

One-To-One's & Planning the Parish assembly

Pastoral Planning is rooted in consultation, conversation and dialogue that lead to action. The first step in this planning conversation is one-to-one conversations. Pastoral Councils all around Brooklyn and Queens are engaging fellow parishioners in conversations about their thoughts and feelings regarding the parish and Church life both now and in the future. These conversations are meant to stir interest, build relationships, gather ideas and identify potential leaders within the parishes, but without a deliberate plan to record and then review the conversations, all of those ideas can be lost. The aim of the conversations is to provide insight to the pastor and other parish leaders so the conversations must go somewhere and they must be considered as a whole.

So, how do pastoral council members listen and then record and finally review the information from one-to-one conversations? There is no one answer to this question. Each parish is slightly different, but, no matter how it is done, there must be a deliberate plan.

The conversations are not interviews. Pastoral Council members should not have a notepad or an evaluation sheet during the conversation. As much as possible, the time spent with another parishioner should be casual but engaging. It should focus on the person and not a specific task of filling out a form or answering a set number of questions. At the same time, council members are encouraged to ask people about their concerns and hopes for the parish, for their families, for their neighborhood. Many parishes have found interesting ways to record the information from the one-to-one conversations. The best method we have found is to record the important points of the conversation on an index card immediately after the conversation.

At the next pastoral council meeting, members are encouraged to share the results of the conversations. What have you heard? What kind of people have you engaged? Who have we not talked with yet? Many parishes have taken the notes from individual conversations and created a spreadsheet with all comments in one document. Comments can be organized by subject or by using the essential elements of parish life. This method is very helpful in finding themes that are emerging in the conversations.

The one-to-one conversations are meant to lay the groundwork for the rest of the pastoral planning process. The parish assembly follows the conversations. The assembly is similar to the conversations in that parishioners are asked about their thoughts and feelings on parish life, but the situation is very different. A one-to-one conversation is 20-30 minutes with one person and focuses on their specific concerns. The assembly is a large meeting where all participants are asked specific questions and have a limited time to respond. Once the assembly is complete the pastoral council should review the information from both the assembly and the conversations noting both similarities and differences. These two forms of consultation are meant to compliment one another.

Because of their unique format one-to-one and the assemblies tend not to be redundant but seek to build a consensus of information. The key to consultative planning is listening. Whether you are involved in an individual conversation or facilitating a large parish gathering, pastoral council members are asked to listen attentively and bring their observations back to the council table to assist the pastor and parish leaders in creating a plan that truly responds to the needs of God's people and the call of Gospel.

Here is one example of a recording tool that one pastoral council used for their one-to-one conversations. If you would like an electronic copy, please contact the Office of Pastoral Planning.

Topic	Comment	Parishioner
Youth	We need to learn how to use technology to reach out to the youth	Young parent, white, male, 30-something
	Kids are pulled in so many directions these days. Church is not a priority	Mother of teenager, Asian, female
	Get the parent interested and the kids will follow	Grandfather, 30-year parishioner
	Get the kids interested and the parents will follow	
Charity	Our parish needs to do more to reach out to the poor	Teenager, female
	There are no opportunities for us to do service projects and teenagers like to do service	Female, Asian, 40's
	The food collections we do at Thanksgiving and the Giving Tree at Christmas are an easy way for people to get involved.	Female, white, elder