

Norms and Structures

PURPOSE

A diocesan pastoral council carefully investigates, prayerfully considers and consensually recommends action to the Bishop regarding pastoral concerns facing the Diocese. (Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops 27) At the heart of this service is a confidence in the inspiration, wisdom and creativity that the Holy Spirit grants to God's People. The Bishop's pastoral council also serves as a liaison between the Bishop and the vicariates of the Diocese. This assembly operates in accordance with relevant articles of Church Teaching and Canon Law (cc. 511-514). This confidential forum is invaluable to the Bishop in discerning how to best promote the Gospel in light of the pastoral needs of the day.

Council Year – The council year starts in September 1st and ends the following August 31st.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is restricted to Christians who are in full communion with the Catholic Church, who are firm in faith, possessing good morals and prudent judgment. The council membership consists primarily of vicariate representatives and ex-officio representatives from the priests, religious and deacons of the Diocese. It is customary to have two representatives from each vicariate to insure adequate regional representation on the council. The Bishop may, at his discretion, appoint additional members-at-large to insure adequate representation of various other groups of significance within the Diocese (e.g. ethnic groups) as well as the various Catholic Rites.

Types of Representation and Terms of Service

The Bishop makes all appointments to the council – ex-officio, vicariate representative and member-at-large.

Ex-officio members serve at the discretion of the Bishop.

Vicariate representatives – are nominated by each vicar. They serve for a maximum of eight years. Vicariate representatives serve for four years in their first term. If a vicariate representative is appointed for a second term, that term of service will be renewed annually for a maximum of four additional years.

One fourth of all vicariate representatives serving in a second term will be replaced at the end of their fifth, sixth, seventh or eighth years to achieve broad local participation. Decisions about such replacements are recommended to the Bishop by the executive committee taking into consideration continuity of representation for each of four regions of the Diocese – metro, north, east, and south.

A vicariate representative can be appointed as a member-at-large at the discretion of the Bishop's office. At such time, their eligibility for participation is determined by rules for at-large membership.

Members-at-large are selected and appointed by the Bishop's Office. Members-at-large serve on the council for a renewable three year term at the discretion of the Bishop. In case a member-at-large is appointed to represent a vicariate their eligibility for service is determined by rules for vicariate representation.

Vacancy, Leave of Absence and Forfeiture – Vacancies will be filled by the Bishop's Office. Members forfeit their seat after two unexcused absences within 12 months. Absence is excused when written notice is received and acknowledged by the secretary of the executive committee. A temporary leave of absence can be granted to any member who makes such request of the Bishop in writing.

When the Bishop's Office becomes vacant the council ceases until such time as it is either reauthorized or reconstituted by a new Bishop.

COMMITTEES

Executive Committee – is a standing committee of the diocesan pastoral council. This committee cooperates with the Bishop's Office to insure the effective operation of the council. This operation involves clarity of purpose, timely communication, organizational collaboration, adequate preparation and meeting facilitation.

Eligibility for participation on the executive committee is open to vicariate representatives or members-at-large from the council. The term of service for executive committee members is two years. This term of service can be renewed as long as eligibility for membership on the council is not abrogated.

The Executive Committee is responsible for the following:

- cooperate with the Bishop's Office to oversee the overall direction for the council
- prepare an agenda for council meetings in collaboration with the Bishop's Office
- provide leadership for each meeting
- insure timely distribution of meeting minutes along with vicariate and committee reports
- maintain an adequate set of policies and procedures for effective council function
- oversee the development, organization and function of ad hoc committees
- insure for continuity in council membership
- equip council members for strategic planning
- conduct a mid-year meeting evaluation

The committee will be appointed by the Bishop's Office. The committee will include the following officers:

- chairperson who is responsible to guide the committee in partnership with the Office of the Bishop
- secretary who assists the Bishop in maintaining records, and producing the minutes of meetings
- co-chairperson to serve in the absence of the chairperson
- ad hoc committee liaison who can also assist with meeting facilitation

Ad Hoc Committees - The Executive Committee will establish such ad hoc committees as are needed to advance the Bishop's strategic priorities in the Diocese. These ad hoc committees will be established at the start of every council year. Such committees may include:

- Strategic Planning –to coordinate council involvement in diocesan pastoral planning and parish vitality initiatives
- Evangelization - to promote a Catholic understanding of evangelization and promote effective parish-based programs and strategies
- Parish-School Collaboration – to share best practices in collaborative leadership, structures and strategies
- Faith Formation – to study program models, family support resources, age appropriate learning strategies
- Communication and Technology - to promote best practices in web development, social networking and media technologies

Ad hoc committees will establish their own leadership (chairperson and secretary). Ad hoc committee meetings can be held face to face or via such technologies as conference call or internet chat. Each committee will conduct research in collaboration with relevant diocesan committees, commissions, agencies or offices. Committees can propose items for council to consider at meetings as well as topics for council formation. At the end of the year, each ad hoc committee will report to the Bishop on their activities and recommend to the Bishop the continuation, change or termination of that committee.

