
DIOCESAN GUIDELINES

PARISH PASTORAL and FINANCE COUNCILS

DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

**DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK
2500 NORTH TYLER
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72207**

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INTRODUCTION TO DIOCESAN GUIDELINES

These guidelines are intended to provide ideas and suggestions to aid pastors and council members in the tasks of organizing councils, selecting and electing/appointing members to serve on the councils and in preparing for and conduct council meetings. Nothing contained in these guidelines is mandatory for your councils. These ideas and suggestions are provided merely to assist you in complying with the Diocesan Norms promulgated by the bishop. Your written comments and suggestions regarding the contents of the guidelines are greatly appreciated.

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CHOOSING A PASTORAL COUNCIL STRUCTURE

Although there are many different organizational structures that could be used, it is recommended that the Parish Pastoral Council be organized as an at-large council, a council of commissions, or combination of at-large council and council of commission.

Option 1: At-Large Council

Nominations

- All candidates nominated by the parish at-large or by the candidates themselves.
- Candidates sought who have a general overview of the entire parish.

Elections

- Parish votes for a specified number of candidates each year.
- Those candidates receiving the highest number of votes are elected to the Pastoral Council for the term specified in the Parish Covenant/ Constitution.

Appointments

- The pastor appoints one or more members of the Finance Council to serve on the Parish Pastoral Council. He may appoint additional members to the Pastoral Council as permitted by the Parish Covenant/Constitution. These additional members may be leaders of particular organizations or committees; or they may be representatives of some portion of the parish not represented by those elected to the Council.
- Appointed members (Financial council Members appointed to Parish Pastoral Council and others) may not exceed one-third of the total council membership.

Council Operations

- Minimum number of Pastoral Council members is 3; maximum is 12.
- Reports on activities and plans are given by representatives of the various parish organizations at each meeting.
- Must be consulted by the pastor regarding all “extraordinary acts” of finance and administration.

Finance Council

- All members appointed by the pastor. Minimum of 3 members.
- At least one member must be appointed by the pastor to serve on the Pastoral Council.
- Must be consulted by the pastor regarding all “extraordinary acts” of finance and administration.
- May also perform “ordinary acts” of finance and administration as a service to the pastor, Pastoral Council, and parish.

Option 2: Council of Commissions

Nominations

- Candidates nominated by Commissions based on the Ministry Areas established for the parish.
- Candidates may also come forward (and be sought) from the parish at-large.
- All candidates must be willing to serve on a particular Commission during their term of office.

Elections

- Parish votes for a specified number of candidates designated by Commission or Ministry Area each year.
- Ballots must be laid out by Commissions.
- Those candidates receiving the highest number of votes in their respective Commission or Ministry Area are elected to the Pastoral Council for the term specified in the Parish Covenant/Constitution.

Appointments

- The pastor appoints one or more members of the Finance Council to serve on the Parish Pastoral Council. He may appoint additional members to the Pastoral Council as permitted by the Parish Covenant/Constitution. These additional members may be leaders of particular organizations or committees; or they may be representatives of some portion of the parish not represented by those elected to the Council.
- Appointed members (Financial council Members appointed to Parish Pastoral Council and others) may not exceed one-third of the total council membership.

Council Operations

- Minimum number of Pastoral Council members is 3; maximum is 12.
- Reports on activities and plans are summarized at each meeting by the Council members who represent the various Commissions.
- The members of each commission should meet with the representatives and/or heads of the various organizations within their particular ministry area at least quarterly to plan, review budget reports, and allow the representative Council member to be aware of the activities of the various organizations in that Ministry Area.
- Must be consulted by the pastor regarding all “extraordinary acts” of finance and administration.

Finance Council

- All members appointed by the pastor. Minimum of 3 members.
- If Pastoral Council members are elected to represent the Finance and Administration Ministry Area, by agreement, the pastor may appoint these elected Pastoral Council members to the Finance Council.

- If the Finance Council is appointed totally separate from the Pastoral Council elections, at least one member must be appointed by the pastor to serve on the Pastoral Council.
- Must be consulted by the pastor regarding all “extraordinary acts” of finance and administration.
- Either the Finance Council or the Finance and Administration Commission may also perform “ordinary acts” of finance and administration as a service to the pastor, Pastoral Council, and parish.

Option 3: Combination of the Two Structures

At-Large Council

Those choosing the At-Large Council structure may wish to move toward the Council of Commissions. To do this, one way is to begin with one or two Commissions, for example: Liturgy and Education & Formation. If one or two Pastoral Council members are elected from each of the areas, the rest of the Council could be elected at-large.

Over time, the other Commissions or Ministry Areas could be developed if this was a goal of the Pastoral Council.

Council of Commissions

For those parishes using the Council of Commissions structure, there may be a need to allow one or two “at-large” seats on the Pastoral Council. This can be accomplished by seeking nominations for the “at-large” seats from the parish and placing the candidates’ names under that heading on the ballot. These Council members would have no Commission responsibilities.

