

Diocese of Belleville



***GUIDELINES FOR
PARISH PASTORAL
COUNCILS***

January 2011



The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton
Bishop of Belleville

January 24, 2011
Feast of St. Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Jesus Christ:

As you know, it is my wish and my expectation that every parish have a functioning Parish Pastoral Council. If you do not currently have a council, I would like you to initiate the process of developing a council this year.

In my Pentecost Sunday Pastoral Letter of June 4, 2006, *We are His Witnesses: Our Spirit-Filled Mission as the Church in Southern Illinois*, I reminded you that God calls all of us through Baptism to be witnesses to the Good News of His Son, Jesus Christ. Changes, developments, differences of opinion, and conflicting experiences in the daily life of the Catholic Church and in our increasingly secular culture sometimes make it more difficult for Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Religious and the Christian Faithful to agree completely concerning the best way for them to be true witnesses to the Gospel. I have called this challenge “the decline in Common Meaning.” One of the most effective ways of renewing Common Meaning in our parish communities is the development of an effective Parish Pastoral Council.

Through the Parish Pastoral Council, parish leaders under the authority of the Pastor, Administrator, or Parish Life Coordinator can reflect on the shared experiences of the parishioners. They can raise appropriate questions that lead to shared understandings about the community of faith. Through open, honest, prayer-filled dialogue, the parishioners have the possibility of arriving at common judgments concerning the mission and priorities of the Body of Christ. Once these shared judgments are recognized, everyone involved is called upon to commit themselves to the Catholic vision of life attained through the not always easy process of being attentive to the experiences, understandings, and judgments of all. This is the beginning of Common Meaning, a shared vision of Christian life in action.

Strategic Planning is a very valuable aid for developing this shared vision in a Parish Pastoral Council. This document puts an emphasis on Strategic Planning because of the need for parishes to articulate their Catholic Christian vision, purpose and mission. When we clarify and articulate our mission, we increase the possibility of attaining “Common Meaning.” When we attain genuine “Common Meaning,” we bring about a greater harmony among the parishioners. As a result more and more members of the parish participate actively in the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ, making the Church a vital reality in the community.

All of this requires prayer, work, and study. Authentic prayer should be at the heart of the life of Parish Pastoral Councils. The opening prayer at meetings must never be rushed. It must really be prayer, opening minds and hearts to the Mystery of God. It should be meaningful and well-prepared, not a perfunctory "Our Father." The Rosary (as a true meditation), the Liturgy of the Hours, *lectio divina* with one or two of the Sunday Mass readings, Seasonal prayers of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter, or a Prayer of the Faithful might be good models for this prayer. An annual spiritual retreat day has the potential of significantly focusing a Parish Council on its Christ-centered mission. While the prayer at the end of a Council meeting must be necessarily brief, it should not be without genuine fervor. Prayers for the sick and needy of the parish can be an effective way of drawing the meeting to a close and reminding all that though many, they are one in Christ.

Study is essential for Strategic Planning, but the study of the Parish Pastoral Council should not be restricted to that which is directly relevant to Strategic Planning. Study of the doctrines, traditions, disciplines, and history of the Catholic Church is of paramount importance. At the very minimum, Parish Pastoral Council members should have their own copies of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. They should be familiar with the current life of the Church and knowledgeable of the writings of the Bishop and the major events in the Diocese. It goes without saying that they should strive to know the life story of their parish community. Some parishes have the wise practice of giving new Parish Pastoral Council members a book to study, such as the Catechism. Reading about the faith will keep the council members focused on the Mass and the central teachings of the Church. The practice of Parish Councils discussing brief selections of Sacred Scripture or an appropriate book at the start of meetings can make an excellent contribution to the spiritual formation of the membership.

Parish Pastoral Councils are both practical and spiritual communities. Ideally, they should be Wisdom Communities, grounded in prayer, study and genuine Christian love. This Christian Love has the potential of spreading throughout the parish. However, I am aware that the practical realities and differences in parish life make this a high and distant goal. Nevertheless, we should not tire of seeking that goal! Parish Pastoral Council meetings must necessarily deal with many mundane concerns. But we must never forget why these councils exist. As I wrote in *We are His Witnesses*, Jesus Christ is the reason why our parishes exist. Parish Councils exist because Christ needs us all. He needs our eyes to continue to see. He needs our ears to continue to hear. He needs our mouths to continue to speak. And He needs our hearts to continue to love.

Parish Pastoral Councils serve as a kind of central nervous system of the parish that links the parish leadership with all of the members of the parish community, from the most active to the least active. Every Pastor, Administrator, or Parish Life Coordinator's servant-leadership is enhanced by collaboration with a Parish Pastoral Council. This is why I have stressed that it is my wish and my expectation that every parish have a functioning Parish Pastoral Council.

Prayerfully yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton
Bishop of Belleville

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Edward K. Braxton". The signature is written in a cursive style and is preceded by a small cross symbol.

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OVERVIEW

The parish pastoral council is a consultative body within the parish that is convened by the pastor and from whom the pastor seeks advice and counsel in planning for parish vitality. A parish pastoral council is not a legislative body. It is advisory to the pastor and charged with prayerfully discerning parish needs, setting pastoral priorities, and empowering people to participate in the mission of Christ. This purpose distinguishes the parish pastoral council from any other ministry or organization within the parish.

In some ways, each parish is unique as is their parish pastoral council. By the same token, some aspects are universal. One of the universal qualities is a shift in parish pastoral councils: from coordinating activities to articulating vision; from voting on issues to building consensus; from reports and intramural issues to planning and goal setting; from being elected by popularity to being selected for competence; from parliamentary procedures to prayerful deliberation.

Parish Pastoral Councils have a dual role of planning and coordinating. Planning requires study and reflection as preconditions for a successful strategic plan. Time must be spent in understanding the parish, the community, the diocese, and the overall teachings of the Catholic Church. Without a plan parish life is unable to reach its fullness. Traditionally Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Belleville have emphasized the coordination of ministries which are structured into committees or commissions. The Parish Pastoral Council is a natural place for the various commissions to interface, share information, and receive guidance from the pastor and the council. Without effective planning, however, the coordinating of committees lacks a vision and purpose. It is only through a strategic plan that a Parish Pastoral Council can appropriately coordinate the commissions.

