
The Parish Pastoral Council:

Its Functions and Relationship to Other Parish Bodies



Role of the Pastor

- Under Church law, the pastor is responsible for all aspects of the sacramental, administrative and pastoral work of his parish (canons 528-532).
- Church law also provides him with two consultative bodies, the Finance Council and the Pastoral Council.
- Maryland state law provides him with civil corporate responsibilities that he shares with other corporators.

Pastor and Parish Staff

- The Pastor oversees the Parish Staff including the appropriate hiring, firing, discipline, payment, etc.
- The Pastor directs the work of the Parish Staff including their interactions with the Pastoral Council, Finance Council and Corporators.

Parish Staff

- The parish staff consists of experts in the realms of parish administration, religious education, liturgy, etc.
- When the pastor needs expert advice in these areas, he consults his staff.

Parish Consultative Bodies

In any parish in the Archdiocese of Baltimore there are two consultative bodies required by canon law.

- The first is the Finance Council which is required under canon 537; and
- The second is the Pastoral Council which is required under local church law under canon 536.

Collaboration

- Corporators, Finance Council Members and Pastoral Council Members collaborate with the Pastor and the Parish Staff for the benefit of the Parish.
- Corporators will either attend the meetings of the Pastoral Council or Finance Council or will receive the minutes of their meetings to understand their work.

Tasks of Pastoral Council

Vatican documents have consistently described the pastoral council in terms of this threefold task: **INVESTIGATING, REFLECTING, AND RECOMMENDING**.

- 1983 Code: Purpose of Parish Pastoral Councils: “The pastor presides over it [the council], and through it the Christian faithful along with those who share in the pastoral care of the parish in virtue of their office give their help in fostering pastoral activity ” (Canon 536).

1. Expectations of the Pastor

- The Church's official teaching insists that the pastor consults.
- The pastoral council is not a sounding board.
- It is a group that investigates, reflects, and recommends conclusions.

Genuine Consultation

- The pastoral council is not a sounding board.
- It is a group that investigates, reflects, and recommends conclusions.

Pastoral Dialogue

- Like Socrates, the pastor knows that he does not know everything.
- He engages people in dialogue because he seeks wisdom.
- Pastors decide the matter about which they want to consult.

Pastor as "Shepherd"

- "I know my own and my own know me" (John 10: 14).
- Pastors decide the matter about which they want to consult.

The Value of Time

- The matter should be important enough to warrant an investment of people's time.
- Pastors should sketch for councilors the process of the consultation.

The Subject Matter of Consultation

- The subject matter of consultation may be construed narrowly (e.g., "How can the parish attract alienated Catholics?").
- The subject matter of consultation may be construed broadly (e.g., "What are the most important issues that our parish faces?").

The Process of Consultation

- The pastor may ask the council to read books or articles, interview parishioners, consult with experts, weigh the opinions of others, and reach a general agreement.
- Pastors decide what the final product of a consultation should be. It could be: a written report, a strategic plan, a revised mission statement, or a new policy.
- Successful Consultations
 - Pastors seek good advice, and councilors deserve to know what their pastor expects.
 - When the council's advice is so good that the pastor accepts it, the council has succeeded.

2. Expectations of Councilors

- The Church expects councilors to thoroughly undertake their threefold task:
 - investigation,
 - reflection, and
 - recommendation.

The Council and Pastoral Planning

- Planning is *not* one among many things that a pastoral council should do...It is its main role.

Distracting Roles

- Other roles conflict and distract the council:
 - the “sounding board” role,
 - the “parish forum” role,
 - the “coordination” role.

Rightful Mission

- The pastoral council plans rather than implementing or supervising.
- When councilors implement, they do so as volunteers under the pastor’s direction.

Selecting Pastoral Council Members

Elections

PROS:

- Involves the whole parish
- Familiar to Americans
- Most widely used in the country

CONS:

- May devolve into popularity contest instead of finding gifts/talents
- May lead to candidates developing a 'platform'

Council of Ministries

PROS:

- Representative of all aspects of parish life
- 'Bottom up'

CONS:

- Council may devolve into supercommittee
- Gifts/talents for leading a ministry may differ from gifts/talents for studying, reflecting, recommending

Discernment

PROS:

- Small group of wise people pray/select the council
- Efficient, targeted

CONS:

- Narrow group of voices
- Can become 'cliquish'

Hybrid: Discernment/Balloting

PROS:

- Open meeting
 - describes purpose, gifts, roles
 - accepts nominations
 - progressive balloting
- Involves whole parish
- Focuses on gifts/talents needed
- Parishioners learn about council

CONS:

- May not lend itself to clear procedure written in bylaws
- May not result in a certain number of council members
- May need to be supplemented by appointed members for racial/age/gender representation

