

**RESOURCES
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DISCOVERING THE PAST AND PRESENT OF PASTORAL COUNCILS

Throughout church history, there are references to councils, including the Councils of Jerusalem and Nicea. It is, however, in the “Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” that bishops of the Second Vatican Council speak about pastoral councils. Although the bishops discuss these councils, it is not clear how these councils are to be viewed. Then, in the late sixties there emerged a variety of pastoral councils in church life; some identified themselves as legislative, and others served in an advisory capacity. For the most part, the early pastoral councils were composed of parishioners who had some financial expertise to share with the pastor.

During the seventies and eighties, as lay ministry began to develop, pastoral councils focused their attention on organizing the new ministries that were appearing, especially the liturgical ministries. This seemed to be what they could do best, that is, help the pastor give some direction to all these new ministries. During the eighties, some councils became very efficient in organizing the existing ministries and developing new projects in response to parish needs.

During the nineties, a new vision of councils was developing, and that vision included pastoral planning. On the national level, two conferences merged into The Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development. It sent a clear message that the work of planning needed to be connected to councils and the focus of pastoral councils would be in pastoral planning. Although councils continued to deal with the matters brought before them by the pastor, they were also charged with developing plans for the pastoral life of the parish.

Looking at Scripture

Scripture does not give explicit direction for parish pastoral councils. However, the words and actions of Jesus give an idea of what he wanted to accomplish in his mission on earth. Through the centuries the church has recognized four marks of his mission. These have been the four main ministries of the church for the last 2000 years.

Jesus offered a MESSAGE of love and healing; he brought people together in COMMUNITY; he reached out in SERVICE to the poor, and he modeled for us a life of PRAYER. These four themes remain the key marks of the church on the universal level as well as in small Christian communities. So we can ask ourselves as church or as pastoral councils:

- How well do we proclaim and live the message of love and forgiveness?
- How are we building community where all are welcomed with open arms?
- How do we reach out to the poor and oppressed?
- How does our liturgy call people to thankfulness and praise?

Thoughts from Vatican II

Although Vatican II did not give a clear direction for pastoral councils, the bishops at the Council did support and encourage council development. The Vatican Council itself was a great example for pastoral councils. It strengthened our understanding of terms like *collegiality*, *subsidiarity*, and *justice participation*. It is in seeing pastoral councils as collegial that we can understand the working of priests and laity together. It is in the principle of subsidiarity that we can grasp the need for different organizations to make decisions on the local level. It is in justice participation that we gain the insight of councils being prophetic.

Comments from Canon Law

In 1983 the revised Code of Canon Law addressed the question of councils at the parish and diocesan level. Canons 511-514 speak about a Diocesan Pastoral Council. Canon 537 states that finance councils must exist in every parish. Canon 536 speaks of parish pastoral councils by saying:

“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.”

From canon law we see that once the bishop judges it opportune, pastoral councils are to be formed in every parish. We note also the clear distinction between finance councils that advise the pastor on the administration of parish goods, and pastoral councils that are to examine pastoral issues, study them, and offer recommendations to the pastor.

HISTORY OF COUNCILS IN THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

The Diocesan Pastoral Advisory Council (DPAC)

In 1977, Bishop John J. Cassata formed the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC), a group which consisted of two priests, two Sisters, one deacon, four lay representatives from each deanery, and two members appointed by the bishop. DPC developed parish council guidelines for the diocese, worked on diocesan personnel policies, and recommended the formation of a board of conciliation, mediation, and arbitration.

In 1987, members of the DPC completed a two-year process of evaluation and clarification of needs that led to the formation of the Diocesan Pastoral Advisory Council. This group of twenty-five priests, religious, and lay people represents the needs and concerns of the diocese as a whole. The group studies areas of concern within the diocese and makes recommendations to the bishop on issues such as multi-cultural ministry, rural ministry, future staffing, and evangelization. The major emphasis within DPAC from 1999-2001 has been the Synod process.

In 1983 the “Handbook for the Diocese of Fort Worth: Your Parish Council” was published. In the opening paragraph of the bishop’s letter in that handbook is stated that councils become obligatory on July 1, 1983. The Introduction to this handbook states the reason why parish councils are being encouraged: “The need for parish councils originated in two documents of Vatican II: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and the Decree on the Lay Apostolate. These documents describe the parish as a Christian community with the pastor, as the representative of the bishop, presiding over the apostolic efforts in which **all members of the parish participate.**”

On July 12, 1990 draft guidelines for parish pastoral councils and parish finance councils in the Diocese of Fort Worth were published. In the bishop’s introductory letter accompanying these guidelines he states: “When those engaged in parish leadership are uncertain about the role of the parish council, these guidelines, exercises and suggestions can be of great help in reassessing how councils serve the parish community. Whatever structures individual parishes devise to facilitate ministry, we must keep in mind that **everyone is called to collaboration, shared decision making and the building of an environment where trust and respect are signs of the presence of the Spirit.**”

In 1995 the draft guidelines were published in a “somewhat more permanent form.” The bishop’s introductory letter stated: “Parishes which do not now have a pastoral council are requested to form one. Those parishes where the council is not pastoral in nature are encouraged to redirect the council’s focus, developing structures and strategies **to serve the pastoral needs of the people.**”

In 2000-2001, in conjunction with the diocese’s first Synod, the guidelines were once again reviewed. The guidelines being published at this time are intended to emphasize the following:

- The Pastoral Council is a wisdom group whose members seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as to how the parish can best carry out the mission of the Church.
- The Finance Council advises the Pastor in administration and stewardship of parish finances.
- The Council’s primary function is pro-active planning.
- The Pastor’s role is to receive the advice of the Council.

ORGANIZING A PASTORAL COUNCIL

Educating the Community

Perhaps the first step in making changes to a pastoral council is to educate the parish community. If a parish is moving from a model of council which manages the details of parish life towards a model of council that does pastoral planning, the parishioners should be alerted to the change especially in regard to the kind of members needed. This may be done through pulpit announcements, Sunday handouts, and/or through explanations to parish leaders and heads of organizations. Talking about a new way of being council can help clarify the vision of all parishioners and elicit renewed interest and participation in the life of the parish.

Clarifying the Gifts for Council Ministry

As in the selection of people for other ministries (lectors, Eucharistic ministers, and youth coordinators), it is important to identify people with particular gifts to serve on the pastoral council. These potential council members can be further trained by sending them to workshops and retreats. Exposure to deanery and diocesan activities also gives them a better sense of the larger church.

Offering Days of Clarification and Discernment

As councils develop, days of discernment are helpful and positive, providing opportunities for people to clarify their understanding of pastoral councils and opportunities for shared prayer. These days are positive spiritual experiences, even if participants decide that the time is not right for their own membership on the council. It is a time for them to ponder the meaning of parish and to give thanks for their gifts. Some parishes have a series of evenings; others host a one-day event. (See “Sample Calendar” in Appendix.)

Exploring a New Model

Today councils are functioning in numerous ways and assuming different levels of responsibility. Each parish should design its council in a way that is compatible with the leadership of the pastor. In the future, pastoral councils will undoubtedly be prepared to assume greater responsibility in planning for the spiritual and pastoral life of the community.

The diagram on the next page illustrates how councils have been changing over the years. Today there is a sense that councils have moved or are moving from the left column to the right. If a council has already arrived in the right hand column, perhaps there are still areas for growth. Each parish council should reflect on its performance during the last five years and determine goals for becoming more vibrant in the near future.

<p style="text-align: center;">WORKING TOGETHER: PASTORAL COUNCIL, FINANCE COUNCIL AND PASTORAL STAFF</p>
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Staff members are hired by the pastor and work under his supervision. They do not work for the pastoral council, but they work to implement the vision that the council and pastor have developed. The pastoral council needs to be in collaboration with the pastoral staff. Once the pastoral plan is in place the pastoral staff needs to be involved in carrying out the goals and strategies so that the plan can be realized.

Parish Roles and Responsibilities

This diagram may help clarify the roles of the pastoral staff, the pastoral council and the finance council. If the pastor and these three groups collaborate, then the mission and goals of the parish are communicated clearly. Quarterly meetings of these groups will promote unity and clarity in the implementation of pastoral decisions and policies.

Parish Roles and Responsibilities

	Parish	Pastoral Council	Finance Council
	(includes parochial vicar and parish staff)		
Pastor's Role	oversees daily operations	presides	Presides
Membership	Appointed or Hired	selected through parish discernment process	appointed by pastor
Focus	day-to-day ministry	long-range pastoral planning	annual budget long-range financial planning
Areas of Responsibility	matters pertaining to a job description or specific area of parish life	matters pertaining to the life of the whole parish: ten essentials	matters pertaining to budget, facilities, or development
Relationship to Pastoral Plan	assists as resource	develops, monitors and evaluates plan	assists as resource
Relationship to Pastor	accountable to pastor	consultative to pastor	consultative to pastor
Method of Decision Making	by consensus when appropriate	by consensus	By consensus when appropriate

During a Time of Pastor Transition

When a vacancy occurs in the position of pastor:

- The consultative bodies (pastoral and Finance Councils) are encouraged to consult with the parish staff and the diocesan Planning Office to develop a profile of the parish and its ministerial needs.
- Consultative bodies do not exercise the role and responsibility of the pastor.

During the first year in a new assignment, a pastor is encouraged to become actively engaged with the members of consultative bodies and the pastoral and administrative staff, both volunteer and paid.

The new pastor and members of consultative structures and administrative staff are encouraged to work together in a spirit of cooperation.

It is wise to defer decisions regarding the alteration of policies and structures during a time of transition.

RECOGNIZING RESOURCES

Diocesan Offices

The Catholic Center exists in order to carry on the work of the local Church, offering resources to pastoral and finance councils. Catholic Center staff members are available to assist in developing goals and strategies within parishes in their efforts to implement the ten Essentials of Parish Life and the goals of the Synod.

Office of Pastoral Planning

This office has responsibility for supporting and developing pastoral councils. The office is also charged with working with all consultative bodies, including the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPAC) and the Ministerium.

It is helpful for councils to stay in touch with the Office of Pastoral Planning so they are aware of opportunities such as the annual “Leadership Conference,” a workshop designed to offer skills and training to councilors and to give a larger view of church.

Bulletin and Newsletter Ideas

Parishioners often do not know that there is a parish pastoral or finance council and are unsure of these ministries’ functions. Periodic bulletin information can be helpful in providing updates to the community.

Possibilities to consider in providing bulletin information:

- Educate the parish about the pastoral and finance councils and their roles;
- Provide updates on major decisions made by the councils;
- Publicize progress being achieved in regard to parish goals;
- List the names of council members periodically;
- Write articles featuring various members of the council;
- Request prayers for the council as they discern pastoral issues.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BAPTISM: Sacrament of initiation by which men and women become members of the Catholic Church and assume responsibility for using their gifts to build up the community in fulfilling the mission of Jesus.

CATECHESIS: Process through which individuals and communities systematically acquire and deepen Christian faith.

CODE OF CANON LAW: Law enacted and promulgated by the Pope for the orderly pastoral administration and government of the Church. The revised Code, effective November 27, 1983, consists of 1,752 canons in seven books.

COLLABORATION: Act of working together through reflective listening and genuine articulation of ideas in a partnership of mutual respect.

COLLEGIALITY: A characteristic of church leadership based on mutuality and unity in diversity: in reference to the universal communion of the bishops with the Holy Father, of pastors with their bishop, and of the faithful with their pastor.