Committee participation is voluntary. Eligibility for council membership always takes precedence over eligibility for committee membership.

OPERATION

Meetings – The council meets in plenary session at least four times a year. These meetings include council formation, planning, consideration of vicariate affairs and particular diocesan priorities. Because the purpose of the council is consultative the requirement of a quorum is achieved with a simple majority (fifty-one percent) of membership in attendance.

A written report of proceedings from each plenary meeting will be distributed to members within two weeks of that meeting. Vicariate and committee reports are due fifteen days prior to every plenary meeting. This allows the executive committee sufficient time to review reports, plan the next meeting agenda and send out an accurate meeting notice with reports in advance.

The executive committee will meet prior to each plenary session to set the meeting agenda and assign leadership roles.

In addition to required meetings, the Bishop may host an annual social with a Mass for the vicars, members of the council and their families.

Ad hoc committees establish their own meeting arrangements to accommodate the reporting schedule of the executive committee.

Resolutions - While it is not a legislative body, the council does on occasion deliberate on a matter. On rare occasion, it may be appropriate for the council to adopt a resolution. Resolutions can be acted upon at a plenary session once it is first proposed and deliberated upon at a plenary meeting. Such resolutions must be submitted to the Executive Committee in writing to insure proper advance notification to council members.

Confidentiality - Because the diocesan pastoral council is a consultative group to the Bishop, publication of any proceedings or deliberations is reserved to the Office of the Bishop. By the same token, one of the functions of the diocesan pastoral council is to communicate diocesan priorities and resources in the vicariates. For that reason discretion is encouraged regarding disclosing particular comments made during meetings. The Bishop will advise the council on those matters which must be kept confidential.

CHANGES AND ADDITIONS

These norms and structures can be amended by the Executive Committee after consultation with the Bishop's Office and after providing timely, written notification to council members. Council members can propose changes and additions in writing either to the chairperson or the Bishop's Office.

Appendix

1. Executive Committee - Position Description
2. Vicariate Representative - Position Description
3. At-Large Representative - Position Description
4. Meeting Format
5. Mid-Term Evaluation
6. Diocesan Map – Member Locations

**Executive Committee
Role Description**

A diocesan pastoral council is an expression of the collegial quality of the People of God as described in documents of the Second Vatican Council (Christus Dominus 27). The executive committee collaborates with the Bishop's Office to insure the effective operation of the council. This operation involves clarity of purpose, timely communication, organizational collaboration, adequate preparation and meeting facilitation.

Qualifications

In addition to the qualifications needed for effective participation on the council, the executive committee functions best when members share skills in: planning, meeting facilitation, negotiation, organization and communication.

Responsibilities

In addition to the responsibilities of the council, the executive committee will be responsible to:

- cooperate with the Bishop's Office to oversee the overall direction for the council
- prepare an agenda for council meetings in collaboration with the Bishop's Office
- provide leadership for each meeting
- insure timely distribution of meeting minutes along with vicariate and committee reports
- maintain an adequate set policies and procedures for effective council function
- oversee the development, organization and function of standing committees
- insure for continuity in council membership
- equip council members for strategic planning
- conduct a mid-year meeting evaluation

Committee Membership and Roles

The committee will be constituted by approximately at least three members. One member of the committee will serve as committee chairperson, responsible to guide the committee in partnership with the Office of the Bishop. Another member will be responsible for record keeping and correspondence. A third member will serve as an alternate chairperson to assist with meeting facilitation and liaison to ad hoc committees.

Accountability and Support

The Bishop oversees the work of the executive committee. The Office of Parish Life provides practical support.

Commitment

A renewable two year term of service with a four year limit.

Vicariate Representative - Position Description

The pastoral council is a body of laity and clergy of the Diocese with whom the Bishop consults regarding pastoral concerns. 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 the pastoral council to coordinate activities. The council carefully investigates, prayerfully considers and consensually recommends action to the Bishop regarding the pastoral concerns facing the Diocese (e.g. strategic plans and particular diocesan initiatives). This council also serves as a liaison between the vicariates and the Bishop's Office.

Qualifications

- a person of prayer in full communion with the Church and active in one's parish and vicariate
- confidence in God's presence and leading of the Church
- tolerance of differing views
- ability to listen carefully to others
- willingness to participate fully and honestly
- ability to think strategically about the future needs of the Church in Western New York
- prudence and the ability to maintain confidentiality

Responsibilities

- attend quarterly meetings of the Diocesan Pastoