

# COMMUNION & CONSULTATION

## *Pastoral Council Guidelines*



Archdiocese of Los Angeles • Synod Implementation Office

Revised Edition June 2007

# ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES



## SYNOD IMPLEMENTATION OFFICE

Deacon David Estrada  
*Executive Director*

Rev. Paul Wolkovits  
*Associate Director*

Maria Elena Uribe  
*Ministry Coordinator*

Alicia Hernandez  
*Administrative Secretary*

[www.la-archdiocese.org/org/synod/](http://www.la-archdiocese.org/org/synod/)

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**Archdiocese of Los Angeles**

Office of  
the Archbishop  
(213) 637-7288

3424  
Wilshire  
Boulevard

Los Angeles  
California  
90010-2202

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JUNE 2007

Dear Friends:

We are living in a time of significant changes in the world and in the Church. As these continue to emerge and absorb our attention, we must remind ourselves that these challenges present new opportunities to advance the mission of the Church. We are being called to proclaim in word and deed the Reign of God, central to the Word, the work, and the meaning and message of Jesus.

As was affirmed in our Archdiocesan Synod of 2003 (Synod), all who are baptized are called to share in this mission. Realizing that some of the lay faithful have been blessed with a measure of leadership, we must help them find ways to utilize their gifts in the service of others. One such way to use one's gifts and talents is by participating in a parish's pastoral council.

Our experience has confirmed that over the last several years, parish pastoral councils have become an indispensable resource for envisioning the future, determining priorities, and developing a parish pastoral plan. I have therefore requested every pastor to establish a parish pastoral council. Pastors benefit by utilizing the gifts and talents of parish leaders who are truly interested in the welfare of their parish, and the leaders benefit from the special graces offered by the Spirit who "makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church." (*Lumen Gentium*, No. 12)

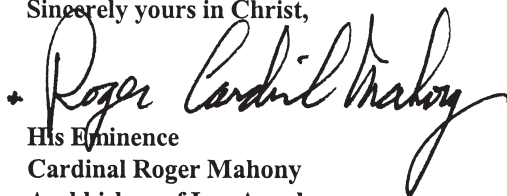
The Synod very successfully demonstrated the advantages of the consultative process involving the Bishop and his people. This historical event, which involved clergy, religious and laity working together, served to identify the needs and priorities of the Archdiocese through a process of collaboration and shared decision making. The resulting six pastoral initiatives and their accompanying strategies are now the sign-posts of the future of this Archdiocese.

Furthermore, the Synod's second pastoral initiative, in particular, calls for the development of structures that provide for appropriate religious and lay participation in decision making and processes of accountability at all levels of the Archdiocese. This initiative clearly recognizes that all of us have received gifts from the Spirit, and that each of us is called forth, by virtue of our baptism, to use these gifts to build the Church and advance the Reign of God. We are each an integral part of our Church's life and mission.

These guidelines, recently updated, offer parishes beginning to establish councils a solid foundation for doing so. They provide clear practical advice and ample documentation. In addition, they offer the members of existing councils an opportunity to examine themselves in light of solid principles of parish consultation.

I encourage all of our parishes to study these guidelines and use them to benefit their councils. The guidelines emphasize the importance of consultation and good parish leadership and the important role which councilors, particularly those who are lay, play in the life of their parish. It is the parish pastoral councils which will help develop the vision of the parish and communicate it to all who seek the Reign of God in their parish communities and beyond.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

  
His Eminence  
Cardinal Roger Mahony  
Archbishop of Los Angeles

# INTRODUCTION

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## *Why Parish Councils?*

*Any guideline for parish pastoral councils ought to answer two basic questions:  
First, what do pastors stand to gain by having a council?  
Second, what do parishioners accomplish by serving on a council?*

**O**ur experience over the past forty years has clarified the answers to these questions. In this document, wherever the word 'pastor' occurs, the reader is to understand a reference to both pastors and PLDs. Pastors (or Parish Life Directors, as the designated leader of the parish community) establish councils because they seek practical advice on pastoral matters. They believe that God's Spirit speaks through their people. They consult their councils because they want to know what is wise and prudent. Outside experts cannot judge what is best for a particular parish because they are not part of it. Councils offer what no expert can offer: a judgment about what is right for a particular parish. That is the pastor's primary motive for having a council.

Parishioners want to serve on councils, we believe, in order to assist the pastor by providing wise and prudent advice. Every leader needs good counsel. Recommendations developed by a pastoral council will be good to the extent that the council reaches its goal. That goal is to investigate pastoral matters and to reflect on them thoroughly, so as to draw sound conclusions. Council members believe that God's Spirit is present in their community. They study the pastoral situation so as to help the parish see it more clearly. They have the satisfaction of doing an important task which contributes to the well being of the Church. That is their primary motive for service.

These guidelines were developed with both pastors and council members in mind. They contain practical suggestions to enhance the value of councils. As noted above, the main value of councils is their

ability to offer the pastor wise and prudent advice. The advice comes from parishioners who are able to study a pastoral matter thoroughly, reflect on it deeply, and make practical recommendations. These guidelines aim to make their task easier. They do so by laying out the basic principles of a pastoral council. They also illuminate the principles with up-to-date research. Pastors and council members will find in these guidelines the Church's reasons for establishing councils and some practical advice to bring them to fruition.

The title of these guidelines, "Communion and Consultation," brings out two key ideas for pastoral councils. Communion is the word that best describes the relationship between the pastor and parishioners. Consultation is what the pastor initiates with the council. Both ideas are essential and express the spirit of these guidelines.



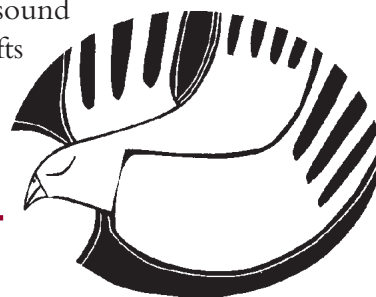
## Prospectus

The present guideline is divided into six chapters:

- Chapter I** *presents the Church's theological motive for establishing councils, as presented at the Second Vatican Council.*
- Chapter II** *lays out the purpose and functions of the pastoral council, using the terminology of pastoral planning.*
- Chapter III** *describes the methods and principles of council operation, especially the importance of developing the agenda.*
- Chapter IV** *defines council roles and relationships, such as that between the council and the parish staff.*
- Chapter V** *lays out the steps for forming a pastoral council.*
- Chapter VI** *recommends models for selecting council members.*

Pastoral councils have had enormous success throughout the United States and since Vatican II are found in three-fourths of the country's 18,000 parishes, according to The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Life.<sup>1</sup> We are convinced they are a success because pastors see the need for sound advice on pastoral matters, and because parishioners want to put their gifts of prudence and wisdom at the service of parishes.

*These guidelines want to enhance this important work.*



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## Local History

Councils at the parish level were recommended in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 1976, when the first archdiocesan council guidelines were published. With the publication in 1983 of the *Code of Canon Law*, councils began to call themselves "pastoral" councils, referring to canon 536.<sup>2</sup> "Pastoral" councils at the diocesan level were the recommendation of the Vatican II Decree on Bishops.<sup>3</sup> Shortly thereafter, many councils continued to promote the various works of the parish as described and recommended in the Vatican II *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People*.<sup>4</sup> This was the major Vatican II text recommending the establishment of parish councils.

In 1991, the Archdiocese completely revised its pastoral council guidelines under the direction of Mr. Jaime Mendoza, Director of the Pastoral Councils Office. The revision assigned pastoral councils the specific task of pastoral planning. The priests of the archdiocese at their 1993 assembly affirmed the importance of pastoral planning. Pastoral planning includes a pastoral council's threefold task of study, reflection and recommendation. A new revision was begun in October of 1997 under the direction of Prof. Mark Fischer, Professor of Theology at St. John's Archdiocesan Seminary and Maria Elena Uribe, Coordinator of the Pastoral Councils Office, and this has since been revised by Deacon David Estrada, Director of The Synod Implementation Office.

## *The Nature and Foundations of the Parish Pastoral Council*

How did parish pastoral councils begin? Why does the Church encourage them? The answer to these questions takes us back to the Second Vatican Council of 1962 - 1965 where pastoral councils were first recommended, and this is where we must begin.

The genesis of pastoral councils however is far older. Councils reflect the Church's understanding of participation, communion, gifts and consultation. These concepts stem from the origins of Christianity. At the conclusion of this chapter, readers will know about both the immediate origins of the parish pastoral council, as well as its roots in Christian tradition.



## Establishment and Nature

Vatican II highly recommended councils as a means to promote pastoral activity. The Bishops in attendance at Vatican II declared that pastoral councils investigate, reflect and propose practical conclusions to concerns that pertain to pastoral obligations.<sup>5</sup> This teaching of Vatican II was reinforced in the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*.<sup>6</sup> The Archbishop of Los Angeles strongly endorses councils as an effective means of engaging the people of God in a process of collaboration, consultation and shared decision making as called for by the Archdiocesan Synod of 2003. He encourages pastors to establish councils in every parish.

