



Diocesan Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany
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Bishop of Albany
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Questions and/or More Information?

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Introduction

In Bishop Edward Scharfenberger's welcome statement for our Diocesan website he describes a vision of how we relate to each other as Church.

"Each and every one of us has marvelous and wonderful gifts to be shared, and we need one another to be able to bring out the best in each other and, in a complementary way, build up the Body of Christ. That is really what Church is about. It's not about buildings. It's not about money. It's not about things or plans. It's about people. It's about making connections. It's about recognizing the presence of God in every single human being."

This vision of Church is a practical expression of the call that each of us receives at our baptism. We share responsibility for each other and for advancing the mission of Jesus Christ in our families, our communities and the world.

On January 25, 1983, Pope John Paul II promulgated a new Code of Canon Law for the Roman Catholic Church. It marked a major step in the implementation of the Second Vatican Council. The code re-affirmed the vision of shared responsibility, based on the documents of the council.

The documents of the council clearly teach that the sacraments of Christian Initiation, namely Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, call all members of the Church to become involved in the threefold mission committed by Christ to the Church. This mission includes praising God (worship), proclaiming the Good News (teaching), and forming communities of faith (serving). In other words, all are called to ministry in the Church.

The new code made it clear that, though the pastoral care of the community is entrusted to a pastor or parish life coordinator (PLC), under the authority of the diocesan bishop, it is the whole parish community (priest or PLC and the people) that are called to the task of pastoring. This pastoral care includes:

- *The responsibility to preach the Gospel and nourish the Christian faithful with the message of salvation;*
- *To celebrate the sacraments and lead the parish community in prayer;*
- *To encourage active participation in the sacred liturgy;*
- *To foster works by which the spirit of the Gospel is promoted;*
- *To support family life and prayer;*
- *To acknowledge and promote the proper role lay members of the parish community have in the Church's mission; and*
- *To develop community leadership.*

Responsibility for the mission of the Church is shared in differing, but equally valid ways by those who are baptized and those who are ordained; the ministry of the members of the parish and of its pastor or PLC are interdependent. This interdependence calls for a model of parish governance that includes broad consultation. The Code of Canon Law, then, suggests that each parish establish a Parish Pastoral Council to assure this broad consultation, and Bishop Scharfenberger has asked that each parish in our diocese have such a council or its equivalent.

As you are probably aware, the purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council is to:

- *explore the pastoral reality, including its relationship with neighboring parishes and the Local Catholic Community (LCC)*
- *reflect upon it; and*
- *make a recommendation to the pastor or PLC.*

Over the years there has been an evolution both in the role of Pastoral Councils and the way they operate. Most parishes began with “Parish Councils” that addressed the physical and financial needs of the parishes, administered and coordinated various parish ministries, and used Roberts Rules of Order to guide meetings and decisions. More recently, “Parish Pastoral Councils” moved toward becoming bodies which imagine and articulate a vision for the necessity of the parish, are steeped in prayer and come to decisions in concert with the pastor or PLC in a process of discernment. All this is understood to be accomplished through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Scharfenberger has consistently affirmed the centrality of the parish as the focal point of the life of the Church. Within the Albany Diocese, the parish has been and will continue to be the center of the Church’s life as we plan across foreseeable future. However, a parish is not a stand-alone entity.

“It is the parish that is the primary center of evangelization, family life, and spiritual and catechetical formation. Grounded in the theology of what the Church is, every parish should be a school of discipleship, a family of families and a family for those without family. Families themselves are often spoken of as the ‘domestic Church,’ the Church in miniature. It is this local parish faith community that supports our families and through which we nurture that personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship manifests itself in courageous discipleship, strong community outreach and the celebration of the sacramental life of the Church”

“Ecclesia semper reformanda (the Church must always be reformed) was a founding principle of Vatican II. So are the complementary principles of collegiality and subsidiarity. Doing things collegially means consciously working together in a collaborative manner, respectful of the gifts and interdependence of everyone. Subsidiarity means, essentially, that nothing should be programmed or administered at a higher level that can better be done a lower one. By organizing and working under these principles we are doing structural theology together... Obviously, not all changes that need to be done are at the diocesan level. Parishes also must continue to find ways to serve the faithful better.”

