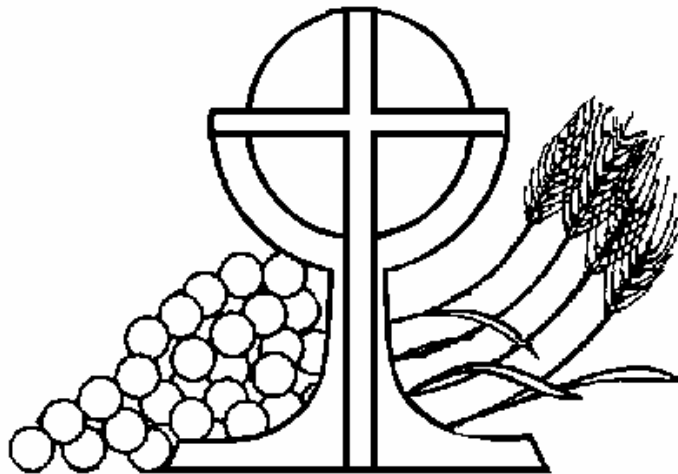


NORMS FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS



**ARCHDIOCESE OF
WINNIPEG
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Archdiocese of Winnipeg Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils

Introduction

Parish Pastoral Councils respond to the decrees of Vatican II. In the Council documents, especially on the church and the pastoral role of bishops, we find not only the theological support but also the practical support for the establishment of pastoral councils. The juridical context for the establishment of pastoral councils is found in the 1983 Code of Canon Law.

A parish pastoral council is a consultative body engaged in common pastoral visioning and planning, and in the fostering of pastoral action in the threefold ministry of the church:

1. its teaching ministry
2. its prayer and worship
3. its shepherding ministry

This threefold ministry responds to the threefold mission of Christ: to teach, to sanctify and to serve.

In 1988 the Archbishop of Winnipeg issued guidelines for the establishment and functioning of parish pastoral councils. The establishment of the Archdiocesan and the Deanery pastoral councils has necessitated the revision of these guidelines.

The anticipated outcome of this update is that the spirit of Vatican II, expressed in the council documents and the code of canon law, will be fully implemented. All Catholics are called to share in the life and mission of the church. The parish pastoral council is an essential body through which this responsibility of pastoral visioning, planning and action is shared.

Mission – vs – Maintenance

From the outset, it should be understood that parish pastoral councils are to focus on the church's mission, not the maintenance of its facilities or organizations. This assumes that council members understand, not only the mission of their particular parish but of the diocesan and universal church as well. There are to be two distinct councils in every parish: a finance committee to advise the pastor on the administration of parish goods and a pastoral council to examine pastoral issues, discern solutions and offer recommendations to the pastor.¹

Changing the focus of parish pastoral councils from one of maintenance to one of mission involves education. As we move from a model of council that manages the details of parish life to a council

¹Obviously from time to time, a small parish may not have the resources to keep this clear distinction. Practical solution will need to be worked out, but these should be by way of exception to the general principle of two separate groups.

focused on pastoral planning, the role of the council and its members must be clearly understood by the whole parish community.

Once the faith community understands that the call for a parish pastoral council is a call to mission, then persons with particular and appropriate gifts will need to be identified and called forth to serve as council members. In addition to a desire to serve the church and an ability to relate well to others, those called to serve on parish pastoral councils must be

Prayerful: Council members will be expected to develop their prayer life as individuals and as community. They should have an opportunity and take the responsibility of guiding the prayer at meetings.

Pastoral: They will have a sense of what it means to be concerned about the pastoral and spiritual issues of the whole parish. Some of the critical pastoral issues are formation, spirituality and worship, outreach and community building.

Prophetic: Councillors should be able to move the parish in a direction that is faithful to the Gospel even if it is not the popular choice. Their call is to prevent the parish from maintaining the status quo and move it to a challenging mission.

Discerning: Members of the council are invited to discern the direction of the parish and to articulate its mission. This is a prayerful, reflective and ongoing process that surfaces the pros and cons and enables councillors to consider what is at the heart of their decision.

Consensus Building: Members are challenged to talk things out (dialogue) so that they are in agreement rather than voting on significant issues and ending up as winners and losers. The gift of consensus building takes time.

