

CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF LEXINGTON

Roman Catholic Diocese of Lexington, KY

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL GUIDELINES

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PREAMBLE

These Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines set forth an understanding of the purpose for and the specific norms governing Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Lexington. In addition, it is recommended that each parish obtain a copy of “Revisioning the Parish Pastoral Council” published by Paulist Press. This nationally recognized publication delves into and offers a structure for the work of Parish Pastoral Councils. It can be a valuable resource.

SECTION 1 – PURPOSE OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

The Code of Canon Law (536) provides the rationale for of the Parish Pastoral Council when it states, “After the diocesan bishop has listened to the presbyteral council and, if he judges it opportune, a pastoral council* is to be established in each parish; the pastor presides over it, 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. This pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop.”

The Parish Pastoral Council then provides leadership by assisting the pastor or parish life director in the creation of a long-term vision and plan that aligns with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan and that addresses the seven elements that form the essence of parish life:

- Evangelization
- Worship
- Word
- Community
- Service
- Stewardship
- Leadership

The Parish Pastoral Council achieves its purpose through:

- Building a community through faith sharing;
- Learning more about the Church;
- Creating or renewing the mission statement for the parish; and
- Developing and monitoring a pastoral plan and its goals, objectives and action steps.

***NOTE:** In small parishes, a Town Hall Meeting may serve as the Parish Pastoral Council (see Section 4 – Town Hall Meetings for more detail).

SECTION 2 – CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

Each Parish Pastoral Council requires a constitution and set of bylaws (samples are included in the appendix). These outline the work of a council and are to be in conformity with Church teachings, the Code of Canon Law, Diocesan policy and the Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines.

A council's constitution and bylaws must address the following essential elements:

1. Member Selection – The process by which members are to be identified, selected and appointed to the Parish Pastoral Council is to reflect the following:

- a. Members are to be registered practicing members of the parish they wish to serve.
- b. The number of members on a council will be determined by the size of the parish and its particular bylaws establishing membership.
- c. Membership selection should begin with a process of discernment.
 - 1) Discernment is a prayerful process for identifying new council members. It involves the parish at large having the opportunity to contemplate on any council vacancies and to suggest candidates for consideration (including one's own candidacy.)
 - 2) The pastor or parish life director initiates this process in the parish and is responsible for the facilitation of needs to bring about the best results in the process.
 - 3) The discernment process is to be established in the council's constitution and bylaws.
- d. Members, once identified, can be either appointed or elected.
 - 1) Appointment to the council is accomplished by the pastor or parish life director once a candidate has agreed to serve.
 - 2) Election* is the most traditional process for selecting new council members. Typically, an ad hoc nomination committee is established by the pastor or parish life director to...
 - a) plan the election;
 - b) prepare a slate of nominees;
 - c) inform nominees of the responsibilities involved;

- d) acquaint the parish with nominees;
- e) conduct the election according to the agreed upon rules; and
- f) publish the names of the newly elected council members.

***NOTE:** The parish or parish life director may still appoint members when necessary to fill unexpected vacancies or to ensure full representation of the parish community for pastoral reasons.

2. Term of Membership

- a. Length of term for council members is to be defined.
- b. Terms may be served either simultaneously or with staggered beginnings so that some members rotate off the council each year and a core of seasoned members remain.

3. Officers and Responsibilities

- a. Essential officers for a council are...
 - 1) presider (the leadership role filled by the pastor or parish life director)
 - 2) chair (serves as facilitator)
 - 3) secretary (official recorder of council proceedings)
- b. A vice-chair may also be established depending on the needs of the council.
- c. The qualifications for office, with the exception of the presider, are to be clearly delineated.

4. Meetings – Meetings are open except when personnel matters* or other sensitive issues are discussed. In such cases, the council is to adjourn to an Executive Session. The chair and pastor/parish life director determine when this is necessary.

***NOTE:** The Parish Pastoral Council as a consultative body only does **NOT**...

- Review administrative decisions of the pastor/parish life director (i.e. does not act as a court of appeals in conflict resolution processes).
- Regulate or implement with respect to rules, regulations and procedures any policy once it is enacted. This is the responsibility of the pastor/parish life director.
- Discuss or make decisions regarding **specific** personnel issues concerning students or staff. Staffing levels and other personnel issues may be discussed and recommendations made to the pastor/parish life director only on a general level.

5. Official Council Recommendation Process – The process the council will use to reach decisions about official recommendations to the pastor/parish life director is to clearly articulated.

