

GUIDELINES FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

(Effective July 2002)

“Go into the world and proclaim the good news to all creation” (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 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 of 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 the insights and cooperation of persons at the level of the local community. That structure is the

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL (PPC).

RATIONALE FOR THE PPC

“By reason of the knowledge, competence or predominance 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.”
Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

These guidelines flow from the Councils’ insistence on the need for active participation by the laity in the life and mission of the Church. They are intended to enable pastors and parishioners to form effective and cohesive PPC in all the parishes of the Diocese of Manchester.

HISTORAL BACKGROUND: VATICAN II

The Second Vatican Council called for the creation of “parish councils.”

“In dioceses, as far as possible, councils should be set up to assist the Church’s apostolic work, whether in the field of evangelization and sanctification or in the fields of charity, social relations and the rest...” Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People #26

Parish councils were to serve in an advisory capacity to the pastor, and were to utilize the many and varied gifts of the laity in service to the Church as it continues to carry out the mission of Christ.

With time, councils became more task-oriented. The parish council model came to include various committees staffed by elected council members who invested a great deal of time and energy in creating programs and making them happen. Council members were usually the “doers” in the parish.

In recent years, this pattern has shifted toward the creation of “**parish pastoral councils.**” The change, which involves more than simply the addition of a word, has created an entirely new role for these councils. The new model calls for bodies, which lead the parish community in discerning the present and future parish direction, as well as calling forth those gifted to serve in that capacity.

This new model requires not only education, but formation of both council members and the parish at large.

A NEW MODEL – MISSION & VISION

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL:

Today’s council is primarily charged to assist in the development of mission – focused parishes rather than programmatic or finance-driven ones. It attempts to place at the heart of the parish a consciousness of a zeal for the mission of Jesus Christ. When there is a clear awareness of this “larger vision” proposed by the gospels and taught by the Church, a parish finds itself energized by a sense of mission and directed to matters that foster the mission of the parish which is grounded in the mission of Christ.

THE PARISH TODAY:

Important elements that form the essence of parish life:

- EVANGELIZATION
- WORSHIP and WORD
- COMMUNITY
- SERVICE and STEWARDSHIP
- LEADERSHIP

These elements constantly interrelate in parish life, each nurturing and supporting the other.

Recognizing these essential elements and understanding their interrelationship are central to the functioning of the pastoral council. These elements are what make pastoral councils “**pastoral**”. The agenda of the council is primarily to research, consider, and propose for action those matters considered to be truly “pastoral.”

REVISIONING

FROM PARISH COUNCIL

- A Body of Leaders
- Coordinating Ministers
- Crisis Management
- Doing Activities
- Business and Politics
- Competition
- Voting

TO PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

*A Leadership Body
Articulating the Mission
Pastoral Planning
Empowerment and Oversight
Prayer and Discernment
Collaboration
Consensus*

DIOCESAN GUIDELINES

I. ESTABLISHMENT OF A PPC

A. The Code of Canon Law.

To reflect the exciting, ongoing movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church, Pope John XXIII called for a revision of the 1917 Code of Canon Law. The revised code was promulgated in 1983 by Pope John Paul II. Echoing the spirit of Vatican II, the new code emphasized the communal nature of the Church. This is particularly evident in the code's definition of parish:

A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church (diocese); the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop. (Canon 515. 1)

The canons also define the role of the laity in the local church:

The Christian faithful are those who, inasmuch as they have been incorporated into Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God; for this reason, since they have become sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal office in their own manner, they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each one. (Canon 204)

And call for the establishment of 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. (Canon 536 1)

By virtue of their baptism, then, the laity are empowered to participate in the mission of the Church and in the "pastoral activity" of the parish, a community of believers striving to experience more fully the Kingdom of God in a particular time and place. One of the ways in which the laity exercise this call is through service on the **Parish Pastoral Council**.

B. A PPC is to be established in every parish of the Diocese of Manchester.

C. In multi-lingual/cultural parishes, representation with a sensitivity for cultural experiences is strongly recommended.

II. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF A PPC

A. Purpose:

- To assist the pastor in his leadership role of planning, organizing, initiating, promoting, coordinating and reviewing the evangelization, worship, religious education/formation and service activities within the parish.

