

## Parish Assembly Publicity through Pulpit talks

As the Parish Pastoral Council plans for the parish assembly, they also must consider ways to stir interest and communicate the basic concepts of pastoral planning to the wider parish community.

One way to accomplish this is through a series of pulpit talks, given before Mass or at announcement time, that explain the areas of essential parish life.



Used in this manner, pulpit talks serve a number of purposes:

- Publicity for the process in totality and specifically for the parish assembly.
- By focusing on the elements, it provides a format for the speaker to work within that is consistent from week to week, ideally generating both a rhythm over time and interest from parishioners. “Oh, someone said something like this last week too. I wonder what’s going on...”
- It provides a context, ensuring the focus of the whole process remains on the mission of the church.
- It educates a parish about its mission. By the time of the assembly, parishioners will already be familiar with the terms and how it can apply concretely to life.
- Different council members witnessing at each week at liturgy communicates a number of things at once; this process is important enough to use time at liturgy, many people are not only involved but personally invested in pastoral planning, the involvement of the entire parish is crucial to its success, and the entire process is transparent- the council seeks to communicate with the parish at every stage of planning.

### Recommendations:

- Choose a different essential element for each week. If you have a limited amount of weeks to publicize, have the council choose the most relevant elements at that time rather than trying to do more than one element in one day which may be confusing and time consuming.
- Pulpit talks should be 2-5 minutes in length. If two people work together on one essential area, the talks should total no more than 5 minutes. Be sure to time yourself beforehand and practice with other council members at a council meeting.
- Council members may find it helpful split the elements among themselves, pairing up in two’s. Pairs can then develop their talks together, supporting one another. Masses can then be split between the two on the day of that element, dividing the work for the day.
- The talk should include:
  - Who you are
  - A (very) brief explanation of the essential area
  - Why this area is essential to parish life
  - How this area has been significant for you in your life
  - Invitation to come to the assembly to discuss the future of parish life.

- It might be helpful to take into account other talks you hear from the pulpit at various times. Think consciously of what attracts your interest and what you find dull. Consider what the person is saying as well as tone, gestures and other subtle elements of public speaking. No one is perfect, and if your talk is genuine, people will respond. However, taking a few cues from what you appreciate in others when you are in the pew will help you connect with listeners when it's your turn to speak.

### **The Seven Essential Elements:**

*This explanation of the elements is intended to inform council members in creating a pulpit talk. It is written to help you understand and articulate in your own words, NOT for the purpose of being read verbatim at the pulpit! Consider what you would find interesting and relevant if you were listening in the pew.*

The Seven Essential elements find their basis in the Code of Canon Law in the advisement of pastors on the norms of parish life (canons 528-530). They can be identified as: Worship, Word, Community, Service, Leadership, Stewardship and Evangelization.

These elements have at their core **Eucharist**, the very heart of our identity as Catholics, the center of parish life and of our faith in Jesus Christ.

*“It is through the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.”*  
(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy).

In its simplest form, we can describe the elements as follows:

**Worship-** The spiritual life of a parish animates its mission. Personal and communal prayer are essential to the building up of the body of Christ. Worship gives expression to the faith of our communities and our degree of commitment to furthering the Reign of God. Through our worship we are nourished and strengthened to engage in the work of ministry which seeks to transform the world.

**Word-** Our spiritual journey is an ongoing lifelong process. As individuals and as a community we are called to deepen our relationship with Christ and pass it on to others. “Word” indicates a number of ways in which we do this, both formally and informally. Through catechesis, sacramental preparation, family formation, Sunday homilies, or the RCIA process, we build communities of faith through preaching, teaching and living the Word of God.

**Community-** We do not worship in isolation for Catholics are a communal people. Church life draws people together in mutual support, activity, celebration, and growth. It is the unity that results from members becoming involved with one another in all other elements of the pastoral mission. Community is the human dynamic through which the mission of the church is embodied and embraced.

*“The parish is where the Church lives. Parishes are communities of faith, of action, and of hope. They are where the gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to renew the Earth.” (Communities of Salt and Light, NCCB)*

**Service** – The Church is called to serve the needs of others and eliminate the causes of injustice. “Service” therefore includes the elements of both charity and justice. Far from being a burden to parish life, social ministry is part of what keeps a parish alive, making it truly Catholic and reflecting the Gospel mission.

These elements are surrounded and supported by **Leadership** and **Stewardship**.

**Leadership** – While the pastor bears ultimate responsibility and authority with a parish, effective councils require a shared leadership among clergy and laity which calls forth the gifts of visioning, planning empowering and evaluating. The council leads as servants of God, drawing forth the gifts of others through active Stewardship.

**Stewardship** – If the Church is to fulfill its mission, we must be deeply committed to sharing our gifts, talents, money, and material resources in the same spirit of generosity as the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave all that He had for our salvation. With an understanding of what membership in the Church involves, this sharing is not so much an option for Catholics but a serious duty that both keeps the church alive and honors those gifts we have been given through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

**Evangelization:** The term evangelization encompasses any way in which the Church continues to spread the Good News of Jesus. Evangelization is at the heart of the mission of the Church. We evangelize by sharing our enthusiasm for the faith, inviting others to join or recommit themselves to the faith, and fostering gospel values in our families and society so as to transform the world.

The seven elements with the Eucharist at its center provides a filter through all which all the activities of the parish can be sifted, each falling into place as the purpose of the parish is prayerfully discerned. Everything the church does and everything it strives to be fits somewhere into this schema of church life. Through pulpit talks, council members not only inform parishioners of these elements, but they quickly connect themselves intimately to what it means to be church in a specific concrete way, helping to provide a vision that will set the stage for the parish assembly.

If you have additional questions on pulpit talks, please call the Pastoral Planning Office at (718) 229-8001 x 735 / 737 or 739.

May God bless you as you give of yourself through pulpit talks!