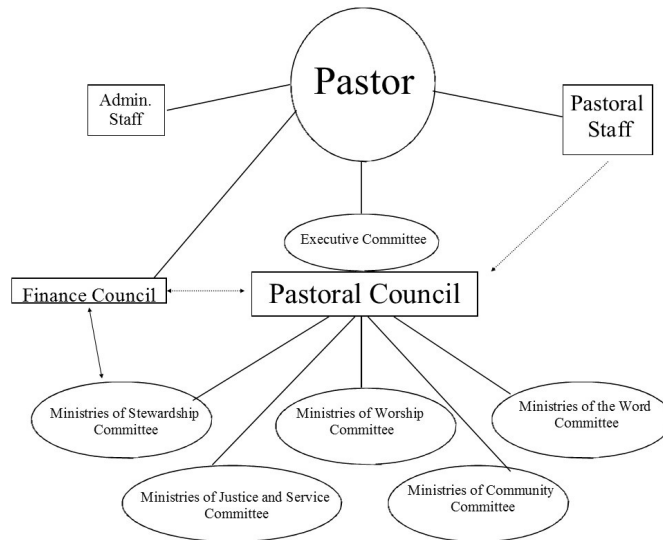


PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL OPERATIONAL MANUAL



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)



DIOCESE OF BUFFALO

2019

OVERVIEW

The parish pastoral council is a consultative body within the parish that is convened by the pastor and from whom the pastor seeks counsel in planning for parish vitality. 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. This purpose distinguishes the activity of the pastoral council from that of any other group, ministry or organization within the parish. Effectiveness is less about doing more things and more about doing the right things. Effective councils do the right things, for the right reasons, and in the right way. This document is intended as a companion to the diocesan guidelines (See further descriptions of the *why* and *what* of pastoral council development in the diocesan guidelines.) This manual is designed to aid in that effort. Please consider the following suggestions for operational success.

These suggestions address:

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1. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In some respects, each pastoral council is as unique as the community itself, or the respective worship space. At the same time there are discernable trends in council development. How does the parish move from merely surviving or even striving, to thriving. The pastoral council has a thriving parish as their ultimate aim.

In order to thrive today, the best councils work toward a shift in focus:

FROM	TO
coordinating activities	articulating vision
voting on issues	building consensus and community
maintaining structure & creating reports	planning and goal setting
selection by popularity	selection by competence
parliamentary procedures	prayerful discernment
reliance on conducting programs	support a missionary discipleship

The most frequently asked questions about pastoral councils include:

- What is the purpose of a pastoral council?
- Why does the pastor consult?
- What does a council do?
- What should a council NOT do?
- What are the popular approaches to organizing a pastoral council?
- How much authority does the council have?
- Who does a council represent?
- How does a council get selected?
- What is the relationship between the pastoral and finance councils?

(See a fuller explanation of the *why* and *what* of pastoral council development in the diocesan guidelines.)

What is the purpose of a parish 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 the parish focused on its divine purpose – love God, love God’s people, do God’s will and lead others to God through Christ. In fostering parish vitality, the pastor involves his council in careful investigation, prayerful consideration and consensual recommendations.

Why does a pastor spend so much time consulting?

The mission of the Church is not reserved to one person or even a few. Through baptism we all have a share in Christ’s mission – priest, prophet and king. Consultation enables the active participation of all the baptized in this mission. A wise pastor consults broadly within the parish, with trustees, members of the staff, pastoral and

finance council and active lay leaders of the parish. The pastoral council is an essential partner in that parish collaboration.

What does a parish pastoral council do?

Most simply, a *parish pastoral council* is a representative group from the *parish* who offers the *pastor good counsel*. The logical question is: Give counsel about what? Canon law defines this as a consultative role (Canon #536). It is the responsibility of the pastor to direct these efforts. It is the responsibility of the pastor to convoke the pastoral council, preside over it and determine the structure, approaches and methods to be used. 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 envisioning, planning, coordinating and empowering all the baptized for fuller participation in the life of the Church. This usually takes the form of a pastoral or strategic plan for the future.

What should a parish pastoral council NOT do?

Pastoral councils are not intended to be a management team for the parish. Because pastoral councils are consultative bodies, they are ill-equipped to either legislate or administrate. Likewise, councils are ill-equipped to: interpret liturgical norms, repair the roof on the church, administer daily parish operations, supervise staff, decide what copier to purchase for the office, establish financial practices, set or enforce employment practices, choose investment portfolios. Decisions like these that require specialized skills or expertise are best left up to the pastor who will consult with relevant experts (e.g. business manager, pastoral staff, finance council, diocesan departments) as appropriate.

How much authority does a pastoral council have?

Today, clergy, religious and laity are called to lead together as coworkers in the vineyard, sharing in a ministry that is rooted in service to God's Reign. The pastoral council is "authorized" by the pastor. Therefore, pastoral councils are never convened without the pastor or his delegate, because a pastoral council cannot be separated from the pastor any more than a body can be separated from its head. Paradoxically, a council which exercises the greatest authority is that which service in a way that is collegial, responsible and prayerful.

Who does the pastoral council represent?

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

How are council members selected?

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

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, two lay members of the parish in addition to the Diocesan Bishop, Vicar General and Pastor. Canon Law recommends the establishment of a pastoral council. Lay Trustees typically serve ex-officio on the parish pastoral council. While a Trustee may serve on the finance council, the Parish Trustee is not part of the finance council solely by virtue of being a Trustee. And while the finance council is distinct from a pastoral council, their roles are complementary. The finance council insures prudence in fiscal management through financial controls, budgeting and consultation, while the pastoral council ensures vitality through participation and effective parish planning.

What are the popular approaches to organizing a pastoral council?

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

1. The *Planning Council* assists the pastor and staff in intentional planning - prayerful discernment of parish priorities, involving parishioners in shared leadership, consensual decision-making and strategic planning.
2. The *Coordinating Council* is a representative body of leaders from all organizations and ministries that meet regularly to share information and coordinate on the most significant activities in the parish. Smaller parishes use a "community meeting" variation of this approach.
3. 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.

No matter which approach is adopted, there are practical matters that are required for effective council development. These include: position descriptions, selection procedures, training, committee structures, procedures, meeting mechanics, reporting methods, vicariate and diocesan linkages, and relationship with other organizations.

2. COUNCIL MEMBER POSITION DESCRIPTION

The pastoral council is a body of clergy and laity, parishioners and staff, with whom the pastor consults regarding overall concerns and priorities of the parish. At the heart of this service is a confidence in the inspiration, wisdom and creativity that the Holy Spirit grants to God's People. This assurance is granted to those who listen openly to God and actively to one another. It is not the purpose of a pastoral council to coordinate activities or manage parish staff. The council is charged with carefully investigating, prayerfully considering and consensually recommending action to the pastor regarding pastoral concerns in the life of the parish (e.g. those things that impact the either the entire parish or its future and vitality).

Qualifications

- a person of prayer, who is comfortable with participation in the Catholic Church
- confidence in God's presence and leading of the Church
- tolerance of differing views and the ability to listen carefully to others
- willingness to participate fully and honestly
- ability to think strategically about the future needs of the parish
- prudence and the ability to maintain confidentiality

Responsibilities

- attend a maximum of ten plenary sessions of the council per year
- participate in only one project group of interest over the term of service
- contribute to the success of parish initiatives and planning as directed by the pastor
- give prayerful consideration to proposals to enrich the vitality of the Catholic Church
- propose action in response to the needs expressed by the people of the parish

Accountability

The pastor presides over the council and meetings can be facilitated by a designated chairperson

Commitment

A three-year term of service. Pastoral Council meetings are held at a time of maximum accessibility which allows for three excused absences per year.

