

Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines

Introduction

A parish pastoral council is a consultative body engaged in common pastoral visioning and planning, and in the fostering of pastoral action in the threefold ministry of the church:

1. its teaching ministry
2. its prayer and worship
3. its shepherding ministry

This threefold ministry responds to the threefold mission of Christ: to teach, to sanctify and to serve.

In 2005, the Archbishop of Winnipeg issued guidelines for the establishment and functioning of parish pastoral councils. The establishment of the Archdiocesan and the Deanery pastoral councils has necessitated the revision of these guidelines.

The anticipated outcome of this update is that the spirit of Vatican II, expressed in the council documents and the code of canon law, will be fully implemented. All Catholics are called to share in the life and mission of the church. The parish pastoral council is an essential body through which the responsibility of pastoral visioning, planning and action is shared.

Mission – vs – Maintenance

From the outset, it should be understood that parish pastoral councils are to focus on the church's mission, not the maintenance of its facilities or organizations. This assumes that council members understand, not only the mission of their particular parish but of the diocesan and universal church as well. There are to be two distinct councils in every parish: a finance committee to advise the pastor on the administration of parish goods and a pastoral council to examine pastoral issues, discern solutions, and offer recommendations to the pastor.¹

¹Obviously from time to time, a small parish may not have the resources to keep this clear distinction. Practical solution will need to be worked out, but these should be by way of exception to the general principle of two separate groups.

Changing the focus of parish pastoral councils from one of maintenance to one of mission involves education. As we move from a model of council that manages the details of parish life to a council focused on pastoral planning, the role of the council and its members must be clearly understood by the whole parish community.

Once the faith community understands that the call for a parish pastoral council is a call to mission, then persons with particular and appropriate gifts will need to be identified and called forth to serve as council members. In addition to a desire to serve the church and an ability to relate well to others, those called to serve on parish pastoral councils must be

Prayerful: Council members will be expected to develop their prayer life as individuals and as community. They should have an opportunity and take the responsibility of guiding the prayer at meetings.

Pastoral: They will have a sense what it means to be concerned about the pastoral and spiritual issues of the whole parish. Some of the critical pastoral issues are formation, spirituality and worship, outreach and community building.

Prophetic: Councilors should be able to move the parish in a direction that is faithful to the Gospel even if it is not the popular choice. Their call is to prevent the parish from maintaining the status quo and move it to a challenging mission.

Discerning: Members of the council are invited to discern the direction of the parish and to articulate its mission. This is a prayerful, reflective and ongoing process that surfaces the pros and cons and enables councilors to consider what is at the heart of their decision.

Consensus Building: Members are challenged to talk things out (dialogue) so that they are in agreement rather than voting on significant issues and ending up as winners and losers. The gift of consensus building takes time.

A mission oriented parish pastoral council assumes that its members will take a greater responsibility in planning the spiritual and pastoral life of the parish community. The following diagram illustrates how councils are evolving as the Church strives to embrace the spirit of Vatican II.

MOVEMENT

From

To

Parish Council

Pastoral Council

Board of Directors

Spiritual Directors

Representatives of Organizations

A Visioning Body

Coordinating Ministers

Articulating the Mission

Crisis Management

Pastoral Planning and Goals

Doing Activities

Empowering Parishioners

Business and Politics

Prayer and Discernment

Competition

Collaboration

Voting on Issues

Building Consensus

Committee Reporting

Active Listening

Elected by Popularity

Selected by Gifts

Constitutions and By-laws

Guidelines

Practical Suggestions

1. ***Council Size:*** Because the pastoral council is a visioning body, not a coordinating committee of ministries, 10 – 12 members are sufficient.
2. ***Terms of Office:*** A three year term, renewable once, seems appropriate, and the terms should be staggered so new members are selected each year. Continuity and stability without stagnation are important elements to keep in mind.
3. ***Composition of the Council:*** The council is to be representative of the faith community so the many avenues of diversity - age, gender, race, ethnicity – must be taken into account in the selection of council members.
4. ***Setting the Agenda:*** In the past parish councils often operated according to Robert's Rules of Order. Today, agendas should reflect the emphasis on pastoral issues, a lived faith and consensus decision-making.

SAMPLE AGENDA

1. Welcoming
2. Opening Prayer
3. Faith Formation / Sharing
4. Current Pastoral Initiatives
5. Archdiocesan Initiatives
6. New Pastoral Initiatives
7. Parish Concerns / Issues
8. Announcements from Parish Organizations / Ministries
9. Next Meeting Date
10. Closing Prayer