(Bishop Edward B. Scharfenberger, God’s Work, Too!, June 5, 2015)

Each parish, working within their vicariate and supported by the diocesan offices must find the right balance of collaboration within their vicariate and at the diocesan level where the parish community and the vicariate are best served and the use of resources is maximized toward that end.

Often greater efficiencies can be achieved for the business end of parish operations at the vicariate level, or smaller group if possible, as well as greater opportunities for retreats, prayer experiences and shared pastoral care of nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, pantries, etc. The discernment of this balance as well as the need to constantly reform our parishes will require us to question our effectiveness.

“Every parish family is invited to re-imagine: What is the Lord calling us to become? To whom are we being sent? Who is not yet among us actively, but who needs to be – and whom we need as well in order to be who we called to be?”

(Bishop Edward Scharfenberger, Our Faith That Moves Mountains, October 12, 2017)

The parish pastoral council is needed to fill the essential role of assisting the pastor or PLC to guide the entire parish community in their mission to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Bishop Scharfenberger invites us all to imagine what a Church we can be:

“By baptism we become temples of the Holy Spirit, homes with hearts in which He yearns to dwell, and missionaries to bring His joy and love to every person we encounter on our life’s journey. What a Church we would become, the one described by Paul as Christ’s own body and experienced throughout history wherever disciples follow their mission and commission, where everyone is filled with the fullness of Christ -- if we only got back to the basics of what in fact we are.” (Bishop Edward Scharfenberger, Back to Basics, January 11, 2018)

Spreading the Gospel of Jesus is the mission of every Christian. Therefore, it is important that the Parish Pastoral Council seek to ignite a passion for evangelization among the entire parish and vicariate.

“The so-called “new evangelization” that no doubt you have heard about is a theme that all the Holy Fathers in recent decades have been speaking about. What it means, basically, is doing what good Christians have always done: bringing Christ to others one person at a time. To do that, each of us needs to make a personal commitment to the Lord to accept the task He is giving us to be His disciple. It means, every day, asking ourselves: “What have I done today to spread the joy of the Gospel? What have I done to lead others to Jesus?” Remember the saying attributed to of St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach always. Use words if necessary.” (Bishop Edward Scharfenberger, The Mission Next Door, September 21, 2017)

The Parish Pastoral Council should include a cross section of the parish membership such that the community is richly represented and a diversity of voices are heard. It is especially important to include representatives of our youth.

“Like sports, evangelization takes a team. It’s unpredictable and energizing, challenging and exciting. To evangelize is not just to keep our Catholic faith, but to spread it. We do this by living it, generously and publicly, by celebrating the joy of being evangelized ourselves.” (Bishop Edward Scharfenberger, The Mission Next Door, July 6, 2017)

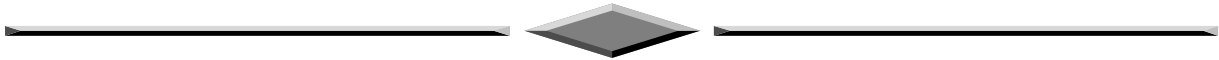
“More than anything else, however, our young people really want to be asked -- about their thoughts, their plans, their passions and their practical advice on how to get things done. They love being participating in projects. They understand that they are missed in church, but do not want to go and just be told to help hand out some bulletins without something more” (Bishop Edward Scharfenberger, Our Young People Want to Know Jesus Now, November 2, 2017)

The following guidelines are meant to be very general in the advice they give. They are gathered from the experience of parishioners in our diocese, and from information received from other dioceses. As each parish has designed its own pastoral council to fill its own particular needs, so each vicariate should decide what format will best serve the needs of the people of its parishes as they collaborate in the work of the Gospel.