Benefits

- a stake in the future of the parish
- relationships with other committed Catholic leaders of the parish
- satisfaction from assisting the parish realize a vibrant future in this community
- development of various leadership skills
- use of personal gifts for the good of the Church

(Refer to the diocesan guidelines for a fuller description of the *why* and *what* of pastoral council development.)

3. INSTALLATION CEREMONY

When installed at a Eucharistic celebration, this ceremony is best used immediately following the homily. Incoming council members can be installed together at one liturgy or at the respective celebrations in which they regularly participate.

Call forward incoming pastoral council members, and once gathered address the congregation as follows:

My Brothers and Sisters, to each of us God has given the gift of Life.

(Option 1:) With that gift comes a call, a call to love God, love God's people, do God's will and lead others to God. This is our mission as a Church - to bring the joy of the Gospel into our world. We accomplish this as a community of faith. Some of our members serve this salvific mission in a particular way by advising the pastor.

(OR)

(Option 2:) Every gift that we receive invites a response. In Baptism we are given a share in the mission of Christ's body – priest, prophet and king. In Confirmation that purpose is ratified, strengthened, and blessed. Today we have before us members of our community who have agreed to serve our parish through their participation in the kingly ministry of Christ, along with the pastor, as members of the pastoral council.

Address incoming parish council members:

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

Your ministry must be exercised in humility because, it was He who gave His life so we may live, who knelt before His disciples to wash their feet and told them: “This then is what I command you: ‘Love one another’.” So I ask:

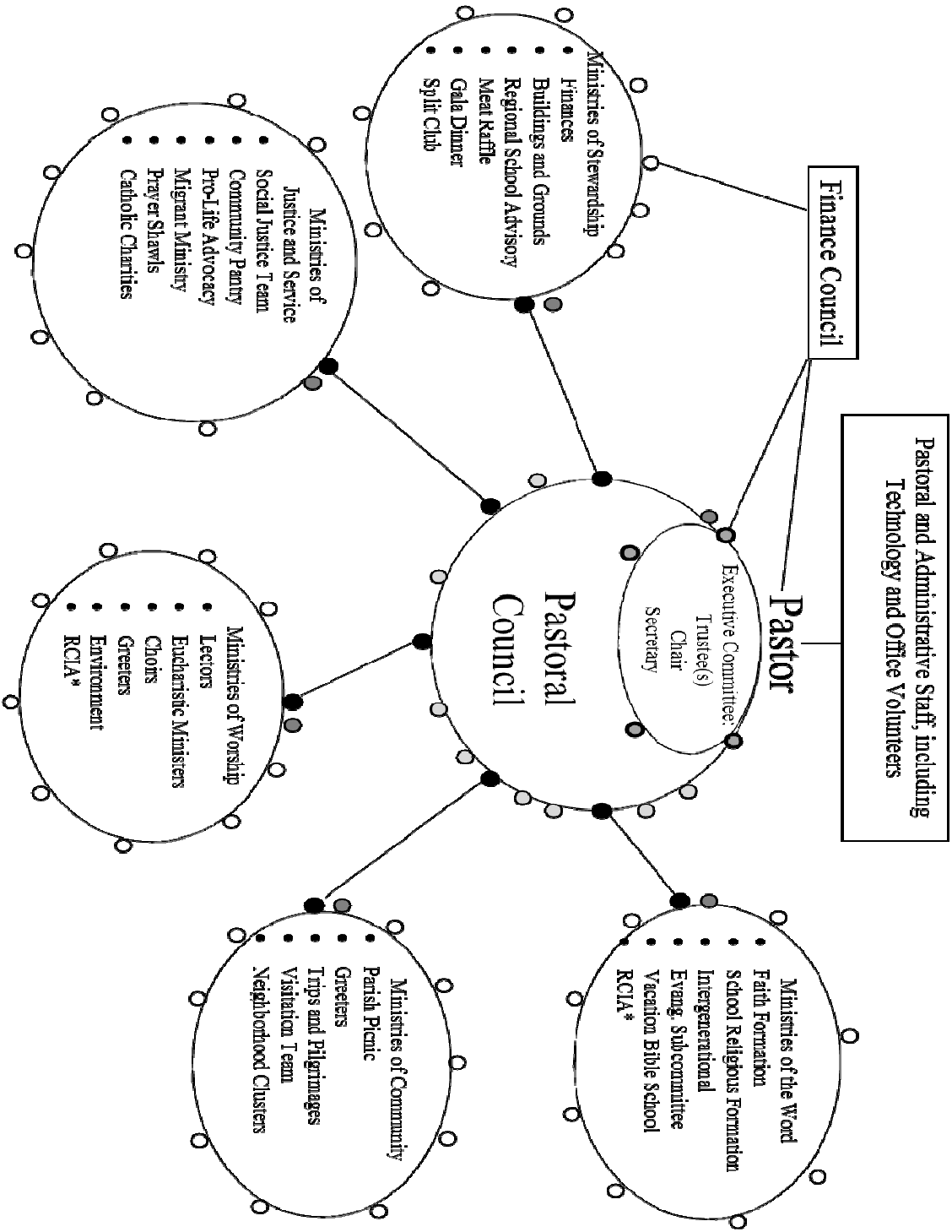
1. Will you dedicate yourself to this work in a spirit of service?
2. Will you avail yourself to needed study on the mission of this parish and the teaching of our Church?
3. Are you resolved to listen to your fellow parishioners and prayerfully consider their needs above your own?
4. Will you assist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

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

May the Lord bless and keep these leaders. May God send the Holy Spirit to guide and counsel them. This we ask through Christ Our Lord.

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

4. ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



5. CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

Efficient and effective councils have clarity of purpose and a plan of operation. In particular circumstances, council effectiveness and efficiency can be aided through the use of a constitution and bylaws. (Refer to the diocesan guidelines for a fuller description of the *why* and *what* of pastoral council development.)

A constitution provides the most visible structure for a council. A constitution forms a set of laws that govern it and establish commonly understood organizational policies. Bylaws function as something of a procedural commentary, elaborating upon constitutional laws to provide for greater efficiency and continuity in practice.

Real effectiveness comes less from doing things right, and more from doing the right things.

When effective, constitutions and bylaws provide the structure needed for a council to stay focused on doing the right things. Many parishes have little need for such formalized structure. The greatest danger with constitutions is that they can become obstacles to doing the right things. In those situations constitutions become unwieldy, and can actually obstruct the council's efficiency. There have been councils who accomplish little else in a year than revising the constitution. That is both inefficient and ineffective. At such times the structure is not serving the organization, the organization is serving the structure.

The maxim for effectiveness is: *The simpler the better*. If required it is advisable to answer the question: What are the essential elements of an effective constitution? These can include: name; function and purpose; membership; selection; officers; committees; meetings; amendments and bylaws; and relations with others both within the parish and beyond. REMEMBER THE MAXIM: *The simpler the better*.

Proposed sample texts are listed below in italics while recommendations and explanatory items are listed in plain text.

ARTICLE I: NAME

The name of this organization is the Parish Pastoral Council for [Your Parish]

ARTICLE II: FUNCTION AND PURPOSE

The pastoral council is a consultative group that is led by the pastor (or pastoral administrator) and charged with prayerfully discerning parish needs, setting pastoral priorities, and empowering people to participate in the mission of Christ. It is the responsibility of the pastor to call, convene and preside over the pastoral council. The pastor invites the council to join him in careful investigation, prayerful consideration and consensual recommendations in service to the parish. This three-fold agenda for parish pastoral councils is derived from the role of the diocesan pastoral council (Decree on Bishops, #27) to accomplish the mission of Christ. Pastoral councils are not legislative bodies. The parish pastoral council is a consultative body that plans and coordinates pastoral matters for the parish under the pastor's leadership.

Note: In all places where the term “pastor” is used, this term can be synonymous with “administrator” or “pastoral administrator” when duly appointed by the Bishop.

ARTICLE III: MEMBERSHIP

This section should delineate:

1. Size - The council will typically have between eight and fifteen members, depending on approach taken or parish size. [See appendices A - C of the diocesan guidelines - web reference at the end of this article]
2. Types of Membership – *There are three types of members: 1) Ex-Officio – including: pastor, pastoral staff, lay trustee, diocesan pastoral council or vicariate representative; 2) Selected - typically three to seven members that are nominated from the congregation; 3) Appointed – members named by the pastor to insure for necessary competencies or the broadest possible representation from the congregation. This is contingent on the approach taken [See appendices A - C of the diocesan guidelines - web reference at the end of this article]*
3. Eligibility - *Eligibility for service is limited to baptized Catholics who are registered with the parish and who are active in support of the parish, supportive of Church teaching and open to prayer, study and dialogue. Once a councilor has served one full three year term they are typically ineligible to be re-nominated for one year. 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. Term of Service – *All seats will be held for a specified term. It is recommended to use three year terms with staggered replacement to insure continuity. It is also recommended that the officers and committee chairs be held for no more than two years.*
5. Vacancies and Forfeitures – *The seat of any vacancy, of any type (appointed, selected or ex-officio) shall be filled for the remainder of a term by the pastor. Forfeiture of any selected or appointed seats will occur after three absences in any council year. Notification will be provided in writing by the council chairperson after two absences. In exceptional circumstances, the executive committee (pastor, chair, secretary and trustee) may excuse an absent member from a third absence if such a request is made to the executive committee by the councilor in question.*

ARTICLE IV: SELECTION

Choose a method of selection that is most consistent with the purpose of the pastoral council [See appendices A - C of the diocesan guidelines - web reference at the end of this article]. The selection process can be described in bylaws.

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

In Approach B – The Coordinating Council: In this approach representatives are typically nominated by the organizations which they will represent. The final appointment is made by the pastor. If a parish convenes less formally for a simple “community meeting”, all parishioners can be welcome to participate and no selection process is necessary.

In Approach C – The Managing 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. The pastor or pastoral council can interview all qualified candidates.

In some parishes the pastor prefers a blend of approaches (e.g. Approaches A and B) which can be effective as long as all efforts are taken to avoid role confusion for council members as well as for other groups within the parish.

Consider the following as norms to insure adequate representation and effective participation:

- Make necessary appointments to the pastoral council for those groups which are under-represented in parish leadership (e.g. youth, region or ethnic minorities).
- Limit eligibility for service to baptized Catholics who are registered and supportive of the parish; active in the practice of their faith; supportive of Church teaching; open to prayer, study and dialogue; and committed to the success of the parish.
- Specify a term of office for each council member (including appointees). Use a three-year term of service with only two years as a committee chair. Stagger replacement (one third of council members) each year to insure for continuity.
- The pastor makes the announcement of selection results to the congregation.
- Once a term is complete, a council member steps down for a full term before being eligible for re-nomination to allow for broad participation and access to leadership for all the baptized.
- The pastor announces selection results to the congregation and arranges for commissioning of the council at a regularly scheduled parish liturgy.

- State limits to any repetition in term of service.

ARTICLE V: OFFICERS

Officers typically consist of a chairperson (or president), a secretary, trustee(s) and sometimes either the liaison to the vicariate or diocesan pastoral council. This group is often considered an executive committee for the council. This committee is always led by the pastor. At the discretion of the pastor, the executive committee can accept responsibility for setting meeting agendas, and arranging for the annual recruitment and selection process.

Selection of Chairperson – The pastor presides over the pastoral council. The pastor has the prerogative to name a chairperson or allow one to be selected from among the council membership. Procedures can be delineated in bylaws. One procedure for selecting a chairperson from the council membership would be:

1. *Open the floor to nominations at a regularly scheduled council meeting.*
2. *Allow those nominated to accept or decline the nomination to identify eligible candidates.*
3. *Provide candidates with a brief description of responsibilities and invite them to express their strengths (and weaknesses), along with their vision for the council in service to the pastor and the parish.*
4. *Dismiss candidates and invite the remaining members of the pastoral council to share their impressions in a prayerful discernment of the needs of the council for a set period of time.*
5. *Once the final field of candidates is clear, a blind ballot can be taken or the pastor can make a selection and state his reasoning. It is the responsibility of the pastor to confirm the outcome of all selections, and report it to the council and the parish.*

The selection process is an ideal time to hear from the pastor about which qualities are most important the optimal functioning of the council. And because it is essential that the pastor be comfortable with the person who will chair the council, the pastor should have ample opportunity to voice parameters of eligibility or reservations regarding any candidate before the selection is made. Under certain circumstances (e.g. after a parish merger) the outcome of the ballot may be kept confidential (e.g. pastor or executive committee eyes only) to avoid divisive interpretations.

Selection of Other Officers (e.g. secretary, co-chair, or liaison to vicariate council)

1. *Open the floor to nominations at a regularly scheduled council meeting.*
2. *Allow those nominated to accept or decline the nomination to identify eligible candidates.*
3. *Provide candidates with a position description and invite them to express their strengths (and weaknesses), along with their vision for the council in service to the pastor and the parish.*

4. *Candidates are dismissed and the remaining members of the pastoral council are given a set period of time to share their impressions in a prayerful discernment of the needs of the council.*
5. *Once the final field of candidates is clear, a blind ballot can be taken. It is the responsibility of the pastor to confirm and report the outcome of the vote.*

Because a parish pastoral council is not a legislative body, the duties of the officers do not have to be included in a constitution. However a position description (or descriptive notes in bylaws) can provide the members with a sketch of the expectations for various roles. The chairperson helps to develop meeting agendas and insures leadership for all regular plenary meetings. All committee chairpersons report to the council chairperson. A council co-chair can share in an alternating leadership role for meetings. Co-chairs are generally considered to be a chairperson-in-training for a subsequent year. The secretary submits all meeting reports (no “minutes” are usually necessary) for approval, and manages formal correspondence.

ARTICLE VI: COMMITTEES

A council is well-advised to have an executive committee which is always led by the pastor. A council may choose to form standing committees that best correspond to its purpose. [See appendices A - C of the diocesan guidelines - web reference at the end of this article]. Bylaws can describe the following regarding committees: Committee chairs should rotate every two years to insure for greatest possible participation of all parishioners.

In a *Planning Council* the committees are formed around the steps of a planning process – process management, needs assessment, goal setting, implementation, and evaluation.

In a *Coordinating Council*, committees are formed around the major areas of parish life – community, faith formation, stewardship, justice and service, worship. On coordinating councils, all councilors agree to participate in one of the standing committees.

In a *Managing Council*, the project tasks become the organizing principle for the committee structure.

Regardless which committee structure is employed, the committees maintain representation on the council and communicate through regular reports.

Ad hoc committees can be proposed and established at a general meeting for a specific purpose or event. Ad hoc committees are automatically dissolved at the completion of the assigned task.

ARTICLE VII: MEETINGS

Effective, efficient and enjoyable meetings are a hallmark of a healthy and productive council. Again the format and length will often be determined by the specific purpose of the council. Constitutions need say little more about meetings. Bylaws can define some of the following:

Frequency and Style - State the minimum number of meetings per year and their frequency. State conditions for holding an executive session and name the rules that govern open or town meetings. Generally speaking the executive committee (including: pastor, council chairperson, secretary) establishes the agenda for each meeting based on the particular outcomes desired.

Quorum – Quorums are seldom required since councils are advisory to the pastor and the preferred approach to deliberation is open discussion with occasional tests for consensus. If a particular meeting is determined by the pastor to be deliberative (e.g. revision of constitution or bylaws), the establishment of a quorum (presence of two-thirds membership) may be recommended. Otherwise all meetings are consultative and seek a general consensus for their outcome.

