

GUIDELINES FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). This command of Christ has inspired countless men and women throughout the Church’s history to give themselves to the work of spreading the Good News. The Second Vatican Council has repeated and renewed this mandate of the Lord, calling all members of the Church to involve themselves in witnessing to the Gospel.

As part of its renewal to the Church, the Council called for a number of new structures to promote active involvement and collaboration in the mission of the Church. After the Council, a new structure was proposed by the Church to call forth in an orderly fashion the insights and cooperation of persons at the level of the local community. That structure is the parish pastoral council.

The rationale for the parish pastoral council may be found in the Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church:

“By reason of the knowledge, competence, or pre-eminence which they have, the laity are empowered indeed sometimes obliged to manifest their opinion on those things which pertain to the good of the Church. If the occasion should arise this should be done through the institutions established by the Church for that purpose and always with truth, courage and prudence and with reverence and charity towards those who, by reason of their office represent the person of Christ.”¹

The guidelines contained in this document flow from the Council’s insistence on the need for active participation by the laity in the life and mission of the Church. These guidelines are intended to enable pastors and parishioners to form effective and cohesive parish pastoral councils [PPC] in all the parishes of the Archdiocese of Boston.

II. EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR THE FORMATION OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

Education is an essential ingredient for the successful establishment of a PPC and for the implementation of these guidelines. Education is necessary to promote the kind of cooperation between clergy and laity that is conducive to vital parish life. In order that a parish pastoral council promote that kind of parish life, clergy, religious and laity must have a well-grounded understanding of the nature and mission of the Church.

Education for the implementation of these guidelines should focus on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, and the Decree on the Laity are foundational documents for a proper understanding of the PPC. Seminars should also focus on the practical issues for developing and implementing a PPC. Education for PPC members should be an ongoing process which will enrich the work of these councils.

While the ongoing implementation of these guidelines is the responsibility of each parish, the Archdiocese must assist parishes in this implementation with seminars and training sessions

for all who will be involved in the work of the PPC. These sessions, intended for clergy, religious and laity, will provide opportunities for spiritual renewal, understanding of the nature of the Church, and practical ways in which to organize and develop successful councils.

III. GUIDELINES FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

A. Establishment of a parish pastoral council

1. The Code of Canon Law states that:
 - a. "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." (Canon 536, par.1)
 - b. "This pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop." (Canon 536, par. 2)
 - c. "Each parish is to have a finance council which is regulated by universal law as well as by norms issued by the diocesan bishop; in this council the Christian faithful, selected according to the same norms, aid the pastor in the administration of parish goods with due regards for the prescription of canon 532." (Canon 537)
2. Every parish in the Archdiocese of Boston is to establish a parish pastoral council within two years of the promulgation of the Synod documents.
3. Parishes with an existing parish council should make the necessary changes in their constitutions and by-laws to conform to these guidelines within a year of the promulgation of the Synod documents.
4. In parishes with multi-lingual communities, reference should be had to the Secretary for Pastoral Services and the Coordinator of the respective ethnic groups to determine how best to ensure participation of these communities in the PPC.

B. Purpose and objectives of a parish pastoral council

1. Purpose: To assist the pastor in his leadership role of planning, organizing, initiating, promoting, coordinating and reviewing the evangelization, worship, religious education and service activities within the parish.
2. Objectives:
 1. To assess adequately the needs of the whole parish and its members, and to develop and implement a pastoral plan which will promote the common good of the parish.
 2. To foster unity and a sense of community in the parish and to coordinate all parish activities in a manner that will best serve the interests of the parish.
 3. To promote programs and activities recommended by the Archbishop, Archdiocesan offices and agencies as well as the pastoral council itself.

C. Membership

1. Ex officio members: the pastor, parochial vicars, assigned permanent deacons and pastoral associates
2. Elected and appointed members
 - a. Qualifications:
 - i. A Catholic who is registered and active in the parish and lives within its boundaries. Twenty-five percent of the appointed and elected

- members may be active, registered parishioners who are nonresidents.
 - ii. Participation in the sacramental life of the Church.
 - iii. Age 18 or older. Two youth members, from those between ninth grade and eighteen years old, may be elected or appointed.
 - b. Term of office
 - i. Three years, with possibility of reelection or reappointment. Members may serve only two consecutive terms.
 - ii. Only one third of the council seats are to be open for election or reelection at one time.
 - iii. In a newly formed council one third of the membership serves a three year, a two year and a one year term, respectively, Those serving a one-year term in a newly formed PPC may serve for two additional terms.
- 3. Number of members
 - a. The pastor, after consultation with the parish pastoral staff, determines the number of members of the PPC, and the number to be elected and appointed in accord with C5 below.
 - b. The total number of members depends on the size of the parish. Ordinarily, the minimum number is ten; the maximum, twenty.
- 4. Selection process for elected members
 - a. During a special week of prayer, the parish asks for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the selection process.
 - b. The pastor, with the advice of the PPC, appoints a nominating committee to receive written nominations from the parish members. Nominees must indicate their willingness to serve. (In establishing a pastoral council for the first time, the pastor appoints a nominating committee.)
 - c. Nominees are elected who receive the highest number of votes cast by parishioners, eighteen years of age or older. Young people from those between ninth grade and eighteen years old may elect the youth members of the Council.
 - d. The pastor, with the advice of the PPC may establish further regulations to carry out the selection process whenever necessary.
- 5. Appointed members: The pastor may appoint members to the PPC. Since the election process may result in a membership not sufficiently representative of the total parish community, the pastor may appoint members to achieve this goal. The number of appointed members is not to exceed twenty-five percent of the total number of members.