CONSENSUS: A method of making decisions. A group strives to reach substantial, not necessarily unanimous, agreement on matters of overall direction and policy that can be supported by all.

CONSULTATION: Act of conferring and deliberating, moving toward decision-making. Refers particularly to the relationship between pastor and laity, respecting the pastor's unique role as canonical head of the parish.

DELEGATE: To assign responsibility and authority to the appropriate level.

DIOCESE: The local or "particular" church, referring to a geographically designated area in which Catholics, usually gathered in parishes, are united in faith and sacraments with their bishop, ordained in apostolic succession.

DISCERNMENT: Formal prayerful process where a group seeks to discover God's will in a particularly significant situation or decision.

DIVERSE CULTURES/GIFTS: A critical aspect of life within the Church, which recognizes, appreciates, celebrates, and uses the gifts of all people.

EMPOWER: To provide individuals and/or groups with skills, information, authority, and resources in order to carry out their responsibilities.

EVALUATION: Systematic way of measuring performance against objectives.

EVANGELIZATION: The way in which the individuals and the community continue to spread the Good News of Jesus, especially, although not exclusively, through personal and corporate sharing of faith.

FINANCE COUNCIL: A consultative body within the parish that offers expertise in finance and plant management as they relate to the mission of the parish.

FORMATION/EDUCATION: One of the ten essentials of parish life, which explains, informs and forms parishioners of all ages in the Scriptures and tradition of the church. Encompasses many traditional ministries of “education.”

GOAL: A clearly defined statement of desired direction or activity in general terms.

LEADERSHIP: Calling forth gifts of visioning, planning, empowering, and evaluating for the service of the community.

MINISTRY: Active service of the baptized, dependent upon the gifts of the individual, the community’s needs, and always directed to the building up of the Body of Christ.

MISSION (OF THE CHURCH): Purpose for which Christians are gathered in faith.

MISSION STATEMENT: Brief, general statement which identifies and establishes the unique direction of a diocese or parish as it lives out the mission of the church.

OBJECTIVE: Planned action that directs efforts toward attaining a goal. Besides describing a result, an objective also specifies what is to be done, who is to do it, and when it is to be completed.

OUTREACH: Extending the resources of the Church to the needs of others, demonstrating commitment to works of compassion and justice.

PARISH: A gathering of the people of God united in faith and dedicated to continuing the universal mission of the Church in their local setting.

PASTORAL: An approach of caring for the life of the parish as a whole.

PARISH COUNCILS: Each parish has two councils. One is finance; the other is pastoral.

PASTORAL PLANNING: The process which turns the parish vision into reality within a particular span of time, through a systematic, cyclical design. Involves the mission statement, long range goals, and annual objectives.

PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL: The consultative body of the bishop that assists with the governance of the diocese and the concerns of the presbyters (priests), formerly called Priests' Council.

REIGN OF GOD: The Biblical expression of God's dynamic rule of the universe, the values and qualities of which were most manifested in the sayings and deeds of Jesus.

REPRESENTATIVE: A characteristic of the makeup of parish pastoral council, namely, a concern for the common good of the entire parish as opposed to that of special interest groups or organizations.

SELECTION: A method by which leaders are chosen to serve on the Parish Pastoral Council, through a discernment rather than election process.

SMALL COMMUNITIES: Groups of parishioners, drawn together by the love of Jesus Christ, to share His message, build community, pray and reach out to alleviate the needs of others.

SPIRITUALITY: Relationship with God, involving prayer, study, and activities that nurture the spirit and call individuals to growth.

STEWARDSHIP: Commitment that challenges all parishioners to share their time, talent and treasure for the fulfillment of the parish mission.

SUNDAY EUCHARIST: An essential element of church life, which is both source and summit of communities' expression of its life in Christ.

TRADITION: The long-standing practices and beliefs of the Church, developed since the days of the Apostles and revered as normative, along with Scriptures, for the life of the Church.

VATICAN II: The most recent of 21 church councils (1962-1965) in which bishops from throughout the universal church gathered with the Pope to discuss and decide on matters of church teaching and practice. A Council of this nature has supreme and full authority over the Church.

WORSHIP: This element of church life gives expression to the sacramental and prayer life of parishioners. Encompasses both Sunday Eucharist and other ritual forms of sacred celebration.

ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS

Parish life may be organized in different ways. Since individual parishes vary greatly, the pastoral leadership should adopt the organizational structure that best serves the needs of the parish.

Different organizational plans may affect the structure and operation of the pastoral council. Several models of parish organization are described on the following pages. The parish may adapt these models or develop new ones. The important issue is not structure but effective function.

These models are:

1. AT LARGE MODEL
2. CLUSTER MODELS
3. COUNCIL OF MINISTRIES MODEL
4. FAITH- SHARING GROUP MODEL

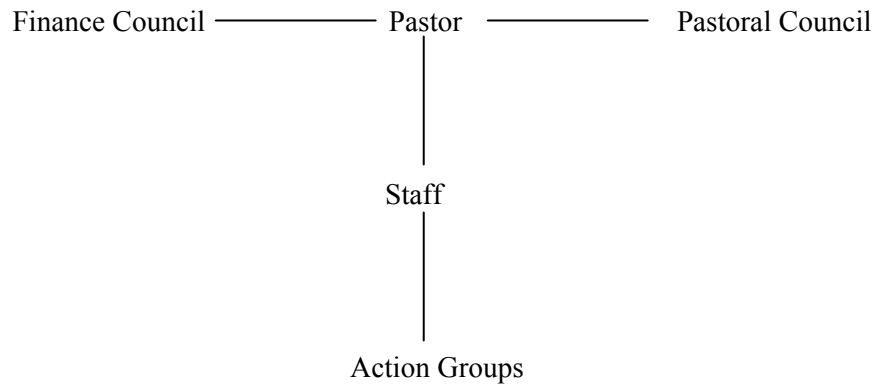
SUGGESTIONS FOR SMALL OR RURAL PARISHES

Long-range planning is an essential part of the work of pastoral councils. However, in small parishes or in rural parishes, the council may also serve as the group responsible for getting things done in the parish (see guidelines page 7).

In parishes where the council serves a dual role, the council should be structured in a way that allows it occasionally to step back from the immediate concerns involved in keeping the parish functioning and take a broader view. At least once a year, the council should evaluate the condition of the parish as a whole, consider how the parish is carrying on the mission of the church, evaluate programs, set priorities and strategize about the future (see sample agendas in Resources section pages 54 and 55).

AT LARGE MODEL

In this model of parish life, the various action groups of the parish operate freely. They communicate with the pastor either directly or through a staff person.



The pastoral council is selected from the parish membership at large with care taken that the council be somewhat representative of all groups involved in parish life.

The selection process involves nominations from all interested parishioners and discernment by the pastor and his pastoral advisors.

CLUSTER MODELS

In cluster models of parish life, various groups in the parish form clusters. One model (the Council of Ministries or Commission Model) clusters the groups into areas of ministry. Another (the Small Church Communities Model) clusters them into faith-sharing groups. Clusters usually communicate with the pastor either through staff persons or members of the cluster assigned to the role of communicator.

Council of Ministries Model

This model clusters the action groups of the parish into areas of ministry which communicate with the pastor through staff persons or designated members of the clusters.

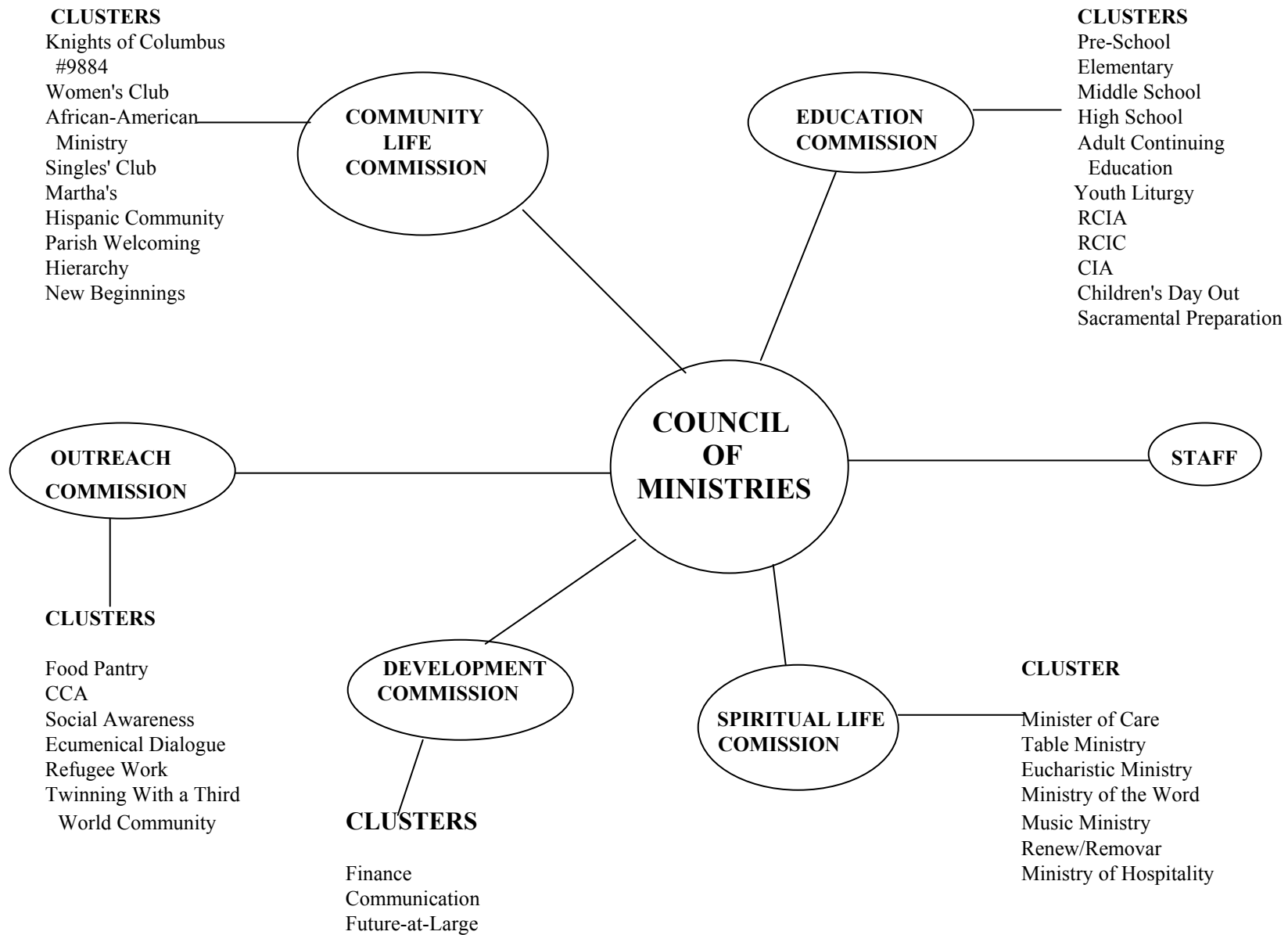
Each action group sends a representative or representatives to a commission, that is, a body that deals with issues pertaining to one area of ministry. The commissions coordinate activities, generate the budget, develop policy and solve problems involving that area of ministry.

In this model the pastoral council (Council of Ministries) is composed of a representative from each commission or area of ministry.

The Council of Ministries acts as the pastoral planning body. It does not deal with day-to-day activities of the commissions or parish but with dreaming, visioning and long-range planning issues.