Guidelines for the Establishment of Pastoral Councils

GUIDELINE 1: THE FORMATION OF PASTORAL COUNCILS SHOULD ALWAYS INCLUDE PRAYERFUL REFLECTION.

The most important quality for pastoral councilmembers is that they must be people of prayer, and that the councils be models of prayer. If prayer is to be the hallmark of Parish Pastoral Councils, it is reasonable to expect that their formation begin in prayer and discernment. Only in prayer will members of parishes, clusters, and pastoral councils come to a true appreciation of the council's role as a visionary body.

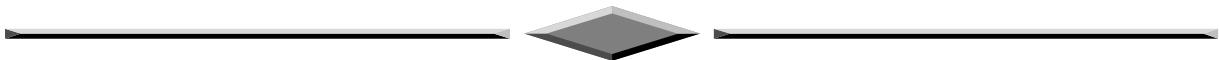


GUIDELINE 2: THE ROLE OF A COUNCIL IS ESSENTIALLY PASTORAL AND VISIONARY.

The pastoral council participates in the responsibility for pastoral ministry, and not just administration:

The good pastor is the one who strives to know his people and serve them. He takes seriously the words of Jesus "I am the good shepherd." Like Jesus, a good pastor can say, "I know my own and my own know me" (John 10:14). This is one reason why he consults his pastoral council. He wants to benefit from the members' knowledge of God and of one another. They in turn want to participate in the local Catholic community for whom he serves as pastor. (Making Parish Councils PASTORAL, by Mark F. Fischer)

The pastoral council should research the ideas, the hopes, the life and activity of the people of God, so the whole community, parish or vicariate, can effectively carry out the mission of the community and fully participate in the ongoing conversion central to its life. It should constantly evaluate the community in its conformity to the Gospel and those constitutive elements of the Gospel that call for understanding the implications of Justice. The council is a visioning and planning body—always looking towards the future with the wisdom of the past.

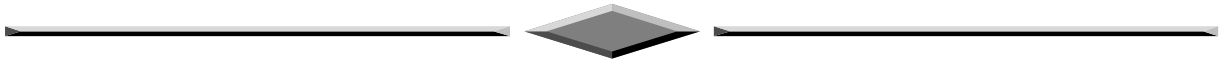


GUIDELINE 3: THE MEMBERSHIP OF A PASTORAL COUNCIL SHOULD BE TRULY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMUNITY.

The number of members of the pastoral council will vary depending on the parish or cluster community, its size, character, and needs. Care should be taken to assure adequate representation of the parish community; at the same time, its membership should be small enough to facilitate its functioning with ease. They should always have a trustee and one member of the Finance Committee on the council.

Each pastoral council should have in writing a clear description of the selection process. It is important that terms of office be explained and that allowance be made for continuity. It is also highly recommended that successive terms of office be limited, to assure that there is a genuine rotation of membership on the Pastoral Council.

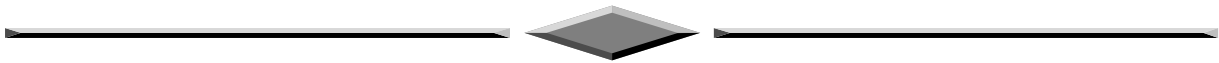
Because the pastoral council is a visionary body—not a coordinating committee of ministries—eight-to-twelve members are usually sufficient. In keeping with a pastoral (not a political model) it is recommended that members of the council be called forth from the community by a selection process that includes communal prayer and is guided by a facilitator who is skilled in the process of discernment. Each parish will determine the criteria for council membership as well as the length of service and the necessary provisions for replacement of members due to resignation, etc.



GUIDELINE 4: THE PASTOR or PLC IS TO PRESIDE OVER THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL.