COMMISSIONS/MINISTRY AREAS

Overview

If the Council of Commissions structure is used by a parish to organize the Pastoral Council, one of the first steps that must be taken is to categorize the various organizations, boards, and activities of the parish into Commissions or Ministry Areas. This is usually the task of the existing Parish Council or the Steering Committee appointed by the pastor to help establish an initial Council.

This categorization may vary from one parish to another, as can the number of Ministry Areas or Commissions. The examples given on the following pages are intended as suggestions of one way to understand and develop the Council of Commissions concept.

Purpose of Commissions

1. Certainly the most basic function Commissions perform each year is working with the Election Committee of the Pastoral Council to find nominees for each year's elections. This would be the minimum a Commission would be expected to do.
2. Commissions can be a key component in yearly planning and budgeting. By the budget being broken down by Commissions, the pastor, Councils, and parish can better see how they are using the parish's resources.
3. The Commission structure allows Pastoral Council meetings to maintain a focus on the overall direction and mission of the parish and not get bogged down in too many details.
4. Because each Commission has one or two representatives on the Pastoral Council, the activities of all the organizations which fall under a Ministry Area can be presented in summary form by the Commission representative to the Council.
5. The Commissions allow another channel to bring matters to the Pastoral Council. Many decisions can and should be made at the Commission level. Only matters affecting the whole parish in a way that they need the whole Council's recommendation need to be brought to the Pastoral Council.
6. Commissions allow more people to be involved in the decisions and responsibilities of the parish.

Leadership on Commissions

Commissions need at least a coordinator and a secretary to operate smoothly. The coordinator and the secretary do not have to be the members of the Commission who are on the Pastoral Council, although arranging it that way does simplify matters somewhat.

However, the coordinator and secretary could be appointed by the pastor each year or elected by the members of the Commission. A person should never serve as coordinator longer than the terms allowed for Pastoral Council members therefore a maximum of two or three years.

The duties of these two people are very similar to those of the chair and secretary of the Pastoral Council.

The Coordinator: - sees that an agenda is set for each meeting
- chairs the meetings
- ensures that prayer is planned
- oversees that activities of the Commission

The Secretary: - announces the meetings to the Commission members and the parish
- takes and sends out minutes of the meetings

Membership on Commissions

Commissions are essentially composed of the Pastoral Council members elected for the Ministry Area and at least one representative from each of the groups or organizations associated with the Commission. However, all Commission meetings and activities are open and publicized to the entire parish. Any parishioner can attend or get involved with the work of the Commissions.

Commission Meetings

Meetings are usually held at least quarterly and many Commissions will want to meet monthly. Each meeting should be advertised in the parish bulletin one week in advance of the meeting.

1. LITURGY COMMISSION

Purpose

To work with the Pastor and other ordained members of the parish to enhance the spiritual life of the parish through planning, implementing, and evaluating the parish's liturgical life. Dominant concern is Sunday and Holy day celebrations of the Mass. Also has as its focus all activities and programs related to the prayer and spiritual growth.

Possible Responsibilities

- coordinating and preparing for Sunday and Holy day celebrations of the Mass.
- coordinating and preparing for Liturgical Seasons of the year.
- observing and evaluating the liturgical life of the parish.
- specifying liturgical needs of the parish and making appropriate recommendations to the Pastoral Council.
- promoting fidelity to Church norms and implementing diocesan policies with respect to sacramental rites.
- providing opportunities for spiritual growth of parish groups such as the Pastoral Council and other commissions and organizations.
- encouraging prayer groups of all kinds in the parish.
- promotion of Eucharistic devotions.
- promotion of Marion devotions.
- promotions of home prayer life and family prayer.
- promotions of evangelization programs and efforts.
- promotions of ecumenical programs and efforts.

Suggested Membership

- Liturgy Planning Committees
- Choir directors
- Altar Society representative
- Coordinator of lectors
- Coordinator of Eucharistic ministers
- Coordinator of ushers
- Coordinator of altar servers
- Representative of ecumenical committees or organizations
- Representative of evangelization committees or organizations

2. EDUCATION AND FORMATION COMMISSION

Purpose

To coordinate, develop, promote, and evaluate all parish-related education and formation programs. All that pertains to the education and formation of the whole person in Christ is within the scope of this Commission.

Possible Responsibilities

- adult religious education programs.
- sponsoring of speakers on theological and formation topics.
- Little Rock Scripture Study Program.
- publicity of education and formation opportunities at other parishes or within the community.
- support of the parish Catholic school if there is one.
- support of the religious education program for pre-schoolers, grade school and high school age children.
- conducting summer vacation Bible School.
- helping with sacramental preparation classes: Baptism, First Communion, First Reconciliation, Confirmation.
- fostering Marriage preparation teams.
- helping with the education/formation portion of the Catechumenate process.
- promotion of vocations to the priesthood, permanent diaconate, and the religious life.
- support of the CYO for high school and junior high students.
- providing family life programs.
- providing programs and outreach for the divorced, separated, and widowed.

