

The Parish Pastoral Council

Its Functions and Relationship
To Other Parish Bodies

The Pastoral Council is Pastoral

Numbers 11:16-17 and 24-30



Call of the Baptized

- There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit (*1 Corinthians 12:4-7*)
- Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them. (*Rom 12:6*)

How the baptized answer their call

- Second Vatican Council emphasized collaboration, responsibility, consultation, and lay participation.
- “Through Baptism the lay faithful are made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made **sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ**. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world.” *Lumen Gentium* (1964)

● Roles:

What roles do the pastor and lay faithful play in fulfilling the mission?



Role of the Pastor

- Under Church law, the pastor is responsible for all aspects of the sacramental, administrative and pastoral work of his parish (canons 528-532).
- Church law also provides him with two consultative bodies, the Finance Committee and the Pastoral Council.
- Maryland state law provides him with civil corporate responsibilities that he shares with other incorporators.

Pastor and Parish Staff

- The Pastor oversees the Parish Staff including the appropriate hiring, firing, discipline, payment, etc.
- The Pastor directs the work of the Parish Staff including their interactions with the Pastoral Council, Finance Committee and Corporators.

Parish Staff

- The parish staff consists of experts in the realms of parish administration, religious education, liturgy, etc.
- When the pastor needs expert advice in these areas, he consults his staff.

Parish Consultative Bodies

- In any parish in the Archdiocese of Baltimore there are two consultative bodies required by canon law.
- The first is the Finance Committee which is required under canon 537; and
- The second is the Pastoral Council which is required under local church law under canon 536.

Parish Finance Committee

- The purpose of the Finance Committee is to assist the pastor in the administration of the goods of the parish as required by church law (Book V of the Code of Canon law).
- Generally the Finance Committee assists the Business Manager in preparing the budget and monitors all financial matters related to the parish on a monthly basis.

Parish Finance Committee

- The Finance Committee receives the parish audit and makes sure all required financial policies are properly implemented such as the segregation of duties, payment of taxes, etc.
- Members are appointed by the pastor and must have the expertise in the financial area so they can give appropriate advice to the pastor.

Parish Corporators

- Under Maryland State law all parishes are separately incorporated. This means that there are civil obligations for the parish corporators toward the activities of the parish.
- The Corporators for each parish are:
 - *President – Archbishop of Baltimore*
 - *Vice President – Vicar Bishop for that Vicariate*
 - *Secretary-Treasurer – Pastor*
 - *Two Lay Corporators appointed by the Archbishop of Baltimore*

Parish Corporators

- Parish Corporators oversee the entire operation of the parish including its financial, pastoral and administrative aspects.
- Parish Corporators have both civil responsibilities under Maryland law and canonical responsibilities as administrators under canon law to act positively on behalf of the parish.

Parish Corporators

- Parish Corporators advise the pastor and work with both the Finance Committee and the Pastoral Council to understand the needs of the parish and make sure that it is properly administered.
- They are particularly concerned with matters that could result in civil legal risk to the parish.

Collaboration

- Corporators, Finance Committee Members and Pastoral Council Members collaborate with the Pastor and the Parish Staff for the benefit of the Parish.
- Corporators will either attend the meetings of the Pastoral Council or Finance Committee or will receive the minutes of their meetings to understand their work.



Purpose:
What is the
purpose of
parish
pastoral
council?

Vatican documents have consistently described the pastoral council in terms of this threefold task: investigating, reflecting, and recommending.

- Paul VI, "*Ecclesiae Sanctae I*," no. 16;
- the 1971 Synod of Bishops' "*The Ministerial Priesthood*," art. 2, II, section 3;
- the 1973 "*Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops*," no. 204; and
- the 1973 "*Circular Letter on 'Pastoral Councils'*" by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, no 9).

1983 Code: Purpose of Parish Pastoral Councils

“The pastor presides over it [the council], 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**” (Canon 536).

The Parish Pastoral Council

Roles in Action

- The Church's expectations of the consultative pastor
- The Church's expectation of councilors

1. Expectations of the Pastor



- The Church's official teaching insists that the pastor consults.

Genuine Consultation

- The pastoral council is not a sounding board.
- It is a group that investigates, reflects, and recommends conclusions.