- a. Consensus is the preferred method of decision making for major issues in a council setting.
- b. Consensus does not mean “majority rule.” Consensus is reached when all council members present can agree upon and support the decisions of the council.
- c. Consensus
 - 1) is built on prayer,
 - 2) seeks the will of God and not the individual will of the council members,
 - 3) is based on mutual trust among the persons making the decisions, and
 - 4) honors the teachings of the Church and Sacred Scriptures.

SECTION 3 – COMMITTEES

The Parish Pastoral Council brings the long-term vision and plan for the parish to life through committees. The council communicates the overall plan and provides direction to the committees, but the committees are responsible for specific planning and implementation.

1. Committee Membership – Membership selection should begin with a process of discernment (see Section 2, 1, c) and shall be determined according to the council constitution and bylaws, i.e. through appointment or election (see Section 2, 1, d).
2. Committee Liaison – A liaison between each committee and the council should be selected.
3. Committee Membership by Parish Staff – Parish staff, such as a director for religious education or a music director, serving on a committee should not chair that committee. Parish staff are to be considered *ex officio* members of the committee, i.e. members who serve by virtue of their position.
4. Executive Committee – The Executive Committee is composed of the presider, the chair, the secretary and any other council member, such as the vice-chair, identified in the constitution and bylaws. This committee sets the agenda and addresses issues that require attention between Parish Pastoral Council meetings.
5. The Diocese of Lexington identifies **three (3) essential committees** that must be established by every Parish Pastoral Council (although a council may establish more than these if necessary):

a. Formation/Religious Education Committee – This committee is responsible for identifying and addressing the formation and religious education needs of the parish community – families, adults, young persons, children, single, divorced, widowed – by working collaboratively with parish staff and volunteers. Specific responsibilities are:

- 1) Planning
- 2) Policy Recommendation
- 3) Review of formation/religious education funding requests
- 4) Submission of a formation/religious education budget to the Parish Finance Council
- 5) Evaluation and assessment of formation/religious education programs

b. Christian Service/Social Concerns Committee – This committee is responsible for identifying temporal needs of others, planning to meet these needs and providing service to those in need. It is also responsible for engaging in the work to change the social conditions that create these needs both in the parish and the larger community. Specific responsibilities are:

- 1) Identification of the needs to be addressed
- 2) Provision of educational resources for Faithful Citizenship
- 3) Establishment of short-range and long-range measurable goals
- 4) Provision of opportunities for parishioners to become involved
- 5) Submission of a Christian service/social concerns budget to the Parish Finance Council
- 6) Evaluation and assessment of Christian service/social concerns programs

c. Liturgy Committee – This committee plans and provides for the spiritual development of the parish community through meaningful liturgies and other forms of parish worship. It is critical that membership on this committee should represent all segments of the parish population: age, gender, race, education level, etc. In addition, the pastor/parish life director, parochial vicar(s), deacon(s), music director and/or worship coordinator should participate as members of this committee. Specific responsibilities are:

- 1) Establishment of short-range and long-range measurable goals for the liturgical life of the parish based on the vision of the Church shaped by the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Bishop, and the Parish Pastoral Council.
- 2) Planning and preparation for the actual parish liturgical celebrations

- 3) Coordination and supervision of the recruitment, training and renewal of liturgical ministers.
- 4) Provision for the ongoing liturgical formation of the parish community (as well as the committee members) to promote the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful
- 5) Communication and collaboration with the pastor/parish life director, parochial vicar(s), deacon(s) and other parish staff in the establishment of parish policies concerning liturgical rites and celebration of the sacraments in accordance with diocesan norms
- 6) Evaluation and assessment of liturgy committee activities
- 7) Submission of a liturgy budget to the Parish Finance Council

SECTION 4 – TOWN HALL MEETINGS

The Town Hall Meeting is characterized by the participation of all parishioners at regularly-held meetings. The Town Hall Meeting approach is designed specifically for small parishes or missions, but serve the same purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council. Similarly, Formation/Religious Education, Christian Service/Social Concerns, and Liturgy should receive significant attention at Town Hall Meetings. It is also important that the Parish Finance Council make regular reports to the Town Hall Meeting to ensure familiarity and transparency in terms of the financial status of the parish community.

Between the regularly-held meetings, a designated group collaborates with the pastor/parish life director to implement the accepted recommendations of the Town Hall Meeting. This designated group may be elected by parishioners, appointed by the pastor/parish life director, or a combination of elected and appointed members.