Suggested Membership

- School Board representative if there is a Catholic school
- Coordinator for the Little Rock Scripture Study Program
- Religious education coordinator or director
- CYO representative and adult advisors
- Member of the RCIA (Catechumenate) team
- Coordinators for sacramental preparation teams
- Member of Vocations Committee

3. **SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CHARITABLE OUTREACH COMMISSION**

Purpose

To inform and involve the parish community in social concerns and charitable acts toward one another and toward the larger community of city, state, nation, and world. To transform into action the Church's concern about social justice and charity towards all.

Possible Responsibilities

- developing parish information action programs based on the Gospel and social teachings of the Church.
- identifying social issues and human needs in the parish and larger community and developing action plans (perhaps ecumenical in nature) to meet those needs.
- keeping the parish aware of pro-life activities.
- sponsoring study groups with the Education & Formation Commission on Papal Encyclicals or Bishops= Pastorals dealing with social issues.
- providing Thanksgiving baskets for the needy.
- providing emergency relief for those without shelter, food, or adequate clothing.
- sponsoring a food bank or lunch program.
- running a thrift shop.
- developing a tutoring program.
- gathering and distributing food and clothing brought for the poor on Sundays.
- developing a home-visitation program for the elderly and shut-in the parish.

Suggested Membership

This commission should include members of the parish who are involved in promoting social justice within the parish and civic community; those involved with the physical, mental, and emotional needs of people; and those who give voluntary care to the poor, the aged, the shut-in, and the helpless.

4. **PARISH LIFE COMMISSION**

Purpose

To promote unity and a sense of “family” among the parish members by providing opportunities for people to be together. Provide a welcome atmosphere for newcomers to the parish.

Possible Responsibilities

- plan opportunities for parish to grow in its sense of unity and “family”.
- hold dances, bingo, potlucks, talent shows, casino nights.
- coordinate parish bazaars.
- conduct newcomers coffee once a month after Mass.
- provide for refreshments after First Communion, Confirmation, and other parish celebrations.
- provide greeters or ministers of hospitality before and after Mass.
- conduct a census of the Catholics within the parish=s boundaries.
- establish neighborhood groups.
- visit the sick or disabled.
- work on parish bulletin.
- provide a monthly parish newsletter.
- sponsor parish teams: softball, volleyball, and bowling.
- sponsor and support Scouting troops.
- provide for a parish historian or archivist who would gather the items which record the faith life of the parish.
- provide for a parish photographer.
- encourage and oversee a parish directory.
- provide poster-making service and bulletin announcement writing service for other Commissions and organizations.
- provide a parish contact person to the diocesan newspaper.

Suggested Membership

- Mens Club
- Ladies Club
- Holy Name Society
- Scout leaders
- Mothers Circle leader
- Parish historian
- Coordinator of greeters and ministers of hospitality
- Arkansas Catholic contact person
- Parish bulletin and newsletter coordinators

5. **FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMISSION**

Purpose

To assist the pastor in the “ordinary” acts of administration of the goods and finances of the parish.

“Ordinary Acts” of Finance and Administration

Whether or not the Finance and Administration Commission and the Finance Council are the same, the Commission can perform some or all of the following “ordinary acts” of finance and administration:

- assembling and helping with the preparation of the annual budget based on the priorities and goals determined by the pastor in consultation with the Pastoral Council.
- ensuring that donor restrictions on gifts and legacies are reflected in parish accounting.
- preparing status and forecast reports (with appropriate interpretive comments) regarding actual expenses/income versus budget for all budgeted areas.
- preparation and submission of an annual report to the diocese in accordance with the norms and by the due date established by the diocesan Financial Office.
- publication of an annual financial report to the parish.
- assistance with the implementation of the “Treasure” portion of the Diocesan Stewardship Program.
- evaluating the effectiveness of collections compared to financial needs.
- preparing and implementing plans to pay parish debts.
- helping ensure that the parish has adequate insurance coverage, particularly regarding workman’s compensation, vehicles, boilers, and machinery. In addition, ensuring that the diocese is notified of additions, deletions, and descriptions of property as well as any insurance claims filed.
- ensuring eligible employees (e.g. teachers, secretaries) are registered for the diocesan health and retirement programs.
- implementation of diocesan standards at the parish level with regard to areas such as charts of accounts and data processing.
- helping ensure that church buildings and property are maintained.

Suggested Membership

- Finance Council
- Parish Long-Range Planning Sub-Committee
- Buildings and Grounds Sub-Committee
- Volunteer parish Plant Manager
- Volunteer Parish Accountant

6. STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEES

Parish Stewardship Committees are responsible for implementing the diocesan Stewardship Program. Each year this consists of a renewal of the “Treasure” portion of the program in the fall. Every few years, this also involves a parallel program in the spring calling for parishioners’ commitment of Time and Talent.

In most parishes it is recommended that the Finance Council or the Finance Administration Commission take on as one of their projects the bulk of the Treasure portion of the Stewardship Program. Similarly, it is suggested that the Pastoral Council as a Talent part of the Stewardship Program.

If a parish chooses not to follow these suggestions and decides to have the Stewardship Committee function as a separate group from the Pastoral Council, some member of the Stewardship Committee should be either on a Commission or on the Pastoral Council and report its activities and plans to that group. This ensures that the Pastoral Council remains the “umbrella group” for the parish.

NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

ELECTION COMMITTEE

The election committee needs to be established two or three months before the scheduled election to provide ample time for funding candidates. This Committee can be appointed the Pastoral Council Chair. One proven procedure is to have those whose terms are expiring on the Council make up the Election Committee. The nomination and election process each year then would be the last official act of the outgoing members.

In addition, the entire nomination and election process should be overseen by the Chair of the Council and by the pastor.

Nomination/Election Process

1. Explain the process of making nominations to the parish.
2. Seek nominees from the parish and from the Commissions (if that Council Structure is chosen). Perhaps circulate a nominating sheet at weekend Masses if the elections are at-large.
3. Personally talk to each nominee about the responsibilities of Pastoral Councils Members. Perhaps have an orientation session with the nominees as a group.
4. Review the nominees with the Pastor and the Chair of the Council. Be sure that each nominee is a Catholic, at least 18 years old, and a registered member of the parish.
5. Acquire a brief biographical sketch about each nominee and one paragraph on why the person wishes to serve on the Council.
6. Prepare a ballot (by Commission if necessary).
7. Publish the biographical sketches and paragraphs for each nominee in the bulletin or as a separate handout after each Mass one week in advance of the elections.
8. Hold elections during or following each Mass the next weekend. Absentee ballots should be allowed, but not write-in votes as write-in nominees would not have been properly oriented to the Council's role and responsibility.
9. Count the votes and inform the pastor and ALL nominees of the election results.
10. Announce the election results to the Council and the parish.
11. Plan the installation of these new members (perhaps during a Sunday liturgy).

TERMS OF OFFICE

In general, it is recommended that all Pastoral Council and Finance Council members serve two-year or three-year terms and no more than two consecutive terms.

If a member cannot complete a term, the replacement should serve out the remaining time of the term. This replacement can either be the person receiving the next highest number of votes in the previous election or it could be someone appointed by the pastor in consultation with the Pastoral Council.

Since it is sometimes difficult to remember when a particular council member's term of service on the council is completed or whether a particular member on the parish pastoral council was elected or appointed, parishes are strongly encouraged to adopt some method to keep track of these two things. One possible method is to record each member's name in the minutes of each meeting with an annotation indicating the date his or her term expires and whether the person was elected or appointed to the position. For example, if John Doe was elected to his first three term on the parish council in January 2000, then his name would appear in the minutes as:

John Doe (Jan. 2003 (1) E).

"Jan 2003" would indicate that his current term expires in January 2003. The "(1)" would indicate this is his first term without a break in service. If it was his second term then the annotation would be "(2)". The "E" indicates he was elected. If he had been appointed by the pastor, then "A" for appointed would appear after his name.

It is very important that all appointees, including all those serving on the parish finance council, be appointed for a definite period of term, i.e. two (2) or three (3) years.

COUNCIL OFFICERS

PASTORAL COUNCIL OFFICERS

Officers for the Pastoral Council and their responsibilities are:

The Chair leads, or chairs, all council meetings making sure the agenda and time limits are respected. Secondly, the Chair generally oversees the activities of the Council.

The Vice-Chair assumes the role of the Chair in that person=s absence. The Vice-Chair should also assist the Chair in overseeing the activities of the Council and succeed the Chair in case of resignation.

The Secretary is responsible for seeing that written records or minutes of each meeting are taken and distributed to Council members and to the parish if this is Council policy. In the minutes, the Secretary should make a record of the attendance record of the Council members and inform the Chair and Pastor of anyone missing two consecutive meetings. The Secretary is also responsible for agendas being distributed prior to each meeting.

Note: In some parishes the Pastoral Council may want to have the parish secretary or another qualified person who is not on the council act as a “recording secretary” to assist the Secretary in carrying out the secretarial duties.

The three officers can be selected in whatever way the Council and pastor think best. One way is to take some time to allow each member to tell what experience they have had with setting agendas and leading small group meetings. They might also tell whether they would be willing to lead the council. After this discussion, nominations could then be made for Chair and Vice-Chair.

A similar prayerful discussion should be held regarding who has experience in writing and other secretarial skills. These people would be the nominees for Secretary.

If you have more than one nominee for any of the positions, a private vote could then be taken to select the officers.

FINANCE COUNCIL OFFICERS

The Finance Council may be chaired either by the pastor or by a Finance Council member. If a member is appointed by the pastor as Chair, that person should work with the pastor to schedule meetings, prepare agendas, send out notices and minutes, et cetera.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND AGENDA

PASTORAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

For every Pastoral Committee, the three officers make up an Executive Committee which have primarily one main function: to meet with the pastor between meetings and work with him to prepare the agenda for the upcoming meeting.

The Executive Committee can also serve as an interim consultation group for the pastor between meetings. However, the Committee should in no way preempt the Pastoral Council's role as the primary consultative body to the pastor.

SETTING AGENDAS

Meetings are always more productive and more efficient if everyone attending the meeting receives an agenda and any needed background information in advance. The Chair is then able to stretch out the amount of time available for the items on the agenda and move the meeting along as necessary. Sometimes items simply cannot be resolved in one meeting and the agenda allows them to not "get lost" from the one meeting to the next.