The selection process involves nominations and discernment within the area of ministry.

A disadvantage of this model may be that only people actively involved in parish activities can serve on the pastoral council (Council of Ministries). People may have to give up a favorite activity in order to find time to serve on the council.



FAITH-SHARING GROUP MODEL

This model is based on work done by Fr. Art Baranowski. Several parishes in the diocese are developing small church communities and exploring this model.

Another name for the faith-sharing group model is Small Church Communities or Small Basic Christian Communities.*

In this model parish life is organized around faith-sharing groups which may be organized into larger group clusters.

Communication with the pastor could take place through staff persons or designated communicators (called pastoral facilitators).

In this model the pastoral council could be composed of representatives from each faith-sharing group or cluster.

Since faith-sharing groups do not involve all parishioners, people from other areas of parish life may need to be included.

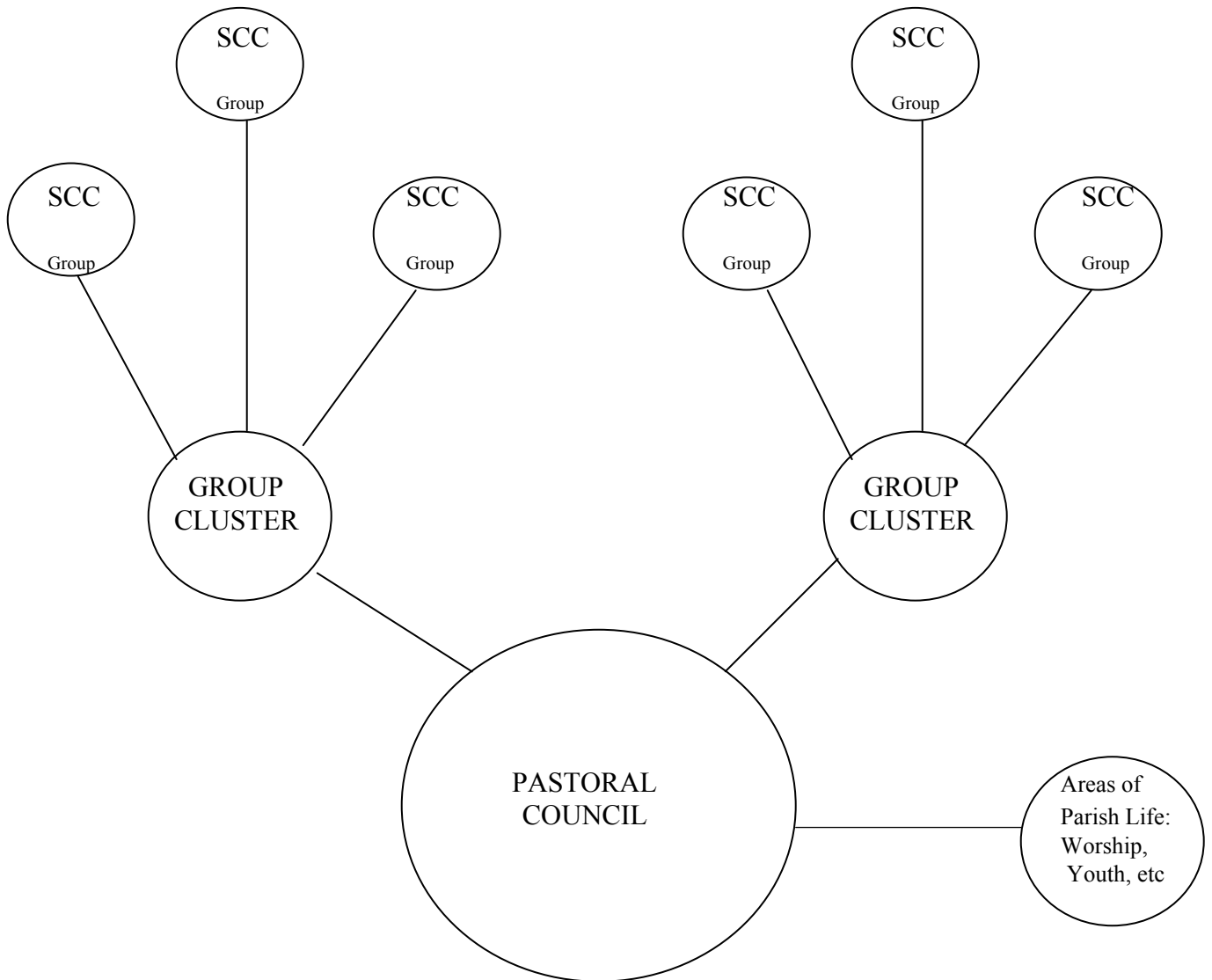
The selection process could involve nominations and discernment within the faith-sharing groups or group clusters and/or other areas of parish life.

The pastoral council would become a planning body, not dealing with day-to-day activities or administrative issues of the parish.

A critical component of all pastoral council meetings in all parishes is inclusion of substantial time for prayer, reflection, discernment and faith-sharing.

*See *Creating Small Faith Communities* by Arthur R. Baranowski, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1615 Republic St., Cincinnati, Ohio 45210

FAITH – SHARING GROUP MODEL



MULTICULTURAL APPROACHES TO COUNCIL

Two critical aspects are involved: learning how religion is practiced and its role in a culture and learning how to overcome the problems created by various languages.

Possible Structures:

1. **Parallel councils in each language or culture** (reflect the idea that each group forms a separate parish and the groups share a building).

A more unified approach can be achieved if the councils:

- try to have joint meetings a couple of times per year;
- try to find common ground;
- try to develop the same agenda in each group;
- find "bridge" people who can facilitate communications.

2. **One council serving all language and/or culture groups**

Choosing Membership:

- No tokenism -- each language or cultural group would have equal strength on the council. These members would be chosen for their leadership qualities. There could be proportional representation.
- The council would make a commitment to modeling cultural interaction by sharing diversity and similarities.
- The council would engage in multicultural activities such as shared prayer and other celebrations.
- The council would find and develop "bridge people," persons who are multicultural and/or bilingual and open to others.
- The council would be openly in dialogue on issues between (among) groups such as:
 - How do we handle language?
 - How do we surface issues and work toward solutions together?

Formation of Council Members:

- Initial training
- Subsequent formation
 - Open discussion of the various understandings of church and parish
 - Ownership of the mission of the parish based on the mission of Jesus: teaching, worship, building community, service of and caring for others
 - Setting clear goals that come from all communities and are acceptable to all
 - Developing a commitment to goals and an agenda that includes issues of interest to all
 - Developing a practical plan for promoting and modeling multicultural understanding and celebration by the council itself
 - Choosing a meeting process that allows all to be heard such as mutual invitation (include explanation of mutual invitation).
 - Fostering meeting skills that maximize the ability of all to participate (may require breaking into small groups, then coming together in the large group with a multilingual facilitator).

From Sister Pat Rickert, SSND, Consultant for Parish Council Development, Diocese of Cleveland and Sister Clare Reinert, SSND, Director-Pastoral Councils, Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES

- R take responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others
- E empathetic listening – enter into the other person’s situation and point of view
- S be sensitive to differences in communication styles
- P ponder what you hear and feel before you speak
- E examine your own assumptions and perceptions
- C keep confidentiality
- T tolerate ambiguity because we are *not* here to debate who is right or wrong

MUTUAL INVITATION PROCESS

PURPOSE: to ensure that each person in the group is invited by name to share in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

METHOD:

1. The leader clarifies what the group members are being invited to share.
2. The leader gives guidelines about the use of time.
3. The leader may share first or may invite another person by name to share.
4. The one invited does not need to be the person next to the speaker.
5. After the person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.
6. If the person invited chooses not to share, the person may simply say “pass” and proceed to invite another to share. No explanation is needed or given for passing.
7. The process will continue until everyone has been invited to speak.
8. At that time any person who passed will be invited again to share. Persons are still free to pass.
9. The main activity of the group is to listen.

RATIONALE:

The Invitation Method is a way to include all people in the conversation in a very respectful atmosphere. While each person is speaking, the others listen. No one may interrupt the speaker nor jump in to speak without being invited by name. In this method, no one has more authority than anyone else – each person is invited to share, and after sharing that person has the privilege to invite who will share next.

These guidelines are based on material by Eric H.F. Law and adapted for use by the Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC, San Antonio, Texas, 1999.)

EDUCATING THE PARISH

*WHY A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL?**

Under the impetus the Second Vatican Council's call to the People of God to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit and participate more fully in the life of the Church, "parish councils" mushroomed all over the world. This was especially true in the United States, where people were already used to some form of participation in government.

The bishops of the Second Vatican Council declared that pastors should promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church. They further advised that priests listen to the laity so that with them they would be able to read the signs of the times. What's more, they reminded the laity that they belong to the "priesthood of the faithful." By baptism and confirmation the laity share in the priestly mission of Christ and are to participate in the apostolate of the Church, contributing even to its decision-making process.

Parish councils can act as the "wisdom community" of the parish where people learn to be stewards of the gifts of God and to listen to the needs of all. Through the process of consultation, the parish council contributes to the building up of the faith community and can be an adventure in shared responsibility, like the communities of the first Christians that took action as a body.

As much as the Second Vatican Council wished the laity to become more participatory in parish life, it did not mandate the establishment of parish councils, nor did it even offer guidelines for structuring them. The rapid growth of councils in the '70's was more or less spontaneous. Although there were general patterns from diocese to diocese, no two councils were exactly alike in structure and function. Some councils were informal appointees of the pastor; some were formed through a tightly organized -- and sometimes competitive -- election process. Some councils were loosely organized, met infrequently or rubber-stamped decisions already made; others were highly organized, became legislative bodies, administrative bureaucracies or glorified grievance committees. The level of success of parish councils has run the gamut from wonderful to disastrous. Selection, structure, goals and personalities have all been factors.

In 1983 the new and revised Code of Canon Law was published. It went beyond Vatican II by mandating pastoral councils on the diocesan level and highly recommending them on the parish level. But the Code has given these councils a more specific purpose and direction. They are clearly pastoral in nature -- and should be called such.

Historically, parish councils appear to be at a transitional stage. The former concept of council, based on a corporate board of management model, is evolving into a model: a pastoral council that focuses explicitly on the pastoral needs of the people.

In our next segment we will examine the "What" and the "What Not" of parish pastoral councils.

* This section is based on material presented in workshops by Susan Stromatt, Diocese of Galveston/Houston, and revised by Reverend Gilbert Barth, TOR

WHAT IS A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL?

In the first segment of this series we discussed the "WHY" of a parish council, tracing its rationale back to the call of the Second Vatican Council. And we say why, with the recommendation of the revised Code of Canon Law (1983), the council should be called "pastoral" rather than simply "parish." Now, let's take a look at "what" a pastoral council should be or should do.

Perhaps it may be helpful to start by dispelling some common misconceptions and by clarifying what a pastoral council is not. A pastoral council, first of all is not a lay pressure group. It is not simply a "democratization" of the parish. Furthermore, it is not an expansion of parish administration, nor a new linkage of existing parish organizations. And finally, it is not the parish finance committee.

On the positive side, a pastoral council is a living model of the parish as a worshipping community, so the council members come together as workers who live the liturgy, build up the Church and serve the Gospel. They gather in a communion of shared responsibility in the work of the Church.

