



Archdiocese of Philadelphia

Rationale,
Principles,
and Guidelines
for

Parish Pastoral Councils



Office of the Cardinal
222 N. 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1299

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

One of the greatest models of collaboration within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia continues to be the Parish Pastoral Council. Since the initial formation of councils in 1992, Pastors and Parish Pastoral Councils have labored to create and implement a vision of ongoing renewal within each parish. Through the service of Parish Pastoral Councils, mission statements and pastoral plans have been formulated and continue to be revised and implemented within each parish. It is my hope that these efforts have been a fruitful experience for pastors, pastoral staff members, parish pastoral councils, and all parishioners.

As we journey together in this new Millennium, the work of consultative bodies such as the Parish Pastoral Council, assists in fostering mutual relationships between the clergy and the laity. Working together, clergy and lay leaders seek new and creative methods to live fully the Christian mission in the context of contemporary life. In doing so, Parish Pastoral Councils “enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mold communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29).

All of us can look toward the future with the hope that Parish Pastoral Councils will continue to work collaboratively with pastors and parish staff members to bring greater vitality and vibrancy to parish life. To bring this hope to fruition, I encourage all pastors to remain committed to the development of Parish Pastoral Councils, consulting with them to address the varied aspects of parish life. I also encourage the laity to continue to step forward to lend their gifts and talents to the ongoing development of Parish Pastoral Councils and the building up of their parish communities as communities of prayer and worship, communities of faith and service.

I encourage Parish Pastoral Councils to continue the process of faith-filled discernment by remaining attentive to needs of their parish communities as well as the Church’s mandate: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Cardinal Justin Rigali
Archbishop of Philadelphia

RATIONALE FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

Through Baptism and Confirmation all are called to exercise both their right and responsibility to participate fully in the life and mission of the Church. This mission of the Church is rooted in the mission of Christ who commanded everyone - clergy, religious and laity - to "Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all of creation." (Mark 16:15).

This vocation of all the People of God, the community of believers in Jesus Christ, to promote the Reign of God on earth permeates the teachings and spirit of the documents of Vatican Council II. All members of the Church - laity, religious and clergy- according to their proper charisms and roles collaborate in the responsibility for fulfilling its mission. Vatican Council II urged active involvement in the life of the Church by emphasizing the principles of collaborative responsibility, consultation and lay participation.

...the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church. Their activity is so necessary within Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness.

Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 10.

Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary, they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their service and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart.

Dogmatic Constitution On the Church, 30.

The Pastor needs to consult with the laity who in turn have the right to express their views and concerns to their Pastor. An important structure initiated to foster this collaboration in the mission of the Church by all its members is the Parish Pastoral Council. The Parish Pastoral Council assists pastors in achieving the cooperation of the parishioners and staff in the task of carrying out the mission of the Church on the parish level.

While the Parish Pastoral Council is not explicitly mentioned in the documents of Vatican Council II, the theological principles which underlie it are clearly enunciated and a rationale for its development is given.

... by reason of the knowledge, competence or pre-eminence which they have, the laity are empowered, indeed sometimes obliged, to manifest their opinion in 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.

Dogmatic Constitution On the Church, 37.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law gives juridic value to Vatican Council II's teaching on the vocation and mission of the People of God and provides structures to express and encourage collaborative responsibility on every level of ecclesial administration.

Canon 208 speaks of everyone's responsibility to work together in the building up of the Body of Christ.

In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function.

Code of Canon Law, 208.

Canon 519 calls for the Pastor to develop structures which incorporate the principles of collaborative responsibility and of consultation with the staff and parishioners.

The pastor is the proper shepherd of the parish entrusted to him, exercising pastoral care in the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share; in accord with the norm of law he carries out for his community the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing, with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful.

Code of Canon Law, 519.

This Canon emphasizes the role of the community which gives meaning to the office of Pastor and it places him in the context of mutual collaboration with the staff and parishioners in promoting the mission of the Church.

Canon 536 specifically deals with Parish Pastoral Councils.

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. This pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop.

Code of Canon Law, 536.

It is envisioned that the Parish Pastoral Council is to be a major consultative body in the parish which advises the Pastor who presides over the Council. It is composed of the Parochial Vicar(s) and representative parish staff members who carry out the pastoral functions of the parish and of laity who are representatives of the membership of the parish. The purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council is to foster full participation of the entire parish in the life and mission of the Church which reflects the mission of Christ who was sent "...to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners..." (Luke 4:18).

PRINCIPLES

In the Archdiocese of Philadelphia every parish is to have one Parish Pastoral Council which is to foster full participation of the entire parish - clergy, religious, laity - in the pastoral life and mission of the parish and of the Universal Church. The following principles guide the formation of Parish Pastoral Councils:

1. Every Parish Pastoral Council is to develop a statement of purpose which reflects the identity and mission of the parish in light of the Gospel, Church teachings and the specific realities of the parish.
2. The Parish Pastoral Council is solely a consultative body with the role of advising and assisting the Pastor in areas of pastoral concerns.
3. The Parish Pastoral Council develops and recommends parish pastoral plans and directions through a consensus process and prayerful reflection.
4. Every Parish Pastoral Council in its membership should be representative of the entire parish, recognizing and reflecting the parish's rich diversity.
5. The Parish Pastoral Council is to cooperate with parish committees which address such areas of parish life as worship, spirituality, community, evangelization, education, and service.
6. It is the responsibility of the Pastor to convoke the Parish Pastoral Council, to preside over it, and to determine the issues to be treated by it or to receive proposals from its members.
7. In the event that the Pastor of a parish dies, resigns or is transferred, the Parish Pastoral Council ceases to exist.