Pastoral Dialogue



“In fulfilling his duty as guide, the pastor will surely obtain help from the consultative bodies...but these must remain faithful to their reality as consultative bodies.”

- Pope John Paul II, 2001

Pastor as “Shepherd”



- “I know my own and my own know me” (John 10: 14) .
- Pastors decide the matter about which they want to consult.

The Value of Time

- We want Pastoral Council work to warrant an investment of people's time.
- To this end, pastors can sketch for councilors the process of the consultation.



The Subject Matter of Consultation

- The subject matter of consultation may be construed **narrowly**
(e.g., “How can the parish attract alienated Catholics?”).
- The subject matter of consultation may be construed **broadly**
(e.g., “What are the most important issues that our parish faces?”).

The Process of Consultation



- The pastor may ask the council to:
 - read books or articles,
 - interview parishioners,
 - consult with experts,
 - weigh the opinions of others, and
 - reach a general agreement.

Pastors decide what the final product of a consultation should be.



It could be:

- a written report,
- a strategic plan,
- a revised mission statement, or
- a new policy.

Consultative-Only Vote



- When pastors are dissatisfied with the work of the council, they should explain why.
- Councils have a consultative-only vote, because the church does not want to force pastors to take poor advice.

Unsuccessful Consultations

- Pastors who refuse good advice alienate councilors.
- “Ultimately they [lay persons] still possess the power of numbers, of finances, of public opinion, of *sensus fidelium*, of conscience and the radical power of shaking the dust from their feet as they exit or worse, stay on apathetically.”



The quote is from Rev. Richard C. Cunningham, JCD, “The Laity in the Revised Code,” in Edward G. Pfnausch, ed., *Code, Community, Ministry: Selected Studies for the Parish Minister Introducing the Code of Canon Law*, second revised edition (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America and Catholic University of America, 1992), pp. 65-70, p. 70 cited here.²⁹

Successful Consultations

- Pastors seek good advice, and councilors deserve to know what their pastor expects.
- When the council's advice is so good that the pastor accepts it, the council has succeeded.



2. Expectations of Councilors



- The Church expects councilors to thoroughly undertake their threefold task:
 - investigation,
 - reflection, and
 - recommendation.

The Council and Pastoral Planning

- Planning is *not* one among many things that a pastoral council should do.
- It is its main role.



Meetings of the Council



- Who plans the agenda and runs the council’s meetings?
- Most guidelines for councils recommend the establishment of an “**executive**” or “**agenda**” committee. It designs the council’s meetings.

The Agenda Committee



- The pastor (who presides at all council meetings) gathers the executive or agenda committee.

The Council's Officers



- The chairperson's task is to follow the agenda, to start and end on time, and to give everyone a chance to speak and be heard.
- The secretary keeps a record of meetings, a record that reflects whether or not the meetings achieved the agenda.

Ambiguities about Councils

- Are pastoral councils *planners* who make proposals to pastors,
- or *coordinators* who supervise parish ministries?



Distracting Roles



- Other roles conflict and distract the council:
 - the “sounding board” role,
 - the “parish forum” role,
 - the “coordination” role.

Rightful Mission

- The pastoral council plans rather than implementing or supervising.
- When councilors implement, they do so as volunteers under the pastor's direction.

Truly pastoral councils



- Councilors participate in the pastor's apostolate by hearing God's Word and sharing it with him.

Discussion Questions

- How would you describe your pastoral council and its work over the last year?
- What would you recommend to the pastor, if anything, regarding the functions of the pastoral council?



**Selection:
What is the
best way to
select
councillors?**

Desired Qualities

- Inquisitive
- Unafraid of new or different concepts
- Creative
- Practical
- Tolerant
- Multi-Disciplined
- Able to fulfill three-fold mission
- Investigate
- Reflect
- Recommend

Representative of the Parish

- Represents parish by “making present” the wisdom of the community
- NOT:
 - An elected official represents constituents
 - Spokespersons/advocates for the presentation of complaints/suggestions to the pastor
 - Committee chair seeking preferential treatment for their group of ministries

Elections

PROS:

- Involves the whole parish
- Familiar to Americans
- Most widely used in the country

CONS:

- May devolve into popularity contest instead of finding gifts/talents
- May lead to candidates developing a 'platform'

Council of Ministries

PROS:

- Representative of all aspects of parish life
- ‘Bottom up’