In virtue of his/her office the pastor or PLC presides over and guides the final decisions of the council and their implementation by the universal law of the Church, diocesan statutes and civil law. (Canon 536, Par. 1)

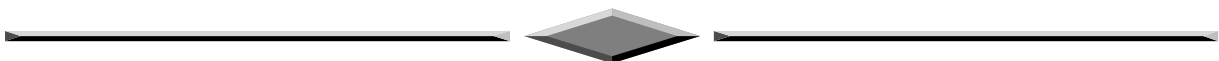
While the pastor or PLC is actively involved in the decision making process, the council selects from among its members a chairperson who conducts the meetings. The selection of a chairperson stands as a visible sign of shared responsibility. Finally, from a practical point of view, when the pastor or PLC is freed from conducting the meeting, he/she is at the same time enabled to be more attentive to the thoughts, ideas and plans that are being expressed.



GUIDELINE 5: THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL AND THE PARISH FINANCE COUNCIL ARE INTERDEPENDENT.

The Parish Pastoral Council is responsible for the pastoral life and ministry of the parish (worship, ministry, etc.). The parish finance council (mandated by Canon 537 of the Code of Canon Law) is responsible for parish financial administration. The Parish Pastoral Council is to be representative of the whole parish in its membership; membership on the finance council looks to persons skilled in finances, civil law and business. (Canon 492)

Despite these distinctions, the two councils are interrelated as both are concerned with the life and ministry of the parish. The parish pastoral council looks to the finance council to provide guidance with regard to the prudent use of resources; the finance council looks to the parish pastoral council for the development of the vision of the parish. Although canonically they are established as two separate and distinct bodies, their strong interdependence is best realized by assuring a collaborative relationship between the two councils.



GUIDELINE 6: EACH COUNCIL SHOULD FORMULATE PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES.

The following information should be included:

PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

The mission statement of each parish indicates the unique qualities of its history, tradition and composition as well as its particular vision for fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ. It gives specific expression to the parish intention to live out its calling within the concrete boundaries of its location, resources and needs. Lastly, it defines why a particular parish exists.

Forming a mission statement involves processes of discernment and consensus. The pastor or PLC and council, having listened to the parish reflect upon its unique characteristics, resources and gifts, determine how it can best give expression to the diocesan vision and the particular call of God to this parish community.

PURPOSE OF THE COUNCIL

The primary responsibility of the council is pastoral planning. This process envisions, addresses and evaluates the needs and goals of the parish community in light of Church teaching and the mission of the local and larger Church. This responsibility calls forth the gifts of planning, visioning, empowering and evaluating and requires a belief in the concept of shared leadership among the clergy and the laity.

The purpose of the council is to (as stated before):

- explore the pastoral reality, including its relationship with the neighboring parishes and the Local Catholic Community;
- reflect upon it; and
- make a recommendation to the pastor or PLC.

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 under the leadership of the pastor or PLC a statement of mission for the parish community and become the reference point for activity in the parish;
- to provide recommendations as requested by the pastor or PLC for parish priorities, directions and policies through pastoral planning for worship, evangelization, outreach, stewardship, etc. and
- to promote communication, understanding, and collaboration 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. The pastor or PLC consults, not because they wish to surrender responsibility for the parish, but because he/she wants to exercise it wisely.

I. 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 PLC 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.



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 others and to delegate; and
- commitment to cooperation, flexibility and openness with people and ideas.

If a parish or vicariate employs a professional staff member such as a business manager, he or she may serve as staff to the Parish Pastoral 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.

II. Size

The size of the council should range from eight to twelve 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.

III. 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 completion of their terms.

IV. 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 PLC as a way to be sure that the council reflects the larger parish community.

V. Executive Structure

Every council should have an executive committee composed of chairperson, and secretary. These members are normally elected by full membership of the council. The executive committee also appoints chairpersons of task forces. The task of the group is to develop an overall-working plan for the pastoral realities that have been identified by the pastor or PLC. In addition, the executive committee should meet with the pastor or PLC before each council meeting to prepare the agenda and design processes to facilitate the meeting.

VI. Pastor or Parish Life Coordinator

The pastor or PLC represents the parish in all juridical 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 PLC presides at all pastoral council meetings and actively listens to the council's deliberations. When appropriate, the pastor or PLC 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 PLC (as minister of governance in the parish) is the final authorizer of any course of action. The pastor or PLC should set the context for the council's discussion by sharing Church teaching and/or setting the parameters for acceptable alternatives. The pastor or PLC is the convener of the executive committee and is ultimately responsible for assuring the council's effective operation; therefore, the council should not meet without their parish leader present. A pastor or PLC may not dissolve the pastoral council without written approval of the bishop.



