

Parish Pastoral Council Norms

Diocese of Rockford

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INTRODUCTION

On January 25, 1983, Pope John Paul II promulgated a new Code of Canon Law for the Roman Catholic Church. It marks a major step in the continued implementation of the Second Vatican Council.

The 1983 Code, again reflecting the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, describes a parish as a definite community of the Christian Faithful established on a stable basis within a particular (Diocese) Church (Canon 515).

After the family, the parish is the most important form of community within the diocese. In the parish, Christ's faithful are gathered together into one under the leadership of the pastor, who represents the Bishop among them, to fulfill their Christian mission. Each parish, then, truly represents the diocese and therefore, the Catholic Church throughout the world.

The pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor, under the authority of the Diocesan Bishop (Canon 515). This pastoral care includes the responsibility to preach the Gospel and nourish the Christian Faithful with the message of salvation, to celebrate the sacraments and to lead the parish community in prayer.

In order to foster the unity of pastor and Christ's faithful of the parish in carrying out Christ's mission, the 1983 Code of Canon Law legislates that, after consultation with the Presbyteral Council and in accord with his pastoral judgement, the Diocesan Bishop may direct the establishment of a pastoral council in each parish of the diocese (Canon 536, n.2).

The Parish Pastoral Council is to take its direction from, and be governed by, norms given by the Diocesan Bishop (Canon 536, n.2). The diocesan norms then are to be adapted to the particular circumstances of each parish according to the parish's size and needs.

Norms Governing Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Rockford

- I. The Name of the Structure is the Parish Pastoral Council.**
- II. Parish Pastoral Councils are consultative in nature.**
- III. The Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council are distinct consultative bodies in the parish.**
- IV. Membership of the Parish Pastoral Council is to be truly representative of the parish.**
- V. The Code of Canon Law prescribes that the pastor presides over the Parish Pastoral Council.**
- VI. The Parish Pastoral Council may establish commissions and/or committees which will directly assist in the work of the parish.**
- VII. Each parish should develop a Constitution which governs the operation of the Parish Pastoral Council.**
- VIII. The Constitution of a Parish Pastoral Council should be presented to the Diocesan Bishop or his delegate for confirmation.**

NORM I: The name of the Structure is the Parish Pastoral Council.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law, Canon 536, designates the parish council as the “Parish Pastoral Council” as a means of describing its broad responsibility. It parallels the Diocesan Pastoral Council, which advises the Diocesan Bishop, the pastor of the Diocesan Church, on matters related to pastoral ministry within the diocese. Because the Parish Pastoral Council participates in responsibility for pastoral ministry within the parish and not just the administration of the parish, its purpose and goals are extensive.

The Parish Pastoral Council should research the needs, the ideas, the hopes, the life and activity of the people of God, so that the whole parish community can effectively carry out the mission of the parish and fully participate in the ongoing conversation that is central to its life.

The Parish Pastoral Council should constantly evaluate the parish in its conformity to the Gospel and those constitutive elements of the Gospel which call for understanding the implications of justice. In this sense, the Parish Pastoral Council shares in the decision-making process which assists the pastor in carrying out the leadership role that is his within the parish.

NORM II: Parish Pastoral Councils are consultative in nature.

Canon 515 describes a parish as a definite community of the Christian Faithful established on a stable basis within the Diocesan Church, with the pastoral care of the parish entrusted to a pastor.

The Parish Pastoral Council is a consultative body (Canon 536, n.2) by which the Christian faithful of a parish, together with those who have pastoral authority in the parish, “give their help in fostering pastoral activity” (Canon 536, n.1). Its work is to be informed and inspired by the vision of the Church, exemplified in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The ways by which it fulfills its shared responsibility are:

1. The spiritual enrichment and growth of its members.
2. The study of the Christian life of the People of God with special attention to their Christian vision, needs and hopes.
3. The discernment of the relationship of the pastoral activity of the parish to the legitimate needs and hope of the parish community.
4. The help in establishing priorities among the various aspects of the pastoral activity of the parish.
5. The formation of policy and the development of programs of pastoral activity.

The clear distinction between policy formation (the proper work of the Parish Pastoral Council) and administration (the proper work of the pastor and parish staff) should be maintained. At the same time, members of the parish staff should offer to the pastoral council their knowledge and judgement regarding questions under discussion.

Matters governed by Ecclesiastical Law or by Episcopal decision are not subject to decisions by the Parish Pastoral Council.

NORM III: The Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council are distinct consultative bodies in the Parish.

Canon Law describes the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council in such a way that they are distinct consultative bodies in the parish because each has responsibility for distinct aspects of parish life and the membership of each is different.

