

Selecting Parish Pastoral Council Members

Preparation Time: 6-8 weeks

Event Time: 4 major events in process

Nomination Sunday (Brief time during liturgy)

Information Night for Nominees (1 ½ hours)

Night of Discernment (2-3 hours)

Commissioning of New Members (Brief Time during liturgy)

Participants: Pastor

Existing Council Members or Steering Committee members

Volunteers, especially to assist in mailing invitations to nominees

The first and one of the most important steps to any pastoral planning process is selecting leaders from among the faith community to be the pastoral planners or the stewards of planning who will serve the parish in this unique capacity.

The Parish Pastoral Council is this leadership body. The membership of the Parish Pastoral Council is made up of members who are not representative leaders of designated groups or committees within the parish, but representatives of the wider parish community. They are encouraged to focus their attention on the needs of all members and not a constituent group.

Parish Pastoral Council ministry is a unique role of leadership within the parish. It is a call by the community done in openness and trust to assist the parish in assessing its current life and to envision the future life of the community.

Therefore, the selection process used to gather these stewards ideally involves the participation and input of all parish members. The classic model of wide participation in selection has been popular election. In many cases, these elections in the past, modeled after our secular democratic forms of governance, have been simply a popularity contest which conferred membership on those who garnished the most votes. Though they did involve the entire community, they also created definite winners and losers and overly politicized the process.

The method of selection that the Pastoral Planning Office is recommending is not popular elections. We would like to encourage a process that does involve the entire community in the decision-making process, but also employs our Christian Tradition as the foundation of our actions. The most effective and theologically grounded method of selection at our disposal is called discernment. Discernment of members involves prayer, reflection, open conversation, and, most importantly, an openness to the Holy Spirit working within our midst to call forth the designated candidates.

The process which is outlined here is one example of such a process. This process may be adapted to meet the needs of the local community and that adaptation is encouraged. The pastor

and existing parish council/steering committee may wish to use an entirely different process for selection or may decide that an existing leadership body in the parish is well-suited for the pastoral planning process.

In proposing a suggested process for the discernment of members, we took into account these key questions:

- Does the process encourage the participation of the entire faith community?
- Does the process begin to inform and educate the parish about pastoral planning and the role of the Parish Pastoral Council?
- Does the process focus on the gifts of individuals and not their popularity?
- Does the process use prayer, faith-sharing, listening, and consensus-building which would be consistent with Church Tradition regarding discernment?
- Does it honor the reflection/decision-making process of the individual who is called to consider this ministry?
- Does the process elicit names of potential leaders within the parish?
- Does the process affirm all candidates and minimize the sense of a winner/loser dynamic?
- Is the process open and transparent?
- Is the process straightforward and easy to implement?
- Does the process seek to minimize the work of the pastor, parish staff, and existing parish leaders?

As the pastor and the existing parish council/steering committee begin to consider and plan the selection process in your parish, you may wish to consider these questions in your discussion.

Discernment Process for the Selection of New Members of the Parish Pastoral Council

The following is an outline of a discernment process for parish pastoral council members. This discernment process includes the participation of a Parish Pastoral Council Facilitator. These facilitators have been trained by the Pastoral Planning Office to assist parishes in the discernment of new members. Their role in the process is clearly defined. If you decide to use an alternative process, the facilitators are flexible enough to adapt to your needs.

NOTE ON LANGUAGES: The PPC facilitators which are available to assist the parishes all speak English. In addition, there are facilitators who also speak Spanish and Creole. All of the material for the discernment process is also available in Spanish and Creole. If there are other languages in which you need translation of materials or a fluent facilitator, please contact the Pastoral Planning Office as soon as possible.

Components of the Discernment Process

This is a brief overview of each segment of the Discernment Process:

1. **Publicity** - Bulletin and pulpit announcement or other means of advertising should be employed by the pastor or the existing council/steering committee to make the parish aware of the process and their role in it.
2. **Nomination** - Nominations should be made at a Sunday liturgy. All parishioners are encouraged to submit names.
3. **Invitations** - Invitations are sent to all nominees inviting them to attend the Night of Information on a no obligation basis to learn more about Parish Pastoral Councils
4. **Night of Information** - This is conducted by the PPC facilitator. This session is usually 1 ½ hours and includes a presentation on the basics of Parish Pastoral Councils and Pastoral Planning as well as logistics, a time for faith-sharing, and a time for questions. This night ends by encouraging nominees to consider and pray over what they have heard and if they still feel called to come the following week to the Discernment Night
5. **Discernment** - This is a facilitated prayerful listening and consensus session. The nominees enter into this process by answering a series of questions and listening to everyone else as they offer their answers to the same questions. The night ends by the participants naming those they wish to be on the Parish Pastoral Council. The PPC facilitator is responsible for facilitating the process and the consensus process.
6. **Commissioning of New Members** - This is conducted by the pastor at the following Sunday liturgy. This commissioning could also be a time to recognize those who are leaving council.

