



Parish Pastoral Councils Guidelines

November, 2010

Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils

Introduction

These Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils are intended to assist pastors and Parish Pastoral Council members understand their respective roles and form Parish Pastoral Councils that provide effective leadership in our communities of faith.

In the Diocese of Camden, Parish Pastoral Councils serve as the ordinary planning instrument that a parish uses to formulate its pastoral plan. Informed by the diocesan Vision Statement and by the parish's Mission Statement, the pastor consults the Council about any practical matters such as the implementation of local pastoral priorities which will in many cases resonate with the diocesan pastoral priorities which are Liturgy, Lay Ministry, Lifelong Faith Formation, Priestly vocations, Youth and Young Adults, and Compassionate Outreach.

Definitions

Parish

A Parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

(Canon 515)

Pastoral

The parish council is called "pastoral" because of its unique relationship to the pastor, who initiates and establishes the council, who convenes its meetings and presides at them. The pastor seeks the good of his people as he consults with the council. The Parish Pastoral Council looks to pastoral concerns, not necessarily temporal, or other administrative concerns.

Council

When the new Code of Canon Law was promulgated in 1983, it clarified the identity of what had previously been called "parish" councils. These councils are now called "parish pastoral" councils with a consultative role.

Purpose

Parish Pastoral Councils provide a way for pastors to consult their people. The Parish Pastoral Council is: "to examine and consider all that relates to pastoral work and to offer practical conclusions on these matters, so that the life and activity of the People of God may be brought into greater conformity with the Gospel."¹ In this description, we find three tasks assigned to the pastoral council: to examine, to consider, and to recommend.

- **To examine.** The object of the Parish Pastoral Council's examination, "pastoral work" is left sufficiently unspecified in order to include all that concerns the pastor and his staff in

¹ *Christus Dominus*, Vatican II, par.27.

serving the parish. The council identifies issues and studies them either at the request of the pastor or on its own initiative.

- **To consider.** The Parish Pastoral Council prayerfully ponders the data it has collected from its examination by trying to discern in what direction God is inviting the parish to go, what is behind the data.
- **To recommend.** After the Parish Pastoral Council has examined and considered any pastoral work, it makes recommendations to the pastor and his staff on what should be done for this parish at this time in its history.

Frequency of Meetings

It is recommended that Parish Pastoral Councils meet monthly except perhaps during December or in summer months.

Transition from Parish Council to Parish Pastoral Council

After the 1983 revised Code of Canon Law the Bishop of Camden, along with his Presbyteral Council, determined that each parish in the diocese would have a parish pastoral council.

The development of Parish Pastoral Councils can be traced:

- **80s** – Parish councils worked toward efficient ministries and developed new projects in response to identified parish needs
- **90s** – A new vision of parish pastoral councils emerged which included pastoral planning
- In the **new millennium**, pastoral planning became vital to the mission of the parish.
- This is where we are today, in need of pastoral planning in light of our newly reconfigured parishes and the changing times in which we live!

Roles and Relationships

Pastor

The Pastor of the parish *presides* over the Council; seeks Council members' advice on pastoral matters of major concern; encourages prayerful reflection and consensus; listens to and gives very serious consideration to the Council's recommendations in the decisions which he makes.

Council

The members of the Parish Pastoral Council offer their wisdom prudently, with regard to major pastoral matters connected with the life and mission of the parish. They examine, consider, and make recommendations after prayer, careful study, and open discussion. Council members do not have a portfolio or meet independently of the pastor.

The Executive Committee consists of the Pastor, Chairperson, Vice-chairperson and Secretary. The Executive Committee meets with the pastor to gather and prepare the agenda for the parish pastoral council meetings, to prepare materials and minutes, and set aside evenings or retreat days for spiritual enrichment. Members of the executive Committee may be appointed by the pastor or may be discerned by the council members from among their membership.

Parish Staff

Parish Staff are not members of the Parish Pastoral Council; however, the Parish Pastoral Council can benefit immensely from the information and assistance which parish staff can provide. Parish staff, in turn, must be oriented and updated frequently regarding the development of the parish's pastoral plan and its implications for their specific areas of responsibility. Staff members may be asked to attend Parish Pastoral Council meetings as resource persons. Parochial vicars, deacons, and pastoral associates are not members, but participate because they work closely with the pastor to realize the pastoral care of the parish and coordinate the ministries of the parish.

Parish Community

The Council helps the members of the parish community to fulfill their baptismal calling to share in Christ's mission and to connect their needs and their strengths with the parish's plans for the future. The parish's pastoral plan is created in consultation with the parish community. Parish Pastoral Councils work with pastors to identify the ministry potential of the people of parish and further the parish's pursuit of its mission by modifying plans and implementation strategies when necessary.

Membership Criteria

Representation

Members of the Parish Pastoral Council are chosen to "reflect the wisdom of the entire people of God" (Canon 512§2). They should be representative of the whole parish and reflect various cultures, ages, geographic areas, and interests of this community of the faithful. They are not members simply by virtue of a leadership position in a parish organization.

Size

The recommended number of elected and appointed members ranges from 9 to 12, (possibly 10 to 15 for larger parishes).