The pastoral council is a consultative body. Consultation is not a new word to us since we are used to asking doctors, dentists and other professional persons for "second opinions." In the Church, though, it is a concept which has only recently appeared on the scene, and in this context, requires some attention. A simple Webster's Dictionary definition would be: "asking the advice of." Rev. James Provost, Executive Coordinator of the Canon Law Society of America, provides the following explanation regarding the Church.

Consultation is the wisdom function in the Church. It is touching into the Spirit within all of God's People and seeking to draw from that the wisdom of what is needed in the Church. But it is also reflective of the fact that we are not a democratic institution which is determined by vote of the majority. We are a Church which comes from Christ, which is commissioned by Christ to carry on a mission, and which is hierarchically constituted by Christ to assure that the mission gets done. We can't decide things by a totally democratic vote; nor can we decide things by a totally autocratic decision. We decide things together -- by the working together of those with the executive function and those with the Spirit, and they express that through the consultative processes in the Church.

Pastoral council members, as the chief consultants to the pastor, represent the needs of all the people of the parish. The council reaches out to determine what are the issues that are impacting the lives of the parishioners. And then, through a process of prayer, study and dialogue, it recommends practical conclusions regarding these issues -- ways in which the parish can minister to the needs of the parishioners.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the pastor made all the decisions regarding the faith community. Any process that he used in reaching his decision was an informal one. In fact, some

would describe him as a "one-man band." Today, we recognize that by baptism, the laity also have the responsibility to continue the mission of Jesus and that they are "empowered -- indeed sometimes obliged -- to manifest their opinion on those things which pertain to the good of the Church."

(Lumen Gentium #37)

A pastor may depend upon his council to provide input on an issue about which he must make an immediate decision, and this will require prayerful consideration and in-depth dialogue on the part of all the council members. Probably more often, though, major issues will surface which will require more study before a recommendation can be made. A council will enter into an investigative process which will produce the material of an informed recommendation.

Thus, today, we are not talking so much about authority, but about how it is exercised and about proper roles. The pastor, as the delegate of the Bishop, has the authority and responsibility to make decisions regarding the running of the parish and the building up of the faith community. The laity, by virtue of their baptism, have the right and responsibility to participate in that decision-making process. Thus, the pastoral council is the structure provided by the Church which enables all to share the responsibility for making the parish alive in Christ.

This leads to the final aspect of council, namely, its internal relationships. The members relate to each other in one Gospel, one Spirit and one Bread. They love and serve one and the same Christ. So, in spite of differences of opinions, the councilors will remain in true communion. Many councils improve these internal relationships by educating themselves in leadership skills and group dynamics by attending special courses or formation programs. They are attentive to their own spiritual growth. Joined with their pastor and parish staff, they will become a strong spiritual force in the parish, enabling them to give Christian witness to one another and to the surrounding community, making credible the words of Jesus:

"By this love you have for one another,
everyone will know that you are my disciples." *(John 14:35)*

WHAT IS A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL?

LET'S DISPEL SOME **COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS** BY CLARIFYING WHAT A PASTORAL COUNCIL IS **NOT**

First, it is **NOT** a lay pressure group.

It is **NOT** simply a “democratization” of the parish.

It is **NOT** an expansion of parish administration, nor a new linkage of existing parish organizations.

It is **NOT** a parish finance committee.

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, A PASTORAL COUNCIL **IS**

A living model of the parish as a worshipping community to **build up** the church and serve the Gospel.

Its members gather in a communion of **shared responsibility** in the work of the Church.

It is a **consultative body**.

It **represents** the needs of **all** the people of the parish.

It **reaches** out to **determine** what are the issues that are impacting the lives of the parishioners.

Through prayer, study and dialogue, it **recommends** practical conclusions regarding these issues.

Christ founded His Church **to assure** that His mission will continue.

Things are **not decided totally democratically** nor **totally autocratically**. We decide **together** — by working together as pastoral members.

Major issues may require the council to enter into an **investigative process**.

The **pastor** has the **authority and responsibility** to make decisions regarding the running of the parish and the building up of the faith community. The laity has the **right and responsibility** to participate in that decision-making process. Joined with the pastor and parish staff, they will become a strong spiritual force in the parish.

HOW DOES A PASTORAL COUNCIL OPERATE?

We first looked at "WHY" a parish should have a pastoral council. Then we tried to explain "WHAT" a pastoral council is and is not. In this third segment of the series, let's consider "HOW" a parish pastoral council should operate.

The council meets with the pastor regularly, probably once a month. The pastor presides over and shares the ministry of the council while bearing the final responsibility for the total parish ministry. He is president or presider of the council but another council member or an outside facilitator may serve as chairperson of the meetings.

The councilors are representatives of the entire parish and not of any particular group or category. They are to articulate the experience of the parish and the community. They are to be active participants in all the workings of the council. They are to listen carefully to others and express their considered opinions faithfully.

Since this is the pastor's major consultative body, he should be able to bring to it any of his pastoral concerns. Other council members can also bring items to the agenda through an agenda committee which will be composed of three members, including the pastor, to be designated by the council itself.

Since the council is a consultative body, voting is replaced by models of consensus and discernment.

While consensus is commonly used to mean complete or unanimous agreement, its precise meaning is general agreement. The council will have reached consensus when all the members of the group are willing to accept a decision. Even though the decision may not necessarily be a member's first choice, the member considers it a workable choice and in the best interest of the parish.

Discernment includes searching for the guidance of the Holy Spirit -- not only at the beginning of every meeting, but at other moments during the deliberations. In fact, the council may spend other time together in prayer and retreat experiences for the purpose of drawing together in love and trust, to heal divisions, and for the discernment of God's will for the community.

Very often, the first project of a pastoral council is to lead the parish in the development of a mission statement. "Who are we as a parish?" "What have we come to believe about being Catholic Christians in the world today?" And finally, "What are we called to do as a parish? What is our purpose or mission?"

Many times councils will form *ad hoc* committees to study certain issues over a longer period of time. These committees might contact resource persons such as staff or parish organizations or even other parishes as they collect information pertinent to their study.

The concerns of the council are pastoral, not administrative or financial. The focus will be on the future, assessing needs and developing plans to meet those needs. To do this the pastoral council will interact with other bodies: the parish staff (which administers policies); the various parish organizations; and the Parish Finance Council (a council appointed by the pastor that will advise on

financial matters, audit parish accounts, direct the Sharing in Ministry and stewardship drives, and propose the annual budget). Thus, the Pastoral Council will be in communication with the facets of the parish life and place them in the context of pastoral concerns.

The above process requires prayer, study, dialogue, discipline, determination and time. Unfortunately, there is no way around it. Short circuiting the process will produce less than an informed recommendation, which, in the end, is of no benefit to anyone. We, the Church, have the opportunities to share our wisdom in order that the best decisions are reached.

In our next and final segment we will consider "WHO" the pastoral council members are to be.

WHO SHOULD BE A MEMBER OF A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL?

The first three segments of this series examined the "Why," the "What," and the "How" of a parish pastoral council. In the light of all that was concluded about the nature, purpose and operations of such a group, this fourth and final segment considers "Who" the members of a pastoral council should be and what qualifications or qualities they should have.

A document published by the Canadian bishops a few years ago, entitled "Parish Pastoral Councils," notes that frequently the structure suggested for a parish council seemed to be in contradiction to its stated philosophy and mission. Pastoral councils are not immediately responsible for liturgy, education, care of the poor, finances, etc. Yet many parish councils spend large amounts of their time listening to endless commission or committee reports, and involving themselves in areas that could be handled better by those who have specific gifts or responsibilities in those areas.

With regard to membership on a pastoral council, the document recommends that it not be a federation of committees, organizations or activities in the parish nor be comprised of delegates of special interest groups. Rather, the document implies that membership be based on giftedness, on quality people. It further suggests that membership be restricted to less than 15 people and definitely be comprised of more parishioners than clergy and staff combined.

A pastoral council will normally comprise from 12 to 14 members, including the pastor, staff personnel and parishioners selected by the parish through a discernment process. This should provide for a broad, flexible, representative and qualified group.

Given the nature and purpose of a parish pastoral council, its members should have at least the following qualifications:

They should be persons of prayer, appreciating the value of private prayer for personal growth in Christ and the value of communal prayer, especially among themselves, for growth in Christ's community of faith and love.

They should have some knowledge of what it means to be Church today, that is, all of God's people speaking and listening to one another to discern what the Spirit is saying about the needs of our times.

They should have some knowledge of the Vatican II documents -- their purpose, spirit, direction, theology -- or at least be open to learning about them.

They should have a sense of mission -- bringing Christ to people and people to Christ.

They should be willing to become considerably involved in the parish, in its life and activities. The person who wishes to make no greater commitment in time and energy than attendance at the monthly meetings should not accept to be a member. Moreover, their commitment to the work of the council must take priority over all other parish involvement.

Who should be a member of the Parish Pastoral Council?

The following are the minimal qualifications necessary for council membership:

- **Gifted persons**

Each person is uniquely gifted with special talents. Initiative, leadership skills, concern for the spiritual growth of the parish, ability to listen and to dialogue – such gifts are needed on the pastoral council.

- **Persons of prayer.**

Members should appreciate the value of private prayer for personal growth in Christ and the value of communal prayer for growth in Christ's community of faith and love.

- **Knowledge of what it means to be Church today.**

This means all of God's people speaking and listening to one another to discern what the Spirit is saying about the needs of our time.

- **Knowledge of the Vatican II documents.**

Knowing their purpose, spirit, direction and theology or at least being willing to learn about them.

Resources are available through the Catholic Center and most likely at your local library.

- **Sense of mission.**

Our mission is the same today as it was when the Church was established, bringing Christ to people and people to Christ.

Please note that persons should be recommended only with their permission. Also, persons with serious time constraints should consider whether service on the pastoral council will be feasible for their schedule. Remember, the commitment to the work of the council must take priority over all other parish involvement.

<p>RECOMMENDATION PROCESS FOR PASTORAL COUNCIL MEMBERS</p>

1. Inform the parish about the nature and purpose of a pastoral council.
2. Inform the parish about the qualities and qualifications of a pastoral council member.

The "Who, What, Why, How of Pastoral Councils" may need to be adapted for the individual parish.

Bulletin inserts may not be an adequate means of communication. If they are the only thing used, response will probably be disappointing.

Some parishes have also used announcements at communion time and/or homily time to inform the people.

The best way to generate response is by getting members of the current council, staff and other parish leaders to offer names of people for consideration. They also must be encouraged to request others to recommend people. Person-to-Person communication is the most effective means of soliciting potential council members.

3. Publish a recommendation form asking for this information:

Candidate _____ Phone # _____

Reasons for recommending _____

Person recommending _____ Phone # _____

4. Contact all persons recommended:
 - Congratulate them on being recommended.
 - Affirm their gifts by mentioning the reasons for their recommendation. (If you wish to mention the name of the person recommending, you need their permission.)
 - Invite all of them to an initial session. Do not ask them if they want to serve on the council until after this session. If the session includes a meal, more people will come. A Saturday morning breakfast can work very well.
 - At the initial session, explain that you realize all these present will not be available to serve. Respect that. However, the purposes of this session are to:
 - acquaint as many people as possible with the operation of the council;
 - affirm the gifts of those called forth;
 - develop the support of the community for the work of the council;
 - create a pool of potential council members.

At this session prepare the candidates for the discernment process. If an interview method will be used, sign-up sheets for times can be provided.