MISSION OF PARISH

A parish does not exist for itself, but for the Mission of Christ. In a word, the parish exists to evangelize. The parish is an intentional community charged with growing in faith, sharing faith and transforming the world in faith. Every parish has a part in Christ's saving mission. Vital parishes are mission-driven. Gathering at the Lord's Table on the Lord's Day forms us into the body of Christ and compels us outward as his ambassadors of mercy and reconciliation to all. It is from this table of gratitude that we go out to care for the least of God's children.

Parishes form a communion of communities within a diocese and are united with Catholics across the globe. It is in the midst of the parish that the Gospel is proclaimed, liturgy offered, and the sacraments celebrated. It is in the company of fellow Catholics that we discern and live out our vocation. It is in the midst of the parish that the beginning and end of our earthly life is celebrated. This is all accomplished through a community of faith with a particular identity, regional character and cultural heritage. In that sense, every parish has both a universal purpose and a unique charism. What is written here speaks to its unifying sense of purpose.

The mission of the parish is not the same as the purpose of the parish pastoral council. The work of the parish pastoral council is to consider, plan and recommend ways for the parish to accomplish the mission of Christ. The parish pastoral council is a strategic organ in the parish that keeps the parish focused on its divine purpose – love God, love God's people, do God's will and lead others to God through Christ.

Recommendation: Review the parish mission statement at least once a year.

"If, after consultation with the pastoral council of priests, the diocesan bishop considers it appropriate, he will recommend the establishment of a council, presided over by the pastor, and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral care in the parish assist in fostering pastoral activity. The pastoral council has only a consultative vote, and it is governed by the norms laid down by the diocesan bishop (Canon #536)

PURPOSE OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

The work of the Parish Pastoral Council is to consider, plan and recommend ways for the parish to accomplish the mission of Christ. The Parish Pastoral Council is a strategic organ in the parish that keeps the parish focused on its divine purpose – love God, love God's people, do God's will and lead others to God through Christ . In fostering parish vitality, the pastor involves his council in careful investigation, prayerful consideration and consensual recommendations.

Often when someone completes a term of service as a member of a Parish Pastoral Council they observe, “Now I don't want to leave. I've finally figured out what I am supposed to be doing here!” This comment illustrates one obstacle to council success and satisfaction. Successful parish pastoral councils are clear about their purpose, scope and role within the parish.

The parish pastoral council is a consultative body that actively participates to plan for parish vitality under the leadership of a pastor. While it is not a legislative body, the concept of consultation has significant meaning in church law. The parish pastoral council is charged with prayerfully discerning parish needs, setting pastoral priorities, and empowering people to participate in the mission of Christ. Identifying needs, establishing priorities and mobilizing a community to act on what it values most is at the heart of parish success.

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?” (Luke 14:28)

We invest time to plan for the things that matter most in our lives. God invites us to care enough about the success of the Church to plan for it. In fostering parish vitality, the pastor involves his council in careful investigation, prayerful consideration and consensual recommendations. This three-fold agenda for parish pastoral councils is derived from the role of the diocesan Parish Pastoral Council. (Decree on Bishops, #27).

Recommendation: Provide orientation and regular formation to all council members – new and old. As part of this orientation, the pastor should express his philosophy on consultation and describe his approach to how the pastoral council will operate in the parish. It may also be helpful to provide written descriptions, and a calendar of council meetings.

WHAT A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL DOES

Most simply, a parish pastoral council is a representative group from the parish who offer counsel to the pastor. The logical question is: Give counsel about what? Parish Pastoral Councils are not intended to be a management team for the parish. The purview of the Parish Pastoral Council relates to matters that impact the spiritual vitality of the parish. In this interest, a Parish Pastoral Council attends to envisioning, planning, coordinating and empowering all the baptized for fuller participation in the life of the Church. This usually takes the form of a long-range plan.

Pastoral planning involves prayerful consideration of the parish mission in a way that is respectful of diocesan priorities and responsive to emerging circumstances. It is consistent with the Gospel and the teachings of the Church. One outgrowth of good planning is building bridges across all divisions within and around the parish. This is accomplished as the Parish Pastoral Council seeks dialogue with the leaders of various groups and ministries within the parish, throughout the deanery and across the diocese.

Canon law defines this as a consultative role (Canon #536). It is the responsibility of the pastor to direct these efforts. It is the responsibility of the pastor to convoke the Parish Pastoral Council, preside over it and determine the structure, approaches, and methods to be used. Today pastors find the greatest satisfaction when the Parish Pastoral Council is unfettered by rigid structures and able to work in collaboration with the finance council, trustees and the parish staff. An effective Parish Pastoral Council is: simple in procedures, prayerful in process, consensual in decisions, enabling in practice, unifying in purpose and apostolic in outlook.

Recommendation: Consider the following topics at the start of each year: How can we be supportive to the pastor this year? How can we best advise the pastor and establish a plan for setting parish priorities each year? What structure is necessary for us and how can we simplify our procedures in a way that makes us more responsive? How can we enable others in the parish to act or become stakeholders in our parish's success? How can we be more prayerful in our deliberations?

As sharers in the role of Christ the Priest, the Prophet and the King, the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church... the laity should accustom themselves to working in the parish in close union with their priests, bringing to the church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which should be examined and resolved by common deliberation. (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 10)

WHAT A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL DOES NOT DO

Because Parish Pastoral Councils are consultative bodies, they are ill-equipped to either legislate or administrate. In particular, most councils are ill-equipped to: interpret liturgical norms, repair the roof on the church, administer daily parish operations, supervise staff, decide what copier to purchase for the office, establish financial practices, set or enforce employment practices, choose investment portfolios. Decisions like these that require specialized skills or expertise are best left up to the pastor who will consult with relevant experts (e.g. business manager, pastoral staff, finance council, diocesan departments) as appropriate.

It is also a mistake for the Parish Pastoral Council to develop big dreams and leave them with the pastor to implement unassisted. Too many sound recommendations meet untimely deaths simply because the council provides no plan for implementation or fails to study the impact of an idea on existing parish infrastructure (cost, staffing, facility requirements, etc.)

A good recommendation is one that considers the possible consequences and includes suggestions for implementation. A good recommendation includes: rationale, goal and reasonable suggestions for a plan of action. One parish pastoral council studied the lack of teens in the parish and recommended reaching out to young people. Their rationale was sound and they knew that the budget was tight, so they recommended recruiting volunteers who would provide programs for youth in the evenings and on weekends when youth are available to attend. Unfortunately, no one took into account that this time of day is when the coordinator of faith formation is already most busy and unable to train and supervise new volunteers. There was no thought given to what space would be required on the parish property. This might have been achievable as a multi-parish cooperative project but it was just too ambitious for this one parish.