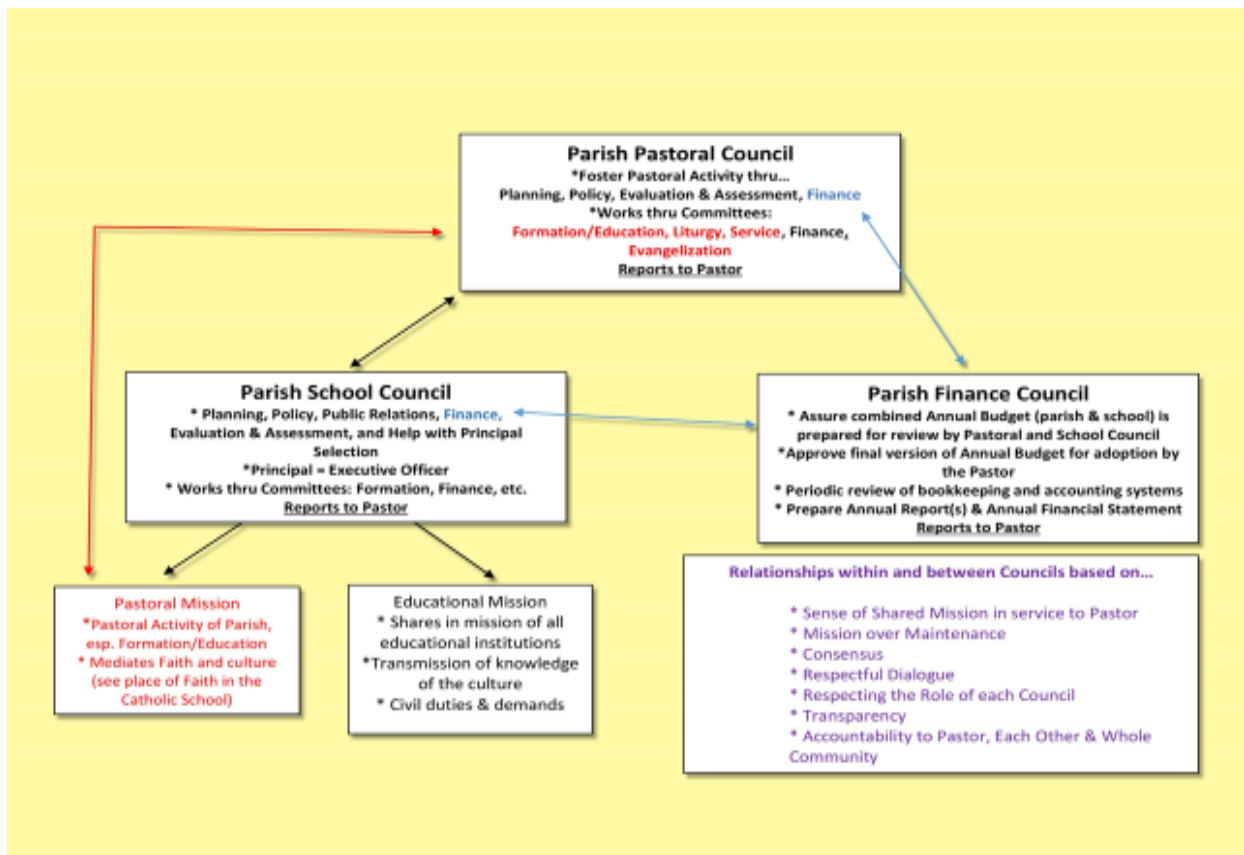
SECTION 5 – PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL’S RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PARISH LEVEL COUNCILS

The constitution and bylaws of the Parish Pastoral Council should articulate the council’s relationship to the Parish Finance Council and the Parish School Council. Reporting requirements and decision-making protocol should be clearly delineated.

1. The Parish Pastoral Council has primacy of place in terms of the parish level councils as it is the consultative body to the pastor/parish life director regarding the essential elements of parish life: Evangelization, Worship, Word, Community, Service, Stewardship, and Leadership.
2. The Parish Finance Council (see the Parish Finance Council Guidelines for the Diocese of Lexington for a full explanation of the council’s function) is the only council required by the Code of Canon Law. This council is the consultative body that advises the pastor/parish life director in matters pertaining to the financial affairs of the parish and school (if applicable).

- a. The Parish Finance Council must be granted access to fiscal information necessary for its deliberations such as parish financial accounts, financial reports, records of indebtedness, and all real property of the parish and school.
 - b. The Parish Finance Council has **deliberative power** to approve or to decline to approve the annual budget for the parish and the school (decision must be accepted and ratified by the pastor to be ultimately valid).
3. The Parish School Council (see the Parish School Council Guidelines for the Diocese of Lexington for a full explanation of the council’s function) is the consultative body to the principal (who serves as the executive officer of the council). The principal reports to the pastor and ultimately to the bishop through the superintendent’s office.