*Parish pastoral councils help in fostering pastoral activity (Canon 536), as distinct from parish finance councils, which aid the pastor in the administration of parish goods (Canon 537).*

The Church's official documents provide us with a number of reasons about pastoral councils. They begin by telling us about its membership. The pastoral council consists of parishioners whom the pastor consults by reason of their knowledge, competence, or outstanding ability. Through them, a pastor explores the needs and desires of the parish.<sup>7</sup> The pastor consults them in order to know his people more profoundly.<sup>8</sup> Council members contribute by thoroughly studying and reflecting on

pastoral problems and by recommending practical solutions. They bring the practical wisdom of parishioners as distinct from the expert opinion of the parish staff. Councilors are chosen for their wisdom which they willingly share with the pastor.

### What about the purpose of councils?

In respect to their purpose, the Church has made a number of statements. The aim of the council is to make the life and activity of the parish ever more closely conform to the gospel.<sup>9</sup> The members offer wise counsel so that the pastoral program is systematically planned and the parish can carry it out effectively.<sup>10</sup>

The word "pastoral" does not simply refer to the topics that the council studies, that is, to "pastoral matters." It also refers to the person of the pastor himself, as the designated leader of the parish community. The council investigates pastoral matters because the pastor, as leader of the parish, requests the council's help. He initiates and establishes the council. He convenes the meetings. He presides over them as one who loves his people and seeks their greatest good.<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, the pastoral council is a body of chosen people, studious, thoughtful and reflective of the local community, consulted by the pastor and dependent upon him for the council's identity.



## Roots In Tradition

The teachings about pastoral councils emerge from the Church's traditions. Although councils are perceived as newer structures, they are rooted in the beginnings of Christianity. Four particular concepts from the earliest traditions underlie the teachings about councils. These are the concepts of communion, participation, gifts and consultation.

The first concept, communion, leads us to the heart of Christian identity. Christians are chosen and united by God. The First Letter of Peter says this about the Christian communion:

*"You are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart' to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light" (2:9).*

All Christians form one people. God has called us together. Our communion is the foundation of our efforts on behalf of the Church.

The second concept, participation in the Christian communion, tells us that everyone is to participate. Christians are participant members of the Body of Christ. St. Paul taught:

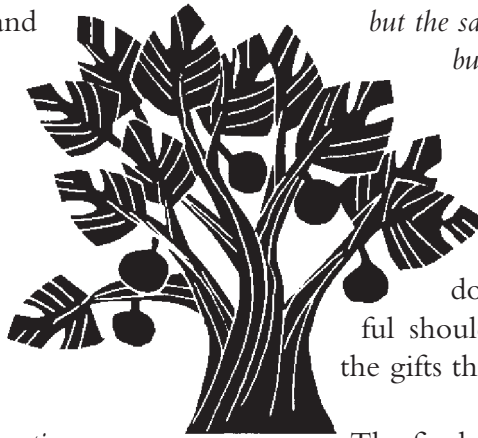
*"As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many are one body, so also Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12).*

Baptism commissions every Christian to continue the saving mission of Christ. Every Christian belongs. Every Christian has a part to play. All of us are to work together as partners in bringing forth God's kingdom.

The third principal concept from Christian tradition is the concept of gifts. As members of the

Body of Christ, every Christian has a gift from God's Spirit. It is given for the benefit of the Church. St. Paul taught that:

*"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone"(1 Cor. 12:4).*



Not everyone has the same gifts. Pastors should seek council members with the gifts of wisdom and prudence. All of the faithful should serve the Church according to the gifts they have been given.

The final concept is the one of consultation. From the earliest days of the Church, the leaders would take counsel with the community. The apostles and the elders met at the Council of Jerusalem, for example, to discuss whether gentile Christians needed to keep the Law of Moses (Acts 15, Galatians 2). No decision was made until all parties, including Paul and Barnabas, had a chance to voice their opinion. Consultation ensured that the leaders received good advice and that the community remained united. What was important in the first century is no less important today. Pastors consult parishioners in order to receive wise counsel and to hold the community together. The four concepts of communion, participation, gifts and consultation are ancient.

Nevertheless, they have relevance for pastoral councils today. Vatican II recommended the establishment of councils in 1965. That original recommendation has been amplified in later official documents. The pastoral council, a new creation of the Vatican II Church, has its roots in Christian antiquity.



*The Council as a Pastoral Planning Body*

The foundations of pastoral councils rest in the Church's official documents and in the teachings from Christian antiquity about communion, participation, gifts and consultation.

However, what do pastoral councils actually do?

The answer, in a phrase, is pastoral PLANNING. Councils help pastors plan the parish's pastoral program.

Next, we will look at the purpose of councils, their particular functions, and how the pastoral planning process builds consensus and helps the parish discern where God may be leading it.

**Purpose**

Pope Paul VI stated that the pastoral council is "to examine and consider all that relates to pastoral work and to offer practical conclusions on these matters, so that the life and activity of the People of God can be brought into greater conformity with the Gospel."<sup>12</sup> When we look at this definition, we see that it has three parts. Let us look at each of the three parts in detail.

The first part of the definition states that councils examine pastoral matters. The term "pastoral matters" is very broad. In short, it means, whatever pertains to the work of the pastor, including the well-being of the community, the needs of the parish, and any concerns that will need attention in the future. The pastoral council identifies these issues and studies them thoroughly. Pastors must also focus on the priorities identified in the 2003 Archdiocesan Synod

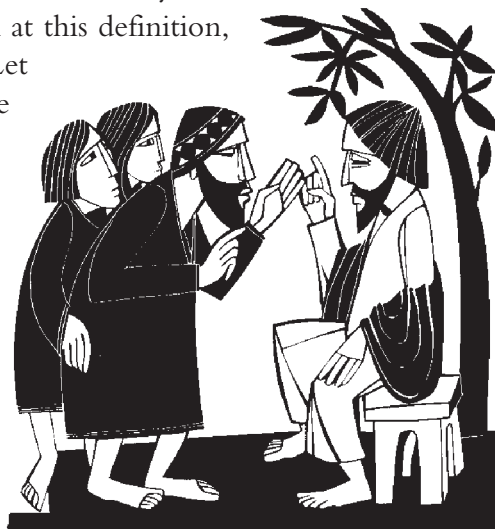
documents.<sup>13</sup> The next part of the definition states that the council "considers" the issues it has examined. Its aim is to get a deep understanding of those issues or concerns.



No council will be satisfied with a dry recitation of facts and figures about the parish. It wants to understand their meaning:

*What do facts and figures say about the faith of the parish?  
What are the strengths and weaknesses in the parish?  
What problems loom on the horizon?*

When the council "considers" pastoral matters, it seeks to discern how God is present in the situation. It prays to discover how God invites the parish community to act.



The final part of the definition has to do with practical conclusions. The council has investigated a situation and reviewed it. It now has to make a judgment. It has to recommend to the pastor what the council believes he should do. It has to judge, not what is right for parishes in general, but what is right for this particular parish. The goal is to bring the parish more into conformity with the Gospel. The three aspects of Pope Paul's definition

express the purposes of the council: to examine, to consider and to draw conclusions.

## The Functions of Planning

The word which best describes the work of the pastoral council is PLANNING. In the 1973 *Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops*, the Vatican stated that the study and reflection of the pastoral council enables the community "to systematically plan its pastoral program and to fulfill it effectively."<sup>14</sup> There is a growing consensus that pastoral planning is precisely the work of councils.<sup>15</sup>

Pastoral planning can take place in many ways, and the Church does not want to hinder the freedom of the pastor to consult as he sees fit. With that caution in mind, we can readily sketch the basic functions of planning. The priests of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles endorsed these functions during their 1993 Priest's Assembly and called for every parish in the Archdiocese to establish a pastoral plan.<sup>16</sup>

Planning begins with an eye towards the future. Every parish has a mission, an end or goal with which God has entrusted it. However, while every parish embraces the same goal of gathering to itself a faithful people, no parish will achieve this in exactly the same way. So a first step in planning and the first function of a pastoral council is to discern how God is calling the parish to fulfill its mission. Every recommendation from the council should be made with the parish's mission in mind. How can the parish achieve its mission? What is the future the council envisions?

*How does the pastoral council develop a parish vision and clarify the mission of the parish?*

It begins by identifying the parish's pastoral needs. Every parish wants to develop the gifts God has given them. This desire unleashes the parish's imag-

ination. The parish begins to imagine itself with a more festive liturgy, greater hospitality, better religious education, physical renovations, an outreach to seniors, greater income, more social services and so on. The list of potential parish needs is endless.

Councils do pastors a favor by helping them to identify what these needs are as well as to prioritize them.