A mission oriented parish pastoral council assumes that its members will take a greater responsibility in planning the spiritual and pastoral life of the parish community. The following diagram illustrates how councils are evolving as the Church strives to embrace the spirit of Vatican II.

MOVEMENT

From

Parish Council

Board of Directors

Representatives of Organizations

Coordinating Ministers

Crisis Management

Doing Activities

Business and Politics

Competition

Voting on Issues

Committee Reporting

Elected by Popularity

Constitutions and By-laws

To

Pastoral Council

Pastoral Directors

A Visioning Body

Articulating the Mission

Pastoral Planning and Goals

Empowering Parishioners

Prayer and Discernment

Collaboration

Building Consensus

Active Listening

Selected by Gifts (Charisms)

Guidelines

Selecting New Members

Almost all parishes at one time used elections to select new members. Today a variety of networks are employed to choose members of parish pastoral councils. Some form of discernment in selecting council members is encouraged to ensure that the gifts necessary for a collaborative and mission-oriented process are placed at the service of the church.

Here is one way of organizing the selection process:

1. Educate the parish community as to the purpose and function of a parish pastoral council and the role of a council member. Ask the community to consider the role and gifts required when nominating new council members.
2. Have the parish nominate people as candidates for the council. They can nominate others or themselves.
3. Depending on the number of candidates, provide an opportunity for clarification where people can better understand the type of council being proposed. At the end of the day ask if they are still willing to participate in a discernment process.
4. Have a day of discernment so participants can reflect on their gifts, the commitment that is being asked and the issues they will deal with in the months ahead. In the end, if you have more new members than you need, you can decide on the process of selection (lottery, further discernment, pastor, election).

Clarifying Roles

Pastor

The pastor is responsible for the overall welfare of the parish and is accountable to the bishop. The pastor participates in, and works collaboratively with the pastoral council, considering seriously recommendations made to him. He presides at the meetings but does not normally facilitate or chair them. Together with the council the pastor leads the parish in the ongoing discernment and realization of its mission.

Pastoral Council

The pastoral council is an advisory or consultative body that is representative of, and speaks for the faithful (e.g. men, women, youth, adults, seniors, etc.) The Council discerns the needs of the community and offers the pastor its insights and wisdom. The council is responsible for seeing the pastoral picture and does not manage parish operations. The finance committee has a limited scope that deals with budget and financial matters, whereas the work of the pastoral council embraces all the pastoral dimensions of the parish. In addition to long range planning, council members deal with any pastoral matters the pastor brings before them.

Executive Committee

Chairperson/Facilitator

In an attempt to do away with political titles those who are chosen to coordinate the workings of the council are called “facilitators.” The title of “chairperson” indicates one who is running the meeting, and the focus might still remain on him or her. This title has a connotation of being in control. The title “facilitator”, however, best describes the task of promoting dialogue and inviting participation.

In addition to facilitating the meeting, the facilitator is responsible for the ongoing organization of the council. He/she meets with the pastor, (the assistant facilitator if desired) and the recorder to plan a detailed agenda and determine other materials that would be helpful in preparation for the meeting. The facilitator can also serve as a representative of the parish on the deanery pastoral council and at other meetings. Facilitators need to have a good understanding of church, parish life, and group interactions. The task of the facilitator is to invite the members to share their wisdom and participate fully in the consensus decisions of the council. (See Appendix A for Guidelines for Facilitators.)

Vice-Chair/Assistant Facilitator

This office is exercised in collaboration with, or in the absence of, the Facilitator.

Recorder/Secretary

The task of this position is to accurately record the proceedings of the meetings for attending members and for those who are absent; to maintain a record of the council’s work in a specific time and place which over time, provides a historical, archival account of the work of the church. It is the recorder’s task to announce the meeting and provide the agenda and other pertinent materials well in advance, allowing members sufficient time to reflect on agenda items prior to the meeting. (See Appendix B for Guidelines for Recorders.)

Prayer and Spiritual Formation

Prayer and faith development are integral to a parish pastoral council that strives to serve the mission of the church and a time of prayer should reflect the work that is before the council. A sub-committee of the council could take responsibility for the preparation of prayer and faith formation, making it a constitutive element of every meeting. (See Appendix C for insights into the importance of prayer in pastoral work.)

