

## Office of the Bishop

*Diocese of Brooklyn*

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My Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

It is with my sincere prayer for the vibrant future of the Diocese of Brooklyn that I issue the following guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils. I am expecting the development of Parish Pastoral Councils in each parish of the Diocese as an integral step toward the ongoing renewal of each parish within the wider context of the New Evangelization.

Parish Pastoral Councils and the Pastoral Planning Process will begin to provide a realistic view of the contemporary experience of parishes and parishioners and begin to shape a mission-driven vision for our future. In order to ensure a vibrant future for our Diocese, it is of utmost importance that pastors commit themselves to the development of Parish Pastoral Councils and consult with them to address the varied aspects of parish life.

The Parish Pastoral Council has the potential of creating new relationships rooted in the mission of our Church as well as attuning the pastors and myself to the unique needs of the parishes. As we move forward in the process of planning it is important that we do so in the light of the Gospel mission and with openness to the insights and experience of the People of God.

My hope for the life of the Parish Pastoral Councils is found most eloquently in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church:

*A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from the familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders: in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders. The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the laity, can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfill its mission for the life of the world. (Lumen Gentium, 37)*

As we look to the future there is much work to be done. The work ahead includes evangelization, stewardship, catechesis, social justice and our continuing formation as disciples of Jesus Christ. This work can only be accomplished by the clergy, religious and laity working collaboratively within parishes and clusters. Effective Parish Pastoral Councils will foster such collaboration.

I strongly encourage Parish Pastoral Councils to proceed with confidence and heightened enthusiasm in the work of the New Evangelization. May Christ Our Hope and Mary, Mother of the Church, guide our efforts as we begin the pastoral planning process together.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.  
Bishop of Brooklyn

## RATIONALE FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

Through Baptism and Confirmation all are called to exercise both their right and responsibility to participate fully in the life and mission of the Church. This mission of the Church is rooted in the mission of Christ who commanded all the baptized to "Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all of creation." (Mark 16:15) This vocation of the community of believers in Jesus Christ, to promote the Reign of God on Earth, permeates the teachings and spirit of the documents of Vatican Council II. All members of the Church collaborate in the responsibility for fulfilling its mission according to their proper charisms and roles. The Second Vatican Council urged active involvement in the life of the Church by emphasizing the principles of collaborative responsibility, consultation and lay participation.

*...the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church. Their activity is so necessary within Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness.*

### **Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 10.**

*Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary, they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their service and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart.*

### **Dogmatic Constitution On the Church, 30.**

Pastors need to consult with the laity who in turn have the right to express their views and concerns to their Pastor. An important structure that fosters this collaboration in the mission of the Church is the Parish Pastoral Council. The Parish Pastoral Council assists pastors to foster the cooperation of the parishioners and staff in the task of carrying out the mission of the Church on the parish level. While the Parish Pastoral Council is not explicitly mentioned in the documents of Vatican Council II, the theological principles which underlie it are clearly enunciated and a rationale for its development is given.

*... by reason of the knowledge, competence or pre-eminence which they have, the laity are empowered, indeed sometimes obliged, to manifest their opinion in those things which pertain to the good of the Church. If the occasion should arise, this should be done through the institutions established by the Church for that purpose and always with truth, courage and prudence and with reverence and charity towards those who by reason of their office, represent the person of Christ.*

### **Dogmatic Constitution On the Church, 37.**

## CANON LAW REFERENCES

The 1983 Code of Canon Law elaborates on the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the vocation and mission of the People of God and provides structures to express and encourage collaborative responsibility on every level of ecclesial administration.

Canon 208 speaks of everyone's responsibility to work together in the building up of the Body of Christ.

*In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function.*

**Code of Canon Law, 208.**

Canon 519 calls for the Pastor to develop structures that incorporate the principles of collaborative responsibility and of consultation with the staff and parishioners.

*The pastor is the proper shepherd of the parish entrusted to him, exercising pastoral care in the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share; in accord with the norm of law he carries out for his community the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing, with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful.*

**Code of Canon Law, 519.**

This Canon emphasizes the role of the Pastor and places him in the context of mutual collaboration with the staff and parishioners in promoting the mission of the Church.

Canon 536 specifically deals with Parish Pastoral Councils.

*After the diocesan bishop has listened to the presbyteral council and if he judges it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish; the pastor presides over it, and through it the Christian faithful along with those who share in the pastoral care of the parish in virtue of their office give their help in fostering pastoral activity. This pastoral council*

*possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop.*

**Code of Canon Law, 536.**

The Parish Pastoral Council is called to lead the faith community in the discernment and expression of its own mission. This role challenges parishes to redefine the nature of their leadership and call forth those who are best gifted to serve in this capacity.

This role of the Parish Pastoral Council, as one of ongoing pastoral planning, is an evolution from the parish councils which have existed in the past. The purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council is primarily to develop mission-focused parishes. This does not deny the importance of activity and fiscal responsibility, but it does attempt to place at the heart of the parish a consciousness and zeal for the mission of Jesus Christ.

## PRINCIPLES

In the Diocese of Brooklyn every parish is to have one Parish Pastoral Council which is to foster full participation of the entire parish in the pastoral life and mission of the parish and of the Universal Church. The following principles guide the formation of Parish Pastoral Councils:

1. Every Parish Pastoral Council is to develop a statement of purpose which reflects the identity and mission of the parish in light of the Gospel, Church teachings and the specific realities of the parish.
2. The Parish Pastoral Council is a consultative body with the role of advising and assisting the Pastor in developing a parish pastoral plan and providing input on issues of pastoral concern.
3. The Parish Pastoral Council develops and recommends parish pastoral plans and directions through a consensus process and prayerful reflection.
4. Every Parish Pastoral Council must be representative of the entire parish, recognizing and reflecting the parish's rich diversity.
5. The Parish Pastoral Council is to collaborate with parish committees that address specific areas of parish life such as worship, spirituality, evangelization, religious education, finance and service.
6. It is the responsibility of the Pastor to convoke the Parish Pastoral Council and to preside over it.
7. In the event that the Pastor of a parish dies, resigns or is transferred, the Parish Pastoral Council ceases to exist.
  - a. It is the prerogative of a newly appointed Pastor to either confirm the membership of the former Parish Pastoral Council or initiate a new selection process. The Pastor's

final decision in this matter should occur within three to six months of his installation as Pastor.

- b. During the transition period between Pastors, the newly appointed Pastor (or Territorial Vicar) convenes a meeting of the existing Parish Pastoral Council to address any concerns surrounding the transition.
- c. When an Administrator is appointed that Administrator will assume the rights and responsibilities of the Pastor in relation to the Parish Pastoral Council.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council is to foster the full participation of and consultation with the entire parish in the life and mission of the parish and of the Universal Church.

The essential areas of parish life that the Parish Pastoral Councils considers are:

Worship	Liturgy
Word	Teaching/Education
Service	Charity/Justice, Servant Leadership
Community	Unity in Diversity/Welcoming
Evangelization	Proclamation of the Gospel

## FUNCTION

The general function of the Parish Pastoral Council is to advise the Pastor in the essential areas of parish life found above. It carries out its function by:

1. Informing the Pastor of the needs, concerns, gifts and resources of the whole parish and its members;
2. Developing and reviewing a parish mission statement and periodically re-evaluating and revising it;
3. Developing a parish pastoral plan;
4. Participating in ongoing pastoral planning;
5. Recommending policies, procedures and programs which would assist in the implementation of the mission statement and the parish pastoral plan;
6. Reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of existing programs;
7. Reflecting on Diocesan pastoral priorities and recommending how they can be implemented in the parish.

## FREQUENCY OF MEETING

Parish Pastoral Council meetings are convened about 8 times a year. A normal schedule for these meetings would be monthly with the exception of summer and December.

Extraordinary meetings can be held at the request of the Pastor. All meetings require a quorum of members consisting of the simple majority of members.

Other public meetings, including interviews with parish members and staff members, parish assemblies, and reflection groups may also be a part of the Council's agenda during the initial pastoral planning process.

## SIZE OF COUNCIL

In addition to the Pastor of the parish, the Parish Pastoral Council should be composed of twelve to fifteen members.

## MEMBERSHIP

Parish Pastoral Councils are composed of the Pastor, representative parish staff members and lay members of the parish. Since the Council is to be representative of the entire parish community, the members of the Council ought to reflect the diversity within the parish. Lay members of the Parish Pastoral Council are to be parishioners who are active in the life of the parish.

Membership is determined as follows:

1. ***Ex Officio Members***

Besides the Pastor, the Council may include up to four ex officio members. It is recommended that these members be the Principal of the parish school, the Director of Religious Education, the Permanent Deacon of the parish, Pastoral Associate or other professional staff members.

2. ***Selected Members***

A process for selecting six to eight members should be conducted. It is recommended that the entire parish community be involved in a selection process rooted in prayer and discernment.

3. ***Appointed Members***

At the Pastor's discretion, he may appoint up to three members to compliment the members chosen through the selection process and to be inclusive of the parish's diversity.

## TERMS OF OFFICE FOR MEMBERS

Selected members serve a three year term with the possibility of serving a second term of three years. Selected members may serve only two consecutive terms. Normally, not more than one third of the Council's membership should be changed at one time.

In a newly formed Council all members serve an initial three-year term. After this initial term, one third of the membership serves an additional year, one third serve two additional years, and one third serves a full additional term of three years.

## ROLE OF PASTOR

The Pastor is the presider of the Parish Pastoral Council. The Pastor leads the process of discernment, expression, and fulfillment of the parish's mission. He attends all meetings of the Council and participates in the discussion and decision-making process. Prior to the group's coming to a consensus, the Pastor is obligated to raise questions or objections relating to issues that could affect the outcome of the decision. When consensus occurs, the Pastor ratifies the decision. If it becomes impossible for the Council to reach a consensus (meaning a decision which everyone can live with) it is the responsibility of the Pastor to make the final decision after considering all input.

In his role as presider, the Pastor does not facilitate the meetings but rather oversees and participates in all Council deliberations. He sheds light on Church teaching and parish or diocesan guidelines. Because he is ultimately responsible for the care of the parish, the Pastor presides at the parish council in a way strikingly similar to his presidency at the Eucharist. He leads the community in its expression of the essential elements of parish life.

### Tasks:

- Sets the agenda with the agenda team (see Role of Agenda Team)
- Sees that the Council performs its duties
- Sees to the ongoing development of Council members
- Gives the Council direction and assistance
- Is accountable for the quality of the decisions of the council

### Techniques:

- Helps the Council exercise its proper leadership
- Becomes an active participant in the consensus process

Gives the Council feedback, support, and affirmation

## ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

A person capable of serving in the role of facilitator is selected from among the members of the Parish Pastoral Council. This individual designs and oversees the process for each Council meeting, assisting the group with planning, decision-making, and problem solving. The facilitator is not a chairperson to whom comments are addressed, but rather someone who assists the group in fulfilling its tasks and responsibilities

### Tasks:

- Prepares the agenda with the agenda team (see Role of Agenda Team)
- Focuses the group on the task at hand
- Encourages all to participate in the life and work of the Council
- Is neutral, not evaluating the ideas of others
- Suggests alternatives, varies methods and procedures
- Helps arrive at win/win solutions

### Techniques:

- Defines issues clearly
- Does not have all the answers, but refers questions back to Council members
- Maintains a positive atmosphere, giving positive feedback and compliments
- Does not dominate conversation

## ROLE OF RECORDER

The recorder keeps track of the progress of each meeting and records official decisions for reference. The recorder is also responsible for any Council correspondence including the dissemination of the agenda and meeting reminders in advance of each meeting.

### Tasks:

- Prepares the agenda with agenda team (see Role of Agenda Team)
- Keeps a record of the basic information, decisions, and assignments of the Council (not a detailed set of “minutes”)
- In important decisions, keeps a public record on newsprint
- Remains neutral, contributes his/her ideas only after stepping aside from role
- Provides copies of the record within one week of the meeting

### Techniques:

- Listens for key words, basic ideas, the essence of the record
- Writes legibly and quickly when doing public recording
- Uses abbreviations
- Stops the group and asks for repetition if the ideas are coming too fast

Numbers, titles, and dates all sheets

## ROLE OF AGENDA TEAM

The agenda team consists of the Pastor, facilitator, and recorder. These three individuals meet ahead of time to formulate each meeting’s agenda after soliciting input from the full Council. They also discuss practical arrangements for the meeting.