No parish, however, can do all the things it would like to do. A parish community can only generate so much income, can only acquire so many volunteers and can only stretch its staff to a certain degree. Once the parish has

identified its needs, it must put them into an order of importance. This is another planning area in which councils can render service. They can help pastors see which needs are urgent and which are not. They help pastors discern God's will.

After the council has identified the parish's needs and put them into an order of importance, then its most important pastoral planning task begins. This is the task of studying how to meet those needs. A good council investigates the situation in the parish. It consults parishioners and researches what experts say about the subject. It considers various options and their cost. It learns all it can about the matter under consideration. Why? Because a good council realizes that prudence is a form of knowledge. It knows the right action to take for the parish. It studies and reflects on various issues, and this enables the council to lay the foundation for sound decisions.

When the council has considered a matter sufficiently, it makes a recommendation. It recommends what the parish ought to do, directed by its pastor. This is where the pastoral council gains its greatest satisfaction. When it has thoroughly studied a matter, understands the parish situation, has considered



what the experts recommend and weighed those recommendations from the viewpoint of the parish, it has planned well. Whether or not the pastor accepts its recommendations, the council can take pride in a job well done.

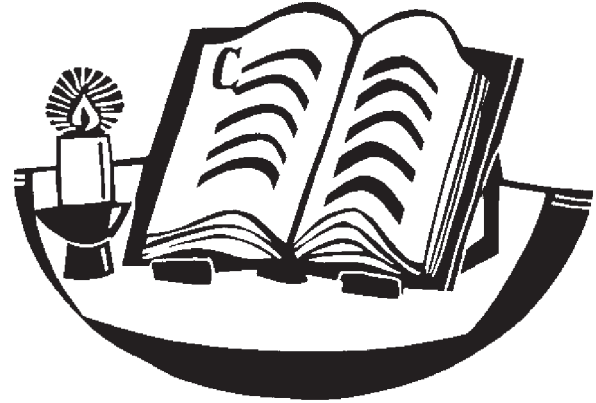
## Planning, Not Implementation

**A**fter the council has presented its conclusions to the pastor, much work remains to be done. The recommendations of the council must become a reality. They must be implemented. However, implementation of the council's recommendations is not the work of the council. Pastors often ask council members to assume this responsibility. Graciously, council members often accept and carry it out. At that point, they act as volunteers under the pastor's direction. They are no longer performing the council's work of studying, considering and recommending. They are carrying out the directives of a pastor who has accepted the council's advice and decided to implement it.



Once a recommendation has been made, the planning cycle begins anew. The pastor asks the council to assess how well their recommendations have been

implemented. Alternatively, they ask the council to turn its attention to other parish needs, prioritizing and planning how to meet them. Investigating pastoral matters, pondering them and making recommendations is of constant importance. The council's work is never over.



This chapter has defined the purpose and functions of the pastoral council. It defined the council's purpose in the threefold terms of official Vatican documents. They state what the council studies, reflects and recommends. Moreover, this chapter has described the functions of the pastoral council as a planning body.

*Such a council states and clarifies the parish's mission, develops a vision of the parish's preferred future, identifies and prioritizes the parish's needs, and draws practical conclusions.*

After it has made its recommendations to the pastor, it passes the baton to him. If the pastor accepts the council's advice, he asks others to help implement it. Then the council's work of study, reflection and recommendation begins once again.



*A pastor, a vice-chair and an agenda are essential for a good council meeting. The pastor consults the council and asks for help. Without the pastor there would be no one for the council to advise. The vice-chair facilitates the meeting. Without the vice-chair, members would not know when to speak and the more talkative members would dominate. The agenda is the plan for the meeting. Without an agenda, the meeting would be no more than an unstructured discussion. A pastor, vice-chair and agenda are essential, and they must be well prepared.*

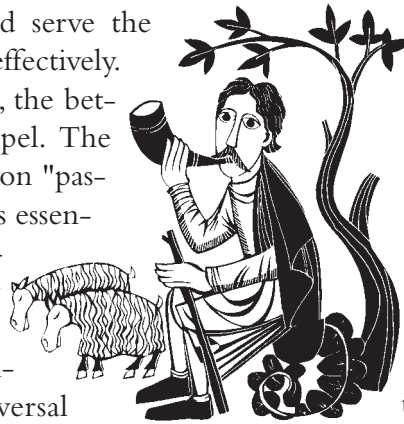
## The Pastor and The Meeting

According to Canon Law,<sup>17</sup> the pastor presides over the council. He consults the council because he wants to know and serve the parish more profoundly and effectively. The better he knows the parish, the better he can help it follow the gospel. The pastor asks the council to focus on "pastoral matters." These are matters essential to the parish's mission, activity and programs - essentially anything, apart from administration, faith, orthodoxy, moral principles or laws of the universal Church.<sup>18</sup> Topics for the council are proposed by the pastor or by the council members themselves, whose knowledge of the parish he should strive to deepen.

The pastor defines the purpose for the meeting and then consults the council. The word "consults" implies a great deal. It implies, first of all, that the pastor has a question and needs assistance in finding the answer. His question may be about the effectiveness of the parish's youth ministry, or how well the parish plant is being maintained, or how successfully the parish is reaching out to immigrants. In any case, the pastor starts with a question. He decides to seek the wisdom and experience of parishioners, not just the expert opinion of his staff. He turns to the council because he sees the value in consulting others.

When the pastor consults the council, he demon-

strates his confidence in the members' abilities. He believes that the council can help provide a better and more complete answer by their studying and reflecting on the question as well.



*A common faith and a desire to assist the parish unite council and pastor; this should be the regular theme of the pastor's prayer with the council.*

They are trying to accomplish the mission God has entrusted to them. In the course of fulfilling that mission, a question has arisen. The pastor generates council activity by posing the question and supporting council members in their search for an answer.

The pastor who consults his council takes ownership of the question being asked and, based on the council's response, assumes he and the parish have an interest in it. No answer will suffice until he, the pastor, is satisfied with it. By consulting the council, he enters into a form of covenant with its members. He agrees to pursue the question with them until he has an answer. If dissatisfied with their answer, the pastor gives the reasons for his dissatisfaction, and asks the council to address the issues left outstanding.

This ensures the honesty of council meetings. The goal is to get at the truth of a matter and to persist until the pastor can affirm the council's findings. The search for the truth is the council's primary



objective. The pastor has asked a question and turned to the council for an answer. That is the fundamental dynamic of council meetings.

## Facilitation by the Vice-Chair

The vice-chair facilitates, that is, makes the meetings proceed smoothly and easily. A typical council meeting tries to accomplish a number of things. Under the title of pastoral planning (our term for investigating pastoral matters, pondering them and drawing practical conclusions), there are a variety of specific tasks. The vice-chair is the one who helps to bring out the facts. He or she understands the responsibility and grasps the essence of the agenda items. Secondly, the vice-chair knows how to help the council members accomplish the task. Directed by the vice-chair, the council achieves its objectives and maintains its cohesiveness. Let us look at how council meetings accomplish the three aspects of pastoral planning under the vice-chair's guidance.<sup>19</sup>

The council first investigates pastoral matters. This implies that the pastor has shared with the council a pastoral situation and a question for which he seeks an answer.<sup>20</sup> Investigation begins by understanding the question.

The vice-chair has to  
make sure that the council understands  
what the pastor is asking them to do.

Then the vice-chair invites the council to share its initial thoughts in a process akin to brainstorming. Council members need an opportunity to express how they will study the matter.

During the initial discussion, a number of proposals will emerge. These are often proposals needing more thorough investigation. Suggestions will be given for research, consultation, or the drafting of an initial response. In this way council members exercise initiative and bring new matters to the pastor's attention. The vice-chair senses the emergence of a common opinion about the first steps, invites volun-

teers to undertake them and clarifies initial responsibilities. In subsequent meetings, as the investigation proceeds, the vice-chair solicits reports and facilitates an orderly discussion of them.

The second step is to evaluate the results of the investigation and reflect on them thoroughly. At this stage, the vice-chair ensures that everyone understands the purpose of the investigation and how it answers the pastor's question. Reference is made to the council's progress as reflected in its published minutes.

The vice-chair makes certain  
that the results of the investigation are  
available to the council members and  
that each member has an opportunity  
to express his/her opinion.

During the exchange of opinions, more questions will arise. The vice-chair distinguishes between the questions that can be readily answered and those that require further research.

The final step is to draw conclusions. This is the most difficult step, because it asks the council to reach an agreement. It implies that the council has grasped the pastor's question and is prepared to answer it. Drawing a conclusion presents a challenge to the vice-chair. He or she must understand the viewpoints of the pastor and of the various members and be able to express the truth at which they have arrived.

*Both the truth and the council are important.*

The Council's commitment to finding an answer to the question at hand is obviously meant to help the pastor make a decision. Councils help pastors arrive at conclusions by presenting the truth in various dimensions and shaping these into one answer. The council members must then be able to affirm that answer. When they do so the council has reached consensus.