DISCERNMENT PROCESS

SELECTING NEW PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL MEMBERS PASTORAL COUNCIL DISCERNMENT PROCESS (Option #1)

Two options for selection are presented in this handbook. We suggest that you read both and adapt them for use in your parish.

The questions on the following page are intended to help a person who is considering serving on a pastoral council with the discernment process. An interview based on these questions should be carried out in as comfortable, respectful and non-threatening a way as possible. Discerning that one is not called to serve on a pastoral council is an important and valid outcome for the interview.

The interviewer should communicate the following information:

In the Church, the call to serve comes from a person's efforts to live a Christ-like life. Others in this parish have seen Christ in you and have recognized that the gifts you have are valuable to this community. The interview process is for your benefit. It is a means of discerning your gifts and discovering if you are truly called to serve in the ministry of pastoral council at this time. You are free to decline to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. However, the interview is completely confidential. Nothing that passes among us will ever be spoken of outside this room.

The interview should begin with an appropriate prayer, such as:

*Together, let us pray for the help of the Holy Spirit as we begin; in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Come, Holy Spirit, fill our hearts and enkindle in us the fire of your love.*

The interview format can be copied and questions can be given to the person being interviewed on a typewritten sheet. The first side has questions, with spaces to answer them, that are designed to expose the data that will be the basis of the discernment. On the back side are questions which lead to the discernment decision.

This process winnows out so many people that the number of those who remain rarely exceeds the number of places to be filled. If there are more people willing to serve than there are places on the council, the members can be chosen by lot or by a modification of Option #1. It is advisable to fill the maximum number of slots at the beginning because the council will inevitably shrink once it is constituted. Also, any people that the pastor may consider appointing ought to go through the same discernment process at the same time as the others.

Recommendation ballots should have spaces for the name, address and phone number of the recommending person and a reason for the recommendation. Stating the reason for the recommendation is a means of affirming the candidate, helping him or her to discover the gifts in himself or herself that others see. Over time this affirmation of gifts becomes a strength for the community.

DISCERNMENT PROCESS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Beginning my discernment

In the space below each statement write a short phrase or sentence explaining why this quality might be necessary for a pastoral council member.

A person who demonstrates that his/her faith is alive and active.

A person who demonstrates commitment to this parish community.

Check five qualities on this list that you see yourself as having.

The ability:

- to listen and to articulate accurately what I have heard
- to inspire and lead others
- to make decisions
- to deal with conflict
- to follow through on my commitments
- to help the parish set its vision
- to work well in groups
- to delegate responsibilities
- to desire spiritual growth
- to be open to new ideas
- to be creative
- to take risks
- to feel comfortable working with others in a group where all are equals and no one dominates
- to be eager to serve the parish community
- to be enthusiastic about the possibilities of this parish
- to find enough time and focused energy to serve on the pastoral council (a minimum of 4-6 hours per month)

My greatest strength is: _____

I use this gift when I:

My greatest weakness is: _____

I am doing _____ to deal with it.

List all the church-related involvements you now have.

List all other involvements you now have.

When was the last time you made a commitment you later found you couldn't keep? What were the circumstances that made you change your mind?

Given your current commitments, do you see yourself as having time and focused energy for pastoral council involvement? (Remember, this is a minimum of 4-6 hours per month. It may require extra meetings or even "homework.")

Would you need to give up something in order to serve on the council? If so, what?

Are you willing to make that sacrifice? (The interviewer can press you on this, asking follow-up questions, if necessary.)

Do you have a primary leadership role in any parish group?

How could this help you as a member of the pastoral council?

How might this hinder you as a member of the pastoral council?

Group decision making involves the question: "What is the best thing for this group at this time in its history?" Would you be able to participate in this kind of process...

- listening to what each person on the council says...
- then seeking the group's consensus...
- letting go of your own personal agenda...?

Using your answers as part of your input, what do you think God is calling you to do regarding the ministry of pastoral councils?

SELECTING PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL MEMBERS (Option 2)

Each parish is encouraged to develop a method of selection which will call not only the most visible and active members to serve on the council but also quieter members. Below is one possible way to select councilors. Parishes are encouraged to adapt this method to suit their own circumstances and needs.

Step 1 Parish-wide education about the purpose and function of a parish pastoral council is undertaken.

Step 2 Parishioners are invited to submit the names of those they think would serve well as pastoral councilors. This might occur during Mass one weekend. Each parishioner would submit one name. Parishioners may submit their own names.

Step 3 Every person whose name is submitted is invited to a meeting which will last 4-6 hours. The only requirement for attendance is that the nominee must not be closed to the possibility of serving on the council. (Practice shows that usually only a small percentage of nominees will attend the meeting.)

Step 4 The meeting itself:

Participants:

Nominees, current council members and the pastor

Day:

Usually this works well on a Saturday or Sunday and includes refreshments or a meal. (Some parishes include a meal as a community experience.)

Space:

Must be large enough to allow all the participants to sit in a circle.

Equipment:

A chair for each participant, a small table, a chalk board or newsprint, two small boxes, many quarter sheets of paper of **two different colors**, name tags, pencils and a wastebasket.

Format:

Begin with a prayer.

Present an in-depth explanation of the role of the pastoral council and the responsibility of a council member. This could include information on the nature of consultation and the consensus process. Encourage nominees to ask questions in order to clear up any misunderstandings or gaps in their knowledge of what is being asked of them.

Rearrange the chairs into a circle with a small table in the center. Ask the participants to introduce themselves and to tell something about their family and their interests.

Two questions: How do you feel about this community now? What is your fondest hope for the future? (Process cards may be used to facilitate this discussion.)

Each person, including current council members, is asked to share his or her response to the question, "What is your fondest hope for our parish in the next 3/5/10 years?" No discussion is called for and no one is interrupted.

Each person is given one green and two gold quarter sheets of paper. (The colors of the paper don't matter, but they must be different.)

An appropriate Scripture passage is read. (A list of suggestions is included at the end.)

A period of silent prayer follows. Guidance is asked regarding two questions:

Are you personally willing to serve our parish as a pastoral councilor?

Who are the two persons in this group the Holy Spirit is calling to serve as members of the pastoral council?

Each person who is willing to serve as a pastoral councilor writes his or her name on the green sheet of paper. Anyone who chooses not to serve should write his/her name and "not eligible" on the paper.

Each person then writes on the gold piece of paper the names of the two persons they consider best qualified, persons they believe are being called to serve.

All sheets of paper are folded and collected in the small boxes.

All sheets of paper are opened by the facilitator and the names of all persons whose names appear on both sheets of paper are listed on the chalkboard or newsprint.

Break:

Following the break, the balloting process is repeated with only the gold sheets until the appropriate number of members has been discerned. This may take several rounds. Questioning and prayer could begin each round. (Additional questions are included at the end.)

The discernment process can include refreshments or a meal. The new council members are presented to the parish community at the time of their installation.

This process has the advantage over other forms of selection as it allows time for each person to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It respects persons and eliminates competition while providing a prayerful and peaceful atmosphere for the selection of pastoral council members.

*This process was adapted from **Today's Parish**, "The Right Way to Elect Officers."*

DISCERNMENT PROCESS
ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

1 Samuel 3:1-10
Wisdom 7:7-12
Matthew 5:1-10
John 15:14-17
Acts 1:21-26

1 Corinthians 12:4-11
1 Corinthians 12:12-17
1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Ephesians 3:14-19
Ephesians 4:3-6
Colossians 3:12-17

Possible to help with the process:

1. What do you see as the two biggest problems facing the parish this year?
2. What personal talents or skills would you draw upon in order to address these problems?
3. What are your dreams for the parish? What one thing would you like to see improved in the next five years?
4. How do you see the parish responding to the needs of the wider community?
5. What difficulties might you face as a member of a pastoral council?

DISCERNMENT PROCESS SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

These passages are offered in addition to those on page 33 of the Handbook for Consultative Bodies

Exodus 3:13 - 15	I Corinthians 16:13 - 14
1 Samuel 3:7 - 11	II Corinthians 1: 3 - 4
Wisdom 7:15 - 17	II Corinthians 4: 5 - 9
Sirach 1: 1 - 8	Galatians 3: 27 - 29
Sirach 4: 11 - 13	Ephesians 3: 14 - 21
Micah 6: 6 - 8	Ephesians 4: 3 - 13
Matthew 5: 1 - 10	Ephesians 5: 1 - 2
Matthew 18: 1 - 4	Ephesians 6: 10 - 11
Matthew 18: 19 - 20	Ephesians 6: 18
John 15: 14 - 31	Philippians 1: 3 - 6
John 17: 20 - 23	Philippians 1: 9 - 10
Romans 1: 8 - 12	Philippians 4: 4 - 7
Romans 5: 1 - 2	Colossians 2: 6 - 8
Romans 8: 28	Colossians 3: 12- 17
Romans 8: 35 - 39	I Thessalonians 1: 2 - 3
Romans 11: 33 - 36	I Thessalonians 5: 14 - 22
Romans 16: 25 - 27	I Thessalonians 5: 23 - 24
I Corinthians 1: 1 - 3	II Thessalonians 1: 11 - 12
I Corinthians 1: 4 - 9	I Peter 1: 3 - 5
I Corinthians 4: 1 - 2	I Peter 1: 6 - 9
I Corinthians 10: 31 - 33	I Peter 2: 4 - 10
I Corinthians 12: 4 - 11	I Peter 4: 7 - 11
I Corinthians 12: 12 - 17	I Peter 4: 12 - 13
I Corinthians 13: 1 - 3	II Peter 1: 3 - 7
I Corinthians 15: 58	II Peter 3: 8 - 9

Questions for Discernment

What are the two biggest challenges facing our parish this year?

How does this parish respond to the needs of the wider community? How could it do more?

What do you like best about this parish?

What Beatitude do you think best describes this parish?

How does this parish help you live your vocation as a child of God?

What does this parish do that helps people become better Christians? Name two ways it could do this more effectively?

WRITING A CHARTER

A charter outlines the operation of the council. Each operating body of the parish should have a carefully prepared charter in order to have a defined sense of purpose and operating guidelines.

A charter should include the following:

- **The Name of the Organization**

- **The Parish Mission Statement**

The parish mission statement is the community's description of itself and its exercise of ministry. Each parish is a unique, Spirit-filled community and as such it should articulate its mission.

- **The Purpose of the Organization**

Each organization of the parish, especially the parish pastoral council and parish finance council, should have a clear understanding of its role in carrying out the parish mission.

- **Membership**

The charter should state explicitly how the membership is constituted and the means of establishing its membership. This is especially important for the pastoral council and the finance council whose membership may be determined by a variety of means (discernment, selection or appointment).

- **Organization Structure**

Most organizations require a record keeper (secretary), a facilitator (chairperson) and/or an agenda committee. The charter should describe the structure of the organization and spell out how and by whom these organizational function will be carried out.

- **Meetings**

The charter should specify the number of meetings each year and their regularity as well as the principles governing open meetings and executive sessions (if any).

- **Updating of the Charter**

The charter should be reviewed and updated periodically. The regularity of review as well as the means of review and amendment should be described by the charter.

TRAINING OF NEW PASTORAL COUNCIL MEMBERS

This is one possible approach to training new pastoral council members. The committee charged with responsibility for designing the training can critique this approach and polish it to suit their needs.

Step 1 Brainstorming (What do new council members need to know?)

Step 2 Prioritizing (What are the most important things they need to know?)

Step 3 Discovering resources (What resources are available in the parish? What resources are available in the diocese?)