Hospitality

Hospitality sets the tone for a meeting and is conducive to an atmosphere of collaboration. One or two people could be responsible for the climate of the room, the refreshments, and the welcoming atmosphere.

Committees

From time to time there is a need to form various committees. When first organizing a pastoral council a **steering committee may be struck** to develop guidelines. The **executive committee** as described above plans the monthly pastoral council meetings. **Standing committees** might include religious education, liturgy, adult faith, social justice, outreach and so forth. Periodically an **ad hoc**

committee might be required to deal with a special research project (e.g. youth concerns, evangelization opportunities, neighborhood gangs, etc.). At least one parish pastoral council member should participate in any ad hoc committees to provide the necessary link to the council.

Developing Relationships

1. The Parish Finance Committee: The parish finance committee and the parish pastoral council function interdependently; it is important that they communicate with one another in carrying out the parish mission. In the Archdiocese of Winnipeg it is common practice for the parish trustees to serve on both the finance and pastoral councils. This enables the pastoral council to be aware of the financial situation of the parish.

2. Pastoral Staff: The staff works with and for the pastor. The staff does not work for the parish council but they do work to implement the vision that the council and the pastor have developed.

3. Parish Organizations:

A parish pastoral council is not a body of representatives (of organizations) but a representative body (of the whole community). As such it exists to articulate the parish's mission, identify the goals that flow from it and define the objectives for reaching the goals. In other words, parish organizations and committees exist to further the pastoral plan as developed by the council. Therefore, good communication between the council and the organizations is essential to allow the council to evaluate the work of the organizations, and to keep the organizations aware of their recommendations. This can be effectively handled through written reports and requests provided to the council's executive and by the distribution of council minutes to the various organizations. It is suggested that twice a year the parish staff and different leaders of organizations meet with the parish pastoral council to review and clarify the parish vision.

4. The Diocesan Church:

The parish pastoral council, open to the needs of their faith community, must also open its members to diocesan pastoral priorities as the parish is the privileged place for their application and implementation. It will cooperate in the life of the diocesan church by providing representation and support to the various councils and committees at the deanery and diocesan levels. It will collaborate by communicating the needs, concerns and activities of the diocesan church to the parish community, and likewise, from the parish to the diocesan church. The Deanery Pastoral Council is to be the primary channel for this two way communication.

Practical Suggestions

1. Council Size: Because the pastoral council is a visioning body, not a coordinating committee of ministries, 8 – 12 members is sufficient. Nine members would allow the selection of three new members each year.

2. Meeting Times: The council should meet on a monthly basis between September and June for about 2 – 3 hours. Council members would benefit from an annual retreat together.

3. ***Terms of Office:*** A three year term, renewable once, seems appropriate, and the terms should be staggered so new members are selected each year. Continuity and stability without stagnation are important elements to keep in mind.

4. ***Composition of the Council:*** The council is to be representative of the faith community so the many avenues of diversity - age, gender, race, ethnicity, economy, education and theology – must be taken into account in the selection of council members.

5. ***Setting the Agenda:*** In the past parish councils often operated according to Robert's Rules of Order. Today, agendas should reflect the emphasis on pastoral issues, a lived faith and consensus decision-making. (See Appendix D for a sample agenda.)

APPENDIX A

THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR

The facilitator's main role is to support everyone to do their best thinking. Participatory values support intelligent thinking by engaged committed individuals who can work together to make wise decisions: Four key functions of this role are:

1. The Facilitator encourages full participation:

A problem inherent in group decision-making is self-censorship. People don't say what they are really thinking; it's hard to take risks. A facilitator will not accept or use statements that discourage people from saying what they're thinking. S/he will make room for quiet members, reduce the incidence of premature criticism and support everyone to keep thinking instead of shutting down.

2. The Facilitator promotes mutual understanding:

Each person's life experiences are so individual and unique that everyone has a different view of the world. A facilitator understands that expectations, assumptions, use of language and behaviour can all be sources of misunderstanding. A facilitator helps the group realize that sustainable agreements are built on a foundation of mutual understanding and helps members see that thinking from each other's viewpoints is invaluable.

3. The Facilitator fosters inclusive solutions:

Most people are entrenched in a conventional mindset for solving problems/conflicts and remain attached to their fixed positions, working to defend their own interests. A facilitator helps groups break free from business-as-usual discussions and engage in divergent thinking and a search for innovative ideas that incorporate everyone's points of view.

