

Diocesan Guidelines

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL



*"Dressed as a servant, and humble as a slave, Jesus led.
He invites us to follow Him."*

DIOCESE OF BUFFALO

2019

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Overview

The parish pastoral council is a leadership team within the parish that is convened by the pastor and with whom the pastor consults in planning for a vital parish – present and future. A 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. (See the operational manual for a council member position description)

This purpose distinguishes the pastoral council from any other ministry or organization within the parish. Because each parish is unique, any recommendations for effective consultation or pastoral planning need to be adapted to particular local circumstances. At the same time, some principles for council development can be applied broadly. The recommendations found in these guidelines have been found to work with a variety of councils in diverse pastoral settings.

Today there are dynamic changes in how pastors consult with leaders in a parish. The nature of consultation is shifting:

FROM	TO
coordinating activities	articulating vision
voting on issues	building consensus
committee reports	planning and goal setting
elected by popularity	selected by competence
parliamentary procedure and by-laws	prayerful consideration

Over the last few decades parish, vicariate and diocesan pastoral councils have grown in their understanding of their role. These councils have become instruments of innovation, strategic thinking and empowerment in the parish. There are three approaches to pastoral consultation prevalent in the Catholic Church in the United States. (Refer to the operational manual for further discussion of how to implement this innovation.)

The *Planning Council* assists the pastor and staff in intentional planning for fulfilling Christ's mission. The emphasis in this approach is on prayerful discernment of parish priorities, involving parishioners in shared leadership, consensual decision-making and goal-driven management acknowledging an emergent cultural context.

The *Coordinating Council* is a representative body of leaders from all organizations and ministries that meet regularly to share information and coordinate the most significant activities in the parish. Small parishes sometimes

us an informal variation on of this approach through periodic “community meetings”.

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 can be adapted to local circumstances. Deciding 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 capabilities in the congregation, the cultural groups present in the community, as well as the relative strengths and weaknesses of the particular approach itself.

In all pastoral situations, the goal of consultation is to serve the good of the whole parish, in the example of our Lord who led through radical service. An effective council is a collaborative leadership team that insures participation, unity and parish vitality.

The following guidelines set out the purpose of the pastoral council and describe how the pastoral council fits within the mission of the parish. This policy statement highlights the strengths of the three most popular approaches to organizing a council, offers recommendations on the relationship between the parish pastoral council and the parish finance council, as well as: identify typical traps that frustrate council effectiveness, discuss various methods for member selection, advise on broadening parish representation, and more. (Refer to the operational manual for further discussion of how to implement these recommendations.)

The appendices include: a full description of the most prevalent approaches to organizing pastoral councils, guidelines for strategic planning, the importance of reaching consensus, sample planning calendar, authorizing texts for council development and additional resource recommendations.

The purpose of this document is to support the efforts of pastors and parish pastoral councils. It is formatted in a question and answer style for ease of reference. While there are many recommendations that could be inferred, there are also particular recommendations highlighted for each question. If you desire more resources or education, refer to the operational manual for best practices for parish pastoral councils, please contact the Office for Evangelization and Parish Life, Diocese of Buffalo.

What is the mission of the parish?

If the Church exists to evangelize (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*), then the parish is an intentional community charged with fostering faith, sharing faith and transforming the world in faith. Every parish exercises this essential role 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 the table of Eucharist ("Gratitude"), where we go out to care especially for the least of God's children and work on behalf of justice.

Parishes form a communion of communities within a diocese that 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 activity is done 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.

A parish does not exist for itself, but for the Mission of Christ. (The Parish: A People, A Mission, A Structure, USCCB 1980). The parish exists to evangelize. Pope Paul VI concluded that evangelization means "*bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel itself.*" (*On Evangelization in the Modern World, 1975*).

The mission of the parish is not the same as the purpose of the pastoral council. The work of the pastoral council is to consider, plan and recommend ways for the parish to accomplish the mission of Christ. The pastoral council is a strategic organ in the parish that keeps it focused on its divine purpose – a God-centered life.

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

What is the purpose of a parish pastoral council?

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 those things most important 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 pastoral council (*Decree on Bishops, #27*).