The Parish Pastoral Council has responsibility for:

- a. giving counsel to the pastor regarding pastoral activity in the parish
- b. assisting the pastor in his pastoral role
- c. fostering the pastoral life and ministry of the parish.

The Parish Finance Council has responsibility for:

- a. giving counsel to the pastor regarding the administration of the temporal goods of the parish
- b. assisting the pastor in his temporal administrative role
- c. assisting the pastor in financial matters.

The Parish Pastoral Council is to be representative of the entire parish in its membership, whereas membership on the Parish Finance Council is made up of persons skilled in finances, civil law and business.

Despite these distinctions, the two councils are interrelated because both are concerned with needs of the parish. The Parish Pastoral Council looks to the Parish Finance Council for the resources needed to implement parish programs, policies and ideas. The Parish Finance Council looks to the Parish Pastoral Council for the development of the mission of the parish. Good communication between the two councils is essential so that the best use of the parish's temporal goods can be made for the spiritual good of the parish.

For further information on Parish Finance Councils, please consult the document entitled: "Parish Finance Council By-Laws and Duties," published by the Diocese of Rockford. The most recent version can be obtained from Dr. Wayne Lenell, Secretary for Finance and Administration, 815-964-5231.

NORM IV: Membership of the Parish Pastoral Council is to be truly representative of the Parish.

Persons serving on the Pastoral Council should have the ability to pray, study matters, reflect on them thoroughly so as to make sound recommendations to the pastor. The number of members of the Parish Pastoral Council will vary depending on the size of each parish, its character and its

needs. Care should be taken to assure that the council's membership is large enough to assure adequate representation of all aspects of the parish. Members must be Catholics in good standing with the Church. They must be committed to a life of prayer, to the mission and ministries of the parish and to the Church's understanding of consultation.

The suggested minimum number of members is six. Those who share in the pastoral care of the parish by virtue of their office are members of the Pastoral Council. If a Parochial Vicar, Deacon or Pastoral Associate shares in the pastoral care of the parish, they may be a member of the Council. (They can be officio members or ex-officio members which would be stated as such in the constitution.)

The constitution of the Parish Pastoral Council should contain:

- a clear description of the selection process for members,
- the number of members on the council,
- length of terms of office,
- number of terms allowed for members,
- process for filling a vacancy on the council.

NORM V. The Code of Canon Law prescribes that the Pastor presides over the Parish Pastoral Council.

By virtue of his office, the Pastor presides over the Parish Pastoral Council. As Presider, the Pastor directs the deliberations of the Parish Pastoral Council and is involved completely in the planning and policy development. The Pastor is responsible for the final approval of Council recommendations concerning Pastoral plans and policies as well as for the implementation by Parish Staff and other groups. The Pastor must see to it that the Parish Pastoral Council does not endorse proposals which would be contrary to the universal law of the Church, diocesan statutes and civil law.

The Pastor consults the Pastoral Council on major pastoral concerns which affect the life and mission of the parish: namely, to proclaim the Word, to build up the community, to celebrate liturgy, and to serve all God's people. The Council strives to achieve consensual agreement upon recommendations which affect future directions for spiritual growth and pastoral activity.

While the Pastor may preside, canonically, over the Parish Pastoral Council, it is suggested that the Council choose from among its members a chairperson or facilitator who conducts the meetings.

NORM VI. The Parish Pastoral Council may establish commissions and/or committees which will directly assist in the work of the Parish.

Each Pastoral Council determines the commissions or committees needed for their particular Parish. Commissions or standing committees should be established as necessary for on-going activities in the Parish. Ad-hoc committees can be established for specific tasks. Ad-hoc committees are dissolved when their tasks are completed.

The word “Commission” is used to denote a group which assists the Council by *developing pastoral plans and policies* in a specific area of parish life and then recommending these policies to the Parish Pastoral Council. In order to have direct communication between the Council and Commissions, a liaison person needs to be designated for each Commission.

The word “Committee” is used to denote a group which collaborates with the staff in *implementing plans and policies*. Standing committees deal with on-going areas of responsibility. Ad hoc committees have a specific task and a limited duration of existence.