CONS:

- Council may devolve into supercommittee
- Gifts/talents for leading a ministry may differ from gifts/talents for studying, reflecting, recommending

Discernment

PROS:

- Small group of wise people pray/select the council
- Efficient, targeted

CONS:

- Narrow group of voices
- Can become 'cliquish'

Hybrid: Discernment/Balloting

PROS:

- Open meeting
 - describes purpose, gifts, roles
 - accepts nominations
 - progressive balloting
- Involves whole parish
- Focuses on gifts/talents needed
- Parishioners learn about council

CONS:

- May not lend itself to clear procedure written in bylaws
- May not result in a certain number of council members
- May need to be supplemented by appointed members for racial/age/gender representation

To Stagger Terms or Not

STAGGER:

- Continuity / Institutional Memory
- Veterans can guide new members
- Easier to find a handful of new members rather than entire council

DON'T STAGGER:

- Advantage if Pastor's question involves in-depth study/reflection over more than one year (e.g. strategic planning)
- Less frequent selection process
- Pastor can quickly reorient council of all-new members

What to do in a meeting?

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Manage (quadrant of necessity) 30%	Ponder (quadrant of leadership) 50%
Not important	15% Take action (quadrant of deception)	5% Busywork (quadrant of waste)

From Rockford Diocese Pastoral Planning video approx minute 37

Agendas and meetings

- Council meetings should minimize reporting and maximize discussion
- The agenda should focus on:
 - 1) matters of information,
 - 2) matters requiring council action,
 - 3) matters that call for prayerful discernment and discussion leading to a recommendation or decision.
- Decision-making works best when leaders stress consensus, not voting.

Using Discernment to Reach Consensus

- Quietly call the matter to mind
- Model discussion of the matter on a discernment process such as the Ignatian Examen
- Based on the discussion, gauge whether there is consensus on the matter
 - If not, revisit the matter at the next meeting
 - Remember, the choice is between “good”s, not “good” and “evil” (otherwise, the choice should be simple)

Model of Discernment

- Recognize the presence of God and call on the Holy Spirit for guidance on the issue
- Be thankful for the gifts that have been given and received with respect to the matter at hand
- Reflect on feelings and motivations on the matter – where is God present or being blocked?
- Speak with God in your heart – what would you say?
- Where do you feel you are being led on the matter? Does it give you courage, strength, inspiration and peace?
- Ask God for the grace to move forward in loving

Qualities for Discernment

(from St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*)

- Openness – open to whatever might be revealed
- Generosity – focused on service to God
- Courage – ready to respond, even if it is difficult
- Interior Freedom – free of obstacles to prayer
- Prayerful reflection – attention to God's presence or barriers to it
- Priorities – all else must be subordinate to serving God
- Don't confuse ends with means – don't allow God to enter only after a decision has been made

Agendas and meetings

- Information items should not become lengthy discussion items or report giving, since they are for information only.
- Action items should be decided at the meeting. It is assumed that the council is ready to make a recommendation or a decision.
- Discernment or discussion items should be discussed with openness and the understanding that decisions may not be made at present. It is important that all council members have the opportunity to participate in any discussion. Discernment leads to decision.

Typical Calendar

Typical events within a year might include:

- Orientation for new Pastoral Council members
- Review, and update if necessary, mission statement, goals, objectives and strategies
- Examine and study pastoral issues
- Host a parish assembly
- Share the conclusions of your parish assembly
- Meet with Finance Council to review annual budget and long range plans
- Hold a Pastoral Council retreat
- Brainstorm on new objectives and strategies for your goals
- Evaluate Pastoral Council on work
- Facilitate the selection of new Pastoral Council members

Mission Priorities of the Parish

- Each parish works from its Mission Statement, which:
 - Shares mission focus of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission
 - Is simple, direct, memorable and action-oriented
 - “Love God. Love Others. Make Disciples.”
(Church of the Nativity)

Arch. of Balt. Mission Priorities

As disciples of Jesus Christ our mission is:

- **Evangelization** - Announcing the Good News
- **Liturgy** - Celebrating our faith
- **Education** – Learning our tradition
- **Service** - Caring for those in need
- **Stewardship** - Managing our human, financial and material resources

Mission Model

- All the elements of the parish work together to accomplish the mission