Far too often when someone completes a term of service as a parish council member they observe, “Now I don’t want to leave. I’ve finally figured out what I am supposed to be doing here!” This kind of comment illustrates one obstacle to council success and satisfaction. Successful pastoral councils are clear about their purpose, scope and role within the parish. (See appendices for more ideas on council approaches, and organizational tips. Also, refer to the operational manual for further discussion of how to develop a parish pastoral council.)

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 does a parish pastoral council do?

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?

Pastoral councils are not intended to be a management team for the parish. The purview of the pastoral council relates to matters that impact the spiritual vitality of the parish. In this interest, a pastoral council attends to visioning, 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 sometimes called a strategic or pastoral plan.

Pastoral planning involves prayerful consideration of parish identity and 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 pastoral council seeks dialogue with the leaders of various groups and ministries within the parish, throughout the vicariate and across the diocese.

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

Recommendation: Discuss how to best advise the pastor and establish a plan for setting parish priorities each year.

Why does a pastor spend time consulting?

Awe 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)

In the *Acts* we are presented with 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 (For authorizing texts refer to Appendix G).

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 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.

(Refer to the operational manual for further discussion of how to develop a council and its relationships with other advisory groups within the parish.)

What should a parish pastoral council NOT do?

Most pastoral councils are ill-equipped to:

- interpret liturgical norms
- design youth retreats
- repair the roof on the church
- administer daily parish operations
- supervise staff
- establish financial practices
- set or enforce employment practices
- choose investment portfolios...

Decisions like these 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. Councils that are unsure of their role, often wander into the purview of staff members or other organizations and ministries within the parish. (Refer to the operational manual for further direction on the proper function and operation of pastoral councils.)

It is also a mistake for the 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 wise recommendation is one that considers the possible consequences and includes suggestions for implementation.

One parish 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. A good recommendation includes: a rationale, goals and reasonable suggestions for a plan of action.

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?

Are there popular approaches to organizing a pastoral council?

Pastoral councils are given a variety of names (e.g. parish leadership team, advisory group, or lay council). Sometimes these names denote a particular philosophy, goal, or approach. The three most popular approaches to operating a pastoral council are: Approach A - *Planning Council*, Approach B - *Coordinating Council*, Approach C – *Managing (projects) Council*.

Each approach has a particular focus, responsibilities, structure, membership, leadership, term of service, and style of meetings. Each has particular strengths and weaknesses. A full description for all three approaches is included in the appendices (A, B, and C).

Approach A - *Planning Council* assists the pastor and staff in intentional planning for fulfilling Christ's purpose. This approach places emphasis on prayerful discernment of parish priorities, involving parishioners in shared leadership, consensual decision-making and management by objective. This approach is best suited to parishes that are intentional about achieving success and preparing for emerging pastoral needs. (See a full description in Appendix A.)

Approach B - *Coordinating Council* is a representative body of leaders from all organizations and ministries that meet regularly to share information and coordinate significant activities in the parish. This model is particularly beneficial in large or busy parishes or where optimal communication among ministry groups is essential. (See a full description in Appendix B.) There is a "community meeting" variation for smaller, rural or urban parishes and parish clusters.

Approach C - *Managing (projects) Council* is a small group of leaders who manage and implement projects and programs as directed by the pastor. It is a flexible and adaptable group which is appointed by the pastor based on the particular project at hand. This approach is favored in smaller parishes, where priorities can shift or where the pastor directs the pastoral council and works most closely with it. (See a full description in Appendix C.)

Each approach can be adapted to local circumstances. Deciding 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, the leadership abilities in the congregation, the cultural groups present in the community as well as the relative strengths and weaknesses of the approach itself.

No matter which approach is adopted; there are practical matters that require the attention of the pastor for effective council functioning. These include:

creating position descriptions, selecting members, providing training, establishing appropriate committee structures, setting meeting agendas, publishing meeting reports to members and the parish community, maintaining inter-parish and diocesan linkages, and ensuring the transparency of council proceedings. Much of the content of these guidelines and appendices can be adapted to create a statement of purpose and procedures for the parish pastoral council.

Recommendation:

- 1. Every council should have an executive structure that includes the pastor, chairperson, trustee 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 the council has sufficient time at each meeting for prayer & study.*
- 2. 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 pastoral council is often the most effective planning group in the parish when it is partnered with the resources of the pastoral staff, trustees, parish finance council, vicariate council and diocesan pastoral council.*

(Refer to the operational manual for further direction on how to operate and conduct meetings in a strategic approach to parish life.)

