

PASTORAL COUNCIL GUIDELINES FOR MARY, MOTHER OF MERCY PARISH

A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own Shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop. [Canon 515]

PURPOSE:

Every parish in the Diocese of Rochester is required to have a parish pastoral council. The pastoral council (henceforth, the council) is a consultative body to the pastor. Because a parish is a community of the Christian faithful, it is essential that the parish structures serve the community in carrying out the mission of the Church: to proclaim the Gospel, to form community, to worship, and to serve others, especially those in need. The parish organizational structures must never be simply needs in themselves, but should always work to promote the mission of the parish, the diocesan church, and the universal Church.

The specific purposes of the pastoral council for this parish are as follows:

- to develop a common vision and purpose, actively advocate for the poor and the powerless, and to extend Christian commitment to the surrounding neighborhoods and communities;
- to be dedicated to and articulate the mission for the parish community and become the reference point for activity in the parish;
- to provide recommendations for parish priorities, directions, and policies through pastoral planning for worship, evangelization, outreach, stewardship, etc.;
- to promote communication, understanding, and collaboration among parish organizations and between the parish, the bishop, the diocese, and the universal Church.

MEMBERSHIP:

The council should reflect parish membership by being inclusive of the demographic realities of the community (e.g., minorities, the aged, youth, persons with disabling or handicapping conditions, etc.) This does not mean that members represent a particular constituency, but rather that the council should reflect the diversity of the parish in terms of age, race, and length of membership in the parish.

The council's primary gift is practical wisdom. The council is made up of parishioners who have a vested interest in the life and development of the parish and want to help the pastor in this regard. Accordingly, council members must meet the following criteria:

- be fully initiated Roman Catholics in good standing with the Church;
- be registered and supporting members of the parish;
- be participants in parish life and worship;
- be committed to prayer, study, listening, and dialogue;
- be committed to giving the time needed for participation; and

- be aware of and comply with the Parish Conflict of Interest Policy.

Council members should also possess the following gifts necessary for pastoral leadership:

- a desire for spiritual growth in oneself and in the parish;
- eagerness to participate in parish decisions about its direction;
- willingness to listen, speak openly and honestly, and to work toward consensus;
- integrity in articulating what one has heard and what one believes;
- the ability to inspire and empower others and to delegate; and
- cooperation, flexibility, and openness with people and ideas.

If a parish employs a professional staff member such as a business manager, he or she may serve as staff to the pastoral council and be available to answer questions regarding matters discussed. Parish employees are not members of the parish pastoral council; they support the parish pastoral council.

SIZE:

The size of the council should range from a minimum of six to a maximum of fifteen members. Council members should be representative of the surrounding communities where the three churches comprising the parish are located. At least one of the two parish trustees should also participate in parish council meetings.

SELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS:

A significant number (at least two-thirds) of the council's members should be from the parish-at-large. Additional members (one-third) may be appointed by the pastor as a way to be sure that the council reflects the larger parish community.

A determination will be made at the April council meeting regarding the number of parishioners needed to be elected/selected for the upcoming year. If eligible, people should decide at this time if they want to extend their terms.

After the April meeting, parishioners who meet the criteria listed above are invited/encouraged to put their names into contention for membership on the council. Selection of council members will be held each May, with new members introduced to the congregation in June and invited to attend the June meeting of the council.

If sufficient people express an interest in membership on the council, two or three may be chosen to serve as alternates. These alternates should attend council meetings so they are prepared to step in should a sitting member not be able to fulfill their term. Alternate members are strongly encouraged to take an active role on a committee of their choosing. Alternates will serve as such for one year with preference given to them to become full members the following year.

TERMS OF SERVICE FOR COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Members will serve 3-year terms, from July through June, not to exceed two consecutive terms. After two terms, a member must take one year off before being eligible for another term. If a vacancy

occurs during a person's term, the pastor, in consultation with the council, may appoint one of the sitting alternates (see above) to serve out the balance of the term.

EXECUTIVE STRUCTURE:

Every council should have an executive committee composed of pastor, chairperson, vice chairperson, and secretary. These members are normally elected by full membership of the council (see below). This executive committee is charged with developing an overall-working plan for the year, which identifies the issues facing the council and estimates when the council will be dealing with the issue. The executive committee also appoints chairpersons of various committees and ministries.