### Tasks and Techniques:

- Formulates the agenda for each meeting
  - a. Reviews previous meetings’ agenda for unfinished business
  - b. Consults the annual planning cycle to identify current items: evaluating the parish plan, planning an assembly, scheduling a retreat, etc.
  - c. Reviews Council skill development needs
- Considers practical matters relating to Council meeting
  - a. Seeks a speaker or other resources
  - b. Coordinates changes in time or place of meeting
  - c. Researches any topic to be discussed
  - d. Acquires necessary materials for upcoming meeting

## ROLE OF PPC SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT TEAM

The Parish Pastoral Council members should select 2-3 of its own members to serve as the PPC Spiritual Enrichment Team for a one-year period. This responsibility should rotate each year.

The spiritual formation team plans programs for spiritual enrichment for Council members. This team is also responsible for the preparation of the prayer/study segment of each meeting. It may also plan an annual retreat or periodic evening of reflection for the Council as an important means of ongoing spiritual formation.

### Tasks and Techniques:

- Plans programs of spiritual enrichment
  - a. Gets input from Council to determine direction for spiritual growth
  - b. Obtains prayer/reflection material for the Council
  - c. Seeks sources of input on spiritual formation topics
  - d. Plans for Council attendance at diocesan-sponsored enrichment programs
- Prepares prayer/study portion of every meeting
  - a. Considers the parish situation, liturgical season, Council agenda, or other factors which would inform the prayer experience
  - b. Designs prayer with sensitivity to the need for song, silence, listening to God's Word, sharing reflections, and general prayer for the Council and parish needs
  - c. Prepares all the details of the prayer – music, texts, rituals, and roles
- Designs evenings of prayer or annual retreat
  - a. Reserves time for such events in Council planning calendar
  - b. Develops ideas for themes and format
  - c. Makes needed arrangements and prepares details

## RELATIONSHIP WITH PARISH ORGANIZATIONS

Each parish has a unique organizational structure which allows ministry to thrive within the faith community. Parish Pastoral Councils should not seek to suppress these existing structures, but collaborate with existing committees and organizations as much as possible.

Parish Pastoral Council members are encouraged to have a total view of parish life, a perspective that encompasses the entire mission of the parish. This view should encompass the hopes, concerns, needs and initiatives of parish organizations and should seek to view these as parts of a larger whole.

Therefore, it is recommended that Parish Pastoral Councils not be comprised of leaders of parish organizations. Instead these leaders come with the widest possible view of parish life and in turn create and implement pastoral plans in collaboration with organizations.

During the initial planning phase, Pastoral Council members may conduct interviews with parish committee leaders and members and invite them to be an integral part of the planning process.

## RELATIONSHIP WITH PARISH FINANCE COUNCIL

The Parish Finance Council, mandated by the Code of Canon Law, is separate and distinct from the Parish Pastoral Council. Communication between the two Councils is, however, essential. In order to ensure this communication, a member of the Parish Finance Council also serves on the Parish Pastoral Council as an ex officio member. The Parish Finance Council shares with the Parish Pastoral Council information regarding the parish finances and temporalities on a regular basis. The Parish Finance Council assists the Pastor in implementing the pastoral plans suggested by the Parish Pastoral Council by making fiscally responsible recommendations.

## PRAYER FOR VIBRANT CATHOLIC LIFE

Heavenly Father, we ask You to guide us  
as we enter into and continue the task  
of renewing our parishes, our clusters and our diocese

Help us to be the Church to which Your Son calls us  
We pray for the grace needed  
to remain rooted in our deepest values  
in the midst of a changing world  
and to move forward with confidence  
in Your Providential Care

Keep us always focused on the fact that  
we are on this earth to announce  
the tidings of great joy to all the people  
and build the Reign of God among us

We ask Your Wisdom through Christ our Lord

Amen