

Parish Ministry: Sharing Faith, Call, Service

On August 26, 1987, Bishop Matthew H. Clark issued nine policy statements which focus “our common goal to share faith, call and service in our local and larger communities. To accomplish this, we need to develop meaningful approaches which help to form us in the person of our Savior Jesus.”

For our local Church, these statements provide the general outline for the workings of parish pastoral councils throughout our Diocese. These statements were the result of a year’s efforts by parish leaders and diocesan staff to examine, expand and update the guidelines for parish ministry first promulgated by Bishop Joseph L. Hogan in 1972, revised in Fall, 1975 and reaffirmed by Bishop Clark in Fall, 1979.

The accompanying reflections were developed to stimulate discussion and implementation of the policy statements within parishes and parish pastoral councils.

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Policy Statement

- 1. Each parish needs an active public leadership body which meets on a regular basis. This body seeks to build, strengthen and nourish faith and to empower members by encouraging critical thinking and ownership. All efforts are rooted in the challenge**

of the gospel and flow from the community's prayers, gifts and needs as we gather around the eucharistic table to express and intensify our relationship to each other in the priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.

Scriptural Reflection

Acts 2:42-47

2 Corinthians 3:1-6

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

Theological Reflection

The faithful who are by baptism incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and the world.

Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, No. 31.

Pastoral Reflection

As I understand the tradition, the leader is called to be with the group in search. The spiritual leader - be that the bishop, pastor, superior, principal vicar - is called to be “prophet” only in the sense of calling the members of the group to purity of heart that they might pray for light. In this sense the leader assists them in their efforts to get in touch with their own religious experience by faith sharing, and calls them to search in their own hearts for the will of God and the strength and courage to speak that will and to follow it as it emerges in the process. But all the while the leader is to be equally involved in the struggle, the questions, the faith sharing, the willingness to “let go” and to follow the guidance of the God of the Gathering!

Mary Benet McKinney, Sharing Wisdom,
Tabor Publishing, 1987, p. 48.

Canonical Reflection

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. This pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop.

Canon 536, no. 1, 2

Reflection Questions

Does our meeting schedule facilitate good ongoing communication within the group?

How do we reflect on the challenge of the gospel to focus our activities?

Am I open to the needs of others in the faith community?

How do we ensure that the activities of this body are shared with the members of the faith community?

Do I bring faith - faith in God, faith in the giftedness of each person present, faith in myself to be a productive, positive force?

Is prayer an integral part of our meetings, a focal point from which our work together flows?

Policy Statement

2. This body is to be a parish pastoral council, attentive to all that envelopes the human family. Our effort to build the body of Christ is facilitated when membership representative of the cross-section of the community works together to design common written expectations and procedures for the consistent, effective engagement of this body in its work.

Scriptural Reflection

Ephesians 6:18-20 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 Matthew 28:20

Theological Reflection

“The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.” In their introduction to this document, the fathers of the Council say:

In its desire to intensify the apostolic activity of the people of God, the council now earnestly turns its thoughts to the Christian laity. Mention has been made in other documents of the laity’s special and indispensable role in the mission of the church.

Indeed the church can never be without the lay apostolate Scripture clearly shows how spontaneous and fruitful was this activity in the church’s early days.

No less fervent a zeal on the part of lay people is called for today; present circumstances, in fact, demand from them an apostolate infinitely broader and more intense. . . .

Pastoral Reflection

The Second Vatican Council clearly proclaimed the universal call to holiness. Not only are lay people included in God’s call to holiness, but theirs is a unique call requiring a unique response which itself is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is characteristic that lay men and women hear the call to holiness in the very web of their existence (Lumen Gentium, 31), in and through the events of the world, the pluralism of modern living, the complex decisions and conflicting values they must struggle with, the richness and fragility of sexual relationships, the delicate balance between activity and stillness, presence and privacy, love and loss.

The response of lay people to this call promises to contribute still more to the spiritual heritage of the Church. Already the laity’s hunger for God’s word is everywhere evident. Increasingly lay men and women are seeking spiritual formation and direction in deep ways of prayer. This has helped to spur several renewal movements.