Step 4 Developing ways to communicate the information to the new council and developing ways for the new council to process the information.

Step 5 Designing the training process (How many times will the council meet for training? When? Where? Who will conduct the training sessions? What format will be used?)

Step 6 Designing an instrument to evaluate the training

Step 7 Implementing the training process

Step 8 Evaluating the training process

WRITING A PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

(Option #1)

- Step 1** The Parish Pastoral Council decides that a parish Mission Statement is needed. As many members of the parish as possible should be invited to participate.
- Step 2** The parish is invited to become involved in a process of establishing the direction for the parish and its goals for the next three years.
- Step 3** Parishioners are invited to articulate dreams for the parish during a Sunday liturgy or a town hall meeting or some other large assembly.
- Step 4** Two all-parish assemblies are held when parishioners develop priorities and goals based upon the dreams they have articulated.

SCHEDULE:

1. One month prior to "Dream Sunday" a letter is sent from the pastor or the Pastoral Council, explaining what is being planned and giving the dates of the program. Bulletin announcements containing the same information run every week for a month.
2. One week before "Dream Sunday" a presentation of the history of the parish is given along with a talk explaining the reasons for "Dream Sunday." Cards are handed out to all present. The cards say: "My dream for this parish community by the year _____ is:"
3. On "Dream Sunday" parishioners are asked to hand in their "dream cards."
4. Mission Statement Committee members compile a "dream list," which includes all the dreams from the "dream cards."
5. First Assembly (2 - 2 1/2 hours):
 - Opening Prayer.
 - "Dream List" presentation
 - Study and reflection on the "Dream List".
 - Individuals are asked to focus the dreams into possible goal issues for accomplishment in a fixed amount of time (possibly 3-5 years).
 - Small groups are formed. Participants share goals issues and arrive at a consensus concerning a limited number of goal issues (3-5 perhaps).
 - Each small group presents these goal issues to the large gathering.
 - Closing prayer.
6. After the First Assembly, committee members compile a list of all goal issues.

7. Second assembly (2 - 2 1/2 hours):
 - Opening prayer.
 - Goal issues are presented to participants.
 - Individuals determine priority issues.
 - Small groups are formed. Individual priorities are shared and each group determines by consensus 3 priority issues.
 - Each small group presents its priority issues to the large gathering.
 - Large gathering determines by consensus the priority issues of the parish.
 - Closing prayer.
8. The Mission Statement Committee writes goals from the consensus of the large assembly.
9. The Committee presents the goals to the Parish Pastoral Council. The goals are published in the bulletin.
10. The Parish Pastoral Council writes and publishes a Mission Statement for the parish based on the goals. The council also recommends policy objectives for the coming year.

WRITING A PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

(Option #2)

First Meeting

Opening reading: Matt 16:13-19, followed by time for reflection and prayer. An explanation of the purpose of the four meetings follows. A speaker presents a talk on the nature of the Church which will provide the background for preparing a Mission Statement.

Second Meeting

(Could begin with a short ice breaker to provide a congenial atmosphere for discussion and sharing.)

Opening reading: Deuteronomy 30:11-14, followed by time for reflection and prayer.

Small groups of 5-6 people are formed. These groups discuss the questions of the first work sheet. A secretary in each group can keep notes.

Break -- 10 minutes

Short exercise -- 10 minutes: After the break ask each person to prioritize the Models of the Church according to which he or she feels this parish is called to be. (Second Work sheet)

Small groups re-form -- 30 minutes: Each person shares his/her priority rating. The group discusses priorities until a consensus is reached on the highest priority for the parish. The group secretary records the results.

Large group reassembles: The consensus decisions of the small groups are presented to the assembly. The secretary should record them on chalkboard or newsprint for all to see.

Closing prayer.

Third Meeting

Time for re-bonding (15 minutes)

Opening reading: The first paragraph from the Preface to The Church in the Modern World.

Individual reflection -- 10 minutes: Each person should reflect on and list his or her answers to this question: "What needs of the world and issues of society should the Church be concerned about today?"

Small group -- 30 minutes: The small group develops a consensus on five issues the Church should be concerned about. These are written on newsprint and posted for all to see.

Individual reflection -- 10 minutes: Each person should reflect on and list the needs of this

community (city, town, neighborhood, parish) that the parish should be concerned and doing something about.

Small groups -- 30 minutes: The small group again shares and comes to a consensus on five issues the parish should be concerned and doing something about.

Break -- 15-20 minutes

Individual reflection -- 10 minutes: Reflect on and list the needs of persons living in the community that the parish should minister to. (Everyone is encouraged to consider his or her own needs.)

Small groups -- 30 minutes: Share in small groups and come to a consensus on five issues. Write on newsprint and post.

One person from each small group is asked to help adapt the suggestions so they can be distributed to the whole parish. Copies of the third work sheet and the Diocesan Mission Statement should be given to all participants. They are asked to reflect on these before the last meeting.

Final Meeting

Re-bonding -- 15 minutes

Opening reading: Habakkuk 2:2-3, followed by time for reflection and prayer.

Small groups -- 30 minutes: Each small group is asked to write a Mission Statement based upon the discussion the group has had. Be sure to include consideration of the Diocesan Mission Statement.

Large group -- Small group Mission Statements and any suggestions from the parish at large are discussed. Consensus should be developed on the main points of parish identity and mission which will be included in the final statement.

The Pastoral Council or volunteers from this assembly could be charged with writing the final Mission Statement. The final Mission Statement should be published for the whole parish. It could serve as the starting point of all future planning for the parish.

From the Diocese of Galveston/Houston Parish Council Handbook.

**FIRST WORKSHEET
SUGGESTED QUESTIONS**

1. Please rank the following purposes of this parish in the order in which you feel they are important. (#1 -- most important; #8 -- least important)

- _____ To offer the liturgy of praise
- _____ To proclaim the Good News
- _____ To be a witness and a sign of God's Kingdom on earth
- _____ To be a community that shares in the fellowship of Christ
- _____ To save my soul
- _____ To provide moral guidance
- _____ To feed the hungry, visit the sick, care for the poor and forgive sinners
- _____ To be an education center

2. Belonging to this parish is a way of saying: (choose two)

- _____ I am living God in community
- _____ I believe in God
- _____ I am a Catholic
- _____ I am involved
- _____ It is another home
- _____ This is where I worship
- _____ Other _____

3. The two things I like best about this parish:

4. The two things I like least about this parish:

5. What would you like your children to remember about this parish?

6. If you had \$100 to divide among the various activities and services of our parish, how would

you allocate the money?

Religious Education	_____
Day School	_____
Adult Education	_____
Charity within the parish	_____
Charity outside of the parish	_____
Ecumenical activities	_____
Spiritual activities	_____
Administrative activities	_____
Leadership development	_____
Other _____	_____

7. Write the one word or phrase which means the same thing as the "parish" to you.

8. Listed below are some world needs and issues of society about which the Christian church should be concerned today. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement in the following manner:
 - 1 -- Agree
 - 2 -- No feeling
 - 3 -- Disagree
9. Listed below are some needs and concerns of this community (city, town neighborhood) about which our parish should be concerned and doing something. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement in the manner indicated in #8.
10. Facilitator provides list of some needs of persons in this church and living in this community to which our parish should minister. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement in the manner indicated in #8.

SECOND WORKSHEET MODELS OF CHURCH

MODEL	STRESSES	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Institution	Visible Organization Buildings Rules and regulations Authority and obedience Precisely determined: · way of worship · formula of belief · moral code Tradition Clear-cut system of procedures & discipline	Church has roots of tradition Continuity with the past Effective with large number of people	Clericalism Juridicalism Triumphalism
Community	Parish as family Church as people of God Inner ties of faith, grace and love Personal relationships Value as person and personal presence	Membership by relationship more than registration	In excess, risks, secularism, personalism, elitism Discontinuity with tradition "Country Club" atmosphere
Sacrament	Church as visible sign of Christ's presence "Source and Summit" of Christian life Worship of God in word and sacrament Church is present in an actual present event	Worshipping community Rich symbolism & ritual Intimate relationship with life and resurrection of Jesus Christ	Dogmatic proclamation (institution) Rampant verbalism without guidance (community)
Herald	Hope and promise Proclaim the Good News The Kingship of God is at hand Flows from the Church as sacrament Prophetic character	Scriptural enrichment Propels outward Evangelization	
Servant	Service Compassion Changing the world for the better Christians work for others against oppression, violence & discrimination	Wounded healer to the world To preach and practice justice	Political – identification with political movements Political identity rather than church identity Secularism – identification of church mission with that of society

THIRD WORKSHEET
MISSION STATEMENT WORKSHEET

WHO ARE WE?

Nature of the group --

Location --

Description of membership --

Ethnic makeup
Financial status
Age, sex
Families, singles, etc.

To whom are we accountable?

With whom are we in relationship?

How are we unique?

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

WHAT ARE WE "CALLED" TO DO?

Purpose of the parish --

Services provided (include groups served) --

GETTING COMMITTEES AND OTHER ACTION GROUPS STARTED

Pastoral councils may be faced with the task of developing effective committees to do the work of the parish. A distinction should be made between ad hoc committees and standing committees. Ad hoc committees may be structured in any way that suits their purpose. The following paragraphs outline important steps in the formation of standing committees.

RECRUITING*:

- Approach prospective members individually. Personal contact is more powerful than an announcement in the bulletin.
- Do not be afraid to use the Gospel message in inviting people to become involved. A relationship to the faith should be the primary motivation to serve.
- Let the prospective member know how his or her skill and knowledge are valuable to the community.
- Define the responsibilities that the person will be taking on. People are much more likely to become involved when they understand what is expected of them.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERS:

- The person should have interest in and knowledge of the area of responsibility and be willing to learn more about it.
- All on the committee should understand how the committee relates to other parish organizations, the staff and the pastor and how the work of the committee relates to overall parish goals.
- Committee members should be willing to search out the needs of the people, and respond to those needs.
- Committee members should be able to work effectively with others.

ORGANIZATION*: Once a committee is formed, it could follow these steps in organization:

1. Elects or selects a chairperson and a secretary.
2. Develops a process of ongoing education.
3. Defines its purpose and writes a purpose statement.
4. Researches diocesan guidelines in order to identify resources and programs which will help it get its work done.
5. Assigns members specific tasks or develops sub-groups to cover certain areas, such as calendar planning or program development.
6. Sets goals for one year (and long-range goals for 3-5 years), and develops objectives which will carry out the goals.
7. Prays together and forms a community of faith within the larger parish community.
8. Works with the Finance Council to develop a budget.
9. Develops a system of self-evaluation.

* Recruiting and organizing adapted from *the New Practical Guide for Parish Councils*, by William Rademacher.

DEVELOPING A PARISH SURVEY

Often, decision-making in a parish can be facilitated by asking members of the parish for their opinion. A survey can be a useful way to gather those opinions. The Office of Parish Planning at the Catholic Center, (817) 560-3300 X115 can furnish samples of informal surveys.

A more thorough and scientific, formal evaluation of parish needs and parish programs is available from The Parish Evaluation Project, Rev. Thomas Sweetser, O'Hare Lake Office Plaza, 2200 East Devon, Suite 283, Des Plaines, Illinois 60018, (708) 297-2080. This self-analysis tool for parishes, adaptable to parish office computers for analysis, breakdown tables, cross tables and stats is called *Informed*. It includes a notebook and computer software, surveys, material for a random sample and a six hour group process to help the parish set priorities.

