

Diocese of Madison



Policies Relating to Parish Pastoral Councils

A. Definition

The Parish Pastoral Council is a consultative body whose purpose is to assist the Pastor in matters concerning the pastoral life of the Parish.

Canon 536 of *The Code of Canon Law* states:

§ 1. - 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.

§ 2. - This pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop.

The Pastor has authority from the Bishop and the universal law of the Church to decide and act on behalf of the Parish (Canon 532). The Pastoral Council is strictly advisory to the Pastor. It is important, therefore, that the Pastor be central to the deliberations and the functioning of the Parish Pastoral Council.

A Pastor who has responsibility for multiple parishes should strongly consider creating one Pastoral Council to jointly represent all of the parishes for which he is responsible. In addition to streamlining the administrative workload, this approach can help foster collaboration among these parishes.

B. Mission and Purpose

The Parish Pastoral Council assists the Pastor in identifying and understanding important matters that affect the life of the Parish, gathering the thoughts and ideas of the community and discuss them with the Pastor as together they seek the good of the Parish.

The pastoral activity of the parish in which the Council assists the Pastor includes but is not limited to the following areas:

1. Encouraging active participation in parish prayer and liturgies;
2. Promoting catechesis and evangelization for parishioners of all ages;
3. Fostering Catholic family life;
4. Encouraging community outreach;
5. Encouraging the performance of spiritual and corporal works of mercy;
6. Strengthening relationships with the diocesan Bishop and Church.

Under the direction of the pastor and in cooperation with the parish staff, the Council assists in:

1. Discerning the strengths and needs of the parish community;
2. Developing and maintaining a parish mission statement;
3. Engaging in ongoing strategic planning;
4. Assisting in the establishment of pastoral goals, priorities and action plans for the parish;
5. Assisting in the formation of parish policies concerning pastoral matters;
6. Fostering communication among different parish entities;
7. Evaluating programs and processes.

C. Membership

1. The Pastoral Council shall be comprised of at-large and *ex-officio* members.
2. There shall be not fewer than three and not more than nine at-large members, all of whom must be fully initiated, practicing Catholics, at least 18 years old, registered members of the Parish, and participants in parish worship life, especially Mass and the sacraments.
3. Additionally, the Pastoral Council may include up to two youth members who are under 18 and active in the parish, having the same function and privileges as adult members.
4. Additionally, certain people are automatically members of the Pastoral Council by virtue of their office (*ex-officio* members). These include the Pastor and the two lay Trustees of the Parish.
5. The term for at-large members shall be three years and limited to two consecutive terms. July 1 is the suggested date for new terms to begin.

D. Selection of Members

1. At least two-thirds of the Council members shall be elected or chosen in some manner by the parishioners. The remainder may be appointed by the pastor.
2. At each annual selection, one-third of the members shall be selected for a term of three years to fill the vacancies caused by the members whose terms are due to expire.
3. Several months prior to each annual selection of new members, the Council shall establish a Selection Committee to manage a selection process which should include the following steps:
 - a) **Education of Parishioners** Through bulletin and pulpit announcements, parishioners are informed about the Council selection process and asked to give prayerful consideration to nominating parishioners (including themselves) for the Council.
 - b) **Nomination** Nomination forms are made available at all liturgies for two weeks.
 - c) **Notification** Nominated parishioners are informed. Those who accept nomination participate on the final slate of nominees or discernment session.
 - d) **Final Slate of Nominees** Nominees submit biographical information and their statement of parish vision to the Selection Committee.
 - e) **Selection** The Selection Committee facilitates the actual selection process and informs the parish of the results. Selection can either be via parishioner ballot or a discernment process.

If by Discernment: Nominees and council members, with the help of a facilitator, enter

into prayerful dialog until it is discerned which nominees are best suited to serve on the Council at this time.

If by Ballot: Ballots are provided to all parishioners. The Selection Committee administers, supervises, tabulates and keeps records of the election. A tie vote is resolved by lot.

E. Vacancies

1. Any at-large member of the Council may resign in writing to the Pastor, with a copy to the Council chair.
2. At any meeting of the Council, any at-large member may be removed for good cause by consensus or by an affirmative vote of three-fourths of the Council. Any member whose removal has been proposed shall be given an opportunity to be heard at the meeting. Good cause includes missing two consecutive meetings without good reason, physical or mental incapacity, or failure to perform duties as a Council member.
3. If there is a vacancy among the at-large members, the pastor shall appointment someone to serve the remainder of the term of the spot vacated.

F. Officers

1. The officers of the Council shall be a chairperson and a secretary.
2. Officers can be selected either by ballot or a discernment process.
3. Ex-officio members are ineligible to serve as Officers.
4. The Pastor of the Parish presides over meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council and receives the Council's proposals.
5. The Chairperson assists the Pastor in coordinating the work of the Council and in preparing for meetings. The Chairperson performs other such tasks as may be delegated to him/her by the Pastor, including the possibility of facilitating Council meetings.
6. The Chairperson's name and contact telephone number shall be published on the front of the parish Sunday bulletin.

G. Meetings

1. The Parish Pastoral Council shall hold regular meetings at least four times a year (monthly meetings are recommended).
2. Special meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council may be called by the Pastor, the chairperson, or a quorum. A quorum consists of two-thirds of the total membership.
3. Meetings and agendas shall be arranged by the Chairperson in consultation with and with the approval of the Pastor. An agenda, minutes from the previous meeting, and materials should be distributed to all members far enough in advance to allow for review and consideration.
4. The Pastor and Council members are expected to attend all meetings.
5. Priests and Deacons of the Parish should be invited to and encouraged to attend all Council meetings.

6. At request of the Pastor, certain staff members may be expected to attend Council meetings.
7. Advance notice of the time and place of the meetings of the Council should be published in the Parish bulletin.
8. All parishioners shall be entitled and welcome to attend as observers. (Although the Pastor is entitled to identify certain sessions as “closed” if he deems it appropriate.)
9. Minutes of Council meetings shall be recorded and retained by the Secretary, and made available upon request to parishioners who are interested in Council activities.

H. Committees

It is recommended that the Pastoral Council establish the following committees, each of which is accountable to the Council:

- a) **Worship** Assists the pastor and the parish in attaining a full, conscious and active participation in the Mass and the prayer life of the parish; Helps coordinate liturgical celebrations; Helps maintain an ongoing program of education and training for liturgical ministers.
- b) **Religious Formation** Assists the pastor and the parish in providing lifelong opportunities for every person to grow deeper in their faith and personal conversion. Such opportunities should include sacramental preparation, adult and family ministry, youth ministry, school ministry and child ministry.
- c) **Schools** Dedicated to the promotion and welfare of Catholic education.
- d) **Parish Life** Supports the overall vibrancy of parish life, planning social activities, spiritual retreats and other activities which foster community and enhance the quality of parish life; Assists the parish pastoral staff in hospitality, new member registration and orientation; Recommends pastoral care policies and procedures.
- e) **Stewardship** Promotes the giving of time, talent and treasure through a scriptural understanding of stewardship; Helps organize ways by which parishioners offer their talents and time for the good of the community.
- f) **Human Concerns** Helps parishioners discern the needs of others, especially the poor, and identifies resources to meet those needs, enlisting the active cooperation of all parishioners.
- g) **Vocations** Works with the diocesan Office of Vocations to help foster vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life and lay ministry.

These committees should be staffed primarily by parishioners who are not members of the Pastoral Council, with a Council member simply serving as liaison between the committee and the Council.