B. Objectives:

- 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.
- 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.
- To promote programs and activities in the parish as recommended by the **PPC**, the Bishop, or diocesan offices.

MEMBERSHIP

- A. Ex officio members are determined by the pastor. The recommended guideline is to include associate pastors and employed pastoral staff, e.g. Pastoral Associate, DRE, and similar ministers.
- B. To encourage a pastoral model, it is suggested that members be called forth from the community by a *selection* or *discernment* process rather than by election.
- C. Criteria for selection:
- Baptized, practicing Catholic
 - Registered member of the parish (ideally for at least five years.)
 - Participating in the ongoing life of the parish, especially Sunday Eucharist.
 - Be at least eighteen years of age.

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.
- Enthusiasm about the present and future directions of the parish
- Eagerness to participate in parish decisions about its direction
- Willingness to listen, to speak 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
- Cooperation, flexibility and openness with people and ideas

D. It is recommended that a selection process such as a discernment or modified discernment process be used. Sample models and materials are available upon request. However, if an election process takes place, the following is suggested.

- During a special week of *prayer*, the parish seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they reflect on the role of the **PPC**.
- The pastor, with the advice of the current **PPC**, appoints a *nominating committee* to receive written nominations from the parish members. Nominees must indicate their willingness to serve. (In establishing a **PPC** for the first time, the pastor appoints a nominating committee.)
- Nominees are selected or elected by parishioners, eighteen years of age or older.
- The *pastor*, with the advice of the **PPC** *may establish further regulations* to carry out the selection/election process whenever necessary.
- *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 the council to achieve this goal. The number of appointed members is not to exceed twenty-five percent of the total number of members.

Parishioners who serve on a **PPC** must be those who have received a call to the service of leadership. Together with the pastor, these are individuals who are capable of reflection, discernment, visioning, reaching consensus, and pastoral planning.

The clergy and parish staff, too, must possess and demonstrate this same disposition toward the ministry of shared leadership if the process is to be effective. For this reason, the pastor and the council members ought to engage in initial and ongoing formation in the ministry of leadership.

E. Term of Office

- Three years, with possibility of reelection or reappointment. Members may serve only two consecutive terms.
- Only one-third of the Council seats are to be open for selection/election or re election at one time.
- In a newly formed council one-third of the membership serves a three- year, a two-year or a one-year term, respectively. Those serving a one-year term in a newly formed **PPC** may serve for two additional consecutive terms.

F. Number of Members

- 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.
- The total number of members depends on the size of the parish. Ordinarily, the minimum is ten. This does not include ex officio members.

III. SCOPE OF AUTHORITY

Pastors bear a particular responsibility to enable the development of the Christian community entrusted to their care and leadership. The Code of Canon Law has a substantial amount to say about the role and responsibilities of the pastor.

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. (Canon 519)

In order to fulfill his office in earnest the pastor should strive to come to know the faithful who have been entrusted to his care....The pastor is to acknowledge and promote the proper role which the lay members of the Christian faithful have in the Church's mission....(Canon 529, 1, 2)

The pastor, then, has primary role of leadership in both the spiritual and temporal affairs of the parish. Ultimately, all decisions about the operation and direction of the parish need to carry his agreement and approval.

The laity are to assist the pastor in whatever way possible. The **PPC** serves in an advisory role and the pastor takes into serious account their opinions and recommendations.

Relationship of Parish to the Diocese

Other diocesan leadership bodies such as the priests' councils, the deans and the diocesan pastoral council may refer to parish pastoral plans in their own visioning and planning efforts.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through the pastoral planning process, the pastor and pastoral council leads the parish in the discernment and expression of its mission. In communication and cooperation with the associate pastor, parish staff, finance council, parish organizations and committees, and all parishioners, ***the parish pastoral council focuses the vision of the parish on the essential elements of parish life.*** A service of leadership that is rooted in the Spirit has the potential to continually pour the new wine of God's Word into the wineskin that is the parish. By revisioning the parish through the ministry of the Parish Pastoral Council, the entire parish joins together in fulfilling its unique role within the local and universal church.

Adapted and reprinted with permission:

Revisioning the Parish Pastoral Council

By Mary Ann Gubish, Susan Jenny, S.C. with Arlene McGannon
Paulist Press 2001