D. Organization of a parish pastoral council

- 1. The pastor of the parish is the chairman of the parish pastoral council.
- 2. The members of the PPC elect a vice-chairperson each year.
 - a. The vice-chairperson meets with the pastor to prepare the agenda for each meeting.
 - b. At the pastor's discretion, the vice-chairperson or another member of the PPC may moderate the meeting of the PPC.
 - c. In the even of the pastor's absence from a regularly scheduled meeting of the PPC, the vice-chairperson moderates the meeting. In the pastor's absence, the council may not undertake new business, or business which is not included on the agenda.
- 3. Meetings of the PCC
 - a. Only the pastor may call a meeting of the PPC.

- b. A minimum of five regularly scheduled meetings of the PPC occur during the year.
 - c. Meetings of the PPC are generally open to all parishioners.
 - d. The parish staff who are not members of the PPC are encouraged to attend, particularly when their ministry is being discussed.
 - e. The pastor may call for an executive session when appropriate.
- 4. It is the task of each PPC to adopt rules of order for the conduct of their meetings. These rules must reflect a true Christian spirit of concern for all the members of the PPC and the parish.
- 5. The PPC may elect from its members other such officers as are required to meet the needs of the council, e.g., recording secretary, executive committee member.
- 6. The minutes of every public meeting of the PPC should be readily available to each parishioner.
- 7. In the event that the pastor of the parish dies, resigns, or is transferred, the primary function of the PPC, providing counsel to the pastor, ceases. However, during the vacancy of the pastorate, the PPC assists the senior parochial vicar or the Archdiocesan-appointed administrator with the preparation of the materials for the parish profile for the consultation meetings. The PPC also helps in the welcoming of the new pastor. After the new pastor has been installed, he reconvenes the existing PPC within two months.

E. Scope and authority.

- 1. As a consultative body, the PPC is responsible to the pastor, assisting and supporting him in his leadership role. It recognizes the varied gifts of the parish members and invites them to an active leadership role in the parish.
 - a. The PPC should be an important means by which the pastor will hear the voice of the parish.
 - b. Through its deliberations and consultation with the pastor, the PPC helps to unite the pastor and the parishioners. Together they discern the pastoral needs of the parish and ways in which those needs can be addressed.
- 2. In the event that the pastor and the PPC develop serious and continuous conflict so that they cannot work together productively, the pastor must request the assistance of the vicar or regional bishop in facilitating a reconciliation. Should this not occur, the vice-chairperson may make recourse to the same individuals.

F. Characteristics of a parish pastoral council

- 1. *Prayerful.* The council devotes time to reflective prayer at each meeting and makes provision at least once a year to have some special time or meetings spent together solely in prayer, reflection and spiritual sharing.
- 2. *Pastoral.* The council is pastoral in the sense that its purpose is to assist in the development of an overall mission plan for the parish in order to make Christ evermore present to the parishioners and to the wider community.
- 3. *Representative.* The council members represent the entire parish community and exercise their responsibility with a concern that includes all parishioners.
- 4. *Discerning.* Through a prayerful consensus process, the council merges the diverse experiences, skills and gifts of the council members, and having listened to the parishioner's needs and ideas, discerns recommendations concerning the direction and priorities of the parish.
- 5. *Responsive.* The council has a responsibility to be sensitive to and cognizant of justice and peace issues at the local, national, and international level.

6. *Enabling.* In the spirit of God's love, the members of the PPC strive to recognize and support each other's gifts and seek ways in which each parishioner's gifts may surface, grow and flourish for the good of the Church.

G. Relationship with the parish finance council

1. The responsibility for providing counsel to the pastor concerning the administration of the parish finances, budget, and property vested in the finance council.
2. In order to assure good communication, a member of the parish finance council is appointed to the PPC by the pastor, if such a person has not already been elected in the regular election process. (cf. III, C5)
3. Each year the parish finance council assists the pastor in making a report to the PPC concerning the finances and property of the parish.

H. Relationship with parish commissions

1. General guidelines for the establishment of parish commissions are found in the appendix of this document.
2. The PPC must have a close working relationship with the parish commissions.
3. The PPC needs to be aware of all parish activities; however, it is not within the purview of the PPC to direct parish activities.
4. Commission reports should be a standard part of the PPC's agenda so that the work of the commissions can be evaluated, supported and developed.

¹ "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" (Lumen Gentium, 21 November 1964). Par. 37, p. 394-395.