

***GUIDELINES***  
***For***  
***PARISH***  
***PASTORAL***  
***COUNCILS***



***“After the diocesan bishop has listened to the presbyteral council and he judges it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish.”***

Code of Canon Law, Canon 536§1

## **NORMS FOR PARISHES IN THE DIOCESE OF LANSING:**

### **1. EACH PARISH OF THE DIOCESE OF LANSING WILL HAVE A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL. THE NAME OF THIS BODY IS THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL.**

An active parish pastoral council assists in creating a consultative and consensual form of government. It offers opportunity, on a regular basis, for the parishioners and pastor/pastoral coordinator to make and evaluate plans that contribute to and enhance the life and activity of the people of God.

### **2. THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IS CONSULTATIVE IN NATURE.**

*“The pastoral council possesses a consultative vote and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop.” Canon 536§2*

“Collegiality (shared responsibility) is a principle of required consultation and collaboration which should inform policy making on every level. There is an authority of the consultative body – an authority which involves all the baptized in the pursuit of the common good of the Church – God’s people. This is an authority not in the juridical sense of decision-making, but in the emerging consensus which flows from the combined gifts and the multiple experiences of the people of God and which is informed by the same Holy Spirit that informs those (pastors/pastoral coordinators) with jurisdictional authority.”<sup>1</sup>

### **3. THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IS THE PRIMARY AND FORMAL MEANS FOR PASTOR/PASTORAL COORDINATOR AND PARISHIONERS TO MEET AND DISCUSS THE NEEDS AND HOPES OF THE PARISH COMMUNITY.**

The Christian faithful are free to make known their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires to the pastors of the church. (Canon 212) “Shared responsibility in the Church is an imperative created by the power of the Gospel which impels the members for the Christian community to recognize, promote, worship, and witness.”<sup>2</sup>

### **4. THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO SET PARISH DIRECTION IN A PROCESS OF PASTORAL PLANNING THAT WILL:**

- Define the mission of the parish,
- Discern the needs and concerns of the parish community,
- Develop goals and priorities that will address the needs and concerns,
- Call all members of the parish to participate in the mission of the parish,
- Support and encourage pastoral staff/commissions/groups in carrying out their responsibilities.

“The parish pastoral council is a planning council. The function of the council is to deal with the mission of the Church, long-range and short-range goals and objectives, and to design those (broad) procedures and processes by which the pastoral work of the Church is to be accomplished.”<sup>3</sup>

### **5. PRAYER IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL MEETINGS.**

“When the Spirit of truth comes He will lead you to the complete truth” (Jn. 16:13). There is a reflective aspect to planning. Information gathering is not sufficient to draw conclusions. Implications must be weighed in light of the mission. Praying together and sharing quiet time acknowledge and bring the Holy Spirit into the process. Apart from meetings, periodic retreat days are recommended.

### **6. THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IS REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL FACETS OF PARISH POPULATION.**

Since the council is a voice of the parishioners, effort should be made to have the council be truly representative of all the parish.

**7. AT LEAST 75% OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IS SELECTED BY LOT OR ELECTED.**

It is understood that there is a process in the parish for (s)electing council membership which involves the parishioners.

**8. EACH GROUP/COMMITTEE/COMMISSION OF THE PARISH HAS ACCESS TO THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL.**

Evaluation of “what is” is an important phase of the planning process. A parish group must work with the council, informing them of pastoral matters that require council attention. The council must keep apprised of the life and activity of the parish through periodic communication with those involved in programming in the parish.

**9. THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL PROVIDES INITIAL FORMATION FOR NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS AND EDUCATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL MEMBERS.**

The (s)election process should include information as to the formation requirements. It is recommended the council set personal goals that offer opportunity for personal enrichment while on the council.

**COMMENTARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The parish communities within the Diocese of Lansing are diverse. Diocesan norms take on a unique character when applied to a particular parish with a particular history and mission shaped by its membership. This section offers comment and suggestion on questions often asked about parish pastoral councils in seeking to create a practical, workable process in the parish that calls forth the gifts and insights of all the people of God. Some of the suggestions can be applied to the formation and activity of any group assigned a particular responsibility.

**PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP**

Parish pastoral council members must be practicing Catholics, willing and able to share responsibility for setting the vision and direction of the parish and animating the parish community.

Every effort ought to be made to achieve adequate representation of the parish: that is, ethnic, economic, geographic, age, sex.

Seventeen years is recommended as the minimum age for council members.

It is recommended that the number of persons on the parish council be from twelve to twenty-four. Too large a group makes it difficult to interact as a whole. Too small a group does not allow for adequate representation. In smaller parishes, a number less than 12 may be more realistic and necessary.

**COUNCIL MAKE-UP**

The parish pastoral council can be constituted in more than one way. Any method will have its advantages and disadvantages. It is recommended the parish examine its options before making a decision.

Examples of council composition are:

1. All members are from the parish-at-large and have no affiliation with commissions or organizations.
2. All members are also members of commissions and organizations.
3. Each commission and organization is represented on the council and council also has members chosen with no other affiliation.
4. Parish is divided geographically and council is constituted of regional representatives.

Whatever choice is decided upon, every attempt ought to be made to fulfill the norm that the council be representative of the total parish. The allowance of a limited number of appointed members gives opportunity to insure this happening.

There is no distinction in the tasks of the varied membership. Coming from a specific neighborhood or commission or being of an age, sex, or ethnic background will give the member a certain perspective. However, that task remains the same – care for the pastoral life of the total parish.

***Every effort ought to be made to achieve adequate representation of the parish: that is, ethnic, economic, geographic, age, sex.***

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## **COUNCIL SELECTION OR ELECTION**

Parish pastoral council members may either be elected or selected. Whichever process is chosen, it needs to take norms #6 & #7 into account, as well as involve parish participation.

Some ideas for developing the process are:

1. Form a nominating committee of the council responsible for:
  - a. Communicating to the parish
    - 1) the role of the parish pastoral council
    - 2) membership openings
    - 3) requirements of membership
    - 4) method of election or selection
    - 5) extent of parish participation
  - b. Drawing up a slate of nominees and securing their assent.
  - c. Planning and executing an orientation session for nominees
  - d. Carrying out the process of selection or election
  - e.
2. Selection by lot:

This method has its origins in the account of the selection of Matthias to be an apostle (Acts 1:21-26). In the context of prayer, the members of the parish pastoral council are selected in a drawing from among the name of nominees.

3. Election:

Those who are participating in the election ought to be informed as to the relevant experience and gifts of the nominees as well as have an opportunity to meet them personally.

If it is a parish – wide election, voting could take place:

- a. during or immediately following a liturgy on a particular Sunday.
- b. Through direct mail.

- c. At a parish assembly with an understanding that parishioners must attend the assembly to cast a ballot.

4. Appointment:

It is recommended that the pastor/pastoral coordinator, in consultation with the parish pastoral council, make the appointments to the council that are allowed.

High priority in any method chosen is education of, and communication to, the parish community.

## **NEW MEMBERS**

(S)Election processes are usually arranged so that new members come on the council every one or two years.

It is recommended that:

- A special orientation meeting be scheduled where all candidates for parish pastoral council membership are apprised of the history, meaning, current practice and responsibilities of the council
- A notebook be provided that includes
  - ✓ Diocesan parish pastoral council norms
  - ✓ Parish document describing the council, that is, the articles of understanding and/or by-laws
  - ✓ Recent minutes
  - ✓ Diocesan and parish mission statements
  - ✓ Current goals/priorities of the parish and diocese
  - ✓ Broad parish policies
  - ✓ Goals of the parish commissions//committees/groups
  - ✓ Annual calendar including meeting dates and places
- A council member be assigned to each newly (s) elected member who will arrange for a meeting to acquaint him/her with the contents of the notebook and answer questions
- The first parish pastoral council meeting with new members be special, e.g., a time for sharing prayer, for sharing a meal or refreshments and for getting to know one another can make up a significant part of the meeting.

## **TERMS ON THE COUNCIL**

Definite terms ought to be set for parish pastoral council membership, governed by by-laws. It is recommended that the minimum number of years for a term be two, three is preferred. In any case, two consecutive terms is considered the maximum service in this capacity.

