

Sample Diocesan Guidelines

FOREWORD

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity from the Second Vatican Council speaks of the laity as sharers in the role of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King (no. 26). It is a call for understanding of Renewal and Rebirth -- a process of personal and community revitalization. The Constitution on the Church emphasizes community, shared responsibility and mission. The existence and effective functioning of a Parish Council is central to these ends -- with each person possessing his own unique role and responsibility, each sharing in the communal responsibility, as members of the People of God, to achieve the mission of the Church.

The following Guidelines have been developed from the research and input of numerous individuals, parishes and dioceses. The PARISH COUNCIL GUIDELINES are intended to:

- assist existing Parish Councils to review and update; help parishes forming Parish Councils;
- assist Parish Councils to reach their full potential in fulfilling the mission of Jesus and His Church.

Each Parish should develop Constitution and By-Laws to meet the distinct needs of the parish.

What is a Parish?

The parish is a community of Christians who, guided by the Holy Spirit and lead by a local pastor, share in the Mission of Jesus. This mission includes community, service, celebration and proclamation.

Community - a sharing with each member, participation in parish life, involvement, material support and a melding of diversity to become one in Christ Jesus.

Service - members truly caring and supporting for one another, endeavoring to meet the temporal and spiritual needs of one another in the name of Christ.

Celebration - a sharing of the fundamental Christian mysteries through the sacraments, directed to the worship of God.

Proclamation - proclamation of the good news of Jesus through our lives and our evangelization of others.

WHAT IS A PARISH COUNCIL?

The Parish Council *is* not another lay organization of the Parish, but rather a shared effort of the clergy, religious, and laity to collaborate *in* the ministry of the parish community. The Parish Council *is* convoked by the pastor and ceases to exist when that pastor terminates his parish assignment or withdraws approval

of the Council. The Council functions in an advisory capacity to the pastor.

GOALS OF A PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Council is a consultative body of the parish. The main purposes of the Council are to give direction, to serve and to be catalyst for development. They are:

- to advise the pastor on present and future directions for the parish community, based on the mission of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit;
- to assist the pastor as an instrument for sharing the mission of Jesus, proclaiming His Gospel, building His Community, celebrating His liturgy, and serving His people
- to set an example of unity and cooperation as a Christian community to the parish and the Church.

The primary tasks of the convoked Council are:

1. To develop itself into a praying, unified Christian community;
2. to develop a parish mission statement;
3. to establish goals and objectives for the parish and prioritize implementation;
4. to coordinate parish-related activities and insure that goals, objectives and priorities are implemented;
5. to promote meaningful dialogue and decision-making among the parish community;
6. to identify and encourage the use of the gifts and talents of all parishioners for the good of parishioners and the local community.

ROLES

PASTOR

The pastor is to provide a ministry of spiritual leadership and pastoral supervision to the parish community. He bears the ultimate responsibility for the development of the faith community. The pastoral leadership is not effective without communication and consultation with the parish community through the Parish Council. "Pastors must sincerely- acknowledge and promote the dignity of the laity and the role which is proper to them in the mission of the Church. They should scrupulously honor that just freedom which is due to everyone in the earthly city. They should listen willingly to the laity, consider their wishes in a trusting spirit and recognize their experience and competence in the different areas of human activity, so that together with them they will be able to read the signs of the times" .

RELIGIOUS

Religious -- priests, brothers, deacons, sisters assigned to the parish must be actively involved in the Parish Council. They bring to the community spiritual gifts, ministerial experience and a love of God for His 'people.

LAITY

Vatican II defined the role and obligation of the laity in the ministry of Christian leadership; challenging them to develop and utilize their gifts and leadership in , the service of Christian community. The ministry is a conversion of heart and acceptance of Christ's call to care for and serve others -- to accept and live discipleship of Jesus.

PARISH TRUSTEES

The Parish Trustees exercise a public ministry to the Church as "trustee" or "steward" and are accountable to it. They are responsible for the legal and financial aspects of parish administration. They need to know the parish goals, priorities and decisions developed by the Council, for effective stewardship cannot be exercised apart from the Parish Council.

PARISH FINANCE COUNCIL

By a directive of the Revised Canon Law, every parish must have a Finance Council. The Finance Council is responsible for advising the pastor on financial matters. It is expected that there will be an ex officio link between the Finance Council and Parish Council. The Parish Council, therefore, is not directly concerned with financial questions of the parish.

PASTORAL TEAM

In parishes dominated by one group, whether ethnic, urban/rural, age or handicapped, it is recommended that a Pastoral team minister to the minority group. This pastoral team should have representation on the parish council.

MEMBERSHIP

Each parish needs to decide upon and include in By-Laws eligibility requirements for Parish Council membership. Generally a Parish Council should include:

1. composition of 12-25 individuals, approximately 2/3 elected
- 2.the Pastor and all clergy of the Parish
3. the lay trustees
4. appointees to provide for unrepresented areas of the Parish (youth, handicapped people, minorities, etc., if such are needed after election)
5. representatives of Parish organizations
6. laity (elected) from the adult parishioners
7. a representative of or to the finance council

Membership to the. Council may be:

Elected - those directly elected by ballot
Ex Officio - all clergy and others determined by By-Laws
Appointed - those appointed by Pastor to provide special talent or fill a specific need.

All three types of memberships are voting memberships.

QUALIFICATIONS

The Parish Council is established to further furthering the faith, growth and mission of the parish community. Persons called to this ministry should:

1. be persons of prayer, of personal growth in Christ and a living sign of Christ;
2. be knowledgeable concerning Church today (shared responsibility);
3. be knowledgeable concerning history and traditions of Church;
4. be understanding of parish as community and center for spiritual growth;
5. be willing to become involved in parish and willing to set direction of parish;
6. be willing to be held accountable for parish involvement;
7. offer a talent, skill, or knowledge to Council ministry
8. have had activity or experience in parish activities.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The commitment to serve as a Council member carries with it demands:

1. active involvement in personal and parish spiritual renewal;
2. participation in council meetings;
3. participation in goal setting and evaluation sessions; study and preparation for each meeting.