It is the prerogative of a newly appointed Pastor either to confirm the membership of the former Parish Pastoral Council or choose to have new members elected, with the exception of the three members who serve on this council *ex officio* and the three members the Pastor is to appoint.

8. When a Parochial Administrator is appointed to a parish because of the incapacity or ill-health of the Pastor, or for some other cause, this Administrator will assume the rights and responsibilities of the Pastor in relation to the Parish Pastoral Council.

(paragraph 7 revised 2/18/05)

GUIDELINES

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council is to foster full participation of the entire parish in the life and mission of the parish and of the Universal Church. The parish faith community participates in this mission by:

Worshiping God;
Creating and nurturing Christian Community;
Growing in Faith and Holiness;
Serving those in need, especially the poor.

FUNCTION

The general function of the Parish Pastoral Council is to advise the Pastor in those pastoral matters presented to it by the Pastor. It carries out its function by:

1. Informing the Pastor of the needs and concerns, gifts and resources of the whole parish and its members;
2. Developing and reviewing a parish mission statement (which will always contain the name of Jesus) and periodically re-evaluating and revising it;
3. Developing a parish pastoral plan;
4. Participating in ongoing pastoral planning;
5. Recommending policies, procedures and programs which would assist in the implementation of the mission statement and the parish pastoral plan;
6. Reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of existing programs;
7. Reflecting on Archdiocesan pastoral priorities and recommending how they can be implemented in the parish.

(Line 2 revised 2/18/05)

ROLE OF THE PASTOR

It is the role of the Pastor to be the chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council. The Pastor presides by:

1. Assuring that the scope of the Council's concerns reflects the entire mission of the parish and of the Universal Church;
2. Assisting and creating among the members of the Council an atmosphere of trust and unity as a witness in strengthening and nurturing the parish faith community;
3. Approving the Council agenda after consulting with the Coordinating Committee;
4. Sharing information, listening actively, contributing to the discussion and promoting consensus.

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

Parish Pastoral Council meetings are convened by the Pastor at least six times a year. Extraordinary meetings can be held at the request of the Pastor. All meetings require a quorum of members consisting of the simple majority of members.

SIZE OF COUNCIL

In addition to the Pastor and Parochial Vicar(s) of the parish, there should be twelve members of the Parish Pastoral Council. Of these twelve (12) members, three are ex officio, three are appointed and the remainder elected.

MEMBERSHIP

Parish Pastoral Councils are composed of the Pastor and his Parochial Vicar(s), representative parish staff members and lay members of the parish. Since the Council is to be representative of the entire parish community, the members of the Council ought to reflect the diversity within the parish. Lay members of the Parish Pastoral Council are to be parishioners in good standing.

Membership is determined as follows:

1. ***Ex Officio***
Besides the Pastor and Parochial Vicar(s) there are 3 ex officio members, one of which must be a member of the Parish Finance Council. Others may be the Principal of the parish elementary school, the Director of Religious Education, the Permanent Deacon of the parish, the Parish Social Minister, the Director for Worship, or other professional staff members.
2. ***Elected***
A process for nominating and electing six members should be conducted by a Nomination Committee chaired by the Vice-Chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council.
3. ***Appointed***
The Pastor is to appoint three members to the Council representative of the community in order to reflect the diversity in the parish community.

TERMS OF OFFICE FOR MEMBERS

Elected and appointed members serve a three year term with the possibility of serving a second term. Elected and appointed members may serve only two consecutive terms.

Normally, not more than one third of the Council's membership should be changed at one time.

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 Council may serve for two additional consecutive terms.

COORDINATING COMMITTEE

The Coordinating Committee is composed of the Pastor, who is the chairperson, the vice-chairperson and the secretary. It is responsible for formulating the Council's agenda and dealing with Council matters between meetings.

The vice-chairperson and the secretary are members of the Council who have served preferably one year on the Council and who have a basic understanding and working knowledge of the Council process. They are chosen by the Council members and serve a two year term, unless their membership expires prior to completion of a two year term.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE VICE-CHAIRPERSON

1. Presides at meetings in the Pastor's absence;
2. Assists the Pastor in conducting the Council's work;
3. Serves on the Coordinating Committee which formulates the Council's agenda;
4. Carries out other duties as described in the parish guidelines.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SECRETARY

1. Records the minutes of the Parish Pastoral Council and Coordinating Committee meetings and sees that the minutes and the agenda are made available to the Council members;
2. Maintains attendance and other records;
3. Handles all Council correspondence;
4. Serves on the Coordinating Committee which formulates the Council's agenda;
5. Carries out other duties assigned in the parish guidelines.

RELATIONSHIP WITH PARISH COMMITTEES

The Parish Pastoral Council cooperates with parish committees and parish organizations such as worship/spirituality, evangelization, education, parish life and human/social concerns, finances, etc. These are not Pastoral Council committees.

Parish staff members and parish committees are a resource to the Parish Pastoral Council. Parish committees through the Pastor and staff are linked to the Parish Pastoral Council.

To encourage unity and integration and to foster a close working relationship among all parish groups, the Parish Pastoral Council meets at least one a year with the leaders of parish committees and parish organizations.

RELATIONSHIP WITH PARISH FINANCE COUNCIL

The Parish Finance Council, mandated by the Code of Canon Law, is separate and distinct from the Parish Pastoral Council. Communication between the two Councils is, however, essential. In order to ensure the communication, a member of the Parish Finance Council serves on the Parish Pastoral Council as an ex officio member.

The Parish Finance Council shares with the Parish Pastoral Council information regarding the parish finances and temporalities on a regular basis. The Parish Finance Council assists the Pastor in implementing the pastoral plans suggested by the Parish Pastoral Council by making fiscally responsible recommendations.



ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA
Parish Pastoral Council Program
222 North Seventeenth Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1299
215-587-3694