

**DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER  
PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL GUIDELINES**

**I. PURPOSE**

*A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop (c. 515).*

Because it is a community of the Christian faithful, it is essential that the parish structures serve the community in carrying out the mission of the Church: to proclaim the Gospel, to form community, and to serve especially those in need. The parish organizational structures must never be simply needs in themselves, but should always work to promote the mission of the parish, the diocesan Church and the universal Church.

The pastoral council is a consultative body to the pastor (pastoral administrator), who receives from the bishop the responsibility to be his local presence and to share the shepherding roles of teaching, sanctifying and governing in a specific parish. A fruit of the Second Vatican Council is the reality of shared responsibility in our Church today. It is premised on the communion that is the very nature of the Church and the mission Christ has entrusted to the Church. The mission is not reserved to the work of one person, but the responsibility of all the People of God. The duty and the right of apostolic initiative lies within all by virtue of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, through the gifts of the Spirit, supported and coordinated through the ministry of hierarchical service. The parish pastoral council is an effort to provide for the structured expression of shared responsibility, to enable appropriate decisions to be reached for the good of the communion of the Church and its mission.

Every parish and faith community in the Diocese of Rochester is to have a parish pastoral council, which meets at a minimum of four times per year. In an arrangement of parishes such as a cluster, it is permitted to operate with a joint pastoral council with at least some members of each parish represented. Each parish must have its own separate finance council, but each council may at times be assembled as a group to discuss common concerns and issues. At times it may be appropriate to convoke individual pastoral councils and/or finance councils for meetings preliminary to a joint cluster pastoral or finance council meeting. It is also the understanding in the Diocese of Rochester that campus' ministry coordinates its activities through pastoral and finance council meetings, adapted where appropriate to these guidelines.

The pastoral council 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 one another in the priestly ministry of Jesus Christ. The specific purposes of the pastoral council are:

- to form community as a sign and witness of unity for the larger parish community;
- to provide recommendations for parish priorities, directions and policies through pastoral planning;
- to promote communication, understanding, and collaboration among parish organizations and between the parish, the Diocese and the universal Church.

In forming community, council members are challenged to ongoing renewal through prayer, study, listening, and dialogue. In developing priorities and directions for the parish, the council is to become the means of achieving full participation by the whole parish community in its mission by giving all a voice in guiding and directing parish life.

The goal of the parish pastoral council is not simply to serve the members of the parish, but to develop a common vision and purpose, actively advocate for the poor and the powerless, and extend Christian commitment to the surrounding neighborhoods and communities. Toward that end, a statement of mission for the parish community is orchestrated by this body and becomes the reference point for activity in the parish.

In fostering communication, the council encourages and initiates dialogue among parish leadership and organizations and brings to the council concerns of the larger Church. The council, likewise, can be a means to inform the bishop of parish needs and directions.

In business and government, leadership is often expressed as the ability to assert one's power and influence. Pastoral leadership, in contrast, is a ministry of service. The Second Vatican Council in its teaching made clear that pastoral leadership and authority cannot be separated from the action of service which builds up community and empowers its members to reach their full individual stature. The preferred model of decision-making at every level is consensus.

## **II. MEMBERSHIP**

A primary value for membership of a parish pastoral council is that the council be a true reflection of the parish community. Insofar as possible, the council should reflect parish membership. Members should be inclusive of the demographic realities of the community (e.g., minorities, the aged, persons with disabling or handicapping conditions, etc.) This does not mean that members represent a particular constituency, but rather that the council should reflect the diversity of the parish in terms of age, race length of membership in the parish.

In addition, members should be:

- baptized and confirmed Roman Catholics in good standing with the Church;
- registered and supporting members of the parish;

- participants in parish life;
- in possession of an understanding of and commitment to the Church in accord with the principles of Vatican II;
- committed to prayer, study, listening, and dialogue; and
- committed to giving the time needed for participation.

One of the two lay trustees of the Parish Corporation serves as an ex officio member of the parish pastoral council.

### **III. SIZE**

The size of the council should range from seven to fifteen members. The size should be small enough to promote a sense of community among the members, and yet large enough to reflect the diversity of the parish. The complexity of the council's agenda should also be a factor in determining the size.