Recommendation: Before every meeting the executive committee should ask themselves: Are we competent to advise the pastor on these matters? With whom should we consult to be effective advisors? What is the best method for addressing the matters. At hand? Do our recommendations include sound rationale, accountability and realistic plans for action?

ORGANIZING A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

There are three ways of organizing a council that are most popular. Each approach can be adapted to local circumstances. Deciding on which approach is best for a given parish will likely take into consideration several factors that may include: particular local needs, the leadership style of the pastor, leadership abilities in the congregation, the cultural groups present in the community as well as the relative strengths and weaknesses of the approach itself. All approaches presume a commitment to collaborative leadership, unity and parish vitality. The approaches are:

Approach A - The Planning Council assists the pastor and staff in intentional planning - prayerful discernment of parish priorities, involving parishioners in shared leadership, consensual decision-making and strategic planning.

Approach B - The Coordinating Council is a representative body of leaders from all organizations and ministries that meet regularly to share information and coordinate on the most significant activities in the parish. Smaller parishes use a “community meeting” variation of this approach.

Approach C - The Managing (projects) Council is a small group of leaders who manage and pursue particular priorities or implement particular projects as directed by the pastor.

Each approach has a particular focus, responsibilities, structure, membership, leadership, term of service, and style of meetings. Each has particular strengths and weaknesses. No matter which approach is adopted, there are practical matters that are required for effective council development. These include: creating position descriptions, selecting members, providing training, establishing appropriate committee structures, setting meeting agendas, publishing meeting minutes, reporting to the parish community, maintaining inter-parish, deanery, and diocesan linkages, and ensuring the transparency of council proceedings.

Recommendation: Every council should have an executive structure that includes the pastor, president/chairperson, and secretary. This group is responsible for creating the working plan and calendar for the year as well as assembling the agenda for each meeting. This group should insure that significant time is given to prayer and study. **The Planning Council (Approach A) is highly recommended in this Diocese because intentionality and planning for the future insures parish vitality.** Strategic planning keeps a parish focused on its priorities while allowing for cooperation with neighboring parishes in response to the emerging spiritual needs of all Catholics. The Parish Pastoral Council is often the most effective planning group in the parish when it is partnered with the resources of the pastoral staff, trustees, and parish finance council.

PASTOR CONSULTING

As we came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people... (Acts 2:43-47)

The Acts of the Apostles presents an inspiring picture of the character and mission of the church in times no more certain than today. One of the most striking aspects of this portrayal of church is that they were “together and had all things in common.” This is a stunning description of who we are at our best – energized, intentional and united in identity, purpose and direction.

The Second Vatican Council invited us to recognize our dignity as a People of God who have been abundantly loved and who have received a great commission (Mt. 28: 16-20) to bring the Good News of Jesus into every human situation as ambassadors of Christ's mercy (2 Cor. 5:20). It is in this spirit of unity that we approach our ministry together. Within each U.S. diocese, the Bishop seeks consultation with representatives and experts in leading the local Church and he authorizes pastors to do likewise within each parish.

The mission of the Church is not reserved to one person or a few. It is through baptism that all have a share in Christ's mission – priest, prophet and king. Consultation enables the active participation of all the baptized in this mission.

It is through consultative structures in the church polity that we ensure participation, unity and vitality (Canon 208). Consultation is an important way for the Church to practice subsidiarity - enabling creative leadership and achieving renewal from within. A wise pastor consults with the trustees, members of the staff and lay leaders of the parish. One essential partner in parish collaboration is the parish pastoral council.

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL AUTHORITY

Today, clergy, religious and laity are called to active participation as co-workers in the vineyard, sharing in a ministry rooted service to God's Reign. For the laity this call to active participation can be exercised in the parish pastoral council and its committees.

When considering the issue of authority, it is helpful to consider the etymology of the word. The Parish Pastoral Council is "authorized" by the pastor. The Parish Pastoral Council's "authority" is derived from its "author". A Parish Pastoral Council is authorized by the pastor. It is the pastor who extends to the Parish Pastoral Council both authority and direction in common service to the parish. Therefore, Parish Pastoral Councils are never convened without the pastor or his delegate, because a Parish Pastoral Council cannot be separated from the pastor anymore than a body can be separated from its head.

Paradoxically, the councils which exercise the greatest authority are those whose service is collegial, responsible and prayerful. Councils can dream big, consider wild possibilities, and even come to wrong conclusions because their role is consultative. This is a liberating message to the ears of a conscientious councilor. It is the pastor who must weigh all the factors, ultimately decide and be accountable for the outcome. A council cannot act effectively in contradiction to the pastor. By the same token, there are few effective pastors who do not recognize their need for the support and wisdom available to them through a conscientious council.

Recommendation: Occasionally consider how your ministry unifies the congregation with its pastor and enables the baptized to share in leadership for the church.

Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary, they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their service and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common understanding with one heart.

(Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 30)

WHO A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL REPRESENTS

The Parish Pastoral Council represents the entire parish. This includes all cultures, ages and groups within a parish. It represents those who attend Mass occasionally, as well as the core supporters of the parish; those who have been parishioners for fifty years, five years and five months. In all matters, the Parish Pastoral Council is charged with considering the good of the parish as a whole as it seeks to fulfill the Mission of Christ. It is important that council members understand their role at the parish level, as well as the need to communicate with similar structures at the deanery and diocesan levels.

To accomplish this, a Parish Pastoral Council must be a representative body, not a body of representatives. This means that unlike legislative groups, a member of a Parish Pastoral Council does not represent any particular interest group (that can find itself in competition with others within the parish). This makes voting, complex procedural rules (parliamentary procedure) and other conflict-reducing methods of decision-making irrelevant. The Parish Pastoral Council is a place to seek consensus (see Appendix H) on the vital questions of the day.

The Parish Pastoral Council enables its members and the entire parish community to share in the mission and ministry of Christ. Effective pastoral councils are a forum for dialogue and places for building community. In that interest, it can be prudent to invite particular representation from groups (e.g. age, culture, location) that are underrepresented in leadership or that lack access in the parish.

