

**From the “Upper Room”
to
“the Ends of the Earth”**



**Guidelines for
Parish Pastoral Councils
Archdiocese of Saint Boniface**

April 25, 2012

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OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

August 30, 2011

Dear Pastors and Parishioners;

It is with much hope that I come to the faithful of the archdiocese to present these Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC). A Parish Pastoral Council is vital in the life of all our parishes in its unique and distinctive role as the primary deliberative body of a parish. United with the pastor, the council members are to pray as our ancestors in faith did in the upper room, reflect as Jesus taught us throughout his life and then guide and inspire the parish with the gifts of wisdom, knowledge and understanding in defining the pastoral situation of the parish and the initiatives required to meet all its pastoral needs.

However we find ourselves as parish, from a large urban to a small rural parish; parishes in a “family cluster” to bilingual parishes – all are best served by a Parish Pastoral Council. These “Guidelines” are here to guide parishes in the formation of a PPC. Along with the Guidelines a support structure is also in place in the form of resources from the archdiocesan Pastoral Centre. In addition, workshops are available for all pastoral regions to assist in the implementation of effective Parish Pastoral Councils. I pray that all parishes, all members of a PPC and all pastors will avail themselves of these resources.

As the Holy Spirit continues to guide us day to day,

Sincerely in Christ,

+Albert LeGatt
Archbishop of Saint Boniface

Introduction: A Vision for a Parish Pastoral Council

Establishing a parish pastoral council or re-visioning an existing council is an important opportunity for a parish to fully embrace and develop its mission. This requires more than simply establishing a new parish structure or program. It also involves a renewed vision of the parish and its mission. The essential features of this vision can be found in Scripture and in documents of the Second Vatican Council.

The Upper Room: A Biblical Image of a Parish Pastoral Council

... they went to the room upstairs where they were staying [...]. All were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers. – Acts 1:13-14

The practice of gathering in council to develop the Church's pastoral mission goes back to the very beginning of the Church. The first "pastoral council" is described in the Acts of the Apostles. It took place in the "upper room" where the disciples gathered after Jesus ascended into heaven.

Jesus had already given them their mission: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) - but he had told them not to set out on this mission until they received the Holy Spirit. Trusting in the promise of Jesus, the disciples went immediately to the upper room to pray and await the direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. A few days later, when the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, the disciples immediately went out from the upper room to proclaim the Good News of Jesus in the streets of Jerusalem.

A careful reading of the Acts of the Apostles indicates that upper room gatherings did not cease with Pentecost. The disciples continued to gather in this way, especially when new developments raised questions about how to continue the mission of Jesus. Thus, in a few years, they became Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the then known world.

These "upper room" meetings are a model for today's parish pastoral councils - a regular gathering where pastor and parishioners pray and discern together how the parish community is to take up the mission Jesus Christ entrusted to it.

Vatican II – the Church as Communion

Today's parish pastoral councils originated in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council as an expression of the Council's agenda for the renewal of the church and its mission. Key to understanding both the Council's agenda and the parish pastoral council is the concept of "communion" – the word which Pope John Paul says, describes the "very essence" of the church in the Council's teachings.

Communion ... embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church. Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us, to make us all "one heart and one soul" . It is in building this communion of love that the Church appears as "sacrament", as the "sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the human race." (Lumen Gentium 1)

- Novo Millennio Ineunte, #42

A parish, as an integral community of the Church, exists to build up and serve this communion of love and, in so doing, announces the gospel of Jesus to the world. Communion is therefore at the heart of its pastoral mission. As the parish pastoral council exists to foster the parish's mission, its origin, its mode of operation, and its goals can best be expressed by the word "communion". It seeks to nurture and build up a relationship of communion within a parish.

The first generation of parish councils following the Second Vatican Council tended to be administrative in nature, caring for parish finances, facilities, organizations and programs. Over the last 20 years most dioceses in North America have evaluated this experience and issued new guidelines for parish councils. These new guidelines are unanimous in proposing that councils shift their focus from parish administration to the pastoral mission of the parish. Hence the name "parish pastoral council" is used rather than "parish council".