How much authority does a pastoral council have?

Today, clergy, religious and laity are called to lead together as co-workers in the vineyard, sharing in a ministry rooted in service to God's Reign. For the laity, this call to lead 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 pastoral council's "authority" is derived from its "author". A pastoral council is authorized by the pastor. It is the pastor who extends to the pastoral council both authority and direction in common service to the parish. Pastoral councils are never convened without the pastor because a pastoral council cannot be separated from the pastor anymore than a body can be separated from its head.

Paradoxically, councils which exercise the greatest authority are those that provide the most humble, responsible and prayerful of service. 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. 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.

Who does the pastoral council represent?

The pastoral council represents the entire parish. This includes all cultures, ages and groups. It includes 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.

To accomplish this, a pastoral council is more than a body of *representatives*. It is a *representative body*. This means that unlike legislative groups, a member of 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 pastoral council is a place to seek consensus (see Appendix D) on the big issues, strategic directions and vital questions for the parish.

The 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 vicariate and diocesan levels. There is much expertise available beyond a parish to assist pastoral councils in understanding best practices in operation.

Recommendations:

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

How are council members selected?

It is always beneficial to have broad representation and diverse membership when deliberating on matters with far reaching impact (e.g. parish mission, policies, or priorities). There are many ways for members to be engaged in this work.

Each of the selection procedures below should be evaluated for its relevance to the preferred outcome and compatibility with the pastoral council's approach.

In Approach A - *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. (Appendix A)

In Approach B - *Coordinating Council*: In this approach 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 this approach, all parishioners are welcome and no selection process is necessary (Appendix B)

In 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. (Appendix C)

There are several selection methods. Regardless of which method is used it should be carried out in a way that is transparent, inclusive and empowering. The pastor always has the right to appoint additional members to insure representation. And the congregation should always be informed when openings arise or there is a significant transition of leadership on the pastoral council. 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. This orientation provides the why, what and how of council operations. 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

the 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.

Regardless of the selection method, involvement that is effective and enriching presumes that council members receive an orientation to the why, what and how of council operations. (Refer to the operational manual for an installation ceremony for council members.)

See the Planning Calendar (Appendix F) for timing of selection.

Recommendations:

1. *Choose a method of selection that is most consistent with the purpose of the pastoral council.*
2. *Appoint representatives to the pastoral council for groups underrepresented in parish leadership (e.g. youth, young adult, ethnic minorities)*
3. *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,*
4. *Specify a term of office for each council member (including appointees). Use three-year terms of service. Stagger replacement (one third of council members) each year to insure for continuity.*
5. *The pastor makes the announcement of selection results to the congregation.*

What is the relationship between the parish pastoral council and the finance council?

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, usually two of which are lay people. The pastor can ask the trustees to serve ex-officio on one or both of the finance council and the parish pastoral council. 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 pastoral council ensures participation and effective planning for the parish as a whole.

The diocese has published best practices for business administration that establish policies and procedures for financial governance and reporting. These directives describe the responsibilities of the parish finance council in detail. It is not within 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. A finance council will also assist the pastor in formulating and manage a budget that emerges from parish planning.

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

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. Depending on the needs of the pastor and the expertise of its membership, this might include helping the pastor in overseeing maintenance of parish facilities. Finance councils sometimes organize fundraising efforts, monitor expenditures or conduct a capital campaign. These are just some of the possible areas of communication or cooperation with the pastoral council or intersecting committees of it. (Refer to the operational manual for further discussion of the complimentary roles of these councils.)

Recommendation: Insure effective communication and cooperation between these advisory groups within the parish. This can be accomplished through liaisons or reciprocal ex-officio representation. Some parishes structure the parish finance council as a standing committee of the pastoral council while keeping role distinctions clear.

APPENDIX A

Planning Council - Description

Focus: This is becoming the dominant approach to pastoral consultation in which the pastoral council serves as a strategic planning team for the parish with responsibility to prayerfully consider the evolving pastoral needs of the community. This approach places emphasis on a blend of spiritual discernment and management by objectives. It includes review of the parish mission, assessment of past progress and strategic planning for continued vitality. It can include a formal needs assessment, focus groups, action planning and occasional parish assemblies.