Record – There is increasing demand for transparency in church deliberations. Responsive councils establish a method for record keeping and publishing meeting reports that insures for transparency and maintains confidentiality when necessary. The most popular reporting methods include:

1. publish written report (not “minutes”) or a meeting summary to committees
2. make a written meeting summary available to interested parishioners
3. post a meeting summary at the parish website
4. publish a meeting summary in the parish newsletter
5. mention important decisions briefly from the pulpit

The record and publication of meeting results lies with the executive committee which is always led by the pastor.

Access to the Council Agenda and Open Meetings – it is becoming increasingly important to provide all parishioners with access to church decision making. Bylaws can include how parishioners can submit agenda items to the pastoral council. If parishioners are allowed to propose items to the pastoral council for consideration, it is important that they be advised regarding the disposition of the issue that they submitted. Many times a pastoral council secretary will notify the interested parishioner of meeting time when the item in question will be considered so that the interested parishioner can observe if they so desire. If a group of parishioners desires to address the council on any matters of concern, it is best for those interested to put such request in writing, and allow the executive committee to arrange a proper venue for that discussion. It may be optimal for members of the executive committee to meet with the group separately and report those findings to the council at the next available meeting. Most councils decline to consider any complaint that is unsigned. This procedure can be defined in the bylaws.

Recommendations and Decisions – Most issues that are placed before a pastoral council do not have a technical solution. Technical questions are best addressed by specialists. Pastoral council members are generalists, not specialists who tend to deal with issues that do not have an easy answer but that do have broad impact. A process for arriving

at recommendations and decisions should take this into account. When some level of consensus is not possible, a matter can be delegated or deferred, allowing for further study and the opportunity to consider more alternatives. If this is defined, it is best to do so in bylaws.

Effective communication is essential to maintain healthy relationships within a parish system.

The following can be recommended for inclusion in bylaws:

1. establish a policy regarding ways that parishioners can submit items for council consideration
2. provide parishioners with access to the contact information of parish council members
3. conduct meetings that are open to parishioners who want to observe though no one outside the council is at liberty to speak without permission
4. submit the goals of the pastoral council to the parish for comment or approval
5. host an annual parish meeting at which time parish priorities are discussed and proposal can receive comment
6. obtain committee reports and provide them in advance of council meetings
7. publish a written meeting summary to committees
8. make a meeting summary available to interested parishioners
9. post a meeting summary at the parish website, or in the parish newsletter
10. mention important decisions briefly from the pulpit

ARTICLE VIII: AMENDMENTS AND BYLAWS

State the number of members needed to amend the constitution or its bylaws.

Amendments to the constitution and revisions to the bylaws require the consent of the pastor. They can be submitted for three quarters vote by the council. The full text of a proposed amendment along with supportive documentation must be distributed to all council members at least two months prior to the meeting at which the vote will take place.

It is recommended that council procedures, policies, process for selection and procedure for amendments can be posted appropriately in the parish (website or bulletin board). It is preferred that such amendments be emailed to each council member with receipt request, (though some council members may elect to receive amendments by mail).

Bylaws can be temporarily suspended or changed by a two-thirds vote by the council at any regularly scheduled meeting, providing a quorum is established and the pastor's approval is obtained.

6. RELATIONSHIP OF THE PASTORAL COUNCIL WITH OTHERS

The parish mission belongs to the parish. The pastor administers the parish and presides over both the pastoral council and the finance council. It is the responsibility of the pastoral council to enable the participation of the entire parish in setting priorities and implementing a parish plan of action. Once the parish has developed a pastoral plan, the pastor consults with the finance council regarding feasibility and funding questions. Pastoral councils collaborate with the parish finance council both for effective planning and in the evaluation of parish programs.

The Relationship of the Pastoral Council to Others within the Parish:

NON-ORDAINED PASTORAL ADMINISTRATOR - Parishes can sometimes be placed in the care of a non-ordained pastoral administrator who manages the parish day-to-day. This administrator is delegated to preside over the pastoral council. This may require a period of reorientation and adjustment. The parish retains its own pastoral and finance council and there are no changes needed in the constitution or bylaws with the exception of noting that “pastor” “administrator” and “pastoral administrator” are co-terminus in use for council operation.

PARISH STAFF – The pastoral council is charged with supporting the pastor and working alongside his staff in service to the parish. *Staff members are appointed to the pastoral council by the pastor and have an ex-officio (non-voting) role.* Still their expertise and experience is invaluable for council planning.

Role confusion can arise for members of the pastoral council who have other parish involvements beyond membership on the council. In these other involvements they are accountable to the staff person that coordinates the various parish ministries. Pastoral council members acknowledge the technical expertise of professional staff members and collaborate with them. As such, they cooperate in setting parish priorities. They partner with staff in planning for the future. They collaborate in facilitating communication and encouraging the participation of all parishioners in various parish events, ministries and organizations.

LAY TRUSTEES – In civil law, each Roman Catholic parish corporation is governed by a Board of Trustees which includes the pastor and the Bishop as well as the Moderator of the Curia and two lay individual (trustees) subject to the canonical jurisdiction of the Diocesan Bishop, according to New York State Law. The duties of the Board of Trustees are fiduciary and require responsibility for the care and preservation of the temporalities and property of the parish corporation. The Board of Trustees votes to approve any sale of real property.

Following the approval of the Diocesan Bishop, the parish may then petition New York State courts for an order to allow the sale. Along with the parish finance council, the lay trustees play an active role in the review of the annual parish corporation budget. Additionally lay trustees are responsible for reviewing and signing the annual financial report of the parish corporation along with the pastor, after the finance council has reviewed it. This report is forwarded to the Bishop.

The day-to-day demands placed on parish trustees are usually minimal when the parish is functioning properly, since the pastor or administrator is charged with managing daily operations which includes personnel management, business administration, finances and pastoral duties. And because trustees are usually represented ex-officio on both the finance and pastoral councils, they are usually organically involved in all significant discussions or deliberations.

FINANCE COUNCIL - Parish finance council (and diocesan pastoral council representatives) typically have an ex-officio role on the parish pastoral council. The parish finance council presents an annual report which is reviewed by the pastoral council and sent to the Bishop. (See more on: 11. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PASTORAL AND FINANCE COUNCIL below).

RELATIONS TO OTHERS BEYOND THE PARISH

Typically the parish pastoral council has little interaction with leaders from another parish. For this reason it is recommended that the pastoral council name a liaison to the vicariate council. This changes when a parish operates in a cooperative cluster, is led by a pastoral administrator or decides to merge. At such times the function of a pastoral council can be adapted significantly.

PARISH CLUSTERS - When parishes are linked or form a cluster, they still retain their independence. In such relationships, the pastoral councils operate independently though they are more attentive to the plans and activities of the other members in the parish cluster. There is little impact on the constitution or bylaws except for the addition of a representative from the cluster.

PARISH MERGERS - In the case of a planned merger, there are stages in the process which begin with the sharing of a pastor and an increase in inter-parish cooperation. As merger plans develop, a transition team may be formed to coordinate parish activities. The transition team can be granted standing as an ad hoc committee of the pastoral council.

As a merger progresses, there is considerable energy spent on communication and coordination between parishes. A transition team may be formed out of the membership of the respective pastoral councils to help bring the process to completion. The pastor may also reorganize various structures, policies and

procedures in anticipation of the merger to bring them into alignment with each of the respective parishes. This realignment may necessitate amendments to the constitution.

At the completion of a merger, a new pastor is usually assigned. At the discretion of the new pastor, the existing pastoral councils are dissolved. Pastoral councils can serve as a unifying factor during a merger, working together with staff throughout the process to foster cohesion and clarify any misunderstandings that may arise in the process.

OTHER COUNCILS - The diocesan pastoral council representatives and the vicariate council representatives serve as a vital communication link between the Bishop, other parishes and the parish pastoral council.