NOMINATIONS

It is recommended that an ad hoc nominations committee be formed, no later than March of each year. Members of this committee, who need not be Council members, are charged with the responsibility of planning, conducting, and overseeing the elections. The pastor should also serve on this committee.

The committee should:

1. seek nominations from the parish at large - all interested individuals should be encouraged to run; candidates may submit their own name or be nominated;
2. contact nominees to apprise them of purpose, function and work of the Council;
3. obtain written consent for candidacy, and biographical data;
4. present the slate of candidates and their qualifications to the pastor for his approval;
5. present the slate of candidates to parish at least 2 weeks prior to election;
6. conduct the election, ratify results, inform and publicize those elected in compliance with the policies and procedures for the election.

ELECTIONS

Policies and procedures for elections should include the following criteria:

1. the eligibility of all parishioners 18 years of age or older to vote and/or be a nominee;

2. the opportunity for all parishioners to participate in nominations and elections;
3. the maintenance of confidentiality with respect to actual numbers of votes for each candidate;
4. the number of elected members each year, whether at large or regional candidates; .
5. whether the election is a primary or general election;
6. the method of nomination, voting, resolution of tie votes and the ratification of winners.

ORIENTATION

It is vital that all new Council members attend an orientation program. This program should include:

1. the universal Catholic Church, the diocese, and the nature and function of the parish;
2. prayerful reflection and sharing;
3. background material regarding Christian leadership;
4. information regarding purpose, function and structure of parish council; the history and operation of the parish council; .
5. copy of Constitution and By-Laws.

TERM OF OFFICE

Parish Council terms of office are usually 2 or 3 years. The membership is elected on a 1/3 staggered schedule to insure continuity. Individuals may serve 4-6 years or 2 consecutive terms. Vacancies occurring during the year should be filled with the runner-up candidate, although individual constitutions may dictate otherwise. The Council is empowered to terminate a membership if the individual does not fulfill his/her responsibilities.

OFFICERS

The executive board should consist of the following officers: president/chairperson, vice president/vice chairperson selected annually by the Council members. The secretary may be elected, appointed or be the parish staff secretary.

DUTIES

PRESIDENT/CHAIRPERSON

The president/chairperson is responsible for:

1. setting an atmosphere of prayer, charity and unity;
2. communication between council and parishioners;
3. communication with the pastor;
4. organization and coordination of council activities to accomplish goals;
5. chairing all regular and special meetings;
6. communication with committee chairs and parish staff;
7. chairing all executive committee meetings.

VICE PRESIDENT/VICE CHAIRPERSON

The vice president/vice chairperson performs duties ascribed to the president/chairperson in the latter's absence and assists the latter in execution of his/her duties.

SECRETARY

This person may be parish staff, appointed or elected. include:

1. recording the minutes of all meetings;
2. maintaining membership roster and attendance records;
3. distributing information and correspondence to members as necessary
4. receiving and forwarding all council correspondence;

MEETINGS

Parish Councils should meet every month for regular business meetings and once yearly for goal setting, reflection and assessment. A meeting should not be held without the pastor in attendance. The subcommittees should meet as necessary. Care should be exercised to prepare for each meeting. Members should receive an agenda at least 1 week prior to meeting. Each meeting should include:

1. prayer/reflection (scripture reading, devotions, prayer, etc. to establish a noticeable 2. prayerful atmosphere)
2. roll call
3. minutes
4. reports
5. old business
6. new business
7. Pastor's report
8. closing prayer

Time allotment should be a maximum 2-3 hours with the meeting divided into thirds -- prayer, goal setting, business.

VOTING -- DECISIONS

Each member of the Council is ascribed one vote regardless of whether appointed, ex officio or elected members. The members are to assist the Pastor in the formation of policies and programs in the Parish, recommendations must be in keeping with Diocesan policy.

Each proposal must be

1. thoroughly explained;
2. decided on what is good for the parish community;
3. discussed openly, thoroughly and honestly in a reflective atmosphere.

COMMITTEES

The Parish Council committees are a means to implement parish goals and broaden

participation and representation of the parish. The ad hoc committees are formed as needed for specific tasks. Standing committees should be established to address the following areas:

1. spiritual life
2. liturgy
3. education
4. social concerns/action planning

Each committee acts as a "task force" to research its assigned task and make recommendations to the council. Upon council approval, recommendations are implemented by the committee.

SPIRITUAL LIFE Committee develops plans for spiritual development and enrichment of parishioners of all ages through special services and programs.

LITURGY Committee develops plans for spiritual development of parishioners through the liturgy, celebrations and services. .

EDUCATION Committee develops, recommends, promotes and evaluates all religious education programs for all parishioners.

SOCIAL CONCERN/ACTION Committee develops and coordinates programs that promote justice and charity.

PLANNING Committee assists *in* planning, providing for and supervising physical plant, but without intruding into the responsibility of the Finance *Council* (see below).

FINANCE COUNCIL AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO PARISH COUNCIL

Canon 537 prescribes that every parish establish a finance council separate 'from the Parish Council. The finance council *is* directly accountable for parish finances; membership *is* appointed by the Pastor and includes persons skilled in finance, law and business. The Parish *Council* is concerned with pastoral life and parish ministry; membership *is* elected and representative. The two councils are separate yet interrelated in activity. The finance council looks to the parish council to develop the mission of the parish; the parish council looks to the finance council for prudent stewardship of resources to implement parish programs.