This shift of focus follows from the renewed emphasis of the Second Vatican Council on the mission of Jesus, which mission has been entrusted to the whole church and to all of its members. As such, a renewed parish pastoral council is charged with taking up the task which Pope John Paul II identified for the church in our time – "to make the Church the home and the school of communion". (Novo Millennio Ineunte, #43)

An Opportunity and a Challenge for Parishes

When animated by the vision of Scripture and the Second Vatican Council, the task of establishing an effective parish pastoral council offers a wonderful opportunity for a parish. It will also present many challenges. These challenges include:

- developing a renewed vision of the parish focused on the mission of Jesus Christ
- learning to plan and make pastoral decisions together in "the upper room"
- building relationships of trust and communion

Daunting as they may be, these challenges can be exciting occasions for growth and renewal in a parish community if the vision of parish pastoral council as an "upper room" experience and as a "servant of communion" guides each step along the way.

Archdiocesan Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils

What follows in these guidelines is an outline of the essential features of parish pastoral councils. To assist pastors and parish communities with the task of establishing or re-visioning their own parish pastoral councils, additional resources and aids will be available through the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre.

I. The Purpose of a Parish Pastoral Council

a) Basic guidelines for parish pastoral councils are given in the Code of Canon Law:

Can. 536 §1. If the diocesan bishop judges it opportune after he has heard the presbyteral council, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.

§2. A pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by the norms established by the diocesan bishop.

b) A parish pastoral council:

- exists to foster pastoral activity which is in accord with and expresses the mission of the parish;
- is a consultative body which serves and advises the pastor in his responsibility for the pastoral mission of the parish;
- is the main body for lay leadership in the pastoral life of the parish and, therefore, aims to engage and enable the whole parish community for fuller participation in the mission of the parish.

A parish pastoral council is not intended to deal with finances or administration. These are the responsibility of the parish finance council. The two councils need to work closely together but maintain a clear separation of responsibility and personnel.

II. The Functioning of a Parish Pastoral Council

The parish pastoral council is like no other organization. In consideration of the 'upper room' experience and the vision of establishing 'communion' we then understand that the proper functioning of a parish pastoral council includes all of the following:

- **Community building, collaboration, and consensus** The central goal of the council is the service of communion in the parish – to develop a strong sense of community among its members and in the entire parish. Key to building community is the collaborative manner in which the council functions, expressed by seeking to reach consensus in all decisions.

- **Prayer** Like the disciples in the Upper Room, an effective council is rooted in prayer as it discerns and develops the parish’s mission. Through prayer, the council seeks direction and empowerment from the Holy Spirit to take up the mission Jesus has given to the parish.
- **Enabling and calling forth participation** A council works to call forth and enable all members of the parish to participate more fully in the life and mission of the parish in accord with their gifts and experience.
- **Needs assessment / reading the signs of the time** One of its main tasks is to come to a fuller understanding of the pastoral needs of all people served by the parish. This involves “reading the signs of the time,” i.e. how the gospel can be presented in a manner that speaks to the realities that people are living in a particular time and place.
- **Pastoral planning, developing and evaluating** In response to the real needs of a parish, the council must propose appropriate pastoral responses. These tasks are often described simply as pastoral planning, developing pastoral programs and services, and evaluating the effectiveness of pastoral initiatives.
- **Investigate, reflect and recommend.** A council follows a practical course of action proposed for pastoral councils in Vatican II’s Decree on Bishops (#27)
 - investigate the pastoral reality of their parish,
 - reflect upon / study it,
 - recommend their conclusions to the pastor.

Implementing pastoral activities

The main responsibility of a pastoral council is to plan pastoral activities, not to implement those activities. Implementation is the responsibility of the whole parish community led by the pastor. Council members who do become involved in implementing council recommendations should do so not as council members but on the same basis as any other member of the parish.

III. The Roles and Responsibilities of Parish Pastoral Council Members

- **The pastor** is responsible for the pastoral mission of the parish by virtue of his appointment from the bishop. As the shepherd of the parish, he presides over all parish pastoral council activities, i.e. he is the council president. He seeks the wisdom and advice of the council in order to better exercise his responsibilities as pastor.

- **Council members** represent the whole parish not in a legal or democratic sense, but in their ability to attend to the pastoral realities and needs of the whole parish. Their main responsibilities are:
 - to assist the pastor so he can better carry out his responsibility for the life and mission of the parish;
 - to call forth fuller participation of the whole parish community in the pastoral mission of the parish;
 - to represent the parish at meetings of the Regional Pastoral Council.