VII. 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;
- sharing the agenda with council members in advance of the meeting and asking council members to prepare for the meeting in some way (e.g. by reading something in advance, speaking with parishioners, or putting their thoughts on paper);
- 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; and
- ensuring everyone has a chance to speak.

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.

A typical agenda should include:

- gathering and welcome;
- opening prayer (and reflection) on the theme of the needs of the parish community;
- revisions and approval of the agenda;
- approval of the meeting minutes from the previous meeting;
- items to be discussed (old and new business) along with varying viewpoints, recommendations, and actions necessary;
- brainstorming discussion of insights gained;
- discussion of (and commitments to) the next steps; and
- review of responsibilities for planning for the next and future meetings.

It is helpful to indicate, beside each agenda item, the time that should be applied to it. This enables the leader to judge whether the council will be able to accomplish its goals before adjourning.

VIII. 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 council and decisions of the pastor or PLC;
- open Action Items; and
- date, time and location of the next meeting.

IX. Meetings

The parish pastoral council should meet at minimum six and ideally, ten to twelve 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).

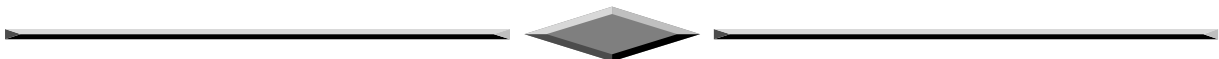
For the council's operations to be effective it is important for council members to develop an understanding of the components of a successful meeting, (clear meeting objectives, or outcomes, a realistic agenda, and timeframe, consideration of how agenda items will be handled, adequate preparatory material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

COMMITTEES

Bodies such as parish pastoral councils usually research data for their deliberations and implement their vision in the work of committees or ad hoc implementation teams. Standing committees care for ongoing needs of the council such as selection process, membership or other ad hoc implementation teams that care for specific concerns and are usually time limited. Regular evaluations of the council's activities will indicate if an ad hoc committee is no longer needed. Care should be taken lest committees be established which have no specific function.

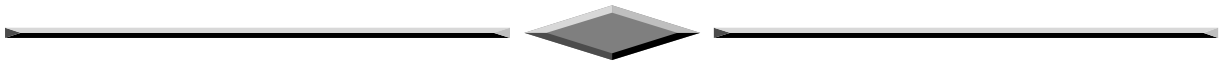
PROCEDURES FOR DECISION MAKING

A critical element in the transition from parish to pastoral councils is decision making by consensus. Consensus is not reached by a majority vote and is not a win/lose situation; rather, it is a process of decision making in which members of a group work to reach substantial—though not necessarily unanimous—commitment on an issue. The council reaches consensus on a matter when all members of a council can live with the decision. This shared ownership of the council's determination is essential if the council and parish are to be effective in the fulfillment of the mission. Decision making by consensus gives witness to shared leadership and the building of community that are the most basic parts of parish visioning and mission.



GUIDELINE 7: THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IS LINKED TO THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL.

The Parish Pastoral Council chair should have consistent contact with the Diocesan Pastoral Council. Members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council are required to maintain regular contact with the Parish Pastoral Councils of the parishes within their respective vicariates.



Guidelines for Youth Participation

Young people offer a unique contribution to parish life. They give voice to the needs, hopes and dreams of youth today. The parish community is where people, young and old, men and women receive the education and formation support they need to fulfill their baptismal call. The parish pastoral council offers a vehicle by which youth can become more active in the life of the parish community.

The following guidelines were developed by the Diocesan Youth Council to assist parish pastoral councils in fostering youth participation in the life and ministry of the church.

1. Invite young people to an information session on the role of the parish pastoral council in parish life. Discuss the working of the council and the various committees' needs.