National Council of Catholic Bishops,
Called and Gifted: The American Catholic
Laity, Washington, D.C.: United States
Catholic Conference, 1980, p. 3.

Canonical Reflection

The Christian faithful are those who, in as much as they have been incorporated in Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God; for this reason, since they have become sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal office in their own manner, they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each one.

Canon 204

Reflection Questions

As we have functioned in the past, have we acted as a pastoral council or have we limited our attention to only certain areas?

How can we best serve as representatives of the faith community?

Do we work together or do we tend to isolate ourselves and be more interested with protecting our own turf?

How do we assess the needs of the human family? Do we set and follow through on goals?

Policy Statement

- 3. Key to a parish's effort to be catholic and gospel-led is the pastor who receives from the bishop the responsibility to be the bishop's local presence and to share the shepherding roles of teaching, sanctifying and governing in a specific parish. The pastor represents the parish in all juridical matters and is charged to administer the goods of the parish according to the laws of the universal church. The effectiveness of this leadership is acutely enhanced when we encourage open dialogue, shared decision-making and appropriate action among staff and parishioners.**

Scriptural Reflection

Ephesians 1:17-22

John 12:26

Ephesians 4:15-16

Theological Reflection

Priests must sincerely acknowledge and promote the dignity of the laity and the part proper to them in the Mission of the Church. They should hold in high honor that just freedom which is due to everyone in the earthly city. They must willingly listen to the laity, consider their wants in a fraternal spirit, and recognize their experience and competence in the different areas of human activity, so that together with them they will be able to recognize the signs of the times. . . . Priests should also confidently entrust to the laity duties in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. In fact, on suitable occasions, they should invite them to undertake works on their own initiative.

“Decree on the Ministry of Life of Priests,”
Art. 9, p. 430

Pastoral Reflection

When all is said and done, the pastor is the most crucial person in the parish. Almost unfaillingly, we have found that where a parish enjoys vitality, the leadership of the pastor has been central to this vitality. On the contrary, where there are problems, the pastor's part in these problems is significant.

. . . We find there are many styles of good pastoring. Some good pastors are good teachers, some are good liturgists. Some have good organizational abilities, while others are remarkable for their one-to-one care. Still others are strong community builders, while others have a knack for hospitality that supports the efforts and the leadership of others.

There is no one style of good pastoring, yet there are some common qualities. Good pastors seem to have a confident sense of direction. Aware of their own abilities and of their own weaknesses, they have a good notion of what a parish can be. Second, good pastors care about their people. They show respect for their experience and abilities of

people and are as ready to listen as to speak. They listen carefully and really hear what people are saying. Third, good pastors are able to share decision making and leadership. Their strength evokes the strength of others. Weak pastors evoke the weaknesses of others, their tendency to dependency, pettiness or divisiveness. Fourth, good pastors seem to be interested in both the developments in theology and the life of the larger church beyond their parishes.

Philip J. Murnion, "Parish Renewal: State(ments) of the Question," *America*, vol. 147, New York Press, 1982, p. 314.

Canonical Reflection

The pastor is the proper shepherd of the parish entrusted to him, exercising pastoral care in the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share; in accord with the norm of law he carries out for his community the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing, with the cooperation of others presbyters or deacons and the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful.

Canon 519

Reflection Questions

How clear is the administrative role of pastor and staff?

How consistent have our efforts been to encourage open dialogue within Council between pastor and other members? Have we been positive and constructive?

How can the pastor best share the shepherding roles of teaching, sanctifying and governing in our parish?

How effectively do we share in the decision-making process?

How have we individually and as a body shown our affirmation and support for our pastor?

Policy Statement

- The goal of a parish pastoral council is not simply to serve the needs of the parish but to develop a common vision and purpose, actively advocate for the poor and the powerless, and extend our Christian commitment to the neighborhoods and communities around us. The development of a statement of mission for the community is orchestrated by this body and becomes the reference point for activity in the parish as it speaks not only of our present condition but also of the desired reality.**

Scriptural Reflection

Ephesians 2:19-22

John 14:13-14

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Theological Reflection

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with virtues. Allotting his gifts as he wills, he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church. . . . The Spirit is, for the Church and for each and every believer, the principle of their union and unity in the teaching of the apostles and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42).