It is important that council members understand their role at the parish level, as well as the need to communicate with similar structures at the deanery and diocesan levels. There is much expertise available beyond a parish to assist pastoral councils in understanding best practices in operation.

Recommendations: Commission the pastoral council at a regular Sunday Mass. Provide the council with opportunities for prayerful reflection (perhaps a day of spiritual renewal together each year).

"In dioceses, as far as possible, there should be councils which assist the apostolic work of the Church, either in the field of making the gospel known and men holy, or in the charitable, social or other spheres. To this end, clergy and religious should appropriately cooperate with the laity...Councils of this type should be established as far as possible also on the parochial, inter-parochial, and inter-diocesan level as well as in the national and international sphere." (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 26)

COUNCIL MEMBERS SELECTION

There are several possible methods of selection. Regardless of which method is used, it is best to do so in a way that is transparent, and inclusive. The pastor always has the right to appoint additional members to insure the broadest representation. And the congregation should always be informed when openings arise or when there is a significant transition of leadership on the pastoral council. Some popular methods of membership selection include: discernment, random selection, nominations, and general election.

Approach A - In the Planning Council, the pastor needs parishioners who are competent in strategic planning, facilitating change and familiar with the people and needs of the parish. It is fitting that some nominations come from the congregation to insure broad representation. Sometimes a nominating committee is formed to conduct a search for the needed expertise and experience from within the parish.

Approach B - In the Coordinating Council representatives are typically selected or nominated by the organizations from which they come. The final appointment is made by the pastor. With regard to the simple “community meeting” variation to his approach, all parishioners are welcome and no selection process is necessary.

Approach C – Managing (projects) Council the needed expertise may vary depending on the project. In announcing the project under consideration, the pastor can include an invitation to those with particular interest and experience to contact him. The pastor is free to appoint members or accept nominations from the congregation and interview all qualified candidates.

- Specify a term of office for each council member (including appointees). Use a three-year term of service with only two years as a committee chair. Stagger replacement (one third of council members) each year to insure for continuity.
- The pastor makes the announcement of selection results to the congregation.
- Once a term is complete, a council member steps down for a full term before being re-nominated again. This allows for broad participation and allows for the leadership of all the baptized.

COUNCIL MEMBERS SELECTION (continued)

Some popular methods of membership selection include:

1. Discernment – In this method nominations are welcome. Candidates are provided background materials to read on the purpose and function of a pastoral council and they are invited to attend informational session/s sponsored by current council members. Candidates are asked to submit a letter of interest that expresses the reason for their interest and highlights their relevant talents and expertise by a given deadline. Nominations are considered by the current council after a discussion of most needed qualifications. A secret ballot can be taken after a time of prayer for the Spirit's guidance.

2. Random Selection – Nominations are submitted and reviewed by the pastor. Names are drawn by lots in a prayerful context at a regularly scheduled meeting, regular weekend liturgy or another suitable parish event.

3. Nominations Committee - A sitting pastoral council advertises openings and interviews candidates in an effort to match abilities with council needs. Preferences are presented to the pastor for approval.

4. Open Election – Nominations are accepted and nominees are contacted to confirm interest. Interested nominees should be provided an opportunity to have their questions answered about the responsibilities associated with being a councilor. Those that remain interested are presented to the parish along with a brief resume detailing their abilities and their reason for interest. Election is held at weekend liturgies either after the homily or after Mass. Balloting should be confidential. Once ballots are counted, the pastor contacts selectees to congratulate them and confirm their willingness to serve. The pastor should contact the other candidates to announce the result and thank them for their willingness to serve.

See the "Planning Calendar" for timing of selection.

Recommendations:

- Choose a method of selection that is most consistent with the purpose of the pastoral council.
- Appoint representatives to the pastoral council for groups underrepresented in parish leadership (e.g. youth, young adult, ethnic minorities).

Limit eligibility for service to baptized Catholics who are registered and supportive of the parish; active in the practice of their faith; supportive of Church teaching; open to prayer, study and dialogue; and committed to the success of the parish. Other qualifications can include: working knowledge of the parish, possession of time and energy, ability to listen to people with diverse views, desire to grow in spirit, openness to study, reliability, willingness to empower others for action, and desire to work collaboratively.

PASTORAL COUNCILS AND FINANCE COUNCILS

What is the relationship between the pastoral and finance councils?

The *Code of Canon Law* mandates the establishment of a finance council in every parish (Canon #537). Additionally, civil law requires the parish to have five Trustees, two lay members of the parish in addition to the diocesan bishop, vicar general and pastor. Canon Law recommends the establishment of a pastoral council. Lay trustees typically serve ex-officio on the Parish Pastoral Council. While a trustee may serve on the finance council, the parish trustee is not part of the finance council solely by virtue of being a trustee. And while the finance council is distinct from a pastoral council, their roles are complementary. The finance council insures prudence in fiscal management through consultation and participation, while the Parish Pastoral Council ensures participation and effective planning for the parish as a whole.

The diocese has established policies and procedures for financial governance and reporting. These directives describe the responsibilities of the parish finance council in detail. It is not the province of a finance council to set parish vision. The finance council does not articulate the mission or set pastoral priorities for the parish. Instead, it is charged with providing sound financial advice. It is the responsibility of the pastor to convene and manage the work of the finance council within the norms, policies and procedures established by the diocese.

The finance council assists the pastor in formulating and managing the parish budget. It also assists the pastor in the completion of the annual report. These are tasks that present opportunities for cooperation between finance councils and pastoral councils.

The Parish Pastoral Council is convoked by the pastor to articulate parish vision, communicate its mission, set goals and recommend a plan for the parish. This plan is shaped and implemented by pastoral staff and ministry leaders. Once logistics and costs are determined, the plan must be reviewed for funding by the finance council. Pastoral excellence cannot be achieved unless these key teams of parish leadership work together in that common interest.

Recommendation: Insure effective communication and cooperation between these advisory groups within the parish. This can be accomplished through liaisons or reciprocal ex-officio representation.

In each parish there is to be a finance council which is governed, in addition to universal law, by norms issued by the diocesan bishop and in which the Christian faithful, selected according to these same norms, are to assist the pastor in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to the prescript of Canon 532 (Canon 537)

COMMISSIONS

Is this a mandatory structure?