There should be a discussion between the executive committee and the pastor before each council meeting to prepare the agenda and discuss processes to facilitate the agenda at each meeting. The agenda should be sent out in advance with the date, time, and location of the meeting. A typical agenda should include the following:

- Opening prayer and reflection
- Revisions and approval of the agenda
- Approval of the meeting minutes from the previous meeting
- Items to be discussed along with recommendations and actions necessary
- Reports from committee representatives
- Planning for the next and future meetings
- Closing prayer

OFFICERS:

At the June meeting the parish council should elect a chair, vice-chair, and secretary who will serve in the coming year, from July 1 through June 30. Nominations for chair and vice-chair are made by secret ballot by pastoral council members who will be members of the upcoming pastoral council year that begins on July 1. From the nominations the people who will be council members in the coming year will vote by secret ballot for the chair, followed by a secret ballot election for the vice chair. The secretary will be chosen by a vocal nomination to be approved by the acceptance of the membership.

The role of the chair will be to:

- call the meeting;
- set an agenda for each meeting in consultation with the pastor and executive committee;
- facilitate open communication at all the meetings, allowing everyone to express their opinions openly while guiding the dynamics of the group to a successful resolution and consensus;
- be sensitive to conflict and able to resolve it amicably with all parties; and
- be responsible for establishing an ongoing process of evaluation of the council's effectiveness.

The role of vice-chair will be to:

- to assist the chair in the above duties; and,
- if the chair is unable to attend a meeting, the vice chair will chair the meeting and set the agenda, in consultation with the chair and the pastor.

The secretary's role will be to:

- keep accurate notes of all meetings;
- handle all correspondence originating from the council;
- maintain a notebook of all agenda and meeting notes and relevant correspondence;
- make sure a copy of council business is maintained in the parish office and available to the congregations;
- prepare and disseminate materials for the council meetings; and
- maintain the membership list for the parish council including contact information for all members and term limits.

MEETINGS:

The parish council should meet a minimum of four times a year. Additional meetings may be called as needed.

Council members who are unable to attend three consecutive meetings without an explanation will be asked to submit their resignation to the council.

MINISTRIES & COMMITTEES OF THE PASTORAL COUNCIL

Council members may represent various committees, groups, or ministries in the parish and will report to the council on the activities of the group they represent. Each group or ministry should report on their activities to the parish and/or council on a regular basis. All committees should be subordinate to either the pastoral council or the finance council. The presiding council must approve the chairs of all subordinate committees.

Such groups include, but are not limited to: Worship (liturgy), Word (evangelization and education), Witness (outreach), Fellowship (social), and Stewardship (finance). Each of these main committees may have various subcommittees that work in conjunction with their main purpose but the subcommittees remain independent in terms of achieving their own unique goals. A description of the proposed scope of these groups is outlined below.

Worship (liturgy): The worship ministry will include an overview of the liturgy at each of the churches located within this merged parish. The purpose of this committee is to enhance the liturgical experience of the parishioners while adhering to diocesan requirements. The committee will advise the priest on the liturgy, offering suggestions and advice on ways to enhance the weekend, daily, and holy day celebrations of the Mass and other liturgies. The committee will be responsible for coordinating the schedules of parish ministers as requested by the priest. The committee will also assist the priest in any necessary training for lay ministers.

Word (evangelization and education): The word ministry oversees the successful operation of the education of the children and adults of the parish in faith formation. This includes programs for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), instructions for parents planning an infant baptism, first Eucharist and reconciliation, confirmation, pre-Cana for couples planning on being married in the church, and general evangelization. The committee will also work on providing plans for parish retreats, missions, Bible studies, and conferences, in conjunction with the Worship/liturgy committee as needed.

Witness (outreach): This committee will work to promote social justice and a consistent life ethic from conception to natural death. The committee will work to further the mission of the parish to carry out the works of mercy (feeding, clothing, sheltering, caring for the sick), social ministry (food kitchens, habitats for the homeless), and respect life programs. At the same time the committee will advocate a “seamless garment” or consistent life ethic approach to the life issues that is informed by Church teaching and inspired by the nonviolent love, peace, and justice of Jesus in the Gospel.

Fellowship (social): The responsibility of this committee shall be to provide opportunities and occasions for the members of the parish to gather in order to deepen the bonds that unite them as sisters and brothers in Christ. The activities of this committee shall be planned in such a way so as to appeal to the broadest cross section of the members of the congregation. They may do this in conjunction with other committees.

Stewardship (finances): The finance council (see canon 537) is in charge of advising the pastor on financial matters related to the parish and its buildings and grounds. Neither the pastoral council nor the finance council is subordinate to the other; rather they are both advisors to the pastor. While each operates independently to the other, it is imperative to have good communication between the two.

CONCLUSION:

Everyone involved with the council is working either individually or as part of a group for one purpose: doing what is best for the faith community of this parish and advising the pastor to that same purpose.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. (Romans 12: 4-6)