

St. Paul the Apostle Parish

Pastoral Council Policies and Norms

Pastoral Council

There are two underlying reasons for a Pastoral Council: first, the pastor wishes to have a group to consult with and to provide advice on pastoral matters. Consulting the “collective wisdom” of such a group of parishioners can often lead the pastor to a wiser and more prudent decision.

Second, parishioners want to serve on a council. Responding to their baptismal call to be “priest, prophet and king,” many parishioners feel their gifts and interests lead them to provide council to the pastor.

The roots of councils are founding the documents of the Second Vatican Council. In addition, they have their understanding in the nature of the church. In *Lumen Gentium* (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) and *Gaudium et Spes* (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) the church has received clear guidance and a powerful description of how it should understand itself. In particular, these documents, and others, bring to life the principles of *communion, collegiality, and subsidiarity*.

Communion

Communion speaks of unity within parish life and the church. This unity is the basis for equality of all believers and is rooted in baptism, which can be understood as our common vocation to the ministry of the church. Each of us received such a call no matter what our position in the church. We are all called to be disciples of Christ and to help bring about the Kingdom of God. This sense of discipleship also calls us to participate in the life and ministry with one another.

Collegiality

If there is to be true communion among the baptized then there has to be collegiality between clergy and laity. Just as the pope works in relation with the bishops and bishops work in relation with priests and deacons, so must pastors work in relation with parishioners. This working together to build up the Kingdom of God is spoken of in paragraphs 33 and 37 in *Lumen Gentium*. Not only does the laity have the right to offer their judgment on the working of the church, but there is often a duty to do so. The Pastoral Council offers parishioners the opportunity to exercise their collegiality to further the mission of Christ and the Church, in union with those in holy orders.

Subsidiarity

Subsidiarity is a fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching. It assumes that problems are best defined and resolved by those most closely affected by them. Subsidiarity holds that diversity and good order can only be maintained when group/communion or person is deemed vital for the good of the Church.

Foundations of the Pastoral Council

Adding more light to the need for and of pastoral councils is the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Canons 511-514 speak about a Diocesan Pastoral Council and the role it plays offering council to the Bishop. For example, Canon 511 states:

“In each diocese. . . a pastoral council is to be established whose responsibility it is to investigate under the authority of the bishop all those things which pertain to pastoral works, to ponder them and to propose practical conclusions about them.”

It follows then, that a parish pastoral council would provide a similar service to the pastor of that parish; to investigate pastoral matters, ponder them and propose recommendations.

Canon 536 speaks directly of parish pastoral councils. It states:

“After the diocesan bishop has listened to the presbyteral council and if he judges it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish; the pastor presides over it, and through it the Christian faithful along with those who share in the pastoral care of the parish in virtue of their office give their help in fostering pastoral activity.”

In the Diocese of Portland, parish councils have been mandated since 1981. In 2006, Bishop Malone made “fully-functional” pastoral councils a mandate for each cluster.

1. Parish Pastoral Council

A Parish Pastoral Council (Council) is one means by which the people of God can participate in discerning the mission of Jesus and how, in particular time and place, this mission may be carried out.

The council’s purpose is to promote community, to be a sign and witness of unity, and to assist the pastor in pastoral planning. It is usually a group of 7-12 parishioners (may be more members in larger parishes) that consult with the pastor by reason of their knowledge, competence, and/or interest in the parish or church.

The council is a consultative body to the pastor and, most importantly given the challenges of time and distance presented in some parishes, the coordinating and unifying structure of the Roman Catholic community. The council is the means of achieving the full participation of all parishioners in the parish in its mission by giving all a voice in supporting, guiding, and directing the various aspects of parish church life. Its members gather together the vision, hopes, and needs of the community, reflecting upon them until a consensus is reached, and translates this consensus into parish/church planning through the establishment of goals and objectives. The council sees that these goals and objectives are implemented by commissions and committees are evaluated and amended annually by the faith community.

The pastoral council works with the pastor to discern God's will, to develop a vision for and to clarify the mission of the parish. The council engages in pastoral planning by developing goals through dialogue with various ministries and the parish/church at large. The council pursues its mission in connection to the larger church, aware of its interdependence with other parishes and churches, the diocese, and the universal church.

The Role of a Pastoral Council in Planning

The church's official documents clearly state that the study and reflection of the pastoral council enable the community to plan its pastoral program and to fulfill it effectively. The council, then, is called to help the pastor determine the pastoral program at the parish/church.

Planning flows from a lived experience and a history, and it takes on flesh as it looks to the future. Every parish has been entrusted by God to gather its faithful and to assist them in their journey to holiness. While this "goal" is universal, each church and parish will help bring this about in different ways.

The first step, therefore, is for each parish to articulate its own particular mission, keeping in mind the universal call to holiness. Once the mission is articulated; every recommendation of the council should flow from and help achieve this mission.

The pastoral council begins by:

1. identifying the pastoral needs of the parish
2. prioritizing those needs
3. studying and praying how to meet the needs
4. recommending to the pastor a course of action

It is not part of the council's work, however to implement the recommendations. Implementation is the responsibility of the pastor, the staff, the commissions, and/or other organizations in the parish.