Timeline for Implementation

The following is a time line for implementation. The entire process normally takes 6-8 weeks.

Weeks 1-3 Publicity for the Discernment Process using bulletin announcements, homily, posters, flyers, etc. This could also include prayer cards and general intercessions which pray for the success of the process.

Week 2 Continue Publicity
Prepare forms for identifying potential candidates

Week 3 Continue Publicity
Continue Prayer
Finalize details of process

- Week 4 Distribute Identification/Nomination forms
Encourage parishioners to fill out forms during announcement time
Ushers collect forms in a fashion similar to a second collection
- Week 5 Send invitations or call all those who have been nominated inviting them to the Night of Information
- Week 6 Night of Information
- Week 7 Night of Discernment
- Week 8 Commissioning of new members during liturgy

Roles and Responsibilities in Discernment Process

The role of the pastor and/or council members is:

Publicity and Prayer

Distributing and collecting Nomination Forms

Sending Invitations

Providing space for Night of Information

Providing Space for Discernment

Conducting Commissioning Service

The role of the facilitator is:

Initial Consult with pastor, existing council/steering committee

Conducting Night of Information Session

Facilitating Night of Discernment

Providing materials to parish: sample nomination forms, sample bulletin announcements, Handouts for Night of Information, Prayer Aids for Discernment Night, Sample commissioning services

Nomination and Invitations

The nomination process is normally conducted by the pastor and the Steering Committee or the existing council.

A sample nomination form is included with this manual. The nomination form includes the qualities for a Parish Pastoral Council Member and this list of qualities (or others which you decide upon) should be used in the publicity and communicated to the parish to assist them in the nomination process.

Invitations and/or phone calls should be sent out to nominees as soon as possible after the nominations have been collected. The invitations should include the date and time of the Information session as well as a note of congratulations for being nominated. A nomination signifies that someone in the parish felt that this person has the gifts of leadership and they should be noticed for that acclamation.

Night of Information

The Night of Information is held at the parish. The session usually lasts 1 hour to 1 ½ hours.

A Parish Pastoral Council Facilitator will conduct the session which consists of faith-sharing and a presentation on the basics of parish pastoral councils as well as a time for the pastor, who is the president of the Parish Pastoral Council, to express his hope and vision for the Parish Pastoral Council. The presentation concludes with logistics including the frequency and number of meetings and the needed commitment for the formation process. This presentation is a time for nominees to learn about the Parish Pastoral Council and ask questions regarding this ministry.

Night of Discernment

The Night of Discernment is held one week after the Night of Information. Because this process seeks to narrow the number of nominees, those who were not able to attend the Night of Information are usually not allowed to attend the Night of Discernment. There may be extenuating circumstances, but this is the common practice.

The room is very purposefully arranged. Chairs are set in a circle and participants are asked to sit in the circle. Extra chairs can be removed once everyone is there. The facilitator also sits in the circle. A small table sits in the center with a cloth that reflects the current liturgical season. The table contains a candle, a Bible, a crucifix or other symbols. This is important so that those who may be more reserved have a point of concentration when speaking. It also helps to create a space of prayer.

The night follows the prayer in the worship aid. A Parish Pastoral Council Facilitator will facilitate the evening.

After a period of prayer and listening, the evening concludes with a group-wide consensus process in which each candidate becomes a selector. Each candidate is encouraged to name individuals who they feel have the gifts for this ministry. This process continues, with the assistance of the PPC facilitator, until there is a consensus among the group. These candidates who emerge from the consensus process become the new Parish Pastoral Council Members.

Commissioning of New Members

The commissioning of the new members is conducted by the pastor at the Sunday after the Night of Discernment. There is a sample commissioning service included here. This commissioning could also be a time to recognize those who are leaving the existing council or to recognize the Steering Committee who have now completed their task

If the parish chooses to employ this process, the PPC facilitators will be able to assist you throughout the process. If you choose to employ an adaptation of this process or an entirely different process, the PPC facilitators will be available to assist you in whatever way they can.

If you have concerns or questions, or would like to discuss this or another process, please contact the Pastoral Planning Office or a PPC facilitator.