Certainly, only the most important decisions need to be reached by consensus.<sup>21</sup> These decisions must be widely supported to be effective, and should pertain to issues which have broad relevancy and are general enough for non-experts to decide. There are many issues for which the search for consensus is unnecessary. But when the council achieves consensus, the pastor can be certain that the matter has been well thought out and reflects the wisdom of the community.<sup>22</sup> That wisdom is what the vice-chair strives for.

## Forming the Agenda

The most important element of any council meeting is a good agenda. An agenda is a document that describes in detail what the meeting expects to accomplish. The pastor, the vice-chair and the immediate circle of council leadership prepare the agenda. It shows the goal of the meeting and the means for accomplishing it. Council members should receive the agenda (and any other materials pertinent to the meeting) at least a week before the meeting so that they can prepare for the meeting. With a good agenda, the members know what the meeting will attempt to achieve, and are therefore prepared to be active participants.

### What are the elements of a good agenda?

A good agenda gives the date, time, duration and location of the meeting. It indicates a time for prayer and for the formation of members. It provides an opportunity for the pastor to reflect on the work of the council and the progression of his own thinking about the parish's priority issues and concerns. The agenda should also refer to the previous meeting and seek approval of its published minutes. The agenda should next indicate the various topics to be discussed by the council (i.e., its old and new business) and what the council intends to accomplish under each topic. Finally, the agenda will provide an opportunity for the council to evaluate the present meeting and to clarify the time and place of the next one. For each item, a specific amount of

time should be allotted.

The heart of every agenda is the list of the topics to be discussed and the proposed activity of the council with regard to them. It is not enough to simply list the topic. The agenda must also indicate how the council will treat it.

Let us say, for example, that the topic is youth gangs in the parish. The agenda should state whether the council is to:

- *hear a report about gangs,*
- *brainstorm about how it can approach the question of gangs,*
- *refine a proposal about how to consult the parish community,*
- *take a straw vote about the progress of its investigation,*
- *debate the merits of two different responses to gangs, or*
- *finalize its conclusions for the pastor.*

Each activity requires a different kind of preparation. Council members need to know whether they are to listen, brainstorm, refine, take a poll, debate, or conclude. That is what the agenda does. By clearly stating what the council hopes to accomplish, the agenda helps ensure that the expectations of the council are realistic and that the members can accomplish the work they planned for themselves.

This chapter focused on leadership methods and principles of operation. The aim has been to define a successful council meeting. In the next chapter, the focus will be on the council members themselves – how they are selected, how they form committees, and how they relate to other groups in the parish.



In the last chapter, we saw what makes a good meeting. Pastors who seek advice, vice-chairs who understand what is needed, and agendas which give members a clear plan – these are the essentials. In this chapter, we will look at the councilors themselves. We want to know what makes a good pastoral council member, including the criteria for selection and the selection process itself. In addition, we want to know about council committees (such as the officers or executive committee). Lastly, we want to know about the relation between the council and other parish groups such as the parish staff, the finance council and parish organizations.

**MEMBERSHIP**

*The pastoral council should not be too large - only large enough "so that it is able to effectively carry out the work that is committed to it."<sup>23</sup> Ten to twelve members or less are sufficient. The question, however, is who belongs on the parish pastoral council? In what sense do they "represent" the parish?*

*We will begin with these questions.*

---

## Criteria for Selection

In very general terms, Canon Law speaks about the members of the pastoral council. They will be chosen, it says, to reflect the wisdom of the entire people of God.<sup>24</sup> Ideal members are those who have the ability to study, investigate and thoroughly examine pastoral matters. They are open-minded and have the patience to listen and reflect on what is being said. Finally, council members are able to listen to opposing opinions, understand the value of various points of view, and determine with others what is best for the parish.<sup>25</sup>

This is the reason that the parish pastoral council includes a variety of people. It is not a "lay" council; it includes priests, deacons, and religious, most often as consultants. Members of the parish staff may belong, but since they inform the pastor on a regular basis, they need not have a vote on the council.

*All pastoral council members, however, must be Catholics in good standing with the Church.*

Council members must be committed to a life of prayer, to the mission and ministries of the parish,

and to the Church's understanding of consultation as reflected in this guideline. Finally, they must be willing to participate in continuing education, formation, and the council's group process.

## Representation

The pastoral council reflects the diversity of the parish as the People of God. When selecting council members, special attention is given to the various ethnic communities, age groups, social conditions, the professions of parishioners, and their various ministerial roles. This connotes the importance of inviting the entire parish community into the discernment process leading to membership on the council. Widespread participation in the selection of councilors not only draws on the various gifts and talents of parishioners, but avoids any suggestion that the pastoral council is composed only of those who agree with the pastor's point of view. The Church's official documents state that pastoral councils are to represent the people of God, but not in a legal sense. Rather, council members are representative in that they are a witness or a symbol of the whole community. They make its wisdom present.<sup>26</sup>



## Selection of Members

How can the parish find wise councilors? There are a variety of methods, some of which are outlined in Chapter 6 of this guide. Usually, three principles apply:

- *The first is the principle of gifts. It is common knowledge that every parish has members with the gifts needed for the council ministry and that parishioners are able to recognize these gifts.*
- *The second is the principle of clear expectations. The clearer the pastor can explain the work of the council and his expectations for it, the easier it will be to attract suitable councilors.*
- *The third principle is that of discernment. There are many methods of discerning the gifts of potential council members and these processes should be utilized.*

Let us look at each of these principles in turn.

### The Principle of Gifts

**S**erving on the council is a ministry. It requires certain gifts. These include, first, an understanding of the parish. The mission of a council is to investigate, ponder and propose suggestions and recommendations leading to a pastoral plan.

*The potential council member should have the ability to study, reflect and integrate others' viewpoints.*

Second, wisdom and prudence are essential. Potential members should possess these gifts. Furthermore, the lay person who advises a pastor should also have a breadth of knowledge and competence that are widely recognized.<sup>27</sup> Finally, councilors must have good character. Proven faith, sound morals and integrity describe the character of the potential council member.

### Clear Expectations

**T**he Pastor must clearly explain to the parish what he wants from his council. He needs to say what the council's major planning focus will be. He needs to list the variety of topics the council will

explore and what he hopes the council will accomplish. In short, these topics should be a re-statement of the questions that motivated the pastor to create a council in the first place. Then they can attract the kind of councilors who can be of most assistance. Another expectation pertains to the term of office. Terms vary from parish to parish, but two or three year terms are most common. Most people believe that terms should be staggered. In other words, not every council member should leave office at the same time, but only a select number each year. That ensures continuity in the work of the council. When a pastor leaves the parish, the new pastor decides if and when to reconvene the council.

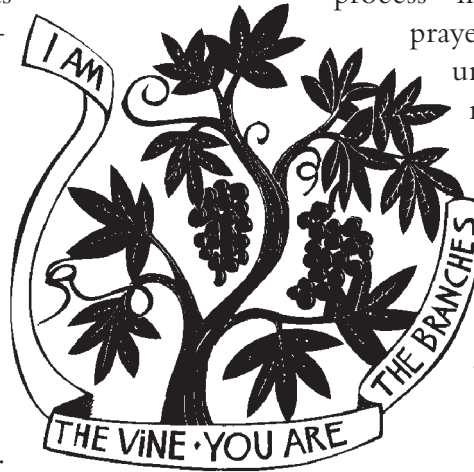
**Councils do not meet in the pastor's absence.**

Pastors should also describe the commitment they are asking of council members. They should say in advance how often the council will meet and how members will be expected to prepare for meetings. They should state any requirements for in-service training or retreats. The more explicit a pastor can be about his expectations, the better his chances of attracting good council members.

## Discernment

The process of discerning who belongs on the council has two components. The first is general participation. Councilors are chosen to reflect the wisdom of the parish community. This is the reason that pastors rely on the help of parishioners to select council members. There are various ways that parishioners help the pastor determine who has the necessary gifts for the council ministry.

The second is informed choice. Unless parishioners understand the pastoral council and have a thorough opportunity to judge who is best for the role, their choice will not be informed. That is the weakness of popular elections. A popular election by parishioners who do not appreciate the work of the council is not helpful.



Parishioners should know that the pastoral council has a specialized role. It requires people with particular talents. Selecting from among parishioners who have a gift for service on the council requires a sufficient time for a genuinely spiritual discernment process involving dialogue and prayer. When parishioners understand the council's ministry and have an opportunity to discern which parishioners are suited for it, they can contribute enormously to the selection of council members.

### COMMITTEES

Almost every pastoral council has committees. They fall into two categories:

- *First, a standing executive or agenda committee*
- *Second, a variety of ad hoc committees.*

These ad hoc committees are not standing committees, but are formed to do a particular task and disband after the work is completed.