For more help with pastoral council development contact the Office for Evangelization and Parish Life dmahaney@buffalodiocese.org or call 716-847-8393.

7. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PASTORAL AND FINANCE COUNCILS

Pastoral council and finance council are two distinct leadership teams in a parish that collaborate in the service of parish excellence. The diocesan bishop encourages every parish to have a pastoral council, provides guidelines and allows pastors significant flexibility in its operation. Canon law requires the pastor of each parish to assemble a finance council which works within the norms, policies and procedures established by this Diocese.

Some pastoral council members have expressed confusion over what seem to be overlapping functions between the two groups. Despite some notable similarities, these groups are very different in purpose, membership and procedures. Among the similarities both groups are convened by the pastor. Both collaborate with parish staff members in areas of mutual interest. Both are becoming increasingly collaborative and strategic in their policies and practices. Both are attentive to confidentiality, appropriate access and transparency regarding their deliberations. Both function best with clarity of function, accountability, organizational policy, procedural norms, and relationship with other parish organizations. Still there are fundamental differences in the purpose and function of these two parish leadership teams.

DISTINCT IN PURPOSE AND MEMBERSHIP

A pastoral council is a consultative group that is charged with prayerfully discerning parish needs, setting pastoral priorities, and empowering people to participate in the mission of Christ. This group collaborates in pastoral planning with members of the staff and other ministry leaders including the finance council. In most parishes it is a representative group that advises the pastor on broad matters of spiritual welfare and parish excellence.

The best pastoral councils know that the parish mission belongs to the parish. As a result the pastoral council sees their role as enabling the participation of the entire parish in setting priorities and implementing a parish plan of action. Once the parish has developed a pastoral plan, the pastor consults with the finance council regarding feasibility and funding questions. Pastoral councils collaborate with the parish finance council both for effective planning and in the evaluation of parish programs.

The parish finance council assists the pastor in administering the material resources and funds of the parish. The finance council provides sound financial advice regarding budget, accurate accounting and compliance with diocesan policies and procedures. The finance council assists the pastor in formulating and managing the parish budget. This group monitors expenditures and may also be asked to assist in various aspects of facility management. On occasion, finance councils can be asked to oversee a capital campaign.

As a result, finance council membership is typically reserved to parishioners who possess the necessary technical expertise in accounting procedures, relevant laws, fundraising, investment, and other related business skills. The scope of responsibility for a finance council is significant even in a relatively small parish. Still, the finance council is an essential partner to the pastoral council and staff in planning parish priorities, determining the feasibility of strategies, considering facility capabilities for events and evaluating program outcomes and sustainability.

DISTINCT IN MEETING AGENDA AND PROCEDURES

Some of the other differences between these two councils are evident simply by viewing the agenda of their respective meetings. Pastoral council meetings usually include time for: prayer, planning, policy recommendations, in-depth discussion or education, consideration of committee reports, team building and evaluation. Canon 212 invites parishioners to respectfully express their needs and to advise the pastor on matters which pertain to the good of the church. Pastoral councils are attentive to the view from the pew. In their efforts to listen deeply, some pastoral councils host open meetings where parishioners can observe, and when appropriate, participate.

The best pastoral councils know that when it comes to significant matters that impact the life of the whole parish or its future vitality, they are not the voice of the faithful. Rather, they are stewards of that voice. In some parishes, parishioners are invited to submit agenda items for council consideration. In such cases, the pastoral council responds in a timely fashion regarding the disposition of any issue brought forward by parishioners. Pastoral councils can notify interested parishioners of the meeting time when an item of interest is being considered. Pastoral councils are also free to invite interested parishioners to attend the meeting and observe if they choose. The best councils are accountable to the pastor and responsive to the congregation.

Finance councils are charged in Canon 1287.2 to render an accounting to the faithful concerning the goods offered by the faithful to the Church in accordance with norms determined by church and civil law. The finance council is required to meet quarterly. For a variety of reasons, including legal restrictions, contractual arrangements and confidentiality, the parish finance council does not enjoy the same freedom to allow open access to its meetings and deliberations. Parish finance councils insure adequate transparency through regular financial reports to the pastoral council and the parish. Their accountability is directly to the pastor who answers to the bishop and parish trustees.

Finance council meeting agendas are more structured and technical than those of pastoral councils. These meetings can include a financial review, budgetary recommendations, consideration of issues related to internal controls, assessment of parish buildings and other assets, as well as the formulation of an annual report. In larger parishes, finance councils accept budget requests from various groups in the parish, prepare a preliminary budget, approve the budget, monitor its administration and submit annual reports. Still, finance council meetings also benefit from prayer, clarity of agenda and regular evaluation of meeting outcomes and the satisfaction of participants.

Both types of councils have significant tasks that are distinct in terms of purpose, membership, procedural norms and accountability. The best pastoral councils are adept at prayerfully considering matters that affect the entire parish and provide the pastor with a broad base of support for plans and policies. The best finance councils support the parish mission, anticipate financial issues, and advise the pastor on business matters that will impact the success of parish priorities and plans. The difference in function justifies a unique membership.

The difference in charter justifies independent accountability. The difference in task justifies differences in meeting agenda and procedures. The Diocese of Buffalo has guidelines for parish pastoral councils (link) including a new guide for pastoral council constitution and bylaws. The Diocese has significant resources that address the practical questions related to financial governance, reporting and controls which are available by calling 847-5571.

For more about how parishes can best utilize these groups, consult *Best Practices of Catholic Pastoral and Finance Councils* by Charles E Zech, Mary L. Gautier, Robert J. Miller and Mary E. Bendyna, RSM (Our Sunday Visitor, 2010)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Consider the following about your own parish pastoral and finance councils:

Do your pastoral council and finance council understand the distinctiveness of their role in the parish?

Are both councils articulate about the unique and evangelizing mission of the parish?

What procedures will insure effective communication and collaboration between the parish finance council and the parish pastoral council of your parish?

What consistent norms can be adopted to insure cooperation between these two groups?

How can communication be improved?

Are all meetings grounded in a prayer?

Do members regularly evaluate meetings for satisfaction with outcome and process?

For more help with pastoral council development, contact: Dennis Mahaney, dmahaney@buffalodiocese.org or call 716-847-8393.

8. PASTORAL PLANNING IN A NUTSHELL

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

We invest time to plan for the things that matter most in our lives. Likewise, God invites us to care enough about the success of the Church to plan for it. The pastoral council is a consultative group that is charged with prayerfully discerning parish needs, setting pastoral priorities, and empowering people to participate in the mission of Christ.

Failing parishes do so because of a failure to engage the imagination and commitment of their people. Pastoral planning is nothing less than engaging people in discerning their purpose and empowering them with a clear sense of direction. Is there any power greater than a community that knows who it is, and what it cares about most? That is the purpose of pastoral planning. Planning provides a clear sense of purpose and concrete actions to achieve the priorities of the parish.

Nothing is as immobilizing in an organization as the lack of direction. Other essential ingredients that are often missing include: multiple directions without purpose or priority, a plan of action, alignment of organizational structures with goals, insufficient resources of staff, facility, and funding to achieve desired impact. Without these essential ingredients few plans will succeed in affecting noticeable growth or necessary change.

Pastoral planning recognizes that every organization has a few innovators, several more early adopters, but far more who move as a herd and plenty of laggards. The trick is not to be discouraged by the time it takes to move the herd. This is nothing new in for a church which saw St. Paul champion radical innovations that scared Jewish Christians. Peter was an early adopter who was able to persuade James and the others at the Council to accept Gentile Christians. This one decision radically altered the fate of Christianity forever.

