

Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils

Introduction. The tradition of the Church urges those who exercise executive authority to seek counsel from those who are affected by their actions before taking action. "What touches all must be approved by all." (*Regulae Juris*) This vision does not democratize the Church in the mode of congregationalism. It provides a vision of faith which recognizes the movement of the Spirit in the midst of the community.

Canon 536 explicitly authorizes bishops to mandate the establishment of parish pastoral councils:

Canon 536 §1. If the diocesan bishop judges it opportune after he has heard the presbyteral council, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.

A pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms determined by the norms established by the diocesan bishop. Such councils exist to aid the pastor in serving the common good of the community. They cease to function when there is no pastor. Service on the council should be determined for fixed terms and the council should meet with regularity as determined by local statute.

Consultation. Consultation is often perceived as simply a safeguard against capricious or ill-considered actions, but in the ecclesial setting it is much more than that. Consultation is a way of acknowledging the presence of God's Spirit in the members of the community. Understanding, insight, and wisdom are gifts that are not limited to appointed or elected officeholders; the faithful have them too, sometimes in abundance. All of the members of the church share, sacramentally and canonically, in the mission and ministry of Christ's Church. Those who serve on councils, boards, and advisory groups have a right to be heard.

For these reasons, canonical consultation is anything but perfunctory or pro forma. It is an authentic and serious process, rooted in the very nature of the Church. Consultation should be the prevailing pattern for responsible action in the church, the course normally followed in taking decisions on forming policies.

Consultation implies:

1. bringing together the members of the group to be consulted;
2. fully informing them of the facts of the situation and its background;
3. encouraging full and free discussion, an honest exchange of ideas about the decision to be taken, each member expressing his or her own judgment sincerely and candidly; and,

4. observing confidentiality of the process, when this is called for (canon 127).

In view of the foregoing, the following is established as particular law in the Diocese of St. Augustine.

Establishment. Every parish in the Diocese of St. Augustine is required to establish a Pastoral Council according to the norms of the Code of Canon Law and these Diocesan norms.

A combined Parish Pastoral Council may be appropriate (but is not directed by these norms) for two faith communities served by the same pastor.

Each Parish Pastoral Council shall have its own statutes, in harmony with these Diocesan norms, which set forth the modes of its own functioning. The statutes are to be sent to the Bishop for his approval. (Send through the Chancellor's office)

Purpose. The purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council is to foster pastoral activity, especially through the promotion of prayer, Christian formation and faith sharing among its membership and within the larger parish community.

The Parish Pastoral Council is consultative to the pastor. Consultation should be carried out in a spirit of prayerful reflection. Through prayer, reflection and frank discussion of the issues brought to the Council, the members should strive to develop consensus on those issues which they address.

Members of the Parish Pastoral Council will, under the direction of the pastor, consult with parishioners about the pastoral needs and priorities of the parish.

Functions. The Parish Pastoral Council plans for the future of the parish. This process is best undertaken by developing a written Pastoral Plan for the parish. At least every two years, the pastoral plan should be reviewed, evaluated, revised or even completely rewritten according to the changing needs and circumstances of the parish. The Pastoral Plan and its biannual review are to be shared with the Bishop and with the parish at large.

The Pastoral Council assists the pastor in formulating parish policies and local pastoral initiatives. Local initiatives and policies are to be faithful to pastoral directives from the Bishop and in conformity with the policies of the Diocese.

It is anticipated that the Parish Council will not be, nor be perceived to be, an elite committee of members of the Parish making decisions for the Parish, but will actively seek out the opinions and views of parish members prior to making decisions / recommendations to the Pastor that have significant financial or other pastoral impact within the parish community.

Membership. Members of the Pastoral Council are to be Catholics of the parish who are mindful of the common good, compassionate, prudent, and faithful in stewardship of time, talent and resources and who participate regularly in the worship of the community.

The number of those who sit on the Council and the method of selection are to be set forth in the parishes' statutes. The membership of the Council should reflect the diversity of ministries, talents and membership of the parish at large.

Participation in the Council by parish staff members other than the pastor should be set forth in the statutes of the parish pastoral council and in the job descriptions of staff members.

The pastor is to see to it that members of the Pastoral Council receive formation and skill development.

Meetings. The Parish Pastoral Council must meet at least four times annually or more frequently as established by the statutes.

The pastor presides at meetings of the Pastoral Council. The actual conduct of meetings may be delegated to a chairperson selected according to the statutes. Other officers such as a vice-chair and a secretary may be selected according to the statutes.

Relationship with other councils and committees. The Parish Pastoral Council is the primary consultative group in the parish. All other parish groups receive their direction for pastoral activity from the pastor assisted by the Pastoral Council.

In consultation with the Parish Pastoral Council the pastor may form other advisory councils or committees (e.g., liturgy committee, social justice committee, school board, board of religious education, etc.). The purpose, membership and operating procedures of these bodies are to be set forth in writing as appendices to the statutes of the Parish Pastoral Council. These bodies are advisory to the pastor. The Pastoral Council assists the pastor in coordinating the work of these other bodies and all other parish groups and ministries.

Suspension and Dissolution of the Pastoral Council. Unless directed otherwise by the Bishop, the Parish Pastoral Council is suspended when a parish is without a pastor or administrator. A new pastor or administrator is expected to call the pastoral council into session within one month of assuming office.

Approved by Bishop Victor Galeone on the 24th day of January, 2007 following consultation with the Presbyteral Council.