### **IV. TERM OF OFFICE**

Terms of office should be three years (renewable once) and staggered so council membership rotates. It is advisable that council members not be eligible for re-election to the council until one year after the completion of their term.

### **V. SELECTION**

A significant number of the council's members should be selected from the parish-at-large, using a method that exemplifies the theology underlying Church governance and promote ownership throughout the parish for participating in the mission of the parish and for supporting the work of the council. Additional members (one to three) may be appointed by the pastor (pastoral administrator) as a way to be sure that the council reflects the larger parish community.

### **VI. EXECUTIVE STRUCTURE**

Every council should have an agenda committee composed of the pastor (pastoral administrator), chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary. These members are normally elected by full membership of the council. The task of the group is to develop an overall-working plan for the year, which identifies the issues facing the council and estimates when the council will be dealing with the issue. The agenda committee should meet before each council meeting to prepare the agenda and design processes for each meeting to facilitate the agenda.

The executive committee needs to be sure that prayer and study are a significant part of the council's deliberations. The executive committee also appoints chairpersons of task forces.

## **VII. PASTOR (PASTORAL ADMINISTRATOR)**

The pastor represents the parish in all juridic matters and is charged to administer the goods of the parish according to the norms of the universal and particular Church. While he normally does not chair the meeting, the pastor presides at all pastoral council meetings and actively listens to the council's deliberations. When appropriate, the pastor may assist the council in developing a consensus around a particular issue by sharing information, providing his own perspectives or identifying common elements or areas of agreement that seem present in the council's discussion. The pastor, as minister of governance in the parish, is the final authorizer of any course of action. The pastor should set the context for the council's discussion by sharing Church teaching and/or setting the parameters for acceptable alternatives. The pastor is the convenor of the executive committee and is ultimately responsible for assuring the council's effective operation. A pastor may not dissolve the pastoral council without the written approval of the bishop.

## **VIII. CHAIRPERSON**

The chairperson, elected by the council membership, is central to the effectiveness of the pastoral council. The chairperson is responsible for:

- organizing and coordinating the agenda and processes of the council;
- chairing and facilitating the meetings of the council (the chairperson may delegate facilitation of portions of the meeting to other members).
- encouraging members and committees of the council to fulfill their specific responsibilities and delegations;
- establishing an ongoing process of evaluation of the council's effectiveness.

The chairperson must be the servant of the group. She/he should be an enabler and facilitator of the council promoting inclusion and participation, keeping the meetings on track, being sensitive to conflict and helping to resolve conflicts positively.

## **VIII. SECRETARY**

The secretary prepares summaries of the meetings of the council, maintains their membership roster, assures the preparation and dissemination of materials for the council meetings, and is responsible for all council correspondence.

## **IX. MEETINGS**

The pastoral council should determine its annual meeting calendar prior to the fall of each year.

Adequate time should be devoted to council orientation, council formation, (prayer, community building, etc.), as well as council business. Some councils hold special meetings for internal planning (setting annual council goals and objectives), formation, (retreats, opportunities to strengthen the ministerial identity and spirituality of the council) and education (study of Church documents, skill developments relative to council work).

For the council's operations to be effective it is important for council members to develop an understanding of the components of a successful meeting, (clear meeting objectives, or outcomes, a realistic agenda, and timeframe, consideration of how agenda items will be handled, adequate preparatory material made available in advance, etc.) and to evaluate the meetings from time to time.

Each parish pastoral council should develop by-laws, or a covenant, reflecting the mutual understanding of the role of the pastoral council that specify:

- the name of the council
- planning role of the council
- purposes, functions, eligibility requirements for membership
- election/selection procedures
- terms for membership and vacancies
- officers, meetings, formulating of agenda procedures, committees, amendments
- the role, membership, composition and function of standing committees of the pastoral council

This covenant is reviewed and approved by the Bishop or his delegate.

Dated: \_\_\_\_s/6-26-2000\_\_\_\_, 2000

\_\_\_\_s/Matthew H. Clark\_\_\_\_  
†Matthew H. Clark  
Bishop of Rochester

Dated: \_\_\_\_s/6-26-2000\_\_\_\_, 2000

\_\_\_\_s/Kevin E. McKenna\_\_\_\_  
Rev. Kevin E. McKenna  
Chancellor