Vatican II, Constitution on the Church, #12.

Pastoral Reflection

Prior to any personal choice on our part, long before we were able to even articulate the profound and inexhaustible word “God,” his love has reached into the core of our being and touched us. This is the experience of the youngest child in our parish as well as ourselves. Our journey from that moment until now is part of a mosaic of stories that forms us as a parish. We continue to be called to renew, enrich, build upon that experience of God. Together we believe that in Jesus the Word of God continues to speak to us, not only in our most inner being, but also in every aspect of life. This faith invites us to a free response that is both personal and communal. Together we are called to build his kingdom, not in some far off place and time, but here and now.

In the gospel Jesus describes the signs of his kingdom. The hungry are fed, the sick are healed, the sorrowful are comforted, the homeless are given shelter, sinners are forgiven, the stranger is made welcome, those who seek are taught to pray. All this will only continue to happen if we share a common vision of how to give these effective signs to one another and to our society. But the whole vision is never given to one person. Each of us has a part of the truth to share, just as each of us has something to contribute to its living out.

This is a challenging time for us as a parish. We have the opportunity to look at ourselves, with all our good qualities as well as weaknesses, so that we may, in sharing a vision of our future, also share a commitment to bringing it about.

Robert R. Newsome, The Ministry Parish,
Paulist Press, 1982, p. 18

Canonical Reflection

In virtue of their baptism and confirmation lay members of the Christian faithful are witnesses to the gospel message by word and by example of a Christian life; they can also be called upon to cooperate with the bishop and presbyters in the exercise of the ministry of the word.

Canon 759

Reflection Questions

Have we worked to develop a common vision and purpose for our parish? How successful have we been? How have we communicated this work to the faith community?

Who are the poor and powerless among us? How do we advocate for them? How comfortable are we in these efforts?

How have we been self-serving in the past? How have we worked out?

How are we bringing people closer to Christ?

Do we share a commitment to bringing about a new world?

How have I shared my gifts? How have I encouraged others to share theirs?

Policy Statement

- 5. It is both the gift and duty of members to listen and respond to the needs of the community to ensure that well-discerned decisions are made on behalf of all -- especially the poor and the powerless.**

Scriptural Reflection

1 Peter 4:10-11

Luke 18:9-14

Isaiah 50:4-5

Theological Reflection

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.

“Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity”,
Art. 10, p. 346

Pastoral Reflection

The common ways of Christian living such as personal prayer, periods of silence and solitude, spiritual reading, and retreat are time tested structures that foster within us growth in a reflective attitude. They lead us toward a deepened relationship with God. However, it is not sufficient that these common ways be highly encouraged by the Church . . . Nor is it enough for us to know that we need silence and solitude, prayer and reconciliation. In order to be effective, these common ways must become our own. We need to create the space for them in the here and now of our daily lives.
. . . just as human love needs to be nurtured if it is to grow, so too does our relationship with God require nourishment. The common ways of Christian living constantly remind us of our call to incorporate these structures into our lives in a way that is realistically possible.

Claire M. Brissette, Reflective Living: A Spiritual Approach to Everyday Life,
Whitinsville, Mass.: Affirmation Books,
1983, pp. 112-13

Canonical Reflection

The Christian faithful are free to make known their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires to the pastors of the Church.

Canon 212

Reflection Questions

What forums do we have available to listen to the needs of the community? How well do we use these gatherings?

How have I come to realize the gift and duty of effective leadership?

How does my life as a Christian make a difference in how I make decisions?

Am I able to make decisions on behalf of all when my personal desires might prejudice the issue?

When people come to us with needs, how do we respond?