This structure for commissions can be altered according to the needs of the parish. Some parishes may need to split the Faith Formation Commission into several commissions. For instance, parishes are strongly encouraged to have Youth Ministry Commissions. The Youth Ministry Commission could report directly to the Parish Pastoral Council or through the Faith Formation Commission. Other parishes may need to consolidate commissions and discern whether certain ministries are necessary. For many of our parishes it would be prudent to provide certain ministries through a parish cluster. RCIA (the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) is liturgical and catechetical (faith formation). Each parish will need to choose which commission works with that ministry.

Does each commissions need to meet every month?

Commissions are the location where planning and action meet. Some commissions may require monthly meetings for planning, implementation and assessment of goals and objectives. Other commissions may only meet to do the work of the commission (i.e. the Maintenance Commission).

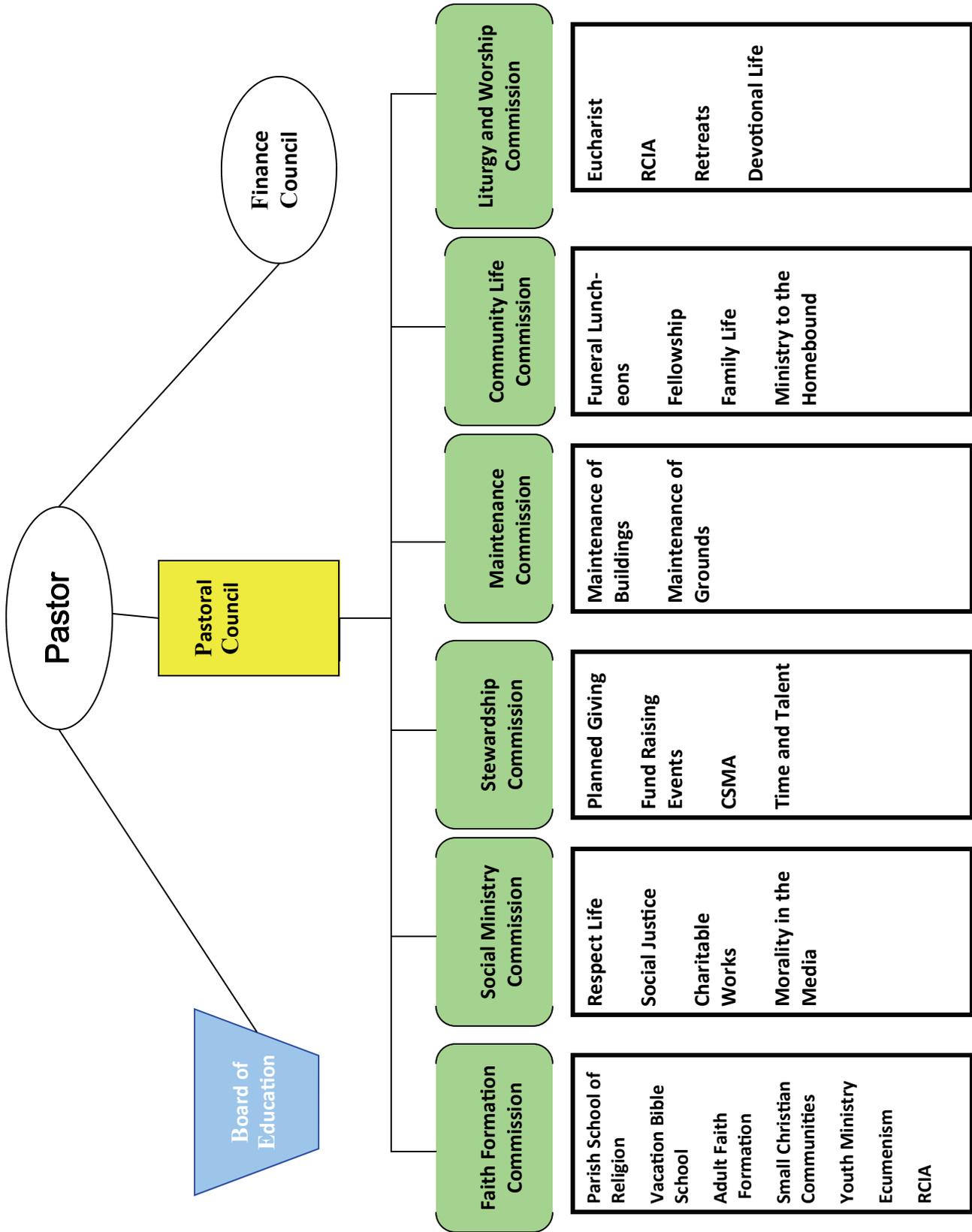
Why is Evangelization across the entire right side of the chart?

Evangelization, the sharing of the Good News of Jesus's life, death, and Resurrection, needs to be a part of every ministry of the parish. When we accept Jesus into our lives we also accept our role in making Jesus real for others. For many people this is fulfilled through their actions, for other it is in words. Hospitality and generosity of heart are important parts of evangelization.

How should commissions report to the Parish Pastoral Council?

Reports from commissions may be submitted in person or in writing. It is recommended that Parish Pastoral Council meetings regularly include commission reports.

EVANGELIZATION



GETTING STARTED CHECKLIST

Review the items below. These are often considered as necessary ingredients for pastoral council development. Check off what is in place and discuss with others on the steering committee how to construct or adapt what is missing. All statements of council governance can be considered for approval at first meeting following orientation and training.

Before Starting...

- gather a steering committee from staff, trustees or others to organize a successful launch
- draft a statement of council purpose (planning? coordination? project managing?)
- write a position description for councilors (responsibilities, qualifications, term of service, etc.)
- determine a method for selecting members
- educate the parish (rationale, purpose, formation process, selection process, schedule)
- schedule training for new members
- plan commissioning service (at regular weekend liturgy)
- define committees (name, role and representation)
- draft an organizational flow chart, policies and procedures

Plan Meetings:

- agenda (both topics and methods)
- announcement
- supplies (refreshments, name cards, agenda, notes, media equipment)
- evaluation (periodic)
- schedule of meetings
- facilitator
- meeting recorder

Communicate Purpose and Proceedings:

- report to the parish community (monthly, quarterly and annual)
- liaison with broader church (nearby parishes, parish cluster, deanery and diocese)
- parish mission statement
- annual goals and objectives
- organizational procedures and policies (quorum, composition, appointments, etc.)