Appendix: Model Statutes for a Parish Pastoral Council

Establishment of Parish Council

A Parish Pastoral Council is hereby established as a consultative body in (Parish Name) Parish (hereinafter referred to as "the Parish") known as The (Parish Name) Parish Council (hereinafter referred to as "The Parish Council.")

Mission of the Parish Council

(Suggested as to form; each Parish upon consideration of its own circumstances should develop its own Mission Statement)

The Mission of the Parish Council shall be to serve and support the universal Mission of the Church - promote the salvation of the people of God and to spread the gospel message within the territory of this parish.

The following provisions shall henceforth govern the operations, deliberations and recommendations of the Parish Council:

Article I - Membership

The Council will consist of the Pastor who will serve as President; any priests or deacons assigned to the Parish, the Pastoral Administrator and no less than five (5) Members. The "Members" shall be the only voting persons. The Pastor serves as President and is seeking consultation. Pastoral Associates, Pastoral Administrators, Deacons and any Business/finance Managers are invited to serve as consultants to the Council.

The 'members' shall be chosen according to the following:

Eligibility. Members shall be practicing Catholics of the Parish - regular participants in the faith-life and worship of the Parish; and, mindful of, and obedient to, the teachings of the Church. Parish staff members are not eligible.

The Pastor shall appoint a nominating committee of three persons.

Having made the qualifications and responsibilities of the Council Members known to the Parish Community, all members of the Parish Community shall be invited to place names in nomination, including their own. A time shall be set within which the nominations shall be made. This shall take place in July or August each year.

Having received the names of nominees, the Nominating Committee shall discuss the candidates and after prayerful consideration shall choose five (5) persons who are judged to be best suited to serve on the Council. These shall be recommended to the Pastor.

The Pastor shall appoint to serve on the Council the five who were recommended, unless he has grave reason not to appoint any someone. The Pastor may appoint an additional three (3)

members who, in his judgment, are suitable for the task even though not recommended by the Nominating Committee.

The Pastor shall establish staggered terms for the initial members - 2 serving 3 years; 2 serving 2 years and 1 serving 1 year. Thereafter all appointments shall be for 3 year terms and no member shall serve for more than two (2) consecutive terms, no matter the length of the term.

Vacancies created by absence, resignation or other reason shall be filled by appointment of the Pastor to the unexpired term of the vacant member's seat on the council.

Article II - Officers, Responsibilities & Organization

The Officers of the Parish Council shall be:

1. President-Pastor,
2. Chair, elected by the Council annually at the annual organization meeting,
3. Vice-Chair, elected by Council annually at the annual organization meeting, and
4. Secretary, elected by Council annually at the annual organization meeting,

At the Organization meeting to be held at the first meeting each year in August or September and annually thereafter, the Council shall adopt Rules of Order. In the event rules of order are not adopted, Robert's Rules of Order shall govern all meetings.

Under normal circumstances the Pastor shall be present and preside at all meetings, though the actual conduct of the meeting may be delegated to the Chair.

Duties of Officers

Chair:

1. Conduct the agenda at all meetings of the Council,
2. Prepare the agenda in consultation with the Pastor provided that no item may be placed on the agenda for discussion without the approval of the Pastor,
3. Appoint committee chairpersons of special committees, and
4. Set regular and call special meetings of the Council.

Vice-Chair:

1. Preside at all regular meetings in the absence of the Chair, and
2. Preside at special meetings in the absence of and upon direction of Chair.

Secretary:

1. Record and distribute minutes of the meetings, and
2. Notify Council members of meetings (may be done by parish staff).

Council Members:

1. Attend a minimum of seventy-five percent (75%) of scheduled meetings, and
2. Actively participate in matters under consideration by the Council.

Article III - Council Duties

1. Hold six (6) meetings per year on the first (day inserted) of the months of August, October, December, February, April and May.
2. Recommend policies, procedures and activities which will promote the mission of the parish or serve the best interests of the parish community.
3. Find or develop resources to support the needs and projects of the parish and work to make these resources available to the parish community, all in conjunction with the Parish Finance Council.
4. Respond to all queries proposed by the Pastor to the council for consultation and advice.

Article IV - Council Committees

There may be one or more committees appointed to research and educate the Council on its tasks. These committees shall be developed as follows:

1. A chairperson, who shall be a member of the Council, shall be appointed by the Chair;
2. The chairperson shall appoint one or two members of the Parish (not Members of the Council) to serve on the committee;
3. The committee shall make a written and oral report through the chairperson to the Council on the subject of concern to the special committee; and
4. The committee shall be disbanded when it completes its task (with the thanks of the Council).

Article V - Meetings

The council shall meet on the first (insert day) of the designated months as above. A tentative agenda shall be provided the members at least one week prior to the meeting; additional items may be added to the agenda with the approval of the Pastor at the time of the meeting. Special meetings may be called upon request of the Pastor.

All matters that come before the Council shall be concluded by recommendation to the Pastor.

Quorum

A quorum for purposes of voting shall be at least one-half, plus one of the nominated / appointed members.

Attendance

Any member of the Council who misses two (2) meetings without submitting an acceptable reason to the Chair shall be considered for replacement.

Article VI - Amendments

These Statutes may be amended by two-thirds majority of the Council at a meeting called for that purpose or at a regular meeting if proposed amendments have been provided to the Council at least 15 days prior to the meeting.

The Pastor may veto any amendments which in his judgment do not serve the needs of the parish community or are in conflict with the norms established by the Bishop or the Code of Canon Law.