## **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF COUNCIL MEMBERS**

It is recommended that the parish pastoral council model that importance of spiritual growth in the lives of individuals and groups. Some suggestions are:

- Share responsibility among the members to prepare prayer for each meeting that provides spiritual nourishment and brings the Spirit into the thinking and reflection of the group. Prayer is integral to the agenda.
- Set council goals that include opportunities for personal and group enrichment, e.g., an overnight retreat that includes spouses in the experience, time set aside during the regular agenda to discuss articles, books and documents that deepen the members' understanding of the Church.

## **AGENDA FORMATION**

A request for an item to be placed on the agenda can be made by a council member, parish staff/team, parish committee or parishioner through the executive committee. Pertinent background information ought to be provided when the request is made.

## **COUNCIL OFFICERS**

It is recommended that the parish pastoral council have the following officers:

**Pastor/pastoral coordinator:** by virtue of position in the parish, the pastor/pastoral coordinator is the presiding officer of the council.

**Chairperson:** a member of the council (s) elected by the council to chair the meetings and appoint whatever committees are necessary.

**Vice-Chairperson:** a member of the council (s) elected by the council to chair meetings in the chairperson's absence.

**Secretary:** the secretary provides an accurate record of minutes, and notifies members of meetings at least seven days in advance. Notification includes minutes of previous meeting, agenda and any documentation relevant to agenda. The secretary handles all communication from the parish pastoral council.

The secretary can be appointed by the pastor/pastoral coordinator and is not necessarily a member of the council.

**Executive Committee:** consists of the pastor/pastoral coordinator, chairperson, and vice-chairperson. This committee prepares council agenda and provides leadership in keeping the council faithful in carrying out its responsibilities.

## **ARTICLES OF UNDERSTANDING/ BY-LAWS**

It is recommended that the pastor/pastoral coordinator and parish community draw up a document reflecting their mutual understanding of the role of the parish pastoral council.

The articles of understanding should specify that name of the council, planning role of the council, purposes, functions, eligibility for membership, election/selection procedures, terms of membership and vacancies.

The by-laws should include officers, terms of officers, duties of officer, meetings, formulating of agenda, committees, and amendments.

***The parish pastoral council relies on the pastoral staff/team to develop and execute programs and offer services that will reflect the parish mission and further the parish goals and priorities.***

## **COUNCIL RELATIONSHIPS**

The council serves in relationship to the following:

**Parish community:** a priority for a parish pastoral council is to keep in touch with the hopes, aspirations and issues of concern of the parishioners. As part of its agenda, a council develops an action plan that would promote mutual cooperation through two-way communication with parishioners. Suggestions are: annual parish assemblies: publishing time, place, agenda and minutes of council meetings.

**Pastoral staff/team:** the parish pastoral council relies on the pastoral staff team to develop and execute programs and offer services what will reflect

the parish mission and further the parish goals and priorities.

**Commissions, committees, groups in parish:** parishioners often participate in the programs and activities of the parish through membership on a commission or committee, in a group or organization. The number and specific responsibilities of such bodies emerge from the demands of the mission and goals and priorities of the parish.

Depending on the size of parish, mode of operation or other reasons, parishes may choose to have persons serve on both council and commission/group or not. Whatever membership policy is, it should be recognized that the tasks of each are different and one ought not take on the other's task.

Three commissions of the parish pastoral council are commonly named:

**Worship commission:** encourages the full, active, and conscious participation of the assembly.

**Education commission:** a consultative body for all matters related to educational, catechetical and youth ministry. They serve in an advisory capacity to the pastor and professional staff, i.e., principal, director of religious education, and coordinator of youth ministry.

**Parish social ministry commission:** serves to empower the entire parish community to fulfill the gospel mandate of justice and charity. The social ministry commission directs, coordinates, and initiates organized efforts to integrate the church's social mission into every aspect of parish life – worship, education, and action. The breadth of this mission is guided by the teachings of the popes and bishops during the last 100 years. Guidelines for the parish social ministry commission are included in this booklet.

Notes

1. *"Collegiality in the local church,"* Archbishop William Borders, *Origins* January 24, 1980 Vol. 9: No. 32,511.
2. Notre Dame University *"Think Tank,"* 1979
3. *"The Parish and Lay Ministry,"* Bertram Griffin, *Chicago Studies*, 23 April (1984), p. 58