

All committees serving as school boards are governed by a constitution approved by the Bishop for that school. They are to be a regulatory body for all aspects of the formal parish educational program. School Boards and Religious Education Committees work in collaboration with each other and the Parish Pastoral Council to promote the overall faith formation of the parish.

Christian Service Committee - This committee is responsible for serving the needs of the parish community, and for responding to the needs of the neighborhood and civic community. Services such as visiting the sick in the hospital, nursing home, or in their own homes, direct assistance for the poor, support groups, outreach, letter writing on issues to legislators, action on social justice issues and educational programs on issues fall within the responsibility of this committee. An equally important role for this committee includes outreach services to and beyond the neighborhood, particularly to the poor.

Evangelization Committee - Because Evangelization is the essential mission of the Church, this committee has been mandated to help "Catholics grow in enthusiasm for their faith and freely share it with others who upon experiencing the Good News are converted to Jesus and join in promoting the dignity of the human person and transforming society." (*Go and Make Disciples*, Bishops' Committee on Evangelization). The focus of the Evangelization Committee is, therefore, to make and nourish disciples. It assists the parish and the council to include evangelization as a dimension of every parish activity and ministry.

Stewardship Committee - The focus of this committee is to encourage Stewardship as a disciple's response. (*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, Bishops' Committee on Stewardship). This committee not only promotes the use of the community's Time, Talent and Treasure to serve the parish, but also encourages the Parish Pastoral Council to practice stewardship as a part of the parish mission. It helps others to recognize stewardship as a model for Christian living rather than a program solely to serve the needs of the church. This committee may be made up of members representing the other committees.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

Having identified a parish's administrative structures, some time needs to be spent in looking at how those groups relate to one another. These relationships can be divided into the following four essential categories.

Staff Accountability Relationships - As mentioned earlier, additional staff may be needed to assist the pastor in the care of the faith community. The pastor hires the staff, supervises and makes sure that all that is done is consistent with parish mission. In these relationships direct accountability is expected.

Formal Advisory Relationships - The Parish Pastoral Council formally consults with the pastor in matters that affect the parish as a whole. Likewise, standing committees of the council have a formal relationship to the council. As committees study issues related to their respective areas and develop proposals, they would follow a formal procedure for review, discussion and approval.

Informal Advisory Relationships - Given the expertise each committee is expected to develop, they become a valuable resource to parish staff. Since members of the committees are often selected for their expertise, the informal advisory relationship is simply a working relationship between staff and the respective group. One is not accountable to the other, but simply provides counsel.

Relationship with Finance Council - The Parish Finance Council is basically responsible and accountable to the pastor/pastoral coordinator, but there will also be the need for clear lines of communication with the Parish Pastoral Council. To facilitate this, one member of the Parish Pastoral Council will be appointed as a liaison to the Finance Council and will attend meetings as a voting member, providing continuity and good communication between the two Councils. It would also be advisable for a member of the Finance Council to be appointed as a liaison to the Parish Pastoral Council as a voting member for the same purposes of communication and continuity.

## **TYPICAL ACTIVITIES**

Based on current parish practices, to identify typical Parish Pastoral Council activities would be likened to counting the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the beach. Examples run the gamut from authorizing the parish secretary to purchase toner for the copy machine to the discernment of mission and the development of a long-range pastoral plan.

Rather than trying to create a shopping list of activities, it is sufficient to say that the Parish Pastoral Council should focus on mission and not management, on policy and not on the details of its implementation, on overall goals and not the detail of how objectives will be carried out. It takes a great deal of self-restraint to keep from getting involved with the management detail because that is where many people are most comfortable. The difficult tasks of evaluation and recommendation are what councils are all about and this requires stretching beyond the limits of established comfort-zones. In all cases, it is suggested that



the principle of subsidiarity become the rule, i.e. decisions and implementation take place at the lowest competent level.

Not all matters need to be taken to the Parish Pastoral Council for decision. If examples were to be noted, however, one might say that the council would appropriately review and recommend the approval of:

- the statement of parish mission and a plan for the pastoral care of the community with regular evaluation of the plan;
- the policy for sharing ministerial services with neighboring parishes;
- the overall parish budget, but not in line item detail:
- the parish personnel policies and pay plan, but not individual personnel matters and salaries;
- the need for a pastoral minister, but not who will be hired for the position;

There are several types of decision-making processes in the operation and care of a parish and all will be appropriate at different times. Some matters require the consultation with the Parish Pastoral Council and others may require "executive" decision with no consultation what-so-ever. Some may be made by an expert and others can be made by a small committee or committee.

Foundation documents, bylaws and various structures are necessary to provide some order to what needs to be done. These things, however, should not stand in the way of caring for the needs of the people in the faith community. Pastor, staff, council and committees need to keep an eye on the mission of the parish and not allow the structures to become an end in themselves.

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Revised: August 13, 1997 - Education Committee

Revised: March 1, 1999 - Terminology: Parish Council to Parish Pastoral Council, clarification of committee relationships and accountability

Revised: January 1, 2005 - Separation of Finance Committee from standing Pastoral Council committees and its establishment as an independent Council with a liaison to the Pastoral Council.