INSTALLATION CEREMONY

When installed at a Eucharistic celebration, this ceremony is best used immediately following the homily. The incoming council members can be installed together at one liturgy or at the respective celebrations in which they regularly participate. Call forward incoming pastoral council members and once gathered address the congregation as follows:

My brothers and sisters:

To each of us God has given the gift of Life. With that gift comes a call, a call to love God, love God's people, do God's will and lead others to God. This is our mission as a Church - to bring Christ into every dimension of human experience. We accomplish this as a community of faith.

Every gift that we receive invites a response. In Baptism we are given a share in the mission of Christ's body – priest, prophet and king. In Confirmation that purpose is ratified, strengthened, and blessed.

Today we have before us members of our parish community who have been called to the ministry of service to our parish through participation on the parish pastoral council.

Address incoming parish council members:

You, my brothers and sisters, have been chosen for an important ministry and must now strive more earnestly than ever to live the Christian life, to give good example, to take your faith seriously, and to be devoted to the mission of this Christian community.

In the example of Christ, you are called to lead as servants on behalf of your fellow parishioners. You are called to foster pastoral excellence in this parish. You are called to collaborate with the staff, trustees, and ministry leaders in planning for our future vitality. And you are asked to enable all of us to participate more fully in the Mission of the Church.

Your ministry is a gift from God and to be meaningful must be done in the name of the Lord. Your ministry is a call from God and must flow from a commitment to the Lord. Your ministry must be motivated for the upkeep of the Church. Your ministry is a ministry of service.

INSTALLATION CEREMONY (continued)

He who gave His life so we may live, knelt before His disciples to wash their feet and told them: "This then is what I command you: 'Love one another'." So I ask:

- Will you dedicate yourself to this work in a spirit of service?
- Will you avail yourself to needed study on the mission of this parish and the teaching of our Church?
- Are you resolved to listen to your fellow parishioners and prayerfully consider their needs above your own?
- Will you assist the pastor in planning for a vital future for this parish?
- Are you resolved to conscientiously enable your brothers and sisters to participate more fully in the Mission of the Church?

(Invite the congregation to extend their hands in blessing for these pastoral councilors.)

May the Lord bless and keep these leaders.

May God send the Holy Spirit to guide and counsel them.

This we ask through Christ Our Lord.

(Invite council members to step forward and confirm their intent by signing their names to a book of commitment or blessing themselves with water from the baptismal font. Invite the congregation to express their encouragement with applause.)

PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS FOR MEETINGS

Good meetings start with preparation. Preparation involves determining the tasks to be accomplished, selecting a method suitable to that purpose and communicating that information throughout the meeting to keep participants informed and on track. The following are essential ingredients for an effective meeting:

Facilitator - to manage the agenda, initiate topics, invite participation, and keep the group on time

Agenda - including both the what (goal and outcome) as well as the how (process and methods)

Record – to keep the group memory during the meeting and publish a collection of decisions and assignments afterward

Equal Access to Information – so everyone knows both what is being discussed, all the options and what resources are available to complete the task

Team Spirit - spirit of unity, trust, clarity of purpose, confidence in group competence, reliability and integrity of members, collaborative intent, belonging and a sense of adventure

Conducive Environment – includes sufficient room, adequate lighting, comfortable temperature, and seating that insures for ease of listening and removal of distractions

Agenda

Meetings of a Parish Pastoral Council are different than business meetings in structure and style. By the same token all good meetings start with a clear agenda that is communicated in advance. Even if a draft of the agenda is distributed in advance, it should be available at the meeting along with minutes of the last meeting and any necessary reports. An agenda includes both the “what” (content of the meeting) and the “how” (meeting process). In a good meeting everyone can answer the following two questions at any point: What is the topic or question under consideration? How will the group discuss, deliberate, or decide on the topic at hand?

The agenda for a meeting to discern parish mission or to set goals will be structured differently than one dedicated to planning an event or discussing parish finances. The arrangement of the environment for information sharing is different than a problem-solving session. Information meetings are set up like classrooms, focusing attention on the source of the information while planning and problem solving meetings have a more circular and inclusive orientation of seats. It is the facilitator's job to provide for necessary supplies (e.g. newsprint pad, pens, name plates, as well as handouts and minutes from the previous meeting). A few specific thoughts follow on agendas, recording minutes and insuring effective listening.

PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS FOR MEETINGS (continued)

It is generally the work of an executive committee to set the agenda, anticipate any issues that might come up in a meeting and evaluate ongoing progress of the Parish Pastoral Council. The Parish Pastoral Council chairperson and the secretary are responsible for sending out meeting minutes and the proposed agenda. The chairperson often facilitates the meeting and the secretary records meeting minutes.

Good meeting agendas should include time for:

- Prayer and reflection
- Acceptance of the previous meeting minutes
- Introduction to the agenda (content and process)
- Occasional team building or enrichment activities
- Plans, decisions or study
- Consideration of updates or reports from strategic planning, projects and committee work
- Evaluation of the meeting and listing of unfinished business
- Depending on the operational approach adopted (planning, coordinating or project managing), it is advisable to strike a balance between learning and doing, between planning for the future and attending to present needs, between prayer and business.

Additional Tips

- Have a clear agenda with times efficiently allocated to complete each task
- Express gratitude to people for coming and for the gift of their time
- Start on time
- Stay focused
- Use a variety of ways for people to process and publish information (including writing, reflection, small group discussion and large group presentations)
- Seek consensus
- Insure that everyone knows what is the next step
- Conclude with prayerful and positive spirit

PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS FOR MEETINGS (continued)

Minutes

Good minutes are succinct and action-oriented. Because they serve as reminders of “homework” assignments delegated at the meeting, minutes should be provided to councilors within a week of the meeting. Avoid trying to take down every comment and every name. Good minutes:

- Name the issue and capture the sense of the discussion
- Accurately state the outcome including a list of key questions raised, decisions made and actions taken
- Are well organized and consistent in format from meeting to meeting
- Retain and report on items that are tabled or left unresolved with reasons
- Are made accessible to the broader congregation

Pastoral planning involves envisioning, investigating and deliberating on important and sometimes emotionally charged matters that affect the entire parish. But in the end, for better or worse, parishioners are all in it together. Respectful listening keeps the team together even through difficult deliberations. It is the role of the meeting facilitator to insure that everyone listens with respect. If one expects a meeting to be contentious, it can be helpful to review rules for good listening at the outset.

Facilitating a group discussion is more art than science. When one or more people are disruptive in a meeting (e.g. talking off topic or monopolizing a conversation) the most elegant way to correct that person is by blending with the person/s and redirecting them. In such situations a facilitator can always take the blame for the conversation going long or too far afield, restate the purpose of the conversation and thank members of the group that have been helpful in this task. On the next two pages are some particular responses for familiar tight spots in a meeting discussion.

PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS FOR MEETINGS (continued)

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN...

... someone gets long-winded?

Facilitator Response: Politely interrupt at a natural break in their remarks and summarize their point: “[Name], what I hear you saying is...” Assure the speaker that they have been understood. Often people keep going, looking for feedback to insure that they are making themselves clear). Then redirect the conversation: “ We still have time to hear from a few others on the matter before time runs short.” It is also diplomatic to seek permission from the speaker to yield and allow for someone else to contribute.

... two or more people start talking at once during a meeting?

Facilitator Response: Interrupt. “[Names] I am excited by the energy in your conversation, sounds like there are some great ideas being shared. Could we all hear them? Why don't we start with [name] and then hear from [name]...?”

... councilors start debating a topic unnecessarily?

Facilitator Response: Interrupt the debate by taking blame for letting the conversation become pointed. Clarify the matter at hand, inviting the group to move ahead, “... given what has been said and the complexity of the issue, what implications can we glean from the discussion?” (Invite someone other than one of the debaters to respond).

... someone always has their hand up to speak first?

Facilitator Response: “Let's hear from a new voice first, how about [name]. What are you thinking about this?”

“[Name] thank you for your willingness to get us talking but this time why don't you help me to invite a quieter member of the group, who haven't we heard from lately?” (having the talker to recognize and invite others to talk can often send the message that we are all responsible for starting discussion).

PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS FOR MEETINGS (continued)

... someone expresses strong feelings on an issue (especially negative)

Thank you [name] for the confidence that you demonstrate in us to share from your heart so openly. This is an important topic and it is worthy of strong feelings. It may warrant more of our time than we planned initially. I'd like to check in with others about it. Are there others who also feel strongly on this matter?"

... remarks are made by parishioners that suggest that someone at a meeting is airing council business outside the meeting?

Facilitator Response: Unless it is urgent, put the topic of "procedures" on the agenda for the next council meeting. Allow councilors to express their views first and after everyone else has had their chance to share their feeling on the matter say, " I want to register my concern that everyone who serves on council deserves to feel secure here. All teamwork is based on trust. Loss of trust is one of the most destructive forces in any organization and breach of confidence is the surest way to lose trust. We all want to feel safe in speaking freely. We all want to know that our views are being heard clearly, and if there is something misunderstood or a disagreement, people will come to us directly to ask questions or share their concerns. We all want to feel safe that confidential information is honored and we are not being misconstrued or mischaracterized by remarks that outside the meeting will likely be taken out of context and without a way of verification. For these reasons can we all agree that anything expressed in this meeting will stay with those who are present in this meeting, unless we all explicitly agree otherwise. Of course, meeting reports will continue to be made available to parishioners and meetings will remain open to parishioners to attend and observe according to our usual practice. Can we all agree?" (get explicit agreement from everyone on council those present as well as those absent).

MEETING PREPARATION TIMELINE

The preparation instructions listed below are directed by the pastor in collaboration with an executive committee of the Parish Pastoral Council .

At end of each meeting:

- Confirm date, time and location of next meeting
- Ask for a volunteer to lead prayer/sharing (if it is a rotated responsibility)
- Advise all councilors of deadline for reports (in writing) two weeks prior to the next meeting

Within one week immediately following each meeting:

- Pastor meets with executive committee to review minutes, and name tasks needed for completion before the next meeting
- Create draft agenda (e.g. follow next step in strategic planning process)
- Communicate with prayer/sharing leader to verify details
- Send out meeting minutes along with draft agenda and task assignments

Two weeks prior to meeting:

- Pastor meets with executive committee to confirm agenda topics and design the meeting and allocate time according to importance of issue and desired outcome (e.g. discussion, recommendation or decision)
- Request written summary of committee reports from committee chairs

Ten days prior to meeting:

- Meet to confirm arrangements for any materials, seating arrangements and space requirements
- Send out any written committee reports
- Three days prior to meeting — Correspond with all councilors by e-mail with a reminder for the meeting and attach any additional needed documentation.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

It has been said that if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Planning for pastoral excellence does not have to be complicated but it does have to be intentional. Planning is the act of giving shape to our dreams. In some sense, the process is the product. Planning communicates vision. Planning builds confidence. Planning clarifies purpose. Planning sets priorities. Planning broadens ownership. Planning creates partners. Planning encourages accountability. All these outcomes are as essential to success as having a correct course of action.

Intentional planning for ministry means grounding every step in Christian vision and values. For Christians, how we make decisions is as important as the decisions that we make. Christian planning is about critical thinking that remains committed to the mission of the Church. Hispanic leaders in the United States have integrated this vision in the Encuentro methodology. The Encuentro process focuses on the needs and aspirations of the community as viewed in the light of the Scriptures and Traditions of the Church. In this context, judgments can be made that are both relevant and true to Christ's mission. Such choices are not only effective but transformative. The five simple steps of Encuentro are: SEE – JUDGE – ACT – CELEBRATE – EVALUATE. These are universal elements in strategic Christian thinking and practice.

Glossary of Terms

Understanding the process outlined below is aided by clarity on how certain terms are used. Below is a brief glossary of key terms often used in describing a process for strategic planning:

Vision - is a statement of group identity and outlook that becomes the basis for group self-understanding. It states why a group exists and names from where they derive their motivation. The Scriptures and Catholic Social teachings are a treasure house of vision and values for Catholic pastoral councils.

Values – emerge out of vision. Values constitute what the organization stands for. Some values are central to a group's identity and practice. These are called core values. Core values constitute the non-negotiables for any organization.

STRATEGIC PLANNING (continued)

Mission – is a statement of broad purpose that builds upon the group's vision, values, identity, and motivation. It expresses the intentions of the group with its outcomes and hopes. Success is more about doing the right things than it is merely doing things right. The mission statement names the right things . And there is nothing more powerful than the deliberations of people dedicated to the same purpose. Strategic planning presumes unity of purpose.

Writing a mission statement is beneficial to confirm an organization's identity, purpose and direction. A mission names the source of authority upon which the group acts. It grounds group members in their vision and values. It taps the motivating forces within a community. In short, it answers the questions – Who are we? What is our purpose? How do we function? To whom are we ultimately accountable? From reading a mission statement, anyone whether or not familiar with the organization, should be able to understand the parish's purpose and what makes it unique.

Goals - are immediate statements of intent. Goals answer questions of what and why for strategic direction. Goals state what we want to do. Goals flow from the mission statement and invite action. They address the needs, state the issues and suggest concrete outcomes.

Objectives - are statements of action that take the intent of a goal and name the persons or groups accountable for implementing the plan. These are also called “S.M.A.R.T. goals” in that they are (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-limited). They answer questions related to who and how for any strategy chosen.

Action Plan – is a step by step description of how an objective will be implemented. It explains both the process and product. This description can include: events, dates, times, cost, facility requirements, locations affected, scheduling tasks, staff and volunteers needed, organizational sponsorship, appropriate procedural changes, and concrete steps that will be taken to address an objective.

Accountability – names who is responsible for coordination and completion of the action plan. The person/s accountable are usually involved in monitoring and evaluating any plan. This can be a subgroup or individual within the parish.

Evaluation – Assessing the results of all programs and services based on strategic objectives.

STRATEGIC PLANNING (continued)

The Planning Process ~

This process can be implemented once the Parish Pastoral Council has established clear operational guidelines and procedures.

Step 1. Identify Needs

A parish can identify needs in many ways. Interviews and surveys are two popular methods.

Questions to consider:

- Who are our core parishioners? Why do they come?
- Who has left us? Why? Where have they gone?
- What is compelling about our parish? What is lacking?
- What concerns our parishioners most? What do they most seek from our parish?
- What are the needs of our target population – material, emotional and spiritual? What are the needs outside our walls?
- In what ways do these needs align with our core sense of purpose (vision, values and mission)?
- How can we discover the answers to these questions? What is the best method for collecting data from the parish and the broader community?

Step 2. Analyze Needs

Needs can be interpreted using various tools but needs are seldom simple. There are issues which can be complex. Any effective analysis includes studying the underlying causes associated with the need. It involves naming who is affected, who has an interest, who has power and who benefits. The use of ministry group meetings, personal interviews, and focus groups, are popular methods.

Questions to consider:

- Why do these needs exist? What are the causes?
- What norms or practices perpetuate the problem?
- Is it appropriate for us to address this concern?
- With whom should we partner to address this need?

STRATEGIC PLANNING (continued)

Step 3. Set Goals

Goals express intent. They also suggest direction for the greatest impact regarding the issue or problem at hand. Questions to consider: How is this need relevant to our mission? What can we do? What is happening and how would Jesus respond? It is advisable to confirm the value of goals with the whole parish. This can be accomplished through neighborhood meetings, parish blogs or at a parish assembly.

Step 4. Study the Issues, Identify Underlying Causes and Assess Parish Resources

Effective leaders know that form follows function. Parish organizations regularly reassess their structures, policies and practices to insure their support for the parish mission. This is most effectively done in dialogue with parish staff and ministry group leaders. This step involves consideration of how the parish organizes itself currently and how that facilitates or impedes action vis-à-vis the needs identified. This consideration includes the consequences of any proposed action on the structure and current practices of the parish. Parish structures, policies and procedures may need to be changed to adequately address these issues. The council can recommend needed adaptations of parish structures and policies to achieve the stated goals.

Step 5. Write Objectives and Assign Resources

The easiest objectives to implement are ones that are S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-limited). These are also called objectives. Objectives are clear and concrete statements that include answers to the following questions: What will be done? Who will do it? What is the measure of success? By what date will it be completed? Consider which parishioners possess the talents needed to accomplish each objective. Consider what diocesan support can be obtained. Consider who is already addressing the same concerns and who might be invited to be collaborators. After this assessment, recommend accountability for strategies, services, or events to the pastor. Once the lead agents and cooperating entities are identified for each strategy, they should be given a role in creating the action plan.

STRATEGIC PLANNING (continued)

Step 6. Create an Action Plan

Design each strategy in detail. Answer all the process and logistical questions related to who, what, when, where and how of the strategies being implemented.

Questions to consider:

- What strategy will best respond to the issue?
- What are the concrete action steps?
- How will this be promoted?
- What partners will be needed to achieve our goals?
- What is the cost? How will we obtain funding?
- Who will oversee the plan? Who will conduct the events?
- What facilities will be needed? Who will schedule events?
- Who will supervise the volunteers?
- What is our back-up plan? What is the kick-off event?
- What are the desired outcomes? How can we best evaluate our success?

Step. 7 Implement and Evaluate the Plan

Assign responsibility for implementation of each strategy to a person or group (e.g. pastor, staff, council committee, parish organization). Is there a benefit to a formal ceremony (e.g. groundbreaking or commissioning) or a public statement of authorization? How will progress be assessed? How will that progress be monitored? How will it be reported to the parish and others who are interested? What future improvements can be applied?

SAMPLE PLANNING CALENDAR

| | |
|------------------|---|
| May | Evaluation of Year Past <i>How well did we do?</i> |
| June | Retreat <i>What is Jesus's calling for our parish? How can we each grow closer to God?</i> |
| July | Study Emerging Needs and Set Goals <i>Why is there a need? What are the causes? What is happening and how would Jesus respond?</i> |
| August | Study Issues, Underlying Causes / Assess Resources <i>With whom should we partner to address this need?</i> |
| September | Write Objectives / Discern and Assess Resources <i>How can we have greatest impact? What strategy will best respond to the issue?</i> |
| October | Review of Parish Mission and Assess Needs <i>What is needed for pastoral success? How can we collect the needs of parish and community?</i> |
| November | Create a Plan of Action <i>What are the concrete action steps? What partners are needed to achieve our goals? Who will carry out the plan? How much will it cost?</i> |
| December | Implement the Plan <i>How will progress be assessed? What improvements can be applied to the process?</i> |
| January | Recruitment / Nominations <i>Who is stepping back? Who is stepping forward?</i> |
| February | Selection / Orientation / Process Overview <i>What is the purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council? How will the council be organized? How will we proceed together? How will we accomplish our mission?</i> |
| March | Review of Progress of Action Plan <i>Who is the responsible agent for each action item? What action is needed by the Pastoral Council?</i> |
| April | Review the Health of Commissions <i>Which commissions are meeting? How are commissions welcoming new members? How can the Pastoral Council assist commissions in their work?</i> |