Once a recommendation has been made the planning process begins again, discerning a new need and preparing to offer recommendations about it.

Because one of its responsibilities is to evaluate how well recommendations have been implemented, the council needs to stay informed of church activities and developments in the parish. This is accomplished through frequent and ongoing communication with the groups and commissions responsible for implementation of the pastoral plan.

Norms for Pastoral Council

1. The Pastor or Administrator is the president of the Pastoral Council. Priests and deacons assigned to the parish are ex officio members. Other members are appointed by the pastor/administrator from the group presented to him for nomination from the council itself or from the parish at large. Members are never to be elected by the parish.

2. The parish Director of Pastoral Administration or other staff person designated in the absence of the Director of Pastoral Administration is staff for the council-not a member. Other paid staff of the parish are not members of the council and generally do not attend meeting unless invited for their particular expertise. Immediate family members of paid staff are ineligible for appointment to the Pastoral Council.
3. Council members should designate, with the approval of the pastor/administrator, a member to serve as chair, another as vice-chair, and a third to serve as secretary. Terms for these positions are at least for one year and renewable. In no instance is the Director of Pastoral Administration to act as chair of the council.
4. The council is to have no fewer than seven (7) members. There is no requirement to have equal representation from each church in the parish. However, when a parish is comprised of more than one church there must be at least two members from each church on the council. The pastor must ensure that there is a balanced representation of lay men, women and religious, and individuals with varying interests, ages, and from varying geographic areas within the parish.
5. Each pastor/administrator has one, and only one, pastoral council – whether it is a joint pastoral council representing more than one church, or the pastoral council of a single parish that has several churches.
6. Council members are limited to two successive three-year terms. Upon completion of two terms, members must go off the council for a full year before being considered for membership again. Terms should be staggered to allow for consistency and continuity.
7. The council goes out of existence upon the transfer, retirement, resignation or death of the pastor/administrator. A new pastor/administrator must constitute a new council as soon as possible but at least within one year of taking office.
8. The council meets in regular session a minimum of four times a year. While most meetings are open to all parishioners there can be times when the pastor/administrator may need to call for an executive session. Meetings are called by the pastor/administrator. The agenda is prepared by the council chair and approved by the pastor/administrator.
9. The council is not to meet in the absence of the pastor/administrator. Although in an emergency he can designate one of the priests or deacons to serve as his delegate.
10. The pastor/administrator may call one or more work sessions, in addition to the regular meetings, that may take place in his absence.
11. The council discusses any and all pastoral matters relating to the life of the people in the parish, it does not discuss matters pertaining to individuals.
12. In this diocese, the pastoral council is asked to approve the annual budget because of the serious impact it may have on the life and mission of a parish and to ensure that it is sufficient to support that mission.
13. There may be subcommittees or commissions of the council, either one of each or several of each for the various churches in the parish. The commissions will include:
 - a. Faith Formation
 - b. Family Ministry

- c. Justice and Charity
 - d. Parish Life
 - e. Worship and Spirituality
14. Reports of those commissions should not form the greater part of the agenda of council meetings
 15. Each parish must have particular statutes approved by the pastor/administrator that specify local matters like meeting time, location, the composition of commissions, and the method of selecting commission members, for example. These particular statutes, however, cannot contradict these norms.
 16. The pastoral council is a consultative body; its recommendations, therefore, are directed to the pastor/administrator and become effective only after he acts upon them.
 17. The by-laws and membership of the council are submitted to the diocesan Office of Parish Planning for Evangelization and updated annually.

Key words for Understanding

- **Accountability-** The obligation to carry out responsibility and to exercise authority in terms of established standards or assigned tasks.
- **Administrator-** A priest assigned by the bishop, on a temporary basis, to serve a church or parish in the absence of a pastor.
- **Clergy-** Those who are ordained to the orders of deacon, priest or bishop including ordained members of congregation of religious men.
- **Collaboration-** Working together as a joint effort.
- **Commission-** A group that develops recommendations concerning such areas of parish life as worship, faith formation, and liturgy. Commissions address parish vision/goals within the context of a specialized area of ministry. A commission typically recommends actions to and acts on decisions from the Pastoral and Finance Council.
- **Committee-** A group involved in a parish ministry, project or program that flows from parish priorities and parish strategic planning. Committees are sometimes stable- buildings and grounds, for example- or temporary- a church/parish supper for example.
- **Deacon (permanent) -** A man who is ordained to the order of deacon and who will remain such.
- **Deacon (transitional) -** A man who has been ordained to the diaconate but who, ultimately, will be ordained to the priesthood.
- **Discernment-** The process that promotes a community's ability to seek God's will in the life of the community.
- **Goal-** A clear statement of a desired direction or end expressed in broad, general terms.
- **Immediate Family Members-** Spouse, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, brother, sister, in-laws, or anyone living in the employee's household.
- **Laity- Or Lay People, Baptized members of the Roman Catholic Church who are not ordained.**

- Lay Ecclesial Minister- One to whom a formal and public role in ministry has been entrusted or upon whom an office has been conferred by competent ecclesiastical authority. A paid staff person (full-or part time) or a volunteer who has responsibility.

March 2011