Young people aged 15-18 yrs. should be invited. Names of those to be invited can be surfaced from the youth ministry team, parish youth council, catechetical programs, pastoral council recommendations and other parish-serving committees or organizations.

2. Those invited to participate in the meeting should have leadership potential, desire to learn and be willing to participate as a working, voting member of the council.
3. After the general meeting, those interested in being considered for membership should have the opportunity to meet the pastoral council president and sit in on a parish pastoral council meeting. An opportunity to meet with committee chairpersons would also be helpful.
4. The names of the young people seeking to serve are placed before the parish community and discerned along with the adult members seeking council positions.
5. The youth, along with the adults, need encouragement to continue leadership formation. Dates of formation programs, courses, lectures and ongoing opportunities for faith formation need to be publicized and communicated to youth members along with adult council members.

Finance Committees

The new code of Canon Law requires a pastor or PLC to have a finance committee. This committee has a consultative vote and assists the pastor (PLC) in the administration of parish goods (Canons 532 and 537).

The finance committee is responsible for the effective stewardship of a parish. The fiscal component should reflect Gospel values and overall parish and diocesan goals. Financial concerns should be addressed within the context of the mission of the parish.

Functions

- advise pastor or PLC in all financial matters;
- prepare any financial information needed in accordance with total parish planning;
- see that expenditures reflect the mission statement, goals and objectives of the parish;
- prepare the annual budget in consultation with the pastor or PLC and other committees and in accordance with the visions and objectives set by the parish pastoral council;
- review income and expenditures to determine that the parish is operating within the approved budget;
- provide the parishioners with periodic and (at least) annual report of the financial state of the parish; and
- study parish income and make recommendations to the pastor or PLC for maintaining and increasing income to meet parish priorities and objectives.

Composition and Size

The pastor or PLC and at least one trustee are usually ex-officio members. Other members should be knowledgeable persons with a sound business sense and knowledge of the parish operation; for example, people with expertise in accounting, civil law, insurance and investing can be very helpful. It is also recommended that there be at least one member of the committee (in addition to the pastor or PLC) familiar with the pastoral needs of the parish. Members should be sensitive to spiritual and pastoral issues and keep abreast of Church developments.

The committee size varies according to parish size and needs. We would suggest four-to-six members.





Multiple Parish Pastoral Councils (MPPCs)

Multiple Parish Pastoral Councils are emerging in our diocese. As our experience with this new structure grows our understanding of how they function will deepen. What follows is an attempt to describe this evolving collaborative structure we are calling Multiple Parish Pastoral Councils (MPPCs).

Multiple Parish Pastoral Councils may be the choice when one pastor or parish life Coordinator is the appointed leader for: multiple parishes, parishes with multiple worship sites, parishes with a mission site, and parishes where the pastor of one parish is also the sacramental minister at another parish. In the last case, the council would have two leaders who would also have to work collaboratively.

While there are no directions in Canon Law about the establishment of MPPCs, the same underlying theological principles should apply to their makeup and accountability as are applied to parish pastoral councils. They should be truly representative of the parishes that are under one parish leader or in geographic locations where a single council will benefit the various communities. An example of this would be Amsterdam, where the council is comprised of four parishes and three pastors. When there are multiple parish leaders, the council recommendations should be made for all parish leaders and these leaders should all have representatives on the council.

Though there will be differing methods of choosing members for the MPPC, it would be most advantageous if members of these bodies represented their parish or worship location and that there is a balance based on the relative size of the worship site or parish. It would also be beneficial if the meetings of the MPPC and the various parish committee meetings be so arranged as to make decision making and reporting less time consuming and more conducive to carrying out MPPC plans.



The Guidelines given in this document for parish pastoral councils can (with few exceptions) be applied to MPPCs.

When an MPPC embarks on a study that requests the commitment of financial resources from each of the parishes with the same leader or multiple leaders in a close geographic area, those expenditures should be given due consideration by the finance committees of each parish working in conjunction with the pastoral council and, of course, the pastor or PLC.