Qualities

The work of the Parish Pastoral Council is a ministry that needs leadership qualities:

- The essential ability to "examine, consider, and recommend."
- A parish member in full communion with the Catholic Church (Canon 512§1)
- Persons of prayer who desire spiritual growth
- Persons who have some knowledge of what it means to be Church today – the people of God who can discern the work of the Holy Spirit in the signs of the times
- Are open to learn about the purpose, spirit, and theology, of the Church documents
- Understand the ongoing mission of the Church – bringing Christ to the people and the people to Christ.
- Are committed to the future of the parish, its pastoral priorities, and ministries
- Have good communication, especially listening, critical thinking, and consensus building skills and are generous with their time and talent
- Recognize the gifts of others and are able to collaborate with them

Pastoral Formation

A new member must express willingness to participate in pastoral, spiritual and ecclesial formation events, programs, such as an annual retreat day or an evening of reflection as established by the Parish Pastoral Council and noted in local guidelines.

Membership Types

Parish Pastoral Councils have two types of members: discerned (elected), and appointed. The number of appointed members ought not to outnumber the discerned (or elected) members.

1. A steering committee for recruitment of members is most helpful to the process.
2. Each member is asked to serve for a three year term, which may be renewed once.
3. The terms of office for council members should be staggered in order to assure sufficient stability and continuity.
4. In the event that a council member is unable to complete his or her term of office, the pastor may appoint a qualified parishioner to serve out the remainder of that term.
5. In the event of the pastor or administrator's death, transfer, or removal the council ceases to exist. It is the responsibility of the new pastor or administrator either to reconvene the former council or to call forth a new council. This is consistent with Canons 501§2 and 513§2 concerning the Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

Recruitment of new council members

There are three methods for the recruitment of new members to the Parish Pastoral Council: discernment, selection, election. Discernment is the preferred methodology; however, a combination of all three methods is acceptable. The council will do its own deliberation about the method chosen.

Discernment: In the present times, parishes around the country have moved to a discernment process for adding new members each year. The pastor shares with the parish community his expectations of the Council as they relate to the mission of the parish and the vision of the future, the focus of pastoral planning. An announcement is made at all the weekend liturgies inviting people to discern a call to serve. Parishioners are free to nominate themselves or any parishioners who meet the qualifications and are willing to participate in a discernment process (usually an evening or day of prayer and mutual conversation).

Or

An invitation is posted in the Sunday bulletin inviting interested parishioners and those whose names the council have generated, to an information meeting about the Parish Pastoral Council. This meeting addresses what is involved in council membership, followed by open discussion on what it takes to be a parish leader. Attendees are given a ministry profile describing the role of a council member. After this meeting, interested parishioners come to a second meeting where they discuss their interests and leadership/communication styles with members of the council. Attendees, in dialogue and prayer, select the new members through a discernment process.

Selection: The steering committee consults with the pastor, parish staff and council members (if a parish pastoral council already exists), and compiles a list of potential new members. The pastor appoints these new members at his own discretion.

Election: The committee prepares a slate of willing candidates who have been nominated by the community-at-large. Using ballots distributed at a weekend Mass, parishioners vote for council members from that slate of candidates.

Pastoral Planning

The primary task of the parish pastoral council is to get to know the people of the parish and the context in which the people live, work, worship, and spend their time. Among PPC skills must be that of examining and reflecting on the “signs of the times” and how this relates to that which God is asking of the parish at this time. This is intimately connected to Pastoral Planning.

Pastoral Planning is a major function of the Parish Pastoral Council. Parish Pastoral Councils develop pastoral plans which profile what the parish’s preferred future could be, and how the parish would best proceed toward realizing that future.

Very simply, a pastoral plan relates to the goals and strategies of the parish’s pastoral priorities; objectives are created in response to these questions:

- A. Who are we; and what are we doing now? What are our values?
- B. What do we want to see in the future? What are the dreams of our parishioners?
- C. How are we going to do it? What specific steps should we take to reach our desired outcome? What do we need?
- D. How did it go? Did we reach the evidence of success we projected?

When the pastor asks the council’s help in planning he may ask the members to:

1. Create a Mission Statement which describes what God is calling the parish to become. Newly merged parishes have done this. It is the role of the new Parish Pastoral Council to review, modify and ratify, as necessary and implement the Parish Mission Statement. This would include reviewing opportunities and difficulties related to the pursuit of its mission. The Parish Pastoral Council may advise the pastor regarding the implementation of the Mission Statement.
2. Communicate the parish’s mission and vision to the entire parish community.
3. Discern the needs and strengths of the community in light of the pastoral priorities of the parish and the diocese. Propose ways in which the members of the parish can take part in making the parish’s pastoral plan a reality. This may require the creation of new ministries or sharing of ministries with other parishes.
4. Connect the parish community’s human and material resources with the major tasks involved in implementing the pastoral plan. A representative from the Finance Council should attend the Parish Pastoral Council meeting to advise the pastor regarding feasibility of the pastoral plan and its objectives.
5. Assess successes and setbacks for the purpose of continuing to improve the parish’s plans and performance.
6. Provide for the ongoing ecclesial and spiritual formation of council members through retreats or mornings/evenings of recollection.
7. Provide progress reports and/or pastoral plans to the diocesan Pastoral Planning Office when requested. The Planning Office is available to provide ongoing formation for Parish Pastoral Councils. For any questions or further information regarding the Guidelines, please contact the diocesan Pastoral Planning Office at 856-583-2843.