All good plans:

- confirm identity, values and vision of a community
- affirm past accomplishment while proposing a rationale for a positive new direction
- align existing programs, events and organizational structures with parish priorities and mission propose concrete steps to achieve group goals
- translate community strategy into individual actions and commitments and communicate these throughout the congregation

For this to come about, all good plans are steeped in prayerful deliberation. Prayer calls us to a God-sized purpose. Prayer engages our creative brain centers, places us in a

receptive posture, and draws forth the powers of empathy. Prayer speaks to hearts and taps our source of hope.

Vision: *The Catholic Church exists to evangelize* – Paul VI. The Catholic parish seeks to foster such spiritual enthusiasm in Catholics that in living their faith they freely share it with others, invite others to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ, and welcoming others to join in the fullness of Catholic faith. In this sacred mission each parish has a duty to champion Gospel values in our society, so that our nation might be transformed through the saving power of the Jesus Christ. How has the parish been most effective in proclaiming Christ and building the kingdom of God?

Parish Mission: Catholics inhabit a growth market unprecedented in centuries. The parish has a responsibility to care for every soul within its reach. In an ever shrinking global community, every parish can have a plan for growth that fosters intentional discipleship within and explicit acts of evangelization that reach out to the ends of the earth. What is the particular circumstance, capacities and vocation of this parish at this moment in time?

Role of the Parish Pastoral Council: The pastoral council serves the parish, as an advisory body to the pastor. The council carefully considers and consensually proposes action to the pastor, in order to advance the mission of Christ in our world. As an advisory group it operates within the boundaries of the doctrine, liturgy and laws of the church. This group will strive to function in ways that are prayerful, representative, discerning, enabling, collaborative and prophetic. What is the role of the council in planning for a vibrant future – beyond surviving or striving, to thriving for years ahead.

Effective planning will address the following:

Needs of God's People:

(Consider using a parish vitality survey or focus group discussion – both are available from Dennis Mahaney, dmahaney@buffalodiocese.org or call: 716-847-8393.)

Parish Capacities:

- What is keeping your parish from growing?
- What would happen if no changes were implemented for ten years?
- What does the congregation look like inside? Who is outside?
- What are the trends in your community? Who is moving in and out?
- Who is attending worship on a typical weekend? Is there a particular population that is conspicuously absent at worship?
- What can we discern about the faith of younger generations – are we handing it on or just holding on?

- What capacities currently exist in the parish – competencies, diocesan and community agencies, facilities, finances, web platforms and expertise, publications, organizational assets, events and programs?

Parish Priorities:

When I think about future trends in our Church, I conclude that this parish can . . .

1. Prepare for change by . . .
2. Foster the involvement of all the baptized by . . .
3. Put families first by...
4. Become a more evangelizing community by . . .
5. Respond to the un-involved and dis-engaged with . . .
6. Foster unity in our diversity by . . .
7. Re-imagine the parish for intentional and missionary discipleship by . . .

Target Population:

S.M.A.R.T. Goals:

Desired Result or Impact:

Strategy Choices (Innovative and Sustainable):

Leadership and Partnerships:

Method Overview:

Prepare:

Equip:

Connect:

Welcome:

Engage:

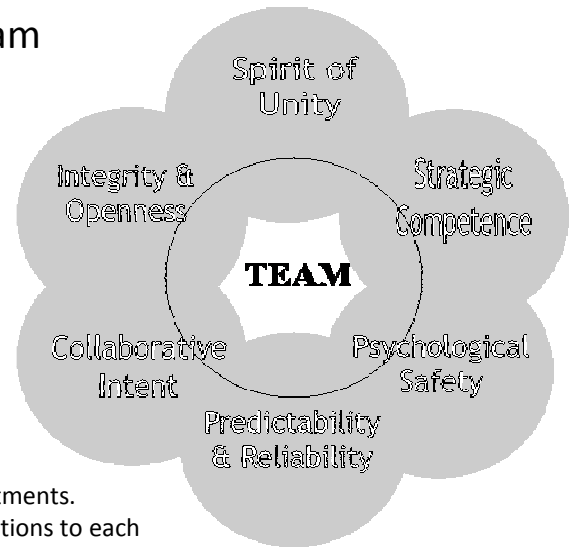
Key Dates and Deadlines:

Initiatives/Programs/Events:

A full description is available from Dennis Mahaney, at dmahaney@buffalodiocese.org, or call: 716-847-8393.

9. Essential Ingredients for Building Team

1. **Spirit of Unity** – *We are all in this together* is the underlying basis for team success. Unity is based on mutual respect, caring & cooperation. Internal disunity can be the single most destructive force in any organization.
2. **Strategic Competence** – is a confidence that the *assembled group has the capabilities necessary to meet their responsibilities*. This includes skills, attitudes and decision-making ability.
3. **Predictability and Reliability** – Every team relies on its members to contribute in order to fulfill team commitments. High performing teams actively communicate expectations to each other so that the *members know what to expect and what is expected of them – rules, standards, procedures, and policies*.
4. **Integrity & Openness** – Integrity is a commitment to *perform without gaps between what is said and what is done*. Openness is transparency or the sense that there are *no tricks or unfair advantages*.
5. **Collaborative Intent** –The desire to work with others and *the conviction that we can accomplish more together than we can as individuals*. Collaborative conversations lead to mutual understanding and the development of a common mission and set of goals. This includes sharing credit for team achievements.
6. **Psychological Safety** – In the hierarchy of needs, *physical and emotional safety are fundamental and prerequisite to accomplishing results*. The environment created by leaders can encourage members to entrust their personal safety to the group. People who can express their vulnerability, and take risks, are best equipped to be creative. Creativity enables the group to think outside the box, develop new responses and solve problems.



Discover ways to build more effective teams by contacting Dennis Mahaney in the Office for Evangelization and Parish Life - dmahaney@buffalodiocese.org or call 716-847-8393.

10. Basic Guidelines for Consensual Decision Making

Keeping in mind that the pastoral council is a body of clergy and laity, parishioners and staff, with whom the pastor consults regarding overall concerns and priorities of the parish. At the heart of this service is a confidence in the inspiration, wisdom and creativity that the Holy Spirit grants to God's People. This assurance is granted to those who listen openly to God and actively to one another. The council is charged with carefully investigating, prayerfully considering and consensually recommending action to the pastor regarding pastoral concerns in the life of the parish (e.g. those things that impact the either the entire parish or its future and vitality). As a result it is helpful to recall the characteristics of consensual recommendations and actions. When deliberating in a collegial fashion:

- Avoid blindly arguing one's own opinion. State opinions clearly and logically as possible. Listen to the reactions of others and consider them carefully before pressing your point.
- Avoid changing one's mind only to reach agreement or avoid argument or avoid conflict. Support solutions with which you are at least somewhat able to agree. Yield only to positions that have objective and logically sound foundations.
- Avoid "conflict reducing" procedures (majority vote, averaging or bargaining) to reach a decision.
- Seek out differences of opinion. They are natural and expected. Try to involve everyone in the process. Disagreements can help the group's decision because they present the widest possible range of opinions, thereby increasing the likelihood that the best decision will be considered and accepted.
- Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, look for the next most acceptable alternative for all members. It may be necessary to throw out the stalemating alternatives and look for a new option. A time of reflective prayer is often used in faith groups as a way of giving members time to carefully re-examine all sides of a difficult issue.
- Discuss underlying assumptions, reasons and values. Listen carefully to all members and encourage participation of all.

11. RULES FOR AGENDA CONSIDERATION

Rule #1: Is the item of sufficient matter? Does the matter affect the entire parish, thus require a policy, or does it affect long term future and planning of the parish? If yes, it is worthy of the council's consideration. But first, some background on situation, assessment of potential consequences with procedural recommendations may be the best way to prepare the council for making a recommendation on the matter at hand. The council may be the best place to deliberate the matter but remember that the council is advisory. It may be best to form a committee which sets the criteria, or presents a recommendation on the matter with sufficient advance notice, research and set of justifications for action. All recommendations and proposals go first to the council leadership.

Before putting it on the agenda, council leaders examine any guidance that may already be available (e.g. the central administrative services of the diocese) as well as professional consultations, or relevant experience from nearby parishes. Before proceeding, council leaders may seek to review recommendations with professionals and experts in a confidential manner.

Rule #2: First Learn Rule #1... Then, in considering the various issues that are sometimes placed before the pastoral council, the council executives can employ the following criteria in deciding how to delegate a matter to parish staff, ministry leader or a committee for review and recommendations. Answer these questions:

If the issue can be delegated... This allows the council to let go of much of the routine business that is often placed before it. If the issue is related to liturgy, perhaps the liturgy committee or a qualified staff person can best address it. If it is a fundraising matter, then it may be assigned to the finance committee, etc.

- **What instructions will accompany the matter that is being delegated to a committee, staff member or parish ministry?** When the leader of the pastoral council delegates a matter, it does so with one or more of the following directions:
 - Gather the information that is needed and report back to leadership, so that the council can make an informed recommendation at a later date.
 - Return with recommendations and a rationale for consideration by the council.
 - Make a recommendation to pastor or staff, advise the council of the most relevant facts, rationale, and be prepared to respond to questions when it comes up on the agenda.
- **Is the issue important enough to be presented to the entire parish community for their comment or prayerful consideration?**
 - Some issues are so important that all the members of the parish should have direct input (e.g. strategic plans, changing Mass schedule or merging services with a nearby parish). Effective councils do not settle critically important issues facing the parish without soliciting the views and needs of all interested parishioners. The council needs to decide the best method for doing this – survey, focus group, one-on-one interviews, open listening sessions, parish synod, etc. Note the potential need for similar preparations, as stated above for committee work before submitting any matter for comment to the full parish.

12. MEETINGS - PRINCIPLES AND SKILLS

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

- **Facilitator** - to manage the agenda, initiate topics, invite participation, and keep the group on time
- **Agenda** - including both the *what* (goal and outcome) as well as the *how* (process and methods)
- **Record** – to keep the group memory during the meeting and publish a collection of decisions and assignments afterward
- **Equal Access to Information** – so everyone knows both what is being discussed, all the options and what resources are available to complete the task
- **Team Spirit** - trust, acceptance, clarity of purpose, belonging and a sense of adventure
- **Conducive Environment** – includes sufficient room, adequate lighting, comfortable temperature, and seating that insures for ease of listening and removal of distractions

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

The agenda for a meeting whose task is to discern parish mission or set goals will be structured differently than one dedicated to planning an event or discussing parish finances. Arrangements regarding the environment best suited for information sharing is different than that for a problem-solving session. Information meetings are set up conference style, focusing attention on the source of the information while planning and problem solving meetings have a tighter, circular and inclusive orientation of seating. It is the facilitator’s job to provide for necessary supplies (e.g. newsprint pad, pens, name plates, as well as handouts and minutes from the previous meeting).

It is generally the work of an executive committee to assist the pastor in setting the agenda, anticipate any issues that might come up in a meeting and evaluate ongoing progress of the pastoral council. The pastoral council chairperson and the secretary are responsible for sending out meeting reports along with the proposed agenda. The

chairperson often facilitates the meeting, while the secretary facilitates reports and records meeting outcomes.

Good meeting agendas often include time for:

- prayer and reflection
- acceptance of the previous meeting minutes
- introduction to the agenda (content and process)
- occasional team building or enrichment activities
- plans, decisions or study
- consideration of updates or reports from strategic planning, projects and committee work
- evaluation of the meeting and listing of unfinished business

Depending on the operational approach adopted (planning, coordinating or project managing), it is advisable to strike a balance between learning and doing, between planning for the future and attending to present needs, between prayer and business.

Additional Tips:

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

Meeting Report:

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

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

Listening Well:

Pastoral planning involves envisioning, investigating and deliberating on important and sometimes emotionally charged matters that affect the entire parish. But in the end,

for better or worse, parishioners are all in it together. Respectful listening keeps the team together even through difficult deliberations. It is the role of the meeting facilitator to insure that everyone listens with respect. If one expects a meeting to be contentious, it can helpful to review rules for good listening at the outset.

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

What happens when...

... someone gets long-winded?

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

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

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

... two or more people start debating a topic unnecessarily?

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

... someone often seeks to speak first?

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

(OR) "[Name] thank you for your willingness to get us talking, but this time why don't you help me to invite a quieter member of the group, who haven't we

heard from lately?" (getting the talker to recognize and invite others to talk can often send the message that we are all responsible for starting us off

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

Facilitator Response: *Thank you [name] for the confidence that you show by sharing so openly. This is an important topic and it is worthy of strong views and feelings. It may warrant more of our time than we planned initially. I'd like to check in with others about it. Are there others who also feel strongly on this matter?"*

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

Facilitator Response: (Unless it is urgent, put this consideration of "procedures" on the agenda for the next council meeting. Allow councilors to express their views first.) After everyone else has had their chance to share their feeling on the matter say, *"I want to register my concern that everyone who serves on council deserves to feel secure here. These consultations are for the pastor's benefit and the pastor decides what gets reported to the parish at large. Loss of trust is one of the most destructive forces in any organization and breach of confidence is the surest way to lose trust. We all deserve to feel safe and speak freely. If there is something misunderstood or a disagreement, people can come to those directly involved to ask questions, or share their concerns. Trust requires that confidence is maintained so that we are not being misconstrued or mischaracterized – especially outside this meeting. Meeting reports are available to parishioners and meetings remain open to parishioners unless the pastor requests an executive session. For these reasons can we all agree that all particular views expressed here are for the use of the pastor, and that they stay with those who are present at the meeting, unless and until we all explicitly agree otherwise. Are there any questions? Are we all in agreement?"* (Obtain explicit agreement to this from everyone on council - those present as well as those absent).

13. MEETING PREPARATION TIMELINE

The preparation instructions listed below are directed by the pastor in collaboration with an executive committee of the parish pastoral council.

At end of each meeting

1. confirm date, time and location of next meeting
2. ask for a volunteer to lead prayer/sharing (if it is a rotated responsibility)
3. advise all councilors of deadline for reports (in writing) two weeks prior to the next meeting

Within one week immediately following each meeting

1. pastor meets with executive committee to review minutes, and name tasks needed for completion before the next meeting
2. create draft agenda (e.g. follow next step in strategic planning process)
3. communicate with prayer/sharing leader to verify details
4. send out meeting minutes along with draft agenda and task assignments

Two weeks prior to meeting

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

Ten days prior to meeting

1. meet to confirm arrangements for any materials, seating arrangements and space requirements
2. send out any written committee reports

Three days prior to meeting - communicate with all council members by email with a reminder for the meeting and attach a copy of agenda along with any additional documents necessary.

14. SAMPLE MEETING FORMAT

(Approximate Time: 1 ½ hours)

Prayer and Formation (20-30 minutes)

Prayer can include song, scripture, reflection time, or faith-sharing. Formation can include study of a timely or perennial issues related to parish vitality, evangelization, strategic-thinking, effective council function, a recent document of church teaching, etc.

Purpose of Meeting (5 minutes)

Brief statement on the meeting objectives made by the chairperson for the meeting. Agenda and minutes of last meeting were already received in advance. Offer a minute for any procedural questions.

Planning and Visioning (30-45 minutes)

Consider a process for strategic planning provided by Dennis Mahaney, 716-847-8393 dmahaney@buffalodiocese.org at the Office for Evangelization and Parish Life, Diocese of Buffalo.

Voice of the Parish (10 minutes)

Comments from visitors or reading of any views from the suggestion/comment box. In almost all cases these questions or concerns are first previewed by the council leadership and referred to the pastor, staff person, council committee or parish ministry for consideration and/or response.