In addition, the MPPC should have regular contact with the Office of Pastoral Planning for purposes of keeping MPPC pastoral plans on track and receiving new guidance and information.

Since this is a relatively new process for pastoral councils throughout the country and the diocese, the Office of Pastoral Planning will be a clearing house for those councils to obtain the best information regarding the functioning of these types of councils.



Parish Pastoral Planning

Since the Second Vatican Council, laity, religious, deacons, priests and bishops have come to a clearer and deeper understanding of the need for all to share in the responsibility to carry on Christ's mission in the world. Pastoral planning draws on the insights, commitment, vision and awareness that come from the Spirit of God speaking through the Christian faithful, while insuring fidelity to revelation and the teachings that come to us from the magisterium of the Church.

In the *Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* developed by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops, great emphasis is placed on the importance of pastoral planning. The bishop is urged to establish a general plan of apostolic action. Among the other matters to be considered, the plan is to deal with doctrine, worship and charity. Information gathering is encouraged so that the plan is well founded. (Par. 102-105, 148, 209) By analogy, each pastor or PLC should be sure that the parish community is actively engaged in pastoral planning in order to assure effective pastoral ministry.



1. Pastoral Planning

The pastoral planning process draws upon concepts and skills used in developing organizations, structuring organizations, and research. Pastoral planning is distinguished from corporate and civic planning in that it integrates theological reflection into the planning process, bringing the light of the Gospel and our tradition of faith to the situation at hand. In order to clarify the roles and relationships of parish ministers and consultative structures in pastoral planning, some distinctions about the areas to which pastoral planning can be applied will be helpful background.

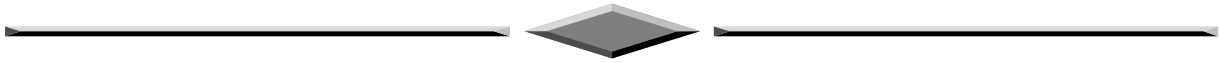


2. Areas of Pastoral Planning

While pastoral planning always results in goals, policies, and parameters for the use of resources, the process can be applied to short term programs or it can be applied to broad five-year goals for a parish. Pastoral planning can be applied by an individual in organizing her or his work for the month; it can be used by a pastoral staff as they plan programs for the year. In general, however, pastoral planning takes place in four areas of parish life:

1. setting broad direction;
2. choosing strategies to promote those directions;
3. establishing effective administrative structures as well as procedures; and
4. planning programs.

Consultative structures (e.g., parish pastoral councils, commissions, etc.) are focused on directional and strategic planning. The executive structures of the parish (e.g., pastoral staff, committees, etc.) are focused on administrative and operational planning.



3. Consultative Structures: Directional and Strategic Planning

Directional planning results in statements of mission and direction. It seeks answers to questions such as: Who are we? What is our unique identity within the context of the diocesan and universal Church? Where are we called to go? What are our priorities? Directional decisions concern the broad mission and goals of the parish in the context of the larger Church. Directional planning requires being familiar with and faithful to Church teaching and the mission of the larger Church, and a willingness and ability to listen to the people of the parish.

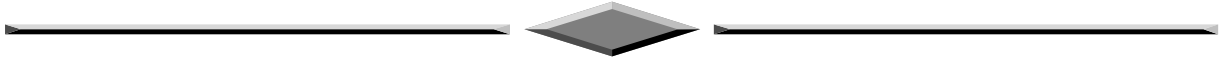
Strategic planning focuses more on specific issues or areas of concern. Strategic decisions are those which result in the commitment of major personnel and financial resources. Strategic decisions lead to a course of action that is difficult to reverse. Strategic directions usually take months or years to achieve.

For example, directional planning may result in a parish priority of "Evangelization of Alienated Catholics." In strategic planning, various methods and approaches would be studied, potential personnel and financial resources would be analyzed, and a general strategy determined; such as, making our facilities accessible to persons with disabling conditions or conducting a major parish census. Strategic planning is most successful when it takes place within the context of established parish priorities, goals, and policies.