4. The Facilitator teaches new thinking skills

Very few people understand the mechanics of group decision-making well enough to organize a group into a productive team of thinkers. S/he can teach the following decision-making skills.

- a) How to turn either/or problems into both/and solutions;
- b) How to run well-designed successful meetings;
- c) How to participate in structured-thinking processes;
- d) How to understand and separate content from process.

APPENDIX B

GUIDELINES FOR RECORDERS

Ideally the Facilitator and the recorder should work in unison to produce minutes. The Facilitator can, for the sake of clarity, assist the recorder in the formulation of specific statements.

The Various Uses for Minutes:

- To accurately record the proceedings of the gathering for attending members and those who are absent; to have a record of the Council's work in a specific time and place;
- To provide the parish community with an accurate account of the content and direction of the meeting; e.g. expressed needs, concerns, suggested solutions, requests, and so on. Minutes should include enough information to provide clarity and understanding for those who are not present;

Meeting Minutes:

Prepare minutes as soon as possible after the meeting. Recall is important so the sooner the minutes are completed, the more accurate they are likely to be.

State the facts briefly but thoroughly. When a concern, suggestion or request is recorded, be specific about whether there is consensus or if it is a minority view. If a minority view is to be included, then identification of the speaker/s is recorded.

A Checklist for Minutes

- Include date, time, location, attendees and absentees.
- Indicate Chair/Facilitator, Recorder and Leader of Prayer
- Writing style: The minutes may be written in a formal or informal style. It is helpful to number each item of the minutes to correspond with the agenda items.
- Minutes are objective and neutral. The recorder does not take a position.
- Agenda Items: Discussion arising from previous minutes and new business:
 - Who raised/introduced the issue? (the Facilitator or other?)
 - What was the issue?
 - How was it heard/handled/concluded? (e.g. discussion, response, agreement, resolution, consensus, delegation, tabled for next meeting, etc.)

Distribution of Minutes

Minutes should be distributed to Council members as soon as possible so that any action to be taken between meetings can be followed up. The agenda for next upcoming meeting, together with any other materials pertinent to the meeting should be distributed to members well in advance of the meeting. This will allow adequate time to reflect on upcoming agenda items.

APPENDIX C

THE PRIMACY OF GRACE

If in the planning that awaits us we commit ourselves more confidently to a pastoral activity that gives personal and communal prayer its proper place, we shall be observing an essential principle of the Christian view of life: *the primacy of grace*.

There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore calls us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that “without Christ we can do nothing” (cf. *Jn 15:5*).

This is the moment of faith, of prayer, of conversation with God, in order to open our hearts to the tide of grace and allow the word of Christ to pass through us in all its power: *Duc in altum!* On that occasion, it was Peter who spoke the word of faith: “At your word I will let down the nets” (ibid.).

As this millennium begins, allow the Successor of Peter to invite the whole Church to make this act of faith, which expresses itself in a renewed commitment to prayer.

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE AGENDA

1. **Check-in.** Welcome to guests, members. What have we observed in the parish? in the community? in the world?
2. **Gathering Prayer and Reflection/Ritual.** Bring hearts and minds to the present moment and the task ahead.
3. **Spiritual Formation, Study or Faith Sharing.** This is a time of faith formation and team development.
4. **Review of current goals and examination/evaluation of progress since last meeting.** For example: a goal set by the council is to create awareness of justice issues. What is being done? How is the goal being realized? What else needs to happen? How can it happen? Who will follow up?
5. **The Pastor's Concerns/Issues.** This is an opportunity for the Pastor to consult on any new pastoral issues or concerns. These may either be dealt with at the meeting or tabled for a future meeting pending further study.
6. **The Diocesan Church.** What is happening in the broader church? At the deanery level? At the diocesan level? What implications does this information have for the parish?
7. **Other concerns/issues/information arising from organizational/ministries reports?** These would be requests by ministries or organizations seeking the advice of Council.
8. **Announcements.** This is the time to announce any upcoming parish functions, events or activities.
9. **Next steps – future needs, next meeting**
10. **Evaluation of meeting**

CLOSING PRAYER