Ongoing Parish Life (0-30 minutes)

Discussion of an issue raised by the pastor for dialogue, reaction or feedback
Reports from ad hoc committees related to items presently under consideration
Decisions on issues brought forward by pastor or approved for agenda by the executive committee (pastor, chairperson, trustee, secretary)

15. Schedule of Meetings and Activities

(This represents a typical 3 month span with the premise that the most effective and efficient frequency of meetings is bi-monthly which allows committees and other parish groupings to meet without conflict on the alternate months)

MONTH 1	ACTION	PURPOSE
1 st	Pastors speaks with council chairperson	Verify direction and progress of the council, set meeting options for an exec. committee meeting
3 rd	Chairperson arranges a meeting of the executive committee	Initiate council meeting preparations and sketch out a council meeting agenda
8 th	Executive Committee Meets (typically pastor, chairperson, secretary and trustee)	Consider proposed agenda for next council meeting
10 th	Secretary distributions meeting reminder along with any necessary documentation	Include all necessary background information – presupposes a bi-monthly meeting schedule
20 th	Council Meets	See meeting format in operation manual
24 th	Secretary distributes a meeting report	Generate a general report on issues considered and accomplishments of the meeting
MONTH 2		
26 th of first month – 1 st	Committee chairs arrange for committee meetings	Presumes a regular meeting schedule with alternative options as suggested in manual
1 st – 10 th	Committees Meets	Consider the role of committees in strategic planning process along with possible implications of plan for various aspects of parish life
14 th	Committee chairpersons send a committee report to the council secretary	This enables secretary to collect council input as well as possible future agenda items along with proposals and expert recommendations
MONTH 3		
1 st	Pastor speaks with the council chairperson	Review committee reports, assess planning progress and evaluate meeting process
3 rd	Council chairperson arranges a meeting of the executive committee	Review committee reports and meeting process evaluation, then propose agenda items for next meeting
8 th	Executive Committee Meets	Consider proposed agenda for next council meeting
10 th	Secretary distributes the building reminder	Include committee reports and any necessary background along with meeting agenda
20 th	Council Meets	See meeting format later in manual
24 th	Secretary distributes a council meeting report	Generate a meeting report (not minutes) for council members as a reminder of assigned tasks

16. MEETING EVALUATION

Excellent - Poor

PRE-MEETING

Meeting schedule is well-publicized 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

Agenda with supportive materials is provided well
in advance of next meeting 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

Planners have sufficient support from pastor in order to
conduct the meeting 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

MEETING

Meeting space is clear and organized 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

Welcome is warm and refreshments are ample 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

Meeting facilitators are competent and confident 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

Gathering demonstrated appreciation for the talents of
all members 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

Participation is encouraged and demonstrated by all in
attendance 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

Sufficient information and time is provided for discussion 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

People leave meeting with a sense of satisfaction and achievement 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

The meeting was as formational as it was informational 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

POST-MEETING

Meeting report is distributed within ten days of meeting 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

Meeting report is complete, accurate and instructive 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

Delegated responsibilities are completed by those assigned 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

Attendees have accurate contact information for everyone as needed 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

17. SAMPLE MEETING PRAYER

A Prayer for the Church

Call to Prayer

Leader: Your Word, O God, is power and truth.

All: We have seen it with our own eyes and stand in awe.

Leader: You have chosen the weak to lift up the strong.

All: And have called the foolish to confound the wise.

Leader: We have seen your glory made manifest in the little ones of the earth,

All: And radiant in the eyes of the poor.

God's Word: Acts 4:32-35

Reflection: This passage is emblematic of the church at its best. And yet, lest we become too self-critical, it may be fitting to note that it is not too many verses later in this account of the early church that its members were squabbling rather uncharitably over what we might now consider self-evident. So we are not always at our best, and if we were, we would scarcely see the need for a redeemer. Interestingly in some sense, it took centuries for the church to get back to any systematic deliberation at the conciliar level of the meaning of being church. In the early 1960's, the church fathers spent considerable time contemplating this passage and its meaning in preparation for the Second Vatican Council. There was even more intense reflection upon such seminal passages from the Acts of the Apostles, in the deliberations that led up to the writing of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – *Lumen Gentium*. This document revealed in the many images of church which elaborate upon the various aspects of the *Light* that we are called to be for *the world*. Leaders should continue to ponder the call to be the church at its best. What does that phrase mean to you today? Who are we as church when we are at our best? Perhaps two questions can assist us in breaking that open today:

Sharing (in pairs or small groups):

What do you hope could always be said about our church?

What do you hope will never, or never again be said?

Response:

Leader: You have called us to be church and we strive to be that faithfully.

Right: Yet still we find ourselves recalling only words and forgetting your Spirit;

Left: sometimes remembering laws and disregarding life;

Right: and we preside over mercy and dispense service,

Left: causing your church to become a place, rather than a people.

All: Help us turn things right side up again, beginning with our hearts.

Closing Prayer:

Leader: We give you thanks for all that you have worked within your church, for all the service rendered and people loved. We ask for strength and courage, to cling to you, and to stand for truth when all others would urge us to abandon you.

All: Through the intercession of Mary, and all the saints and martyrs whose faith surrounds us, we ask for the strength to share our faith with boldness, to welcome others to our side and seize your great commission, and the abundant life that has been won for us. Amen.

- Some prayer wording adapted from *More Than Words* by Schaffran and Kozak (Meyer Stone Books, 1988)

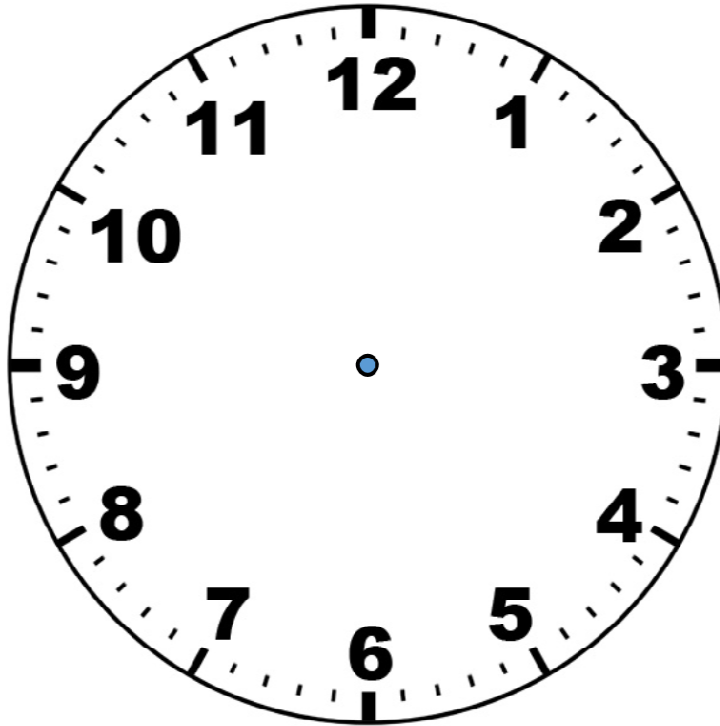
18. Reflection on Time in the Life of My Parish
(for use primarily in pastoral planning but also helpful in newcomer training)

Time in my parish...

Right now it is:

(Thinking about the state of the parish as time on the clock...

Put hands on the clock to suggest what time it is in the life of the parish. Then, complete the sentences below:)



Because of the time...

It is too soon for...

It is too late for...

It is just the right time for...

We need more time for ...

Thinking about what we face in this parish, I imagine that there is an alarm set for _____ and that is because...

More Resources and Support...

There are additional instructional materials, leadership resources, team-building activities, tools and detailed procedures for strategic planning, ideas for inter-parish cooperation, all available from Dennis Mahaney who can be contacted at dmahaney@buffalodiocese.org or call 716-847-8393.