## Executive Committee

Usually, the executive or agenda committee is composed of the pastor and council officers, i.e., vice-chair, assistant to the vice-chair and secretary. This committee plans the agenda and informs the members of it in advance. The pastor presides and the vice-chair conducts the meetings, assisted by the assistant to the vice-chair. The secretary keeps the minutes of the council meetings, to allow members to judge whether they have accomplished their agenda.

The executive committee determines the council's agenda. Occasionally, however, parishioners will ask

the committee to place on the council's agenda items separate from the council's main work. When parishioners submit items for the council's agenda, the committee can respond in one of two ways. The committee can place the item on the council meeting agenda, either immediately or at some future time, or it can inform the parishioner that the item does not belong on the council's agenda. The council then asks the pastor, parish staff, or another parish organization to respond to the item in question. In either case, the committee should explain its decision to the parishioner.

## Ad Hoc Committees

It is common for pastoral councils to appoint ad hoc committees to help them accomplish special tasks. These committees undertake special investigations, engage in research, take surveys, poll parishioners, or consult experts. The aim of the ad hoc committees is to enhance the main work of the council which is investigating and pondering an issue.

*Neither the council  
nor its committees, strictly speaking,  
implements the recommendations  
of the council.*

When the pastor accepts the council's recommendations, he establishes committees to implement them. These are parish committees, not committees of the council.<sup>28</sup>

The general principle is that the pastoral council recommends and the pastor (through his staff and through volunteers) implements. The council helps define the means by which to implement its recommendations, but it does not implement them.

## Relationship to the Parish

The pastoral council is a representative body, not a body of representatives. It reflects the wisdom of the People of God, not constituencies within the parish. Council members should not be chosen because they belong to this or that ministry or parish organization. They should be chosen because they have the gifts necessary for the pastoral council.

Unlike the parish staff, the pastoral council is not a group of experts in catechesis, liturgy, pastoral care, or education. The council's gift is practical wisdom. With that in mind, council members are encouraged to educate themselves in the various fields of theology and pastoral care. They need not be experts,

however, to join the council. Pastors turn to the council not for expert opinion, but for the wisdom of the community. Experts can no doubt judge what is good in general and as a rule. But unless they are parishioners, they cannot say with authority what is appropriate for the parish. Councils are meant to aid in that judgment. They can tell, from among the many options possible for a parish, what is right.

Parish staff members may sit on the parish council, but are not voting members. They primarily serve as consultants. Parochial vicars, and pastoral associates, however, should participate by virtue of their office. They are associates of the pastor who with him implement the pastoral care of the parish.



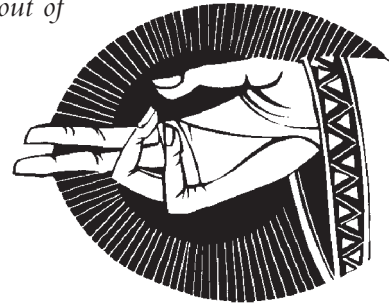
The pastoral council does not "coordinate" parish committees in the sense of directing them. That role belongs to the pastor. Further, he needs to ensure that other parish groups (such as the finance council, other organizations and committees) provide the pastoral council with the information it needs in order to advise him. The council ought to be aware of the activities of other parish groups.<sup>29</sup>

This chapter has focused on the members of the pastoral council. It has stated general principles about how members are chosen, about its committees and about the relationship of the council to the parish staff and to other parish groups. Most importantly, as stated in the definition of the council, it has a specific job to do and its members should be chosen to do that job and no other. In the next chapter, we shall look at how pastors establish councils.



*Steps for Forming a Parish Pastoral Council*

*Although many parishes in the United States have a pastoral council, one out of four does not. Some have never had a council. Others once had a council, but have none at present. When a pastor desires the kind of focused attention on parish matters that only a council can provide, he needs to know how to begin. This chapter will guide him and his associates through the initial process.*



## Desire for a Council

The first step in planning for a council needs to be taken by the pastor. He begins with a desire to consult. He wants a group of trusted and capable parishioners to help him reflect on pastoral matters and offer good advice regarding the pastoral needs of the community. His goal is to obtain sound and meaningful advice, often in the form of recommendations. Through a council, he expects to gain a deeper insight into how the parish can plan its pastoral program thoroughly and carry it out effectively.

Once a pastor recognizes the value of a council, he inquires how to form one. These guidelines have already pointed him toward the principal documents of the Church and toward popular literature about councils. However, a pastor wants to consult with those who have experience in councils. The staff of the Archdiocesan Synod Implementation Office provides personal consultation as well as seminars and training sessions for parish staff and volunteers. It is ready to share its experience about councils, to assist in establishing them, and to help form new members.

For assistance please contact  
Mrs. Maria Elena Uribe  
Ministry Coordinator of the  
Synod Implementation Office  
(213) 637-7321  
[meuribe@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:meuribe@la-archdiocese.org)

## The Parish Staff

When a pastor decides to establish a council, he should involve the parish staff. Staff members will want to know the pastor's motive for forming a council. They will need to understand the relationship between the expertise they provide and the practical wisdom which non-experts can offer. The council composed of non-experts gives pastoral matters the benefit of practical investigation and analysis. The council seeks to discern, from among the many things which experts judge to be possible and desirable, the wise and prudent course for the particular parish. The work of the council is time-consuming, but well spent when meetings are planned and orderly.

*Councils have a perspective  
and gifts, which complement the work  
of parish staffs.*

A pastor will want to inform and consult his staff members about the content and form of council meetings. What, for example, are the areas in which the parish's pastoral program could benefit from investigation and analysis? What aspects of parish life (such as worship, education, charity, and evangelization) need attention? The parish staff can help the pastor define the topics which the council can then explore.

## Using a Steering/Selection Committee to Form the Parish Pastoral Council

Once the pastor has decided to form a parish pastoral council, especially if this is the first council being formed under his pastorate at this parish, and once the parish and school staff understand their relationship to that future council, then the pastor should establish a steering/selection committee. The primary purpose of this body (12 – 15 members) is to steer/guide a process leading to the formation of a Parish Pastoral Council. A chairperson and secretary are selected from and by the members of the steering committee. The committee develops the process for the selection of members and the operational guidelines for the council. For this committee, the pastor will want to choose parishioners and staff members who support the establishment of a council. It is possible that some members of the steering committee will become pastoral council members, in which case the time served on the steering committee may be applied towards their first term. This will help establish staggered terms. The pastor may also want to engage the services of a competent facilitator.

The tasks of the steering committee are as follows:

1. *To define the purpose of the pastoral council*
2. *To educate parishioners about the purpose and function of the pastoral council*
3. *To invite parishioners to participate in the pastoral council*
4. *To oversee the selection of council members*
5. *To draft operational guidelines for the council*

To achieve the first task, the Steering Committee must develop a statement of the council's purpose. This statement must be consistent with the teachings of the Church which indicate that such councils are first and foremost advisory. The resulting statement will form the basis for the council's operational guidelines.

The operational guidelines should define when the council meets, the duration of council meetings, and how members are to be chosen. The use of an

experienced facilitator can ensure that the steering committee understands the role and function of the pastoral council. The facilitator can clarify the various ways in which the council can be structured and help the steering/selection committee develop a process for the selection of members to the pastoral council. Deciding these matters is the steering committee's first task. Any interim guidelines developed in conjunction with the first task could include but not be limited to the following areas (in no particular order of importance):

- *Conveys the length of meetings and number per year*
- *States about when and how the members are selected*
- *Clearly states the number of council members the council will have*
- *Indicates term(s) of office (including how to initiate staggered terms)*
- *Defines requirements for ongoing formation, prayer, retreats*
- *Designates officers and their respective duties*
- *Specifies the method of selecting officers*
- *Describes a methodology used for arriving at a decision based on consensus*
- *Presents any special criteria for mandatory membership*
- *Describes the procedures for dealing with resignations, vacancies, etc.*
- *Lists communication strategies to the parish at large*
- *Aids in dealing with ex-officio member status*
- *Gives criteria for membership*
- *Defines a quorum*
- *Gives reference to ad-hoc committees*

The second and third tasks of the steering committee are to educate and inform parishioners about the purpose and function of the pastoral council, and then invite them to participate. There are many ways to accomplish this, and the steering committee members should consider carefully how they can best achieve results from the knowledge they have of their own community. Experience has shown that the most effective method is to invite all parishioners to a series of open meetings. Regardless of

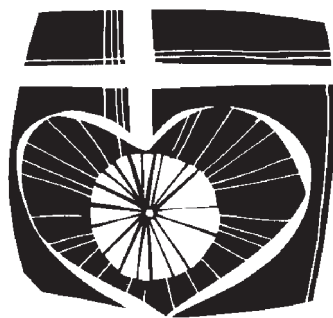


whatever method or way is selected, it is important that all steering committee members have visible active roles in the education and invitation process. In the ensuing meetings, the pastor and the steering committee state the motive for a pastoral council. They explain why the pastor wants to establish a council. They also invite parishioners to suggest topics for the future council's study and reflection. In this way, the steering committee members educate parishioners and invite their participation.

## Selection of Members

The fourth and fifth tasks of the steering/selection committee call for the development of a methodology for the selection of council members and a plan to oversee that process. In the last chapter we identified the general principles which underline the selection of council members. These were the general principles about the need for: 1) Special talents and gifts necessary to serve effectively on a council; 2) Clearly stated expectations from the pastor; and, 3) Allowing parishioners to share in the discernment of council members. Each of these is important. If a pastor gives parishioners a clear expectation about the importance of consulting, tells them about the kind of people he is trying to recruit for the council, and creates opportunities for them to get to know potential members, then parishioners will be able to help select a new council.

We suggest three member selection methodologies in the next chapter of this booklet. A critical part of any selection process is the nomination, be it self-nomination or nominations from parishioners, of those persons viewed as having the qualifications needed for pastoral council membership. Potential nominees participate in an orientation session and in a process of personal discernment prior to any actual selection process. All models must educate parishioners thoroughly, invite



potential members to discern their gifts, and involve the parish community.

**Pastoral councils can have a big impact on the parish staff and on the congregation.**

In summary, pastors who want to establish a council need to plan for it. Such planning should begin with the Church's vision of councils and should draw upon the wisdom of experienced practitioners. Pastors should also consult their staff members. When the parish staff understands the role of the council, staff members can help identify the pastoral matters which the council will study and the way in which the council will approach them. The nuts and bolts of establishing the council, however, belong to a steering committee. Such a committee clarifies the operation of the council, educates parishioners, invites their participation and oversees the selection of members. When the first parish pastoral council is formed, the steering committee has completed its work and ceases to exist.

*Inherent to all of the above is Sound, Open, Ongoing Communication*

In this chapter, we have shown how to cultivate a new council. The steps are somewhat laborious but worth the effort.

**The pastor who plants his council in well-tilled soil will reap a harvest of sound advice based on careful investigation and thorough reflection.**

The members of such a council will have the satisfaction of putting their gifts and talents at the service of the parish. Pastoral councils cannot take the place of the parish staff and dedicated parishioners who assist in the operational viability of the parish. But they can help ensure that the parish mission is well thought out and carefully planned.



## *Recommended Models*

The general principles for selecting council members were laid out in Chapter Five. Potential council members need to know the basic task of the council and the expectations of the pastor. Council members ought to have specific gifts, such as the ability to study, reflect, and reach agreement with one another. In the selection of council members, the entire parish should participate in that process. They should have the opportunity to discern which parishioners are suited for the pastoral council.



There are many ways to put these principles into effect and many ways to select council members. The following three models stress the importance of clear expectations, the discernment of gifts, and participation by the community.

### Shared Wisdom Model

*Benedictine Sister Mary Benet McKinney defined the "Shared Wisdom" model.<sup>30</sup> The essential features of the model are:*

**Information.** Parishioners hear about the ministry of the pastoral council through homilies, parish bulletins, etc.

**Discernment.** People who are interested in the ministry attend a series of meetings. The meetings acquaint people with what service on the council requires. There the parishioners are able to match their own gifts and talents with the needs of the council. This process should not be hurried and should involve conversation, reflection and prayer.

**Self-Nomination And Confirmation.** An individual who feels ready for the council ministry needs to test that insight. He or she should consult the pastor or a staff member.

**Selection.** Once the discernment of nominees is complete, writes Sister Mary Benet, "the process of final selection can vary according to the experience and expectations of the parish or diocese: election, appointment, or a combination of the two."

### Election Committee Model

*This information is presented so that our readers know this model exists. However, we do not encourage using this model because it uses a voting process to select council members. There is always the danger that the "voting" process may turn into a "popularity contest."*

Another popular model of councilor selection involves the establishment of a parish election committee. This model, recommended by Father William Rademacher and Marliiss Rogers,<sup>31</sup> involves the same kind of discernment as the "shared wisdom" model, but uses a committee to screen and discern nominees. The committee then proposes a slate of nominees and conducts a general parish election. It involves the following steps:

**Forming the Committee.** The Election Committee, which includes the pastor, plans the selection process.

**Preparing the People.** The committee informs parishioners about the selection of council members by means of announcements at Mass, the bulletin, and parish forums.

**Identifying Nominees.** The committee agrees on a list of qualifications and identifies potential

nominees. They are parish committee members, parishioners with distinctive skills, or people nominated by other parishioners or by themselves. The committee contacts potential nominees and obtains their consent.

**Orientation of Nominees.** The committee requires potential nominees to participate in an orientation session.

**Preparation of a Slate.** Once the committee has determined a slate of nominees, it provides parishioners with opportunities to get to know them. It publicizes their résumés and conducts "meet your candidate" sessions.

**Election.** Elections are conducted before or after Sunday liturgies or ballots are mailed to registered parishioners.

*Whatever method of selecting the members is chosen, the final step should be with the pastor's affirming the members who are being proposed to sit on his parish pastoral council...*

## Combined Model

Yet another recommended model combines open parish meetings and discernment by an election committee. Like the shared wisdom model, this approach uses open meetings to let parishioners participate. And like the election committee model, a small team of parishioners screen nominees, conduct orientation sessions and select the council.

**Pulpit Announcements.** The pastor (and in large parishes, the other parish priest[s]) explains at the announcements following Sunday Mass about the pastoral council and the qualifications needed to be eligible. He invites the community to write down the names and phone numbers of parishioners who seem qualified for council membership and drop them in convenient boxes located throughout the church. This process can be extended to two con-

secutive weekends to inform parishioners and invite greater participation.

**Publications.** Special bulletin inserts, newsletters and posters publicize the plan for the establishment of the new pastoral council. A tear-off slip of paper is provided to nominate a parishioner for council membership.

**Open Meetings.** At one or more evenings of prayer, parishioners pray for guidance and support of the new council.

**Election Committee.** In parishes with existing councils, a committee of outgoing council members, together with the pastor, reviews the nominations. Each nominee is then contacted by phone. Those who are willing to serve attend one or more orientation sessions for further education about the council and the responsibilities of members. In parishes without councils, an ad hoc group or parish staff can contact nominees and orient them to service on the council.

**Orientation for Nominees.** The orientation consists of information and small group process. The pastor expresses his understanding of the pastoral council. The current council vice-chair (or another knowledgeable consultant) provides a detailed description of meetings and operation. Participants are invited to state orally and in writing why they want to serve and the skills they could bring to the council ministry.

**Selection of Members.** Afterwards, the pastor and the outgoing council members (or an ad hoc group) review what they saw and heard at the orientation. They then discern, by means of prayer and discussion, which nominees shall be selected for service on the council.





## REGIONAL PASTORAL COUNCILS

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles (Archdiocese) is divided into five pastoral (territorial) regions to better attend to the pastoral life of the faithful and respond to their various needs. They are the Santa Barbara, San Fernando, San Gabriel, Our Lady of the Angels, and San Pedro Pastoral Regions. Each of these five regions is further sub-divided into four deaneries (with an appointed Dean or Vicar Forane at the head of each deanery) for a total of 20 deaneries within the entire Archdiocese (four deaneries per region). Further, each of 288 parishes within the Archdiocese is located in one of the 20 deaneries, and is concurrently a member of one of the five regions.

An auxiliary bishop presides over each region, and it is his primary responsibility to administer the region by attending to the spiritual and temporal needs of the faithful through the exercise of his various responsibilities on behalf of the Archbishop, and by working closely with the parishes and other relevant entities within his region. These regional bishops, together with the deans, pastors and/or other ordained, religious, and lay pastoral leaders of each parish, attend to the needs of the faithful.

To assist each regional bishop in the governance of each region, the Archdiocesan Synod of 2003 (the Synod) proposed, among other major priorities, the establishment of Regional Pastoral Councils to address common goals, concerns, challenges, and the sharing of resources. This proposal, which was subsequently approved by the Archbishop, thereby becoming particular law in the Archdiocese, came to fruition in October 2003 when the five Regional Pastoral Councils were formally established and commissioned.

Comprised of members from many of the Parish Pastoral Councils within the Region, a Regional Pastoral Council must be prepared to help identify, present and discuss the various issues and concerns common to the Region. As indicated in the Charter for the Regional Pastoral Councils, the pur-

pose of the Regional Pastoral Council is twofold, namely, to:

- *Collaborate with the regional bishop in considering matters relating to pastoral activity and to formulate practical conclusions, thereby faithfully bringing the vision of the Synod to life on the various local levels within the Pastoral Region; and*
- *Assist the regional bishop in other matters he may choose to bring before the Regional Pastoral Council.*

This collaborative vision, emphasized frequently by the Synod and by the Archbishop, is a call to lay, religious and ordained members of the Church to renew the structures by which decisions are made on all levels. Thus, the Regional Pastoral Councils answer the call expressed in Initiative II of the Synod for greater “religious and lay participation in decision-making and processes of accountability.” Ensuring accountability is an important aspect of the ministry of a Regional Pastoral Council—not only for itself, but for others in ministry as well.

The primary function of a Regional Pastoral Council is to complement the ministry of the Regional Bishop in a consultative role. At times, the Bishop may ask the Council to serve him in an advisory role on a particular matter. In conducting its own internal affairs, each Council functions in a deliberative manner.

The Regional Pastoral Council also enhances the relationship between the regional bishop and the faithful of the region by bringing each closer together. This is manifest when the bishop consults with his council since it is comprised of the faithful from his region. The council communicates its perceptions, particularly the pertinent pastoral needs of the region. It is an extension of the various parish pastoral councils within the region. The final outcome is shared commitment to the common good of the region and the Archdiocese.

## Other Attributes

*1 Regional Pastoral Councils are established to facilitate collaboration among the parishes in each region.*

*2 Regional Pastoral Councils bridge the gap between parish and the Archdiocese, thereby enabling the faithful to experience the Archdiocese as a community of faith, working toward the same Mission, the Mission of Christ.*

*3 Regional Pastoral Councils act as mentoring communities to parishes within their regions.*

*4 Regional Pastoral Councils take ownership of regional needs, which may include addressing limited human and financial resources.*

*5 Regional Pastoral Councils serve as a forum for reflecting upon the pastoral needs that are common to parishes within the region. They can recommend inter-parochial collaboration where appropriate while maintaining communication with the local Parish Pastoral Councils.*

The Second Vatican Council emphasized that each baptized person is called to holiness, to fulfill the mission of Jesus in our world. Christians are called to read the signs of our times and to respond to needs in the manner Jesus would if he were on earth today. Members of parish pastoral councils, regional councils and archdiocesan councils are leaders who must set the stage and espouse a vision of what the future of the local church can be. Their task as leaders is to lead the faithful from where they are now to where they have yet to be. They promote a vision of what a parish, region, and the Archdiocese can be and move the faithful toward that vision. Implementation of a vision does not take place instantly; that vision must be pondered, articulated and repeated over and over again in a variety of ways.

As pastoral council members they form a community of faith that comes together in love and prayer to try to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to them, at this moment, in this time in history. Faith enables you to look beyond the ordinary and see

something more. There is an old story of three people who viewed a sunrise over the ocean. The first person looked at the red ball on the horizon and said, "It is going to rain all day." The second person, recognizing the beauty of nature, exclaimed "what a gorgeous view!" The third person exclaimed, "Praise God!" For it was he who saw the sunrise with the eyes of faith and recognized in it the presence of God. Pastoral Council members can be no less than harbingers of faith who recognize the presence of God in their midst and sing His praises.



## ARCHDIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL

*"If all the baptized are to share in the Church's mission, then the structures in Church life and governance must be renewed, and some new structures established, to allow for the greatest degree of participation on the part of the greatest number of the baptized."*

Gathered and Sent: Documents of the Synod of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles 2003

The Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* tells us that by virtue of our baptism, all of the faithful enjoy true equality in dignity and action. It further states that based on each individual's particular circumstances and responsibilities, all of the faithful are called to cooperate in building up the body of Christ and in fulfilling the mission that God gave the Church to accomplish in the world. The Church, therefore, is rightfully perceived as an ecclesial communion which, according to Pope John II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, will lead the Diocesan/Archdiocesan Bishop to a pastoral style which is ever more open to collaboration with all.<sup>32</sup>

*Pastores Gregis* points out that ecclesial communion, in its outward manifestation, presupposes the participation of every category of the faithful, inasmuch as they, together with the Diocesan/ Archdiocesan Bishop, share responsibility for the good of the local Church which they themselves form. Therefore, the document exhorts that "the Diocesan/Archdiocesan Bishop will make every effort to develop, within his particular Church, structures of communion and participation which make it possible to listen to the Spirit who lives and speaks in the faithful, in order to guide them in carrying out whatever the same Spirit suggests for the true good of the Church."<sup>33</sup>

At the local level, recognizing that the Church, in all its members, is for mission, the Archdiocesan Synod of 2003, among other priorities, called for the renewal or establishment of new structures which would promote or enhance the participation of the

faithful in the fulfillment of its mission. The second Synod initiative calls for appropriate and full participation of the religious and laity, along with the clergy, in decision making. This involves a processes of accountability, the implementation of effective parish and Regional Pastoral Councils, and an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council.

Comprised primarily of three lay members from each of the five Regional Pastoral Councils as well as representatives from other Archdiocesan leadership bodies, the purpose of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council is to "investigate and consider matters relating to pastoral activity and to formulate practical conclusions concerning them."<sup>34</sup> In doing so, the Council is called upon to collaborate with the Archbishop in faithfully bringing the vision of the Synod to life at various local levels with the Archdiocese.<sup>35</sup> Further, it is to assist the Archbishop in other matters he may choose to bring before them.<sup>36</sup>

## CONCLUSION

To carry out the mission of Christ, the development of structures is sometimes necessary to coordinate the various efforts of all who are involved in this endeavor. This is consistent with the 2003 Synod's Second Pastoral Initiative which calls for greater participation in decision making at all levels within the Archdiocese since all of the faithful share in the responsibility for carrying out that very mission.

In keeping with the above, all parishes within the Archdiocese have been mandated to establish a parish pastoral council so that clergy, religious and laity can join together to create a vision and set goals leading to the successful implementation of the mission of Christ, in whatever way it is to be expressed and implemented by the various parish communities.

Parishes are not walled fortresses nor should they be perceived that way. They are living and breathing organisms fully engaged in the life of their communities. Enlivened and motivated by the Sunday liturgy, the faithful of each parish are encouraged to go out and spread the "Good News." As partners in the proclamation of the Word, all are called to share the message with one another, whether man or woman, rich or poor, sick or healthy, old or young, Catholic or non-Catholic, "Jews or Gentile." (I Cor 12:13, KJV)

Through consultation and collaboration at all levels, and the sharing of goals and resources, the baptized can become more proficient and effective in carrying out the mission of Christ. With that in mind, Parish Pastoral Councils, Regional Pastoral Councils, and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council were created to enable the laity, religious and clergy to work together in the building of a vigorous and life giving local Church. The faithful are called to be more fully the Church, a people sent by Christ to be a light to the nations, a beacon of hope and joy to all in this time and place. What better way to contribute to that vision than by beginning as a

member of the Parish Pastoral Council?

*Community*

*"By virtue of this catholicity, each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the entire Church, so that the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to achieve fullness in unity.... Finally, between all the various parts of the Church, there is a bond of intimate communion whereby spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal resources are shared.... All are called to this catholic unity of the people of God which prefigures and promotes universal peace."*

*Lumen Gentium  
(Dogmatic Constitution on the Church),  
Chapter II, 13.*



## ENDNOTES / NOTAS FINALES

- <sup>1</sup> Jim Castelli and Joseph Gremillion, *The Emerging Parish: The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Life since Vatican II* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1987), p. 61; see also pp. 104 ff.
- <sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Code of Canon Law, Latin-English Edition*, translation prepared under the auspices of the Canon Law Society of America (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1983).
- <sup>3</sup> Vatican II, "Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church," *Christus Dominus*, October 28, 1965, no. 27, translated by Matthew Dillon, OSB, Edward O'Leary, OP, and Austin Flannery, OP, in Austin P. Flannery, General Editor, *The Documents of Vatican II*, Preface by John Cardinal Wright (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), p. 580.
- <sup>4</sup> Vatican II, "Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People," *Apostolicam actuositatem*, November 18, 1965, no. 26, translated by "Father Finnian, OCSO," in Flannery, editor, *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 791-2. See Mark F. Fischer, "What Was Vatican II's Intent Regarding Parish Councils?" *Studia Canonica* 33 (1999): 5-25.
- <sup>5</sup> Vatican II, "Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church," no. 27, in Flannery, editor, *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 580.
- <sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Code of Canon Law*, canons 511 and 536. (Canon 511 refers to diocesan pastoral councils).
- <sup>7</sup> Vatican II, "*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*," *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, no. 37, translated by Colman O'Neill, OP, in Flannery, editor, *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 394-95.
- <sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 529 par. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiae Sanctae I*, August 6, 1966, "Apostolic Letter, written *Motu Proprio*, on the implementation of the Decrees *Christus Dominus*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, and *Perfectae Caritatis*," no. 16, translated from the Latin text in AAS 58 (1966), pp. 757-758, by Austin Flannery, in Flannery, editor, *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 601.
- <sup>10</sup> Vatican II, "Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People," no. 26, in Flannery, editor, *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 791-2.
- <sup>11</sup> Sacred Congregation for Bishops, *Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops (Ecclesiae imago*, 31, 1973), no. 204, translation prepared by the Benedictine monks of the Seminary of Christ the King, Mission, British Columbia (Ottawa: Publications Service of the Canadian Catholic Conference, 1974), p. 105.
- <sup>12</sup> Canons 514, par. 1 and 536, par. 1. (Canon 514 refers to *diocesan* pastoral councils).
- <sup>13</sup> Paul VI, *Ecclesiae Sanctae I*, no. 16, in Flannery, editor, *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 601.
- <sup>14</sup> Sacred Congregation for Bishops, *Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops*, no. 204, p. 205.
- <sup>15</sup> The planning role of pastoral councils has been forcefully argued by Robert G. Howes in his books *Creating an Effective Parish Pastoral Council* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991) and *Parish Planning: A Practical Guide to Shared Responsibility* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994). See also the latest publication by Howes, *Bridges: Toward the Inter-Parish Regional Community . . . Deaneries, Clusters, Plural Parishes* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998). The emphasis on planning has been embraced in articles by members of the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development edited by Arthur X. Deegan, II, *Developing a Vibrant Parish Pastoral Council* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1995).
- <sup>16</sup> Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Assembly of Priests Follow-up Committee, *Parish Planning* (Los Angeles: Office of Pastoral Councils, 1995).
- <sup>17</sup> John Paul II, *Code of Canon Law*, canon 536, par. 1.
- <sup>18</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, "Private Letter on 'Pastoral Councils,'" (Circular Letter *Omnes Christifideles*, 1/25/73), no. 9, reprinted in James I. O'Connor, editor, *The Canon Law Digest*, Vol. VII: Officially Published Documents Affecting the Code of Canon Law 1968-1972 (Chicago: Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus, 1975), pp. 280-288. Also published as "Patterns in Local Pastoral Councils" in *Origins* 3:12 (9/13/73): 186-190.



<sup>19</sup> See Medard Laz, *Making Parish Meetings Work* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1997). The distinction between the vice-chair's efforts to keep the council focused on the task, and the efforts to keep relationships among the council members strong, is made by Charles J. Keating, *The Leadership Book* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978, 1994), pp. 14-15.

<sup>20</sup> There are many ways in which a pastor can explore a topic, such as inviting parishioners to share their faith, to reflect theologically, to make decisions in a discerning way, and to plan for the future. See Charles M. Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> Consensus is often presented as the goal of councils, and it is preferable to a forced decision, which is not widely held. But it is also time-consuming and may dull the council's energies. "Without realizing it, the group [or council] elect for decision-making criteria that will maintain the peace, rather than opt for a decision which will be mission-oriented and helpful in accomplishing the mission." Loughlan Sofield, Rosine Hammett and Carroll Juliano, *Building Community: Christian, Caring, Vital* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1998), p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> The search for wisdom is best described by Mary Benet McKinney, *Sharing Wisdom: A Process for Group Decision Making* (Allen, TX: Tabor Publishing, 1987). Reaching for consensus is also described in William J. Rademacher with Marliss Rogers, *The New Practical Guide for Parish Councils* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, "Private Letter on 'Pastoral Councils,'" no. 7.

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Code of Canon Law*, canon 512, par. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Vatican II, "Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church," no. 27, in Flannery, editor, *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 580.

<sup>26</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, "Private Letter on 'Pastoral Councils,'" no. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Vatican II, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," no. 37, in Flannery, editor, *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 394-95.

<sup>28</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Brenda Hermann, *Developing the Parish as a Community of Service* (Silver Spring, MD: LeJacq Publishing, 1984), envision that the pastoral council plans for the parish's mission, rather than coordinate a system of standing committees. See also Loughlan Sofield, Rosine Hammett and Carroll Juliano, *Building Community: Christian, Caring, Vital* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1998), and Loughlan Sofield and Carroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1987). For a contrasting view, see Thomas Sweetser and Carol Wisniewski Holden, *Leadership in a Successful Parish* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), who advocate a view of the pastoral council as the coordinator of parish standing committees. Still more recent is Thomas Sweetser and Patricia M. Forster, *Transforming the Parish* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> William J. Bausch, *The Hands-On Parish: Reflections and Suggestions for Fostering Community* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1989) was the first to advocate that pastoral councils regularly hold meetings of all parish ministers in order to share information. See also William J. Bausch, *The Total Parish Manual* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publication, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Mary Benet McKinney, *Sharing Wisdom: A Process for Group Decision-Making* (Allen, TX: Tabor Publishing, 1987), p. 81. See also McKinney's Appendix I, pp. 140-143. Father Michael Parise has recently used a "shared wisdom" model, and reports on it in an article entitled "Forming Your Parish Pastoral Council," *The Priest* 51:7 (July 1995), pp. 43-47.

<sup>31</sup> William J. Rademacher with Marliss Rogers, *The New Practical Guide for Parish Councils* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988), pp. 120-128.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 32; *Code of Canon Law*, 204 § 1, 208; John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Gregis*, 44.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Gregis*, 44.

<sup>34</sup> Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, "Apostolorum Successores," Congregation of Bishops, 2004, §184.

<sup>35</sup> Gathered and Sent, Documents of the Synod of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles 2003, Liturgy Training Publications, Pastoral Initiative II, Priority 2.

<sup>36</sup> "Private Letter on 'Pastoral Councils'" (Omnes Christifideles, 1/25/73), Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, §9.

## GLOSSARY

**Administrative Decisions** A course of action determined to address or resolve a matter concerned with the daily operation of the parish.

**Accountability** To account for one's actions in regard to his/her participation on a committee, organization, ministry, or other designated function.

**Ad Hoc Committee** A group of people selected to accomplish a particular task. This can be to consider, investigate, report and/or make a recommendation regarding a particular issue, project, or concern.

**Archdiocesan Pastoral Council** A consultative body to the Archbishop regarding the pastoral needs of the local Church.

**Committee** A group of people selected to examine, analyze, inform or carry out recommendations.

**Standing Committee** A committee which remains active for a prolonged period of time.

**Code of Canon Law** A set of norms or laws, approved and adopted by the universal Church, intended to bring order into the life of the ecclesial community. It is articulated by those who are entrusted with the community's care, and its purpose is to serve the common good.

**Collaboration** The process of working together for a common cause and for the benefit of many.

**Consensus** General agreement by the members of a group concerning an opinion, position, proposal or course of action. The essence of consensus is intellectual agreement. Consensus is a deliberate, voluntary agreement about a particular statement or action.

**Consultation** A process in which people come together to seek the advice or opinion of one another. Through this process, they are called to listen, reflect, and through exploration and judgment, come to an understanding and hopefully to a wise decision.

**Consultative Body** A group of advisors who, through prayer, reflection, research, discussion, interaction and deliberation are able to give an opinion.

**Councilor** A member of the Council.

**Discernment** The process of arriving at a decision through prayer, deliberation and reflection.

**Evaluate** The action taken to assess the positive and negative aspects of a plan, goal or concern of the Council.

**Function** The intention or particular activity of anything.

**Goal** A desired achievement.

**Guideline** Predetermined principles, objectives and standards that direct the pertinent performance of a group.

**Mission Statement** A statement which expresses the vision of the future. It creates a clear, convincing purpose and reason for being, while defining the principles and values that sustains and guides a particular entity in setting future goals.

**Norm** A set pattern or method that must or should be followed; an authoritative standard; a principle of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate proper and acceptable behavior.

**Objective** A clear account of the course of action to be taken to achieve a goal.

**Operational Guidelines** Roles, rights, and responsibilities by which members of a group will function. They reach agreement on these, and clearly communicate them to every member of the group (i.e., council).

**Parish Finance Council** Mandated by Canon 537, it is a consultative group formed to assist the pastor in the proper administration of the parish's resources.

**Parish Life Director** A professional minister who is appointed by the Archbishop and entrusted with the spiritual welfare and leadership of a parish which does not have the benefit of a priest pastor.

**Pastoral Planning** Method by which the parish community, through prayer, reflection and study, defines its identity, common purpose, vision, mission, goals and priorities. They then establish the means to accomplish them.

**Pastoral Staff** Consists of pastors, associate pastors, pastoral associates, pastoral administrators, deacons, women and men religious, lay ministers, and other staff who collaborate with the pastor in carrying out the pastoral care ministries and programs within the parish.

**Pastoral Team** The group composed of priests, deacons, men and women religious and lay pastoral ministers who make administrative and pastoral decisions judiciously and responsibly and are accountable for establishing these decisions.

**Planning** A procedure by which the needs, goals, objectives, resources and the means to achieve the desired outcome are determined.

**Preside** To lead, direct, officiate, chair, or oversee a meeting, gathering or liturgical function.

**Presider** The individual who leads, directs, officiates, and oversees a meeting, gathering or liturgical function.

**Priority** A matter, need or goal ranked as preferential; it therefore takes precedence over others.

**Purpose** The reason for which something exists or is done.