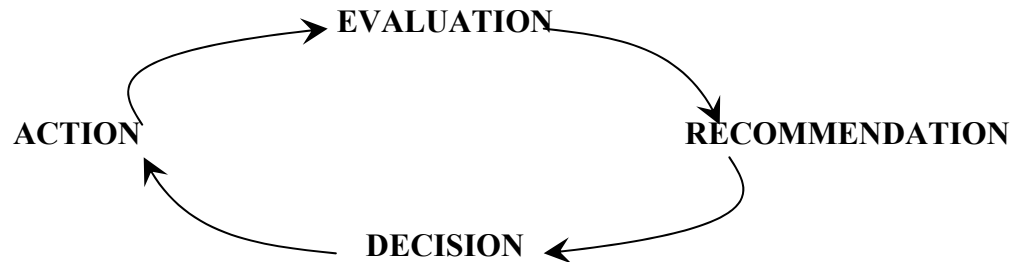
Informed, and other models of opinion surveys are available. Councils desiring more information are encouraged to call the Office of Parish Planning at the Catholic Center, (817) 560-3300 X115.

UNDERSTANDING THE POWER CYCLE

THE POWER CYCLE*: HOW PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER

The Power Cycle is a way of understanding group dynamics. It describes the cycle a parish progresses through in carrying out its work. The Power Cycle is valuable for demonstrating the roles of various persons and groups in getting the work done. When groups have a clear idea of how their work fits into the total picture, they can better understand how they relate to one another.

POLICY-DEVELOPING STAGES



POLICY-IMPLEMENTING STAGES

Stage 1 -- Evaluation: Evaluation is going on all the time in a parish. Usually, it is informal, random and unorganized. By formalizing evaluation the energy of the people is captured, helping them to work together for the good of all. If this energy is not tapped, it becomes destructive gossip, complaints, dissatisfaction and alienation.

In Pastoral Councils, evaluation is done through an intentional process of assessing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, potential, dreams and vision of the parish. It begins with the council's looking at what is currently going on, and the relationships that exist among groups. Evaluation is a process of discerning what God has done and is doing in this congregation of God's people.

Pastoral planning begins with evaluation.

Stage 2 -- Recommendation: Once a congregation has a realistic perception of itself -- where it is coming from (its story and identity), and where it is going (its dream, vision and mission) -- it can develop possible courses of action. Recommendation includes assessment of a program's needed support and the resources available to provide that support. It also includes sensitivity to the relationship that exists among all aspects of parish life.

The key to developing good recommendations is to produce as many optional courses of action and methods for engaging in the action as possible.

Stage 3 -- Decision: Once alternative recommendations have been developed, decisions will be made about which course of action will be followed. Caution: Goals should be achievable. People commonly attempt more action than they have the energy, personnel or resources to support. Failure to achieve unrealistic goals can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, frustration and competition between groups.

Decision includes delegating responsibility for implementing the actions. It also includes recommending resources where necessary.

Stage 4 -- Action: Action follows decision. Those responsible for the action phase should have a clear understanding of the assignment and its relationship to the overall purpose and goals of the Church and the parish. Action is facilitated by careful attention to schedules and timelines and by regular and visible support for those responsible for the action.

Stage 5 -- Evaluation: Action is always followed by evaluation and the cycle begins again. When the energy available to an organization flows through this cycle, it grows and builds upon its own success. If the energy does not flow through this cycle, it seeks other outlets. At best, the energy which would have been available to the organization is lost. At worst, the energy can be turned into destructive force within the organization.

* Adapted from *The Power Cycle*, Management Design Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio.

SHARED WISDOM: A PROCESS OF DISCERNMENT/CONSENSUS

"For this command which I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, 'Who will go up in the sky and get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' Nor is it across the sea that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea, to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out." Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Communal discernment is a process undertaken by a community of people bound together by a common desire to do God's will, and as a community for the purpose of judging what God is calling that community to be and do. There are three assumptions which should be made about communal discernment: 1) no one person alone has ears big enough to hear the infinitely rich Word of God; 2) peace cannot be attained by unpeaceful means, because discord will always flow into the result; and 3) a group does not "discern" trivial matters; issues arise from needs and from the group's identity and mission.

Consensus building is a learned skill, practiced within the process of finding God's will in a decision to be made (discernment). In consensus, a decision is reached which all can support even if there is some disagreement on the issue or proposal involved. The group involved in using consensus must look upon itself as friends seeking the truth together. Substantial agreement is sought, contrasting with other methods like voting in which a decision may be made more expediently, but the group may remain divided. In consensus, an effort is made to seek the participation of all members of the group and to take into consideration the impact of the decision on the entire parish.

It is important at the beginning of the discernment/consensus process to be clear on the nature of the proposal or issue on how the decision will be made in order to avoid unspoken differing expectations of roles in the decision-making process.

In building consensus, it is crucial, also, to first build relationships which enable consensus to happen. An atmosphere of openness, truth and trust is essential or the group may end up with a false consensus. People will feel more comfortable about being truthful if such an atmosphere has been created. Care should be taken to arrange the room in a way that inspires consensus (don't line people up along one long table!) and to create an atmosphere of prayerfulness and reasonable comfort.

People sometimes find it difficult to openly disagree and may express their reluctance by using words like "yeah" or "sure," which may mean they are still expressing some degree of "no." The facilitator/chairperson may need to elicit a clearer response in the process of testing for agreement. It is up to the facilitator/chairperson to "manage" the consensus process so all persons are heard and an atmosphere of cooperation prevails.

Discernment/consensus almost always takes more time at the beginning than other methods. However, it can also turn out to be more "efficient" than other methods in the long-term view, because ownership of a decision by a council leads to their firm support and thus better implementation and more positive community impact. Decisions made quickly tend to lack support in the implementation phase and thus turn out to be ineffective.

Finally, if the group is to truly discern the best direction for the parish in the light of the Gospel and

the parish mission, all members must learn how to pray, reflect and dialogue together in authentic discernment. Other predispositions to discernment are: interior freedom in order to hear God's voice; a sense of balance about preferences; willingness to listen and to share; non-judgmental attitude; ability to risk; and a surrendering of efforts to know the future. A question to be asked throughout the process is: Is it of God or of our own selfishness? When people are in tune with the mind and Spirit of God, God's wish for the people and their wish for God are one (covenant). God wants people to become truly themselves!

★ ★ ★ ★

Parish councils and committees are encouraged to use the following process and refine or adapt it to their needs.

Before the Meeting

Each council member prepares his/her position on an issue as well as possible, realizing that the task is incomplete until the missing pieces are supplied by other members of the council. Each person has a part of the truth. In order to do this preparation, members should have the agenda and issues/proposals under study (worded exactly as they will be presented) at least seven days before the meeting. The chairperson/facilitator must make certain all needed information is available to the council, including at least two alternatives for each proposal. She/he also checks to see if further expertise from a source outside the council/committee system is needed. Each member must be able to assimilate this basic information in order to be part of the discernment. Vision, sensitivity and prayer are essential in order to enter into the discernment process. EACH MEMBER PRAYS PRIVATELY OVER THE ISSUE OR PROPOSAL, ASKING FOR DISCERNMENT OF THE SPIRIT AND DISPOSING HIM/HERSELF TO GOD'S WISDOM.

At the Meeting

(If the council is not scheduled to consider a major issue or proposal at the meeting, they will wish to spend their usual one-third meeting time in prayer, reflection and study; if a major proposal is to be under consideration, the initial prayer may be relatively brief in favor of making prayer and reflection an integral part of the discernment/consensus process.)

Step 1: Prayer and Reflection on Scripture

The council member responsible for prayer at the meeting leads a period of shared prayer for purity of heart and for trust in each other and in the Holy Spirit. A scripture reading and reflection that relates to the matter under consideration sets the tone for decision-making and helps council members to put the matter into a spiritual and communal perspective.

Step 2: Gathering the Evidence

The chairperson/facilitator states the issue or proposal clearly (not as a question) and asks each member to express his/her opinion explaining it fully but briefly (no rambling) so the rest of the council will have the benefit of all the members' thinking. This leads to a deeper understanding of the matter under consideration.

Each member listens to the opinions and feelings of all the other members and is ready to modify his/her own position on the basis of logic, understanding and sensitivity to the common good. (It is important that each member tries to listen to what the group is saying rather than listening only to what individuals in the group are saying -- this is the beginning of common understanding.) Consensus can be reached only when members of the group are open to listening and modifying

their positions.

During this corporate listening process, no discussion or questions are allowed. Members of the group may wish to jot down questions or points to be raised, additional options or possible obstacles. EACH MEMBER STRIVES TO DEVELOP A PRAYERFUL SENSE OF THE COMMON GOOD IN HIS/HER OWN HEART AS HE/SHE LISTENS. A BRIEF PERIOD OF PRAYER FOR COMMITMENT TO GROUP DECISION FOLLOWS THIS STEP.

Step 3: Communal Dialogue

In this step, the group as a whole searches out the most acceptable solution, constantly testing for conformance with parish mission, faith tradition and diocesan policy. The facilitator begins to identify points of agreement or disagreement as members share insights, pros and cons, problems, obstacles and options, testing periodically to see if a consensus is surfacing. Each member's question, clarification or comment should move the group toward a decision. Debate or repetition of already-stated positions IS discouraged. Conflict-reducing techniques, such as voting, compromising or giving in to keep the peace, also are to be avoided. Differences of opinion are both natural and expected -- in exploring differences, the best course of action will gradually become apparent. GROUP MEMBERS MAY AGAIN ENTER INTO PRAYER TO REMAIN IN TOUCH WITH GOD'S WILL.

Step 4: Identifying Consensus

When the facilitator/chairperson feels the group has reached the optimal level of agreement and support, he/she tries to articulate the consensus that is present, stating the decision as it has been shaped and reshaped by the communal dialogue. If there is agreement, the group moves into the next step (confirmation). If not, no consensus is present and Step 3, including prayer, may need to be repeated. A question which could be used at this point is: does anyone care to speak before the Lord, to share from the heart? If substantial disagreement still exists, it may not be possible to reach consensus on the issue during that meeting. Further research and a referral back to the committee may be necessary.

Step 5: Confirmation

When a consensus has been reached, the group prays over it to experience God's confirmation of the decision. Group members will have feelings of deep inner peace, joy, graced energy and satisfaction. They will feel comfortable when considering how it will work over time and how it will be accepted by the rest of the parish. THE GROUP PRAYS TOGETHER IN PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING.

Step 6: Planning For Implementation

The council can develop recommendations for action and establish goals to be met by those implementing the decision.

Resource: Office For Parish Councils, P. O. Box 2018, Milwaukee, WI 53201

HOLDING A TOWN HALL MEETING

In order to hold an effective Town Hall Meeting these questions should be asked:

Purpose:

- What is the meeting intended to accomplish?
- What is the goal of the meeting?
- What is the desired result of the meeting?

Participants:

- Who should be invited? Why?
- How does inviting this person/these people fulfill the purpose or goal of the meeting?

When and where the meeting will be held:

- What is the best time (date, day of the week, hour) for those invited?
- Where (considering the size of space and comfort of those invited) should the meeting be held?

Format:

- The format depends on the goal of the meeting.
- Is input requested from those invited?
- What is the best way to achieve input? Individual addresses? Small group discussion?

Participants will feel that their input was not desired when:

- the meeting is structured in such a way that they do not have an opportunity to speak;
- leaders argue with or discount the input of any participants;
- no record of the participants' comments is kept.