- **The executive committee** is made up of the pastor as president of the PPC, the chairperson; the vice-chairperson, and the secretary. Their task is to prepare for and facilitate council meetings and to maintain close links and good communication with the whole parish community. They decide the pastoral concerns which the council will consider, including:
 - a process for how the issue will be addressed;
 - a timeline for the discussion;
 - a proposal for how the council's recommendation will be made (a resolution, report etc).

The chairperson

- facilitates meetings in a manner that allows for open dialogue and full participation to achieve consensus among council members;
- works with the pastor to prepare the agenda for council meetings.

The vice-chairperson

- assumes the duties of the chairperson when he/she is absent.

The secretary

- prepares material for meetings;
- keeps an accurate record of council meetings.

The executive is usually selected by the council. In some cases the secretary may not be a member of the council but a parishioner able to serve the council in this role.

IV. The Meetings the Parish Pastoral Council

- the pastor and the chairperson are responsible to call meetings and to prepare the agenda
- the pastor is the president of the council, but it is recommended that the chairperson facilitate the meetings
- regular meetings, usually monthly except summer months, are the norm in most parishes

- significant time is given at each meeting for prayer and spiritual reflection
- whenever possible, council decisions/recommendations should be made by consensus i.e. each member of council is able to support it to some degree
- the pastor does not usually “vote.” As the parish pastoral council serves as his consultative body, he may accept or reject a council recommendation. Normally, a pastor should accept the recommendations of his council. If he chooses not to accept their recommendation, he should give a clear account of his reasons to the council.

V. The Selection of Members to the Parish Pastoral Council

Qualifications of a council member

- is a practicing Catholic,
- understands the purpose and method of operation of a parish pastoral council,
- is committed to the mission of the whole parish, not just a particular group or interest
- works well with others,
- has good communication skills.
- ability to represent the overall needs of the whole parish community and not a particular group or interest only;
- the council members should reflect the diversity of the parish e.g. gender, age, ethnic and social background, etc.

If council members are associated with another parish group, they should understand they do not represent that group on the council but rather the interest of the whole parish.

Methods of selection

The following process is recommended:

- educate the parish on the purpose of a parish pastoral council and role of council members
- receive nominations from the parish
- meet with nominated candidates to clarify the role of the parish pastoral council
- prepare a process of discernment for proposed candidates to consider their gifts, availability, etc.
- decide on the method of selection if there are more candidates ready to serve on PPC than the open positions: (election, appointment etc.).

Size of council and length of terms

- size of councils vary - 7 to 11 members is a common suggestion with more for larger, diverse parishes and fewer for smaller parishes.
- a common practice is a three year term with terms staggered so that each year 1/3 of the council is renewed.

- normally, it is stipulated that an individual may serve only 2 consecutive 3 year terms on council.
- in the interest of providing better pastoral services, a single parish pastoral council may serve a cluster of smaller parishes which are served by the same pastor

VI. The Relationship with other Parish or Diocesan Groups

- **Parish Finance Council** has distinct responsibilities from those of the parish pastoral council and functions independently of it. The two bodies need to work together closely and develop clear mechanisms for regular communication such as :
 - exchange of minutes of meetings and resolutions;
 - have members who serve on both bodies;
 - invite a representative of one council to attend the meeting of the other;
 - prepare an annual parish budget together, in particular that portion of the budget which pertains to pastoral activities.
- **Parish staff** The parish pastoral council is not responsible to direct the work of parish staff. The work of parish personnel is to implement the plans and recommendations of the council but they are accountable to the pastor. There should be close collaboration with staff and they should be consulted when a pastoral activity for which they have responsibility is being discussed by the council. Normally, parish personnel are not members of the parish pastoral council.
- **Ministry groups and parish organizations** These groups exist to implement the recommendations of the parish pastoral council but responsibility for implementation rests with the pastor working directly with the groups. Good communication between the parish pastoral council and all other parish groups is essential. Parish groups and organizations should be consulted when the council considers a pastoral issue that concerns them.
- **The diocesan Church** A parish pastoral council needs to keep informed of pastoral priorities proposed by the diocesan church. It should maintain active representation and good two way communication with parish pastoral councils and other committees at the level of the diocese, the deanery, and the region.

VII. The Guidelines or Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils

Each parish pastoral council is encouraged to develop more specific guidelines or a constitution which apply diocesan guidelines to the specific circumstances and practices of their parish. Resources for developing parish pastoral council guidelines are available through the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre.