

Directives for Parish Pastoral Councils

Summary

The following is a summary of the mission and function of parish pastoral councils as mandated in the *Diocese of Scranton Directives for Parish Pastoral Councils*. It is meant to assist pastors, potential council members and the faithful in general to understand the role and purpose of parish pastoral councils. It is by no means a substitute for, nor should it be read in place of, the *Directives*, but rather as an introduction to them.

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.
(Acts 2:42-47)

Mission Statement of the Diocese of Scranton

"We the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Scranton, in union with our Holy Father, the Pope, are called through baptism to share in the mission which Jesus Christ has entrusted to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Priests, deacons, religious and laity, under the leadership of our Bishop, cooperate to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the teaching of the Church to celebrate the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, for the salvation of all, and to witness by grace to the Kingdom of God so as to promote a culture of life, justice and peace."

A. LOCAL HISTORY

These directives respond to Bishop Martino's call for a "New Evangelization" of parish life as expressed in the *Diocesan Mission Statement* issued in February, 2005. They highlight the fact that planning is essential to any pastoral endeavor. The current vision for pastoral councils, embodied in these directives, has grown and developed over the course of some years. It is grounded in Church teaching and in a wealth of pastoral wisdom and experience. It offers to parishes which have many emerging needs a structure that embraces consultation, collegiality and prayerful discernment.

B. THE PARISH

The parish's primary goal is to help every member grow to the fullness of holiness through his or her Christian vocation. The mission of the Church is rooted in the mission of Christ who commanded everyone – clergy, religious and laity – to "go into the world and proclaim the good news to all of creation" (*Mark 16:15*). Vatican Council II urged active involvement in the life of the Church by emphasizing the principles of collaborative responsibility, consultation and lay participation. The Pastor's responsibility

is to shepherd the faithful and recognize their service and charismatic gifts (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 30*).

C. THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

The pastor of a parish shares with the Bishop of the Diocese the responsibility to teach, govern and sanctify for the sake of building up the kingdom of God. Bishops and pastors do not do this alone. By virtue of Baptism, every Catholic has the responsibility to work to build up the Mystical Body of Christ. For the good of the parish and the Church as a whole, pastors need to consult members of the parish regarding the well-being of the parish. The parish pastoral council is the body designated for this purpose.

The parish pastoral council has several specific functions:

- (1) to write a Mission Statement for the parish based on the Diocesan Mission Statement;
- (2) to provide an opportunity for people in all vocations to collaborate for the good of the parish;
- (3) to vision and plan for the overall spiritual growth of the parish;
- (4) to make recommendations to the pastor based on its findings.

Good pastoral planning begins with, and is sustained by, a process of prayer, study, evaluation and recommendation. The pastor and council reflect upon objective criteria to determine whether the parish is fulfilling its mission. They look at pastoral issues, for example, at the liturgical life of the parish. Is the mass celebrated in a reverent and vibrant manner? They look at parish programs. Is the faith taught in a convincing and inspiring fashion? Is the Gospel and the Creed lived in homes, businesses, and public places? Are young people properly prepared for marriage? Does the faith of the people manifest itself in acts of charity and social concern?

The need to root this process in prayer and study cannot be overemphasized. Through prayer and reflection on Scripture and Church documents, council members find standards by which to evaluate the parish. For this reason, each meeting begins with a period of prayer and reflection on some pertinent Church document.

The parish pastoral council is purely a consultative body. It does not legislate, regulate or authorize. It does not enjoin, prohibit, correct or enforce. It makes recommendations to the pastor based on its evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the parish. The pastor remains responsible for all matters of parish governance; however, ecclesial communion presupposes that pastors will take seriously, and be guided by, council recommendations to the extent possible for the good of the parish.

The parish pastoral council is not a substitute for other parish committees that address such areas as worship, catechesis, evangelization, fostering vocations to the priesthood, creating a culture for vocations and service. Nor is it a coordinating group for such

committees. It is not a substitute for parish staff. The parish pastoral council is linked to other committees through the pastor and parish staff.

While each parish has unique needs, there are some problems that virtually all modern parishes share, e.g., re-evangelization of non-practicing Catholics, post-Confirmation catechesis, etc. Well-functioning parish pastoral councils look to the practical experience and wisdom of neighboring parishes and dioceses for guidance in addressing these concerns.

D. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

The Pastoral Council exists to help the Pastor identify needs and evaluate effectiveness of parish programs and services. In addition, it helps to create and maintain a parish atmosphere that is reverent and welcoming and that contributes to planning for the future of the parish. Prayer, then, becomes essential to the Pastoral Council members as a group and individually. Pastoral planning begins with, and is sustained by, a process of discernment and assessment. Through prayer, study, and listening, the Pastor and council begin to identify and prioritize the ways in which the parish is being called to live its specific mission. Each meeting is to begin with a period of prayer followed by a study of some pertinent document.

All phases of the pastoral planning cycle utilize the skill of decision-making by consensus. Consensus is not reached by a majority vote, nor is it a win/loss situation. Rather, it is a method of decision-making grounded in prayer through which the group strives to reach substantial agreements on matters of overall direction and policy, which can be supported by all.

The Pastoral Council relationship is expected to be collaborative in that both Pastor and council listen carefully to each other, and consider both what is being said and why. Members of the pastoral council do not represent constituencies or specific agendas; rather, every member has the responsibility to represent the entire parish.

E. Constitution and By-laws

Every parish in the Diocese of Scranton will establish a pastoral council in accord with the Constitution and By-laws contained in the *Diocese of Scranton Directives for Parish Pastoral Councils*.

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