If input is desired, do not load the meeting with presentations.

If the purpose of the meeting is to share information, use good visual aids (power point, overhead transparencies, handouts, charts, etc.). If you want to get information across, see to it that it is well presented.

Hospitality:

- How will the participants feel welcome? (name tags, refreshments, etc.)

Who does what?

- Who chairs the meeting?
- Who welcomes the people?
- Who makes the presentations?
- Who sets up the chairs and prepares the space?
- Who records the meeting and/or facilitates discussion?

BRAINSTORMING PROCESS

Materials needed: Paper and pencils for each person, newsprint and markers or chalk board and chalk

1. Identify the focus question and write on a board or newsprint where everyone can see it.
2. Allow 3-5 minutes quiet time for everyone to write his or her response to the question. The goal is to get as many ideas as possible. Encourage creativity.
3. Invite every person to share his or her list of ideas. Record them where everyone can see them. The sharing can be structured, with every person taking a turn, or free-form. Be sure everyone says something.
4. As ideas are recorded, each person should jot down any further ideas that occur, sharing them with the group when appropriate.
5. Brainstorming continues as long as ideas are being generated. This is usually no more than 15-20 minutes.
6. Review the ideas as presented, clarifying where necessary and drawing together similar ideas into categories.

Note: No quality judgments may be made during brainstorming. All ideas are acceptable.

DEVELOPING AN AGENDA

A meeting's agenda is an important tool. A good agenda keeps the meeting focused on the work of the organization and assures that the goals and priorities of the organization are kept in mind.

Agenda development should:

- include the process of clarifying the reason for the meeting and the hoped for outcomes;
- be the work of the agenda committee;
- be an open process during which anyone can make suggestions.

The agenda itself should:

- concern activities pertinent to the goals of the committee;
- include "fact sheets" -- background information on complicated issues when necessary;
- include time for prayer and ongoing education.

The Pastoral Council agenda should concentrate only on pastoral matters of concern to the entire parish. When deciding if an item belongs on its agenda, the council should ask these questions:

- Must this be decided by the council, or should it be sent to a commission or committee?
- What instructions or suggestions might the council give the committee or commission regarding this item?
- Does the issue demand a policy statement, guidelines or directives for future reference from the council?
- Does this issue require the discernment of the entire parish?

A POSSIBLE MODEL AGENDA

Gathering Time/Check In: Invite members to share a significant event in their personal life or in the life of the parish since the last meeting. (15 minutes)

Prayer: A vital element since the work of the council is to discern the will of God for the parish. The prayer might be patterned after the Liturgy of the Hours or take a variety of forms as members take turns preparing and leading (20 minutes)

Purpose of the Meeting: Statement of goals for the meeting. Agreement on the agenda and approval of the minutes are included. The priorities set for the meeting should be recorded. (10 minutes)

Visioning and Planning: The main body of the meeting for an action council. It will include discussion of items previously handled in council. *Visioning* is being open to the call of the Holy Spirit to imagine the possibilities for the parish. *Planning* includes assessment of needs, discovery of resources available to meet the needs, and recommending clear direction for response to the needs using parish resources. (40 minutes)

Pastor's Concerns/Continuing Education: Members can take turns leading the education section of the meeting. Resources include the diocesan Pastoral Plan, bishops' pastorals, books, the materials in the appendix of this handbook, and articles from current periodicals. (15 minutes)

Reflection, Evaluation, Closing Prayer: (15 minutes)

Sample Agenda

Annual Evaluation and Planning Session(s) for Rural and/or Small Parishes (This process may take two meetings to accomplish)

Gathering Time (opening conversation)

- What is most important about our parish and its parishioners?
- What am I most grateful about in our parish?

Prayer The prayer might be patterned after the Liturgy of the Hours. Whatever form it takes, a significant amount of time should be invested since the work of the council is to discern the will of God for the parish.

Who Are We? Reflection on the state of the parish

- Population
- Ages
- Income
- Mass attendance
- Sacramental statistics
- Youth statistics
- Ethnic make-up
- Ministries in the parish
- Parish activities
- Fundraisers

How Are We Doing? Evaluation of the present plan

- Describe how well each goal and objective was accomplished.

Where Do We Go From Here? Planning for the Future

- What does our demographic data suggest for the future?
- What do we need to continue to work on from the present plan?
- Given everything that we've heard and discussed, what does the parish need to concentrate its energy on in the coming three years?
- Of everything we've mentioned, what will we name as our priorities for the coming three years?

Sample Agenda

Regular Meetings for Rural and/or Small Parishes

Gathering Time/Check In

Invite members to share a significant event in their personal life or in the life of the parish since the last meeting.

Prayer

The prayer might be patterned after the Liturgy of the Hours. Whatever form it takes, a substantial amount of time should be invested since the work of the council is to discern the will of God for the parish.

Meeting Purpose

Discussion of goals for the meeting (What do we want to accomplish by the end of this meeting?) Agenda items should have clearly stated objectives for example:

Agenda item might be: “ Discuss Parish Volunteer Drive”

List of objectives:

- Form committees and name committee chairs to accomplish each major task.*
- Brainstorm about areas of need and outreach methods.*

Pastor’s concerns/Study and Reflection

This time can be used for discussion of elements of the diocesan Pastoral Plan, articles from current periodicals, other bishops’ pastorals, or materials from the “Resources” section of this handbook.

Reports/Announcements

Planning for next meeting

- Agenda items or discussion for the next meeting

Meeting Evaluation

- Did we accomplish what we set out to do at this meeting?

Closing Prayer and Adjournment

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

CRITERIA

WHAT TO REFLECT ON

A MEETING IS SATISFYING IF:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. We know what we are gathered to do | Agenda |
| 2. There is clear sensitive leadership | Delegation of process leadership |
| 3. Members come prepared to whatever extent is necessary | Homework, work sheets |
| 4. Other memberships and agendas shut down, i.e. phone | Protection of the commitment |
| 5. The time frame is clear and honored | Promptness and closure |
| 6. The flow of the meeting is humane | Pacing |
| 7. There is enough time to accomplish what we set for ourselves | Limited objectives |
| 8. Participants own and value what they are doing | Agenda development |
| 9. Individuals are valued as persons | Inclusion |
| 10. Discussions are brought to appropriate degree of closure | Next steps |
| 11. Responsibility for continued development is fixed | Delegation |
| 12. The meeting design provides for further improvement | Evaluation: Where are you now? How do you feel about our meeting today? |
| 13. Group time is used for the group, individual and sub-group work allowed for | Design: group and individual work |

MDI-381 M

Adapted from Management Design Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio

ROLES FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

One model for successful meetings assigns roles to all in attendance. Everyone thus shares equally the responsibility for the meeting's success. In addition, the various roles help tune individuals in the group to the dynamics of the group. This is an effective way to help individuals transcend their personal interests and points of view and develop a stake in the larger interests of the group.

This worksheet might be helpful in organizing a meeting by assigning roles and responsibilities. This worksheet was developed by Father Jonathan Scalone, Pastor of St. Philip the Apostle Parish, Lewisville. The original plan was suggested by the Parish Evaluation Project by Thomas Sweetser, S.J.

Facilitator (FAC): Responsible for managing the agenda; staying on the subject; giving everyone a chance to speak.

Recorder (REC): Keeps the minutes.

Process Watcher (PW): Keeps the time.

Vibes Watcher (VW): Keeps track of the emotional climate; tells people when things are getting heated, uncomfortable, at ease, satisfied, etc.

Devil's Advocate (DA): Poses contrary questions: "What if ..."

Agenda Item – Each agenda item is marked with the following information

"Member" -- Who is responsible.

"Information" -- What background is needed (should be included when agenda is mailed one week prior to meeting).

"Decision" -- Decision needed.

"Feedback" -- Does the person want feedback and discussion?

"New Business" -- Is this the first time this item has appeared on the agenda?

"Time" -- How much time is allocated to this item? If time runs out and further discussion or decision is wanted, the item is put on the list for the next meeting. Additional information that may be needed is also noted.

"Next Meeting" -- At the end of the meeting the agenda is begun for the next meeting and roles are assigned.

MEETING WORKSHEET

MEETING _____ **DATE:** _____ **TIME:** _____ **LOCATION:** _____
FAC: _____ **REC:** _____ **PW:** _____ **VW:** _____ **DA:** _____
OPENING: _____ **MINUTES APPROVAL:** _____ **AGENDA ADDITION:** _____ **AGENDA PRIORITIZATION:** _____
ROUNDS/ Q & A: _____
FUTURE DATES _____
MEMBERS ATTENDING: _____
MEMBERS NOT ATTENDING: _____

AGENDA ITEM	MEMBER	INFORMATION	DECISION	FEED BACK	PLANNING	NEW BUSINESS	TIME				
								1	2	3	4

MEETING CONCLUSION/EVALUATION _____

NEXT MEETING: _____ TIME: _____ FAC _____ REC _____ PW _____ VW _____ DA _____

AGENDA

AGENDA ITEM	MEMBER	INFORMATION	DECISION	FEED BACK	PLANNING	NEW BUSINESS	TIME	1	2	3	4
1											
2											
3											
4											
5											
6											
7											

AGENDA KEY FOR USE WITH THE MEETING WORKSHEET

1. **INFORMATION ITEMS:** These issues can be mentioned and treated quickly so that everyone on the commission is kept informed about current events and will communicate these to their own groups or ministers.
2. **DECISION ITEMS:** These are issues that have already been discussed at previous meetings but now it is time to come to a decision for action. If people have had time to think and pray over these matters, the decisions should be easily made. No need for any parliamentary procedure. In fact, these decisions should be done with consensus so that everyone can accept and live with the results. Discussion continues until consensus is reached.
3. **FEEDBACK ITEMS:** This is the time people can give one another feedback about events or situations that have been happening within the scope of the commission's work, both strengths and needs.
4. **PLANNING ITEMS:** These are areas that need preparation and thought. No decision need be made at the moment but people should begin thinking and making plans about them for the future.
5. **NEW BUSINESS:** There might be a few items that have come up since the agenda was made up or that individuals want to bring to the group. Hopefully, they can be voiced and then put on the agenda for the following meeting so that they don't take up too much extra time at the end of the meeting.

CONCLUSION/EVALUATION: After the above items have been handled, but no later than ten minutes before quitting time, people are given a chance to give feedback on how the meeting went, whether everyone had a chance to speak, and whether people were listening to each other, etc. This is a time for talking about the process of the meeting and not about any of the items of business. This will help improve communication for the next meeting.

CHECK LIST: Use the check list to deal with the above items:

1. Is this a big matter that the council has to handle or can it be funneled to one of the committees or sub-groups?
2. Do we need to hold a group accountable, empower them or have them gather information for us to act on at a later date?
3. Do we need to set a policy or give an over-all direction for the parish on this issue?
4. Is this a big enough issue to go to the people within a discernment process?

DECIDING WHO DOES WHAT BY WHEN

Once goals and objectives have been set, specific actions to fulfill them are determined. Use these work sheets to aid committee members as they delegate tasks.

Description and Work Summary

Name of Task Force/Committee/Work Group:

Convener:

Members:

Responsibilities:

Term of Service: _____

Effective Date: _____

Reporting Date: _____

Date work is to be completed: _____

Through whom does the group relate to the pastor? _____

FLOW CHART

What steps will be taken to achieve the goal?	Who will be responsible for the step?	When is it to be done?	What resources will be needed for this step?	What will the result/product be?