In another sense, the process is the product. It builds a community in the parish founded on a common sense of purpose where emerging needs are considered, and faithful responses are developed. One of the perennial goals is enablement of leadership throughout the parish in accomplishment of mutually accepted objectives. Plans are communicated and implemented throughout the parish in a way that fosters identity, increases ownership and builds up the leadership resources of the parish. Parish plans can be greatly enriched by tapping into the synergy possible at the inter-parish and vicariate levels.

Responsibilities:

- Commit to stay with the process until its completion
- Prayerfully discern the needs of the parish community
- Evaluate past accomplishments and develop future priorities
- Work through all significant decisions in a spirit of consensus, providing facilitation at focus groups or parish assemblies when appropriate
- Develop goals that respect the cultural identity of the people and that respond to pastoral needs and call the parish to its missionary purpose
- Communicate the progress and results of the process to the congregation
- Attend to relevant developments at the vicariate level (typically through an ex-officio vicariate representative)
- Listen carefully for the reception and reaction of parishioners at every opportunity and communicate that to the executive committee
- Enlist the involvement of all parishioners in implementing parish priorities in ways that unify the various subgroups of the parish (whether age, interest or culture)
- Oversee implementation and evaluation of the pastoral plan that is adopted in a way that unifies the parish

Structure: In this process, the pastoral council is led by the pastor with an executive committee which is often comprised of a lay co-chair, trustee, planning consultant and a secretary. The primary purpose of the executive structure is to manage the process. Key standing committees often include pastoral planning, finance and communication. There can also be committees for the core ministries of the parish and subcommittees to organize particular tasks associated with designing and implementing the pastoral plan (e.g. survey implementation, focus groups, town meeting). The secondary goal of subcommittees is to involve as many parishioners as possible in creation and implementation of the plan.

Leadership and Membership: Membership is typically comprised of ten to twelve parishioners. These members can be selected at-large, or appointed. Appointed members will likely have expertise in needed disciplines (e.g. strategic planning or leading in change). These experts serve alongside the pastoral staff, trustees and sometimes assisted by a vicariate liaison. The meetings follow a process for strategic planning with emphasis on prayerful reflection, dialogue and consensus.

Ideal members of a planning council are global and strategic thinkers and skilled planners who are capable of prayerful discernment. They are people dedicated to the success of the parish and they can work well with others. They have trust in God's presence and leadership for the parish. They are willing to participate, guided by Church teaching.

Meetings: Meeting agendas and schedules are set by the executive committee. The agendas will follow the process for strategic planning that is chosen. Consider suggestions for strategic planning (appendix E), planning calendar (appendix F) and for all other suggestions consult the companion operational manual.

Term of Office and Casual Vacancies: It is recommended that terms of service be set to extend through at least one planning cycle plus six months for continuity of leadership. During the final six months, the pastor or council will select the replacements. The outgoing and incoming members will be paired and work in tandem to accomplish continuity.

The pastor will appoint replacements to fill positions left vacant. The term of service for any such replacement will be for the remainder of the current term of service for the vacated seat.

Strengths:

1. This approach has the greatest potential for long lasting impact
2. Strategic planning is the best approach for graceful responses to external and internal change
3. This approach fosters unity and a positive outlook for the future while avoiding adversarial relations
4. Broader parish involvement is enhanced in this approach

Weaknesses:

1. The process can seem slow and arduous as one planning cycle can extend over an entire year depending on the complexity of the process and the size of the action plan
2. Constant communication and feedback is essential as a gap can arise between the pastoral council planners and other leaders and doers of ministry in the parish
3. If input is not sought or ownership is lacking, the product can fail to have the support needed for effective implementation

APPENDIX B

Coordinating Council - Description

Focus: This is a more traditional approach which emphasizes sharing information and coordination of the activities of the diverse and often disconnected parish organizations and ministries. It is most relevant in larger parishes where there is an active calendar, significant facilities and many parish ministries and organizations.

Responsibilities:

- Represent all people of the parish and make recommendations that contribute to the vitality of the parish
- Share information relevant to the particular ministries and organizations represented for greater mutual understanding and cooperation
- Share in decision-making with the pastor by thoughtful consideration of matters at hand as they relate to the work of the groups represented
- Assist the pastor in referring information and responsibilities to relevant commissions, ministries or organizations
- Address additional matters brought by the pastor

Structure: In most circumstances this looks like a large group that meets regularly. Those in attendance represent the various groups, cultures and ministries of the parish. These groups may be ministerial, operational or cultural. Such groups can be organized into four to six commissions. There can be a limited number of at-large members trustees, pastoral staff or a vicariate representative who serve as ex-officio members. This can involve as many as 20 or more members when all are present.

The commissions typically represent related to the fundamental areas of parish mission (kerygma, liturgia, diakonia, koinonia, and oikonomia) or the ministries of Word (e.g. faith formation, and RCIA), Worship (e.g. liturgy planning, music, and lectors), Community (e.g. social events, outreach and evangelization), Stewardship (e.g. administration, buildings, fundraising and finance), and Service (e.g. pro-life, Christian service committee, justice and peace team). Some parishes make adaptations and some parishes augment these basic parish ministries with other priorities, activities or age-based groupings (e.g. youth ministry). Often the commissions meet separately to share information and consult with one another on practical matters.

Leadership and Membership: The pastoral council is led by the pastor or the pastor and a lay co-chair. Meeting agendas and schedules are set by an executive committee which is typically comprised of the pastor, a lay co-chair, a secretary, vicariate representative and possibly a trustee.

Ideal members of a coordinating council are careful listeners who can speak with brevity and precision. They have knowledge of the organization that they represent. They give greatest priority to the common good in all deliberations. Effective leaders in this council are conscientious in maintaining confidentiality.

Meetings: There is considerable flexibility in this approach. Typically the meeting agenda concentrates on issues related to inter-commission communication and coordination of parish activities. Sometimes meetings can be opportunities for hearing from: the view from the pew, or about vicariate wide collaborative efforts. Please refer to meeting suggestions in the companion operational manual.

Term of Office and Casual Vacancies: Organization and ministry representatives can serve for one year. This length of service for a Coordinating Council is short in order to encourage the broadest possible participation from parish organizations on the parish council. When appropriate, this year can be preceded by a year in apprenticeship and succeeded by a year as a mentor for the parish organization represented.

The pastor will appoint replacements to fill positions left vacant. The term of service for any such replacement will be for the remainder of the current term for the vacated seat.

Strengths:

1. Broad participation and regular communication is likely among the committees and those organizations that are represented.
2. Information is easily disseminated to core members of the congregation.
3. Opportunities exist for education on pastoral excellence and spirituality for ministry.

Weaknesses:

1. The size and diversity of this group reduce its ability to do much beyond exchanging information. This approach has the potential for allowing a competitive culture to form between the various groups and ministries in the parish.
2. It can lead to over-organization and confusion regarding ministries that have several purposes (e.g. youth ministry).
3. The parish may drift into the future without a compelling sense of larger purpose.

A Variation – Community Meeting

The “**Community Meeting**” is a variation on the theme of a coordinating council. It is most frequently used in a smaller rural or urban parish or for a parish cluster that shares one pastor and has simple communication and coordination needs.

In the community meeting, the pastor meets regularly with anyone interested to discuss the issues of the day. Business can mix with pleasure when the meeting starts with a potluck dinner. The business can include: information sharing, activity announcements, discussion about how to coordinate parish activities or improve inter-committee communication. Some meetings focus on the view from the pew while at other times the parish hears about vicariate-wide cooperative efforts.

The format and agenda for the community meeting is by design both simple and flexible. There is no elaborate meeting agenda or procedure as these meetings are conducted as open conversations much as a family sometimes conducts its business over dessert. Typically the pastor is responsible for bringing the agenda and for facilitating the conversation. It is also the pastor’s responsibility to report on the meeting for those who could not attend.

The strength of this variation comes in its simplicity and flexibility. When attendance is good this approach broadens participation and increases communication. Because meetings are open and unstructured, there is little time lost on such organizational issues as council member selection or amending by-laws. This approach is the most flexible and responsive. It is ideal for the pastor who favors a more casual style of interaction with parishioners.

The weakness of a community meeting is due to its lack of structure. As a result, it requires skillful facilitation. It is highly pastor-dependent approach to parish consultation. It is ill-suited for concerted action where continuity of membership is required or for strategic planning. This approach can be problematic at times of major transition or change in leadership.

APPENDIX C

Managing (projects) Council - Description

Focus: In one sense, this approach is a blend of the first two and yet it can be quite distinct. The project managing approach is adaptable to any particular priority issue that the pastor designates. It can be used by the pastor to address what he considers to be the area of greatest opportunity or maximum leverage for parish growth. It is often used in changing circumstances (e.g. diocesan restructuring). While councils using approaches A and B refrain from direct involvement in the actual implementation steps, a pastor may ask this council to retain leadership of a particular project from start to finish. This approach is favored when implementing innovation or managing significant change in parish life.

A project-driven council takes its lead from the pastor and sometimes the larger diocese. One example of this could be when a new pastor is given a particular task by the bishop. Sometimes a diocesan initiative or re-vitalization program is adopted which requires significant energy to implement in the parish (e.g. home visitation or faith-sharing initiative)

This approach is also favored when a compelling recommendation is made by an outgoing pastor who deliberately waits in anticipation of the transition of leadership for its implementation (e.g. a building campaign or staff restructuring). In such circumstances the pastoral council is given a leadership role by the pastor for developing, implementing and evaluating this new initiative.

Responsibilities:

- Assist the pastor in identifying the project focus or theme for the year
- Serve as a sounding board for the pastor in anticipating concerns related to the project
- Assist the pastor in establishing a plan of action to address this priority
- Cooperate in implementing the action steps along with the trustees, parish ministries and organization leaders
- Negotiate changes that are created in the parish system.
- Facilitate a pilot program or successful launch to the project
- Join with the pastor in evaluating the impact of the project in light of other parish priorities and ongoing parish life

Structure: The structure of the pastoral council will depend on the needs of the project. Still one can expect the need for an executive committee to manage

meeting agendas. Other committees will likely include those of the basic ministries of the parish as described in a coordinating council with the possibility of a planning committee. The planning committee will engage parish leaders in the various aspects of project implementation and evaluation as plans progress.

Leadership and Membership: Ideal members of a project-oriented council are parishioners who can plan and persuade. They can tolerate a variety of views. They have a good working relationship with the pastor. They have interest in the project and have the time needed to invest in its implementation. The work in this approach can be directed by the pastor or through a qualified lay chairperson.

Meetings will be regularly scheduled and begin with reports that recap decisions and project progress. Time will be given to deliberating on next steps, and refinements to the proposal under consideration. There will be feedback and discussion of program plans and consideration given to possible inter-parish or vicariate cooperation as well as ways of encouraging involvement among parishioners. Time should always be allotted for other pressing matters unrelated to any particular pastoral projects. Please refer to meeting suggestions in the companion operational manual.

Term of Office and Casual Vacancies: Terms of service will be for one year on a staggered schedule. One third of the pastoral council will step down each year. If the pastoral council is just starting, one third of the members will be asked to stay for two years and another third will be asked to stay for three years to insure continuity.

The pastor will appoint replacements to fill positions left vacant. The term of service for any such replacement will be for the remainder of the current term of service for the vacated seat.

Strength:

1. Future-oriented and positive
2. Provides clarity of task and focus for council energies
3. Enables the pastor to concentrate on the particular areas that he deems of greatest priority.
4. Allows the greatest flexibility for meeting style and content.

Weaknesses:

1. Significant responsibility stays with the pastor, who is often consumed with day to day duties
2. If the role of the pastoral council is not kept clear, meetings can become difficult and diffused.

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3. A sharp focus on one particular issue can distract the pastor and council from other important developments in the parish. Pressing matters or external forces can be overlooked to the detriment of the parish.

APPENDIX D

REACHING CONSENSUS

Consensus is a collective opinion derived when everyone works together. True consensus is evident after a decision is made. Truly consensual decisions enjoy broad ownership and commitment for implementation. It seeks not only the agreement of most participants, but also the inclusion of minority objections as a way to insure greatest accuracy. In this way, consensual decisions foster unity of purpose. Groups that reach consensus can speak with unity despite disagreement. Consensual decisions take the most time but are most often the most accurate.

Consensus is achieved when every member can say...“I have had an opportunity to express my views fully and they have been thoughtfully considered by the group. Even though this solution may not be the one that I believe is optimal, I think it will work and I support it.”

When seeking consensus, differences of opinion are not only tolerated, they are sought out. In consensual decision-making, differences of opinion are seen as ways of gathering all available information and options on a question. Differences clarify the issues and often force the group to seek a better alternative. Consensual decisions are often the most successful decisions because they are well thought out and end up having the strongest support. In consensus, everyone: can live with it, has ample chance to influence it, understands it and supports it.

