



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Guideline: Pastoral Council Guidelines

Related Policy: Parish Governance Policy

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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 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, to worship 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.

As detailed in the Parish By-Laws, every parish in the Diocese of Rochester is to have a Parish Pastoral Council ("The Council"). The Pastoral Council is a consultative body to the pastor (or pastoral administrator). 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. Campus ministry coordinates its activities through pastoral and finance council meetings, adapted where appropriate to these guidelines.

The specific purposes of the Pastoral Council are:

- to develop a common vision and purpose, actively advocate for the poor and the powerless, and to extend Christian commitment to the surrounding neighborhoods and communities;
- to orchestrate a statement of mission for the parish community and become the reference point for activity in the parish;

- to provide recommendations for parish priorities, directions and policies through pastoral planning for worship, evangelization, outreach, stewardship, *etc.*;
- to promote communication, understanding, and collaboration among parish organizations and between the parish, the bishop, the diocese and the universal Church.

Pastoral leadership is a ministry of service. 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.

Membership

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, and length of membership in the parish.

Unlike the parish staff, the Pastoral Council is not a group of experts in catechesis, liturgy, pastoral care or education. **The Council's primary gift is practical wisdom.** The Council is made up of parishioners who have a vested interest in the life and development of the parish and want to help the pastor (or pastoral administrator) in this regard.

Accordingly, Council members must meet the following criteria:

- be fully initiated Roman Catholics in good standing with the Church;
- be registered and supporting members of the parish;
- be participants in parish life and worship;
- be committed to prayer, study, listening and dialogue;
- be committed to giving the time needed for participation; and
- be aware of and comply with the Parish Conflict of Interest Policy. [Link](#)

In addition, he or she should possess the following gifts necessary for pastoral leadership:

- a desire for spiritual growth in oneself and in the parish;
- eagerness to participate in parish decisions about its direction;
- willingness to listen, speak openly and honestly, and to work toward consensus;
- integrity in articulating what one has heard and what one believes;
- the ability to inspire and empower other and to delegate; and
- cooperation, flexibility and openness with people and ideas.

If a parish or cluster employs a professional staff member such as a Finance Director, he or she may serve as staff to the Parish Council. Parish employees are not members of the Parish

Pastoral Council; they support the Parish Pastoral Council. Parish employees should be available to answer questions regarding matters discussed.

If at any time fraud is suspected, members should contact the Diocesan Fraud Hotline at 1-800-388-7177 x1266; where suspected malfeasance can be reported anonymously if necessary.

Size

The size of the Council should range from seven to fifteen members. The size should be small enough to allow for and elicit active participation from each member. The complexity of the Council's agenda should also be a factor in determining its size.

Term of Office -- Policy

The term of office is three years. Terms should be staggered so Council membership rotates. A member may serve for two consecutive three year terms. After one year of a break in service, a new cycle may commence.

Selection

A significant number (at least two thirds) of the Council's members should be from the parish-at-large. Additional members (one third) may be appointed by the pastor (or pastoral administrator) as a way to be sure that the Council reflects the larger parish community.

Executive Structure

Every Council should have an executive committee composed of chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary. These members are normally elected by full membership of the Council. The executive committee also appoints chair-persons of task forces. 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. In addition, the executive committee should meet with the pastor (or pastoral administrator) before each Council meeting to prepare the agenda and design processes for each meeting to facilitate the agenda. The agenda should be sent out in advance with the date, time and location of the meeting.

A typical agenda should include:

- Opening prayer and reflection
- Revisions and approval of the agenda
- Disclosure of conflicts with agenda items
- Approval of the meeting minutes from the previous meeting
- Items to be discussed (old and new business) along with recommendations and actions necessary
- Planning for the next and future meetings

Pastor (Pastoral Administrator)

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

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 in conjunction with the Executive Committee and the 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.

Secretary and Minutes

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.

Effective meeting minutes should include:

- Date of the meeting
- Members who were present, excused and absent
- Items discussed with special attention to all recommendations of the councils and decisions of the pastor (or pastoral administrator)

- Open Action Items
- Date, time and location of the next meeting.

Meetings

The Pastoral Council should meet at a minimum of four times per year. Additionally, 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.

Council Relationship to Finance Council, Committees and Lay Trustees

Neither the Pastoral Council nor the Finance Council is subordinate to the other; rather they are both advisors to the pastor (or pastoral administrator). While each operates independently to the other, it is imperative to have good communication between the two.

Additionally, to ensure proper alignment, all committees should be subordinate to either the Pastoral Council or the Finance Council. The presiding council must approve the chairs of all subordinate committees.

Also, to ensure the pastor (or pastoral administrator) receives advice from the lay trustees that considers all viewpoints; the two lay trustees will serve as ex-officio members on either the Pastoral or Finance Councils – with one lay trustee serving on each council.