For example, the Spiritual Development Commission may identify the need for a process of spiritual enrichment. Members may then study various programs, consult with pastoral staff members, talk to outside experts, and compare the goals of the programs with those of the Pastoral Council and of the Commission. After a thorough study, they recommend to the Pastoral Council a particular program that is most consistent with all of the above. The Council reflects upon the recommendation of the Commission and discerns an appropriate plan of action. Following the discernment, the Council may then recommend the program to the Pastor. The Pastor decides if and how the program is implemented. A staff person might then be delegated to initiate the program. The program might be implemented by establishing a special committee or ministry team to be responsible for it. (If the Commission itself chooses to take responsibility for the program, then the Commission members are taking on a committee function.) The Spiritual Development Commission later may evaluate the program and make further recommendation.

Please see *Guideline For Parish Pastoral Councils* for the Diocese of Rockford for examples of various commissions and committees.

NORM VII. Each Parish should develop a Constitution which governs the operation of a Parish Pastoral Council.

It is essential that each parish have a carefully prepared Constitution for its Parish Pastoral Council. (See the appendix for samples of Constitutions.) The following information should be included in each parish’s Pastoral Council Constitution:

1. The Name of the Organization

The proper corporate name of the parish should always be used rather than an abbreviation. (e.g., “The Parish Pastoral Council of the Church of St. Timothy” is to be preferred to “The Parish Pastoral Council of St. Timothy’s Church” or “ St. Timothy’s Parish Pastoral Council”)

2. The Council’s Nature and Purpose

3. Membership on the Council

- a clear description of the selection process for members,
- the number of members on the council,
- length of terms of office,
- number of terms allowed for members,
- process for filling a vacancy on the council.

4. Officers

The Constitution should designate the officers of the Parish Pastoral Council, the manner of their selection, term of office and general responsibilities.

5. Meetings

The Constitution should specify at least the minimum number of meetings each year and their regularity, as well as the principles governing open meetings as opposed to executive sessions.

6. Commissions and Committees

The Constitution should name the Commissions and the Committees and their role and responsibilities.

7. Amendments

The Constitution should describe clearly the requirements to be fulfilled to amend the Constitution and By-Laws.

8. By-Laws

By-Laws govern the conduct of business of the Parish Pastoral Council, including rules governing elections, the conducting of meetings, etc.

NORM VIII. The Constitution of a Parish Pastoral Council should be presented to the Diocesan Bishop or his delegate for confirmation.

NOTATION

This set of NORMS was developed by Dr. Michael Cieslak and Bill Easton using *Diocese of Rockford, Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines*, October 11, 1986 (promulgated by Bishop O'Neill) and *Diocese of Rockford, Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils (Unofficial Copy: For Study Purposes Only)* developed by the Vicar for Spiritual Formation, the Very Rev. Karl P. Ganss.

A Sample Constitution for the Parish of St. Timothy

I. The Name of the Organization

This body shall be called the Parish Pastoral Council of the Church of St. Timothy, Nowhere, Illinois.

II. The Council's Purpose

The purpose of this Parish Pastoral Council (hereinafter: the Council) shall be to fulfill those responsibilities given to such bodies by the Code of Canon Law and by the Norms of the Catholic Diocese of Rockford.

Matters governed by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church or diocesan regulations must be regarded as beyond the scope of competence of this Council.

The objective of this Council shall be to work together as an advisory group to assist the Pastor in carrying out his role as pastor for St. Timothy Parish.

III. Membership

There shall be nine members on the Council. In the event the Parish would have a Parochial Vicar or an appointed Pastoral Associate, they would be members of the Council. The remaining members would be chosen in accord with the by-laws of this Constitution. The selected members of the Council shall serve for a term of three years and may succeed themselves once. Those who serve on the Council due to their position in the Parish, serve as long as their canonical appointments to the Parish last.

IV. Officers

The Pastor presides over the Council. The officers of the Council, elected by the members thereof, shall be a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Secretary who shall be chosen annually to serve a term of one year. Officers may succeed themselves once. Duties of the officers are specified in the by-laws.

V. Meetings

The Council shall meet four times each calendar year. Additional meetings may be scheduled as needed by the Pastor or Chairperson.

VI. Commissions

The Council may establish Commissions as needed according to the by-laws of this Constitution.

VII. Amendments

This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the members of the Council at a meeting called for the expressed purpose of amending this Constitution. Members shall receive notice of this meeting and the full text of the proposed amendment twenty-one days in advance of the meeting. Such notice shall be in writing to their place of residence. No amendment shall be valid, however, which shall not have received the approval of the Pastor and the Diocesan Bishop.

VIII. By-Laws

The by-laws of the Council shall be approved by the membership at a regular meeting of the Council by majority vote. The by-laws shall be approved by the pastor. The by-laws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the membership at any regular meeting, provided written notice of the proposed amendment shall have been given to each member at the previous regular meeting. Amendments become effective only after the Pastor has given his written approval.