Items on the agenda should be classified as 1) simply for information (e.g. summary reports), 2) those for discussion (with perhaps a decision coming at another meeting), and 3) those needing decisions at the meeting.

With the consent of the Pastor and the Council, additional items may be submitted at the beginning of the meeting by Council members. However, for complex issues, more advanced preparation and information may be needed before taking up an issue.

Other parishioners who want to add items to the agenda should if possible address their concerns to the pastor or a Council member before the original agenda is set by the pastor and Executive Committee. However, the Council may want to allot a certain amount of time during regular meetings to "open the floor" to parishioners. Again, any issue of much complexity probably will have to be carried over to the next meeting.

In almost all cases, parliamentary procedures and Robert's Rules of Order should not be necessary at Pastoral Council meetings. However, the Chair should abide by the agenda and also respect whatever time limits are agreed upon by the Council for the length of the meetings.

SIMPLE AGENDA

One format for Council Meetings and the associated agenda might be:

1. Prayer/Reflection Time
2. Attendance
3. Acceptance/Corrections of Minutes

4. Review of Agenda/Additions/Deletions
5. Reports/Announcements (summary reports from Commissions. Highlight reports from Organizations) (Some Councils require these in advance and simply review them for clarifications.)
6. Discussion of agenda items.
7. Announcement of Date, Time, and Place of Next Meeting.
8. Brief Evaluation of Meeting (Could include: environment, participation level, leadership, content, or process).
9. Closing Prayer.

TOWN HALL MEETINGS

One excellent way to address the need to allow parishioners who are not on the Council to raise issues is to hold an annual “town hall meeting”. This parish-wide meeting could be held so that a report can be given about what has been accomplished in the last year and so that parishioner=s suggestions can be incorporated into the Council plans and budget for the coming year.

CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING

OVERVIEW

How decisions are made is usually as important, if not more important, than what the decisions are. As Councils grow in their ability to truly be “consultative” bodies and small-scale reflections of the Body of Christ the Church, many pastors and councils will want to work on their ability to make decisions by “consensus”.

CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING

A formal consensus decision-making process is time-consuming and therefore should only be used on major issues. The general principles, however, can also be applied to lesser decisions also.

Deciding by a consensus method allows all aspects of an issue and its possible resolutions to be heard and dealt with. After this, members of the Council work to reach a substantial, though not necessarily unanimous, agreement.

The goal is to have a decision which every member can support, even if the decision is not what they would have preferred. In consensus there are no “losers”, everyone should be able to at least say: “I understand the decision and I support it.”

SAMPLE CONSENSUS PROCESS

1. At the meeting, a particular proposal is described in full by a presenter. No questions are allowed during the presentation, but members are encouraged to make notes on points which need clarification or challenge.
2. After the presentation, the Chair invites “clarifying” questions from each member. Each question is noted on butcher paper without further discussion.
3. The Chair then invites “challenging” questions from each member. Examples: Where have you seen this...? Help me understand how...? Each of these questions is noted on butcher paper without further discussion.
4. The Chair then asks, “Let’s explore each of the clarifications and challenges regarding the proposal as listed on the butcher paper”. Each member is then given an opportunity to explore the options of others and clarify the facts and thinking behind the opinions.
5. Once the issue is well-understood, a vote may be cast which asks whether each member: 1) strongly supports the proposal, 2) mildly supports the proposal, 3) opposes but will support the proposal if decided on by the group, 4) mildly opposes the proposal, 5) strongly opposes the proposal.
6. The goal is to get every member to cast at least a 1, 2, or 3 vote for the proposal before it would be acted upon.

If this is not possible, the Chair may:

- determine that no action can be taken at this time.
- ask that the presenter represent the proposal at a later date.
- incorporate changes and recommend action to the pastor; recognizing that those with opposing opinions have been heard and understood.

SUMMARY

There is no way to come to consensus. The important factors are:

- a) make sure the proposal is understood.
- b) see that counter ideas and feelings are expressed and understood.
- c) clearly have the process take place in a context of prayer. Prayer can be introduced before the proposal, during the discussion, before the “vote”, or at any appropriate time.

And again, consensus does not require a unanimous “yes” vote. It is achieved when all members of a group can agree that they have been heard, that their views have been understood (even if differing from the group’s decision), and that they are willing to support the proposal’s implementation.

COUNCIL FORMATION

OVERVIEW

Canon Law, which is part of the foundation on which our Pastoral and Finance Councils are built calls for the formation of lay people involved in church ministry:

Lay persons who devote themselves permanently or temporarily to some special service of the Church are obliged to acquire the appropriate formation which is required to fulfill their function properly and to carry it out conscientiously, zealously, and diligently. (Canon 231 #1)

Those on the Councils of the parish, therefore, should seek and receive formation in a number of ways.

DIOCESAN-SPONSORED TRAINING

The first avenue for diocesan-sponsored training is the viewing and discussing of the video presentations regarding Councils Norms for the diocese. These could be used with nominees, new Council members, and even as a check for experienced Councils to evaluate their progress.

Secondly, all new Council members should try to attend the regional training sessions offered throughout the year by the diocesan Lay Ministry Office.

PRAYER

Prayer is an essential part of any parish meeting if it is to be Christ-centered. All Councils, Committees, Commissions, and organizations should strive to have some quality prayer time during their meetings. This is so important that Bishop Andrew J. McDonald has included it in Norms for Pastoral and Finance Councils.

It is essential to have someone in the group prepare and lead the prayer for each meeting. Rotating this responsibility around the Pastoral Council members often allows for a variety of prayer experiences and a way to get to know and more deeply appreciate each Council member.

In addition, each Council member should accept as one of their duties the responsibility to personally pray for their pastor, parish, and Council. This personal commitment to prayer can help the Council be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit alive in the Church.

RETREAT DAYS

In the life of Councils, there are occasions which ask that time be given for prayer, orientation, and planning. Certainly three of the most significant of these are:

- changes in the Pastoral Council (e.g. new Norms).
- the time following Council elections (new members).

- a change in pastor.

In these and other cases, it is suggested that Councils take some time “apart with the Lord.”” A full Saturday or Friday evening and Saturday is excellent for getting to know one another; praying together; reviewing the roles and responsibilities of the Council, Pastor, and Parish; and setting goals.

Each year it is strongly recommended that Pastoral Councils take the time for this “group formation” and goal-setting for the coming year.

No Council ever “has the time” to do this--a decision must be made to take the time. It is well worth the effort.

STUDY

One of the lessons that Pastoral Councils and other parish organizations are discovering is what good results are gained by spending some time at their meetings learning something. When people learn more about their Church and what they are doing, they are strengthened and enjoy their participation more.

Study for Pastoral Councils could include spending 30 minutes at each meeting on one of the following:

- The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (document of Vatican Council II).
- The next Sunday’s Gospel.
- Bringing in a lecturer on “group dynamics”.
- The U.S. Bishop’s document on the laity: Called and Gifted.

SAMPLE COVENANT

OVERVIEW

To implement the Norms for Parish Councils and Finance Councils, most parishes will find it helpful to adopt a “Covenant” (formerly referred to as a Constitution) to provide basic guidelines as to how the councils will be formed and who they will operate within the parish. Any Covenant pertaining to Parish Councils and/or Finance Councils adopted by a parish must be in compliance with the Norms established by the bishop; therefore, each parish is asked to forward a copy of such Covenant to the Office of Lay Ministry for review.

To assist parishes in preparing a new Covenant or in updating an existing Covenant or Constitution for its councils, a Sample Covenant is provided as a model. Any parish choosing to use this Sample Covenant will need to amend it to meet the particular needs and circumstances unique to it. Remember the Covenant should remain rather general in nature and should not include specifics such as dates (i.e. day to the month) and times of meetings, time of elections, or other information that may need to be changed rather frequently.

Since the Covenant only provides a general framework for the establishment and operation of councils within a parish and is intended to be long-standing (that is seldom amended), each council may also find it helpful to adopt its own rules to facilitate certain administrative aspects of its existence and operation. These rules, which could be referred to as “Operating Guidelines”, would provide more specific rules pertaining to the such things as the appointment/election of officers, dates, times, and locations of meetings, nominating procedures for new members, filling vacancies on the council, etc. An example of an outline for such rules is provided following the Sample Covenant. Councils are encouraged to use “Operating Guidelines” to clearly define how it intends to operate. It is expected and intended that the council will review, update as necessary, and re-adopt its “Operating Guidelines” each year to insure it properly reflects how the council will function for the coming year.

SAMPLE COVENANT

Article I. Purpose and Function

- Section 1. The Parish Council required by the diocesan Bishop in accord with Canon 536 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, shall be the instrument through which a representative body of the People of God that is, _____ Parish, shall share with the Pastor, and those who have a similar responsibility by virtue of their office, in the pastoral care of the parish and the mission of the Church.
- Section 2. The Parish Pastoral Council shall strive to fulfill its purpose by:
- a. Being a consultative body to the Pastor regarding all aspects of parish life and the mission of the Church.
 - b. Using prayer, discussion, and recommendations to share in the pastoral care of the parish and Church.
 - c. Serving as a vehicle for open and constructive communications within the parish community.
 - d. Collaborating with the Pastor to make decisions concerning pastoral matters.
 - e. Identifying and calling forth the gifts and talents of the members of the parish.
 - f. Establishing clear and concise goals and objectives based on the needs of the parish.
 - g. Cooperating with and effectively implementing diocesan policies and programs.
 - h. Serving as a consultative body with regard to “extraordinary acts” of finance and administration as defined by the diocese.
- Section 3. The Parish Finance Council, required by Canon 537 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, shall be the instrument through which a consultative body of parishioners shall assist the Pastor in administering the goods of the parish.
- Section 4. The Parish Financial Council shall strive to fulfill its purpose by:
- a. Using prayer, discussion, and recommendations to help in the administration of parish goods.
 - b. Along with the Pastoral Council, acting as a consultative body with regard to “extraordinary acts” of finance and administration as defined by the diocese.

- c. Performing other “ordinary acts” of finance and administration as a service to the Pastor, Pastoral Council, and parish.

Section 5. Aware that Christ has told us that without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5), the Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils ask for the guidance of His Holy Spirit so that all our words may be spoken and all our works done in His charity.

Article II. Membership

Section 1. Every person who is Catholic, at least 18 years old, and a member of _____ Parish, is eligible to serve as a member of the Pastoral or the Finance Council.

Section 2. The pastor, associate pastor, permanent deacons, and paid staff members are not members of the Councils, but may attend meetings as needed or as directed by the Pastor.

Section 3. Except for pastoral appointments, all members of the Parish Pastoral Council shall be elected by the members of the parish.

Section 4. The Pastor may appoint members to the Pastoral Council. The total number of appointees may not equal more than one-third of the total Council membership.

Section 5. All members of the Financial Council shall be appointed by the Pastor in consultation with the Pastoral Council.

Section 6. At least one member of the Finance Council must be a member of the Pastoral Council.

Section 7. The Pastoral Council shall have _____ Members. (For Council of Commissions Structure, add: There will be two members elected for each Commission/Ministry Area.)

Section 8. The Finance Council shall have at least three members.

Article III. Elections and Terms of Office

Section 1. Parish Pastoral Council elections will be held annually between January 1 and the end of February.

Section 2. Appointments to the Pastoral Council and the Finance Council shall occur immediately after the elections.

- Section 3. The term of office for all Pastoral Council members shall be _____ years. No member may serve more than two consecutive terms unless the pastor grants special permission to do so.
- Section 4. Terms of office shall be staggered so that no more than _____ (a for three-year terms and 2 for two-year terms) of the Councils will be replaced at one time.
- Section 5. Any term of office that cannot be completed by the pastor in consultation with the Pastoral Council. This person shall complete the unexpired term of the member.
- Section 6. Members of the Councils shall be automatically dropped in the event:
- a. No longer being registered members of the parish.
 - b. Missing three meetings in a year.

Article IV. Officers

- Section 1. At the first meeting of the Parish Pastoral Council following the general election, the members of the Council shall elect a Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary from their own membership. These officers shall constitute the Executive Committee which assists the Pastor in establishing agendas for Pastoral Council meetings.
- Section 2. The Chair shall have the following duties:
- a. To chair all meetings of the Council.
 - b. To oversee all activities of the Council.
 - c. To convene the Executive Committee to work with the Pastor to prepare Pastoral Council meeting agendas.
- Section 3. The Vice-Chair shall have the following duties:
- a. To Chair meetings in the absence of the Chair.
 - b. To assist the Chair in overseeing Council=s activities.
 - c. To succeed the Chair in case of resignation.
- Section 4. The Secretary shall have the following duties:
- a. To maintain written records of minutes of the Pastoral Council meetings.
 - b. To maintain an attendance record of all Pastoral Council members.
 - c. To distribute prior to Pastoral Council meetings the agenda of the forthcoming meeting and the minutes of the previous meeting.
- Section 5. The Pastor will appoint a Chair for the Financial Council to assist in duties similar to those of the Executive Committee of the Pastoral Council.

Article V. Ministry Areas (for Council of Commissions)

- Section 1. The Parish Pastoral Council is assisted in its duties by parish committees, boards, and organizations which are categorized within five Commissions or Ministry Areas:
- a. Liturgy
 - b. Education and Formation
 - c. Social Justice and Charitable Outreach
 - d. Parish Life
 - e. Finance and Administration
- Section 2. In each Ministry Area, Commissions are established to assist in accomplishing the objectives of each Ministry Area.
- Section 3. Committees, boards, and organizations within a particular Ministry Area shall determine their specific objectives in accord with the goals of the Parish Pastoral Council.
- Section 4. A brief summary report is to be submitted to the Pastoral Council monthly by the Commission representatives on the activities and plans of the associated committees, boards, and organizations.

Article VI. Meetings

- Section 1. Regular meetings of the Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils shall be held monthly.
- Section 2. Other meetings of the Pastoral Council may be called by the Pastor upon notice given to all members of the Council at least forty-eight (48) hours prior to the date of the meeting.
- Section 3. Council meetings shall be open to all members of the parish.
- Section 4. Proposals by any parishioner may be submitted to the Council by presenting the proposal to a member of the Pastoral Council or the Pastor. Disposition of the proposal follows the normal procedure for new business for the Council.
- Section 5. A Town Hall Meeting shall be held each May to review the activities of the previous year and to listen to suggestions and proposals from the parish at-large.

Article VII. Decision-Making

- Section 1. The preferred decision-making process of the Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils shall be by consensus.

- Section 2. If consensus cannot be reached by the Council, the following voting procedures shall be followed in order to make recommendations to the Pastors.
- a. A simple majority of the members of the Council constitutes a quorum.
 - b. Each member of the Council shall have one vote.
 - c. Recommendations of the Council require a b majority vote.
- Section 3. All votes of the Pastoral Council and the Finance Council are consultative votes and should be considered as recommendations to the Pastor in accordance with the Canons 536 and 537 of the Code of Canon Law.

Article VIII. Nominations and Elections

- Section 1. Each November, the Pastoral Council Chair, in consultation with the Pastor and the other Council members, appoints an Election Committee.
- Section 2. The Election Committee shall present the names to the Pastor and the Chair for a review of persons nominated.
- Section 3. The names and brief descriptions of each nominee and why they want to serve ion the council will be made available to the parishioners one week before the scheduled elections.
- Section 4. The Election Committee is responsible for preparing ballots, conducting the election, and tabulating the votes.
- Section 5. No write-in votes shall be counted, but absentee ballots shall be allowed.
- Section 6. All registered members of the parish over 18 years of age are eligible to vote.
- Section 7. The Election Committee will notify the Pastor, Pastoral Council, Parish, and all Nominees of the results of the elections.
- Section 8. New elected Council members shall assume their duties at the next scheduled Council meeting.

Article IX. Revisions

- Section 1. This Constitution may be revised at any meeting of the Parish Pastoral Council at which the Pastor is present.

- Section 2. Revisions must be presented in writing to all members of the Council prior to the meeting on which a vote is to be taken regarding the revision.
- Section 3. Revisions are passed by a b majority vote of the Pastoral Council.

OPERATING GUIDELINES
OF
_____ **PARISH**
IN THE CITY OF
DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

I
NAME AND PURPOSE

1. Name - The name of this Organization shall be _____.
2. Purpose -

II
MEETINGS

3. Regular Meetings -
4. Special Meetings -
5. Notice of Special Meetings -
6. Voting and Proxies - At every meeting, each member present shall be entitled to cast one (1) vote. Voting by proxies shall not be permitted.
7. Quorum - A quorum at any meeting shall consist of the majority of the membership entitled to vote thereat.

III
COUNCIL MEMBERS

8. Number, Tenure and Qualifications -
9. Manner of Selection -
10. Duties -
11. Resignation and Removal -
12. Vacancies -
13. Proxies - Council Members may not vote by proxy.

14. Election of Officers - Officers shall be elected by the Council and shall serve at the pleasure of the Council and the Pastor

IV
OFFICERS

15. Positions Authorized -
16. Chair -
17. Vice Chair -
18. Secretary -
19. Recording Secretary -
20. Vacancies -

V
GENERAL OPERATING PROVISIONS

21. Minutes of Meetings -
22. Reports from Commissions/Parish Organizations -
23. Methods of Decision Making/Recommendations to Pastor -
24. Agenda -
25. (ANY OTHER PROVISIONS NEEDED TO DEFINE HOW THE COUNCIL WILL OPERATE.)

VI
AMENDMENTS

- 9.1 Amendments - These Operating Guidelines may be altered, amended or repealed and new Operating Guidelines may be adopted by a majority of the Council Members entitled to vote thereon at any regular or special meeting of the Council, provided the substance of the proposed amendment was provided in writing to each member at least thirty (30) days in advance of any vote thereon and provided that the pastor approves said alteration, amendment, or new Operating Guidelines.

VII
CERTIFICATION OF ADOPTION

The foregoing Operating Guidelines of the _____ were duly adopted on _____, 19__, by action of the Council Members.

IN TESTIMONY THEREOF, witness the hand of the undersigned as Secretary of the Organization on said date.

SECRETARY

APPROVED:

CHAIR PERSON

APPROVED BY THE COUNCIL MEMBERS

By _____
CHAIR PERSON

DATE _____

APPROVED:

PASTOR

Exhibit 1:

EVALUATE A MEETING

Instructions: Compare your meeting to the following characteristics of an effective meeting. Check those statements that apply to meetings you normally conduct or attend:

- 9 1. An agenda is prepared prior to the meeting.
- 9 2. Meeting participants have an opportunity to contribute to the agenda.
- 9 3. Advance notice of meeting time and place is provided to those invited.
- 9 4. Meeting facilities are comfortable and adequate for the number of participants.
- 9 5. The meeting begins on time.
- 9 6. The meeting has a scheduled ending time.
- 9 7. The use of time is monitored throughout the meeting.
- 9 8. Everyone has an opportunity to present his or her point of view.
- 9 9. Participants listen attentively to each other.
- 9 10. There are periodic summaries as the meeting progresses.
- 9 11. No one tends to dominate the discussion.
- 9 12. Everyone has a voice in decisions made at the meeting.
- 9 13. The meeting typically ends with a summary of accomplishments.
- 9 14. The meeting is periodically evaluated by participants.
- 9 15. People can be depended upon to carry out any action agreed to during the meeting.
- 9 16. A memorandum of discussion or minutes of the meeting is provided to each participant following the meeting.
- 9 17. The meeting leader follows up with participants on action agreed to during the meeting.
- 9 18. The appropriate and necessary people can be counted on to attend each meeting.
- 9 19. The decision process used is appropriate for the size of the group.
- 9 20. When used, audiovisual equipment is in good working condition and does not detract from the meeting.

Number of Statements checked _____ X 5 = _____ Meeting Score

A score of 80 or more indicates you attend a high percentage of quality meetings. A score below 60 suggests work is required to improve the quality of meetings you attend.