The Parish School Council participates in and encourages strategic planning; develops and defends policies approved by the pastor and implemented by the principal; develops plans/means to finance education programs including tuition, development and fundraising allocating resources according to a budget and monitoring plans; and participates in the selection of the principal when needed.



APPENDIX A: **SAMPLE CONSTITUTION**

Constitution: St. Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

Article I: Name

The name of this organization is the St. Mary's Parish Pastoral Council.

Article II: Mission Statement

We are Catholic Christians of St. Mary's Parish.
We are called by God to community,
To grow in faith, hope and love,
And as disciples, to advance the reign of God here in our midst.

*"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst."
Matthew 18:20*

We will live this community by gathering often in diverse groups
To pray, to learn and to serve.

Article III: Purpose

The purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council is to further the mission of the parish by seeking God's will for the parish through discernment. It achieves this purpose by:

1. Building a community through faith sharing,
2. Learning more about the Church,
3. Creating or renewing a mission statement,
4. Developing and monitoring a pastoral plan with its goals, objectives and action steps.

The Council is advisory to the pastor or parish life director.

Article IV: Membership

1. Members are registered practicing members of the parish.

2. The Council is composed of 10 – 12 members. The pastor or pastoral director is an *ex officio* non-voting member of the Council.
3. Council members are elected by the parish. The pastor or parish life director retains the right to appoint up to 3 (three) members.
4. The absence of a member from two consecutive meetings, without notification to the Parish Pastoral Council, shall constitute grounds for removal.

Article V: Committees

The committees include the Formation Committee, the Liturgy Committee and the Christian Service Committee.

Article VI: Decision Making

1. The Council is advisory to the pastor or pastoral director.
2. Decisions require a quorum. A quorum consists of one more than half of the voting members.
3. Consensus is the preferred method of decision making.
4. If consensus is not possible for an issue, there is a vote. In this case a decision requires one more than half of the voting members present.

Article VII: Amendments

1. Notice of a proposed amendment to the Constitution and accompanying Bylaws must be given in writing prior to the meeting.
2. Consensus is the preferred method for decisions on the Constitution and Bylaws. If consensus cannot be achieved, a two-thirds vote of the Council is required.

DATE

APPENDIX B: **SAMPLE BYLAWS**

Bylaws: St. Mary's Parish Pastoral Council

SECTION 1 – MEMBERSHIP

1. Membership is determined by election. The pastor or parish life director retains the right to appoint up to 3 (three) members.
2. The election/appointment of members takes place in May.
3. One member of the Finance Council must be designated as a member of the Pastoral Council.

SECTION 2 – TERMS

1. Members shall serve a term of 3 (three) years and are not eligible to serve consecutive terms.
2. Members shall serve staggered terms with 1/3 (one-third) of the Council rotating on and off each year.
3. Terms begin on August 1.
4. Vacancies in membership shall be filled if more than a year of the term remains. The pastor or parish life director, after consulting with the Council, will appoint a replacement. The person shall finish the unexpired term and is eligible for reappointment to 1 (one) additional consecutive term.

SECTION 3 – OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

1. Officers
 - a. The pastor or parish life director is the official presider at each meeting. The pastor or pastoral director may delegate this responsibility to the chair.
 - b. The Council elects one of its members to serve as chair, one as vice-chair, and one as secretary. Officers will serve a term of 2 (two) years.
2. The Executive Committee consists of the pastor or pastoral director, the chair, the vice-chair, and the secretary. A major function of the committee is the development of the agenda for the meetings.

SECTION 4 – MEETINGS

1. The Council will meet monthly.
2. Meetings are open except where personnel matters or other sensitive issues are discussed. The chair and pastor/parish life director will make this decision.

SECTION 5 – COMMITTEES

The Council, in consultation with the pastor/parish life director, appoints committees. Committee members serve for a term of 2 (two) years and can be reappointed. A member of the Council is liaison to each committee and attends its meetings.

1. Formation Committee

The Committee on Formation/Education is responsible for identifying the educational and formational needs of the entire parish community – families, adults, young persons, children, single, divorced and widowed – and to meet those needs by working collaboratively with parish staff and volunteers with the goals of continually improving the effectiveness of the religious formation program.

2. Liturgy Committee

The Liturgy Committee plans and provides for the spiritual development of the parish community through meaningful liturgies and other forms of parish worship. This committee should include individuals who represent all aspects of the parish in terms of age, gender, race, education, etc., as well as the pastor/parish life director, parochial vicar(s), sacramental ministers, deacons, music director and worship coordinator.

3. Christian Service Committee

The Committee on Christian Service makes efforts to provide service to others. It also works to change the social conditions that create needs both within the parish and in the larger community.

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