Dealing with Debate: Sometimes, while working on consensus, a group can generate two opposing options. In such stalemates, invite the group to set both options aside and look for a *third way*. This third way is generated out of the rationale – values or benefits named for the two opposing positions. The group can then be engaged in creating the third option using this objective criteria in order to include the concerns or values identified by everyone.

Sometimes, one person or a small group becomes a holdout to agreement. This is evident when those in the minority restate opposition repeatedly. In those situations, it is beneficial to explore the reasons for strong minority dissent (Acts 5:39). Invite those in the majority to reflect back to holdouts why they disagree until holdouts are sure that they are being heard. Invite holdouts to do likewise and then allow holdouts to explain why they cannot live with the choice made by the majority. Ask majority to do likewise. Ask the minority why they are not persuaded by the reasons held by the majority. Seek a *third way* as the win/win alternative. Agreement can sometimes be forged from that exchange.

APPENDIX E

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 U.S. 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-negotiable's* for any organization.

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, Measureable, 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.

Planning Process

This process can be implemented once the 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?

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. (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-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.

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 we 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? (More is available in the operational manual.)

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE PLANNING CALENDAR

May	Evaluation of Year Past <i>How well did we do?</i>
June	Recruitment / Nominations <i>Who is stepping back? Who is stepping forward?</i>
Aug. and Sept.	Selection / Orientation / Process Overview <i>What is the purpose of the pastoral council?</i> <i>How will the council be organized?</i> <i>How will we proceed together?</i> <i>How will we accomplish our mission?</i>
October	Review of Parish Mission and Assess Needs <i>What is needed for pastoral success?</i> <i>How can we collect the needs of parish and community?</i>
November	Study Emerging Needs and Set Goals <i>Why is there a need? What are the causes?</i> <i>What is happening and how would Jesus respond?</i>
December	Celebration and Appreciation <i>What cause do we have to celebrate?</i>
January	Study Issues, Underlying Causes / Assess Resources <i>With whom should we partner to address this need?</i>
February	Write Objectives / Discern and Assess Resources <i>How can we have greatest impact?</i> <i>What strategy will best respond to the issue?</i>
March	Create a Plan of Action <i>What are the concrete action steps?</i> <i>What partners are needed to achieve our goals?</i> <i>Who will carry out the plan? How much will it cost?</i>
April	Implement the Plan <i>How will progress be assessed?</i> <i>What improvements can be applied to the process?</i>

(More direction is available for organizing the calendar and meeting schedule for pastoral councils in the operational manual.)

APPENDIX G

AUTHORIZING TEXTS RELATED TO PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

“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 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)

“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)

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)

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)

APPENDIX H

DIOCESE OF BUFFALO

VISION

The Buffalo Diocese will be a vibrant, welcoming Eucharistic-centered faith community reflective of God's love for us all and our love for our neighbor mirrored in justice, compassion, understanding, holiness, solidarity and peace. The laity will exercise their baptismal call to ministry and, in accord with their charism, competence and training, will work collaboratively with the clergy to minister to the People of God. Restructured parishes and schools will give evidence of the good stewardship of our resources while creating vibrant parish communities and academically excellent, fiscally sound schools. The Diocese will continue to read the signs of the times and make every effort to respond to emerging needs.

MISSION

"At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task." (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, #4)

As the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo comprising the eight counties of Western New York, we seek to read the signs of the times in the new millennium. We do this

- empowered by the Holy Spirit through the grace of baptism
- sensitive to the yearnings of the human spirit
- conscious of the profound power of goodness and truth

- respectful of the ministries and institutions inherited from generations of the faithful.

We are called to see the Eucharist as the source and summit of our lives and to invite others to share this vision by our witnessing to the power of the Gospel. With special concern for those who are poor, and a strong sense of social justice, our Church has significant and unique presence in our community through the service of all generations within a culturally and economically diverse population.

As we journey in faith and grace on this mission, we share the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of people of our time in a spirit of gratitude for God's gracious love revealed in Jesus the Lord.

APPENDIX I ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Please refer to the operational manual for answers to the most practical and logistical questions related to various aspects of council function and organizational development.

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