It is primarily the responsibility of the parish pastoral council to assist the pastor or PLC in directional and strategic planning. Consultation with the parish membership, leadership and staff by the parish pastoral council is essential to the integrity of the process. As the pastor consults with the council, so the council itself is called to consult with other parish leadership and parishioners in general in its planning processes. The pastoral council must ensure that systems are in place to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of goals, priorities, policies, and resource allocations. These systems should lead to a recurring planning cycle resulting in new priorities and goals every three to five years.



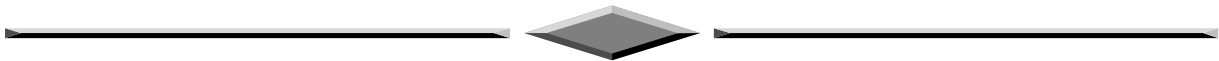
The Revised Code of Canon Law makes special reference to the finance council. The council's primary function is to provide the pastor or PLC with advice concerning the stewardship of parish fiscal resources. It assists the pastor or PLC by developing a parish budget process, providing financial analysis of proposed goals, strategies and programs, and by conducting long-range financial planning with regard to funding capital and operational needs in the parish. The finance council has significant responsibility for the stewardship of parish financial resources; however, its role is not to recommend directions, priorities, or programs other than those related to its delegation: fiscal stewardship.



4. Pastoral Staff and Committees: Planning for Implementation

Administrative and operational planning focuses on converting strategies and policies into programs and action. Planning in these areas involves program goals and objectives, program design, personnel administration and evaluation, and program budgeting. Administrative planning develops, organizes and manages the programs and human and financial resources necessary to carry out strategic decisions. Operational planning deals with actual "hands-on" day-to-day ministries and programs.

The parish staff are hired and supervised by the pastor, PLC or his/her delegate. The pastoral staff is responsible to the pastor or PLC for developing ministerial programs and services that respond to the priorities and directions of the parish. In addition, some pastoral staff may be entrusted with the responsibility for pastoral administration and management. It is the responsibility of the parish pastoral council to evaluate parish priorities and directions on a regular basis. It is the responsibility of the staff to evaluate program goals and objectives. The pastor or PLC works with staff and other parish leadership to coordinate the overall pastoral activities of the parish.



5. Summary

These distinctions provide important insights into the kinds of planning activities that are to be undertaken by those who participate in parish governance. The pastor or PLC is charged by the bishop with the responsibility for governance of the parish and therefore with developing a parish planning process. The parish pastoral council, the finance committee, parish staff and other committees share a primary responsibility for assisting the pastor or PLC in administrative and operational planning. Quite often—particularly in smaller communities—individuals or entire groups may have responsibilities in a number of areas of pastoral planning. In such cases it is even more important that these distinctions be clear to ensure that the appropriate focus of the group is maintained. Each area for planning is essential to the overall health of the parish and therefore the integrity and importance of each should be respected.





Planning Process Outline

KEY ELEMENTS IN PLANNING:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| • Why do we exist? | MISSION |
| • What do we stand for? | VALUES |
| • What do we want to do? | GOALS |
| • How do we get it done? | OBJECTIVES |
| • Short-term actions? | ACTION STEPS |
| • How do we measure ourselves? | ACCOUNTABILITY |

GOALS:

- What we want to do and are committed to do
- Set long-term direction
- Change infrequently, but always subject to review
- Expand on, flow from mission
- Lead to specific, action-oriented objectives

OBJECTIVES:

- How to accomplish our goals
- Consistent with mission
- Flow from and reinforce goals
- Lead to specific programs and activities
- Change more frequently as they are accomplished or as circumstances change

ACTION STEPS:

- How objectives will be implemented
- Descriptive of specific programs and activities
- Flow from and reinforce objectives
- Change frequently in plan revision and review

ACCOUNTABILITY:

- Who is responsible for particular action steps
- Definite timeline (beginning, status check, completion)
- Measure objectives and action steps
- Monitored in quarterly review meetings