Policy Statement

- 6. Each community creates a local supportive structure focused in the particular ministries of word, community-building, worship, temporalities and witness which draws on the gifts and talents of members as together we address the needs of the entire community.**

Spiritual Reflection

1 Corinthians 12:15-18

Hebrews 10:24

Matthew 25:34-40

Theological Reflection

In Chapter 2 of the apostolate of the Laity we read: “. . . the council earnestly exhorts the laity to take a more active part, according to their talents and knowledge and in fidelity to the mind of the church, in the explanation and defense of Christian principles and in the correct application of them to the problems of our times.

Pastoral Reflection

Competition is built into ladder climbing. . . . On a ladder one studies one's competition and know well exactly who is on the rung above and who is pushing from below. Competition and combat are intrinsic to ladder climbing. In contrast, circle dancing is not about competition at all but about sharing ecstasies. There is always room for another person in a circle and in fact the fun of all is increased, not threatened, by the arrival of a new dancer. . . . There are no winners and losers in such a schema -- only dancers with the dance in common. . . . When one is climbing a ladder one's hands are occupied with one's precarious survival and cannot be extended to assist others without putting one's climb and even one's life -- if one is high enough up the ladder -- in jeopardy. In contrast, when one dances a circular dance one's hands are freed to extend to others in assistance and in celebration. They are also freed to ask for and to receive assistance.

Matthew Fox, [A Spirituality Named Compassion](#), Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1979, pp. 47-50.

Canonical Reflection

In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function.

Canon 208

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Do we have a committee structure which gathers persons to work together on projects or segregates us?

Do we explore gifts and talents and discern with persons how they might best serve or do we "fill slots?"

Do we feel the freedom to change structures to facilitate more effective leadership?

How can we consistently address the needs of the entire community instead of only dealing with what's comfortable or predictable or non-controversial?

When has this group acted as ladder climbers? When have we danced in a circle?

Policy Statement

7. **Decisions are made at the appropriate level where they will be implemented. At all times we are challenged to actively involve in the decision-making process those who will be affected by an action. The preferred model of decision-making at every level is consensus.**

Spiritual Reflection

Galatians 5:22-23

Philippians 2:1-2

Matthew 18:20

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

. . . all the faithful of Christ, of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity . . . one and the same holiness is cultivated by all . . . Every person should walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of a living faith which arouses hope and works through charity.

“Constitution of the Church”, Art. 40-41, p. 152

Pastoral Reflection

From a theological perspective, the parish council is envisioned as a community of ministers, ordained and non-ordained, whose major purpose is to give direction to the parish community as it strives to carry out the work of Christ. It is called to be a Christian community. The parish council’s style of functioning must be patterned after the example of Jesus Christ. Its entire interaction and operation must have Jesus as its center. . . . The relationship among the members of the parish council must be a sign and witness to the parish community. It should be reflective of what the parish community itself is called to be.

The Ministry of the Parish Council, Arch. Parish Council Board, Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

Canonical Reflection

In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one’s own condition and function.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do we make decisions?

Does Council feel that it controls or makes decisions for all committees and ministries?

Do we make decisions for people, or do we involve them in the decision-making process?

How comfortable are members to consider a style of decision-making other than majority vote?

How do we work to make our decision-making style reflective of Jesus' example?

Policy Statement

- 8. After prayerful study and open discussion, the parish pastoral council affirms and endorses policy decisions regarding the welfare of the whole faith community. Pastor and staff ensure adherence to diocesan directives and promote implementation of local policy.**

Scriptural Reflection

Wisdom 6:12-17

Philippians 1:9-10

Ephesians 4:15-16

Theological Reflection

The laity will continuously cultivate the “feeling for the diocese” of which the parish is a kind of cell; they will be always ready on the invitation of their bishop to make their own contribution to diocesan undertakings. Indeed, they will not confine their cooperation within the limits of the parish or diocese, but will endeavor, in response to the needs of the towns and rural districts, to extend it to inter-parochial, interdiocesan, national and international spheres. . . . The laity will therefore have concerns for the needs of the People of God scattered throughout the world. Especially will they make missionary works their own by providing them with material means and even with personal service. It is for Christians a duty and an honor to give God back a portion of the goods they have received from him.

Vatican II, Constitution on the Church, #10

Pastoral Reflection

Contemplation and personal discernment are recognized today as normal developments in the spiritual life. Both are experiences of the indwelling God; they are gifts that represent considerable growth and expertise in the life of the Spirit . . . Contemplation and discernment deal directly with the mysterious, incomprehensible God who appears among us and is experienced in Himself (contemplation) or in a given human situation (discernment). Discernment asks us to be contemplatives in action, in our human choices, finding the same God outside whom we discover in silent prayer discernment should not be regarded as a litmus test, to be applied at key moments of decision. It is spirituality in the concrete, because spirituality is precisely the Spirit acting within us and discernment is the awareness of that action.

Spirituality has long suffered from being identified as theory to be applied; it is life first and only then a reflection on life. It is experiencing with understanding and commitment the presence and guidance of God in one's whole life. That is discernment, too. Discernment is thus a life work.

Ernest Larkin, Silent Presence: Discernment As Process and Problem, Denville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1981, pp. 5, 6, 9, 10.

Canonical Reflection

The pastor is to acknowledge and promote the proper role which the lay members of the Christian faithful have in the Church's mission by fostering their associations for religious purpose; he is to cooperate with his own bishop and with the presbyterate of the diocese in working hard so that the faithful be concerned for parochial communion and that they realize that they are members both of the diocese and of the universal Church and participate in and support efforts to promote such communion.

Canon 529, No. 2

Reflection Questions

How easy is it to share your opinion in a Council meeting?

Does this Council pray or does it say prayers?

Do we see making policy decisions as "power" or "service"?

Do we see ourselves as part of a diocesan and universal Church or do we feel isolated?

Policy Statement

9. In all the actions of this body, members endeavor to:

- ... be prayerfully rooted in Christ**
- ... reflect on the experience of God in our midst**
- ... support opportunities for education and spiritual growth**
- ... promote peace, justice and the fundamental option for the poor**
 - ... work to foster and enhance relationships**
- ... share leadership with others through dialogue, training and empowering**
- ... evaluate how well the group accomplishes what it intends**
- ... heighten a sense of connectedness to other parishes in the region and to the diocese as a whole**
- ... en flesh gospel values in this community of Christian faith**

Scriptural Reflection

1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

Romans 12:1-16

1 Samuel 3:1-11

Theological Reflection

The pastors, indeed, know well how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the whole Church. For they know that they themselves were not established by Christ to undertake alone the whole salvific mission of the Church to the world, but that it is their exalted office so to be shepherds of the faithful and also recognize the latter's contribution and charisms that everyone is in his/her own way will, with one mind, cooperate in the common task.

Vatican II, Constitution on the Church, #30

Pastoral Reflection

The parish council is essentially a ministerial community called to exercise Christian leadership in and for the parish Church. The parish councillor, before anything else, must be a person of faith, a believer. The parish councillor's approach to ministry must be motivated and fashioned by the example of Jesus Christ who summarized the meaning of his own ministry when He said: "I have come not to be served, but to serve." Ministry is more than a good deed. It is a conversion of the heart and the acceptance of Christ's call to care for and serve others with a love that accepts no boundaries. Parish councillors, as ministers, must heed the call of Jesus: "Follow me!" The parish councillor is to learn his or her ministry and to model it after the Lord Himself. Any person who wishes to serve God in a special way by continuing the ministerial activity of Jesus must become his disciple. He or she must cherish, above all else, the special form of friendship which Jesus extends in a special calling: "No longer do I call you servants .

.. but I have called you friends. . . . You did not choose me, but I chose you.” (John 15:15-16)

“The Parish Council . . . A Theological Prospective,” Diocese of Trenton and Metuchen.

Canonical Reflection

All the Christian faithful have the duty and the right to work so that the divine message of salvation may increasingly reach the whole of humankind in every age and in every land.

Canon 211

Reflection Questions

How do we help prospective Council members reflect on what they can contribute to the Council?

How do we incorporate opportunities for education and spiritual growth into the monthly business meeting model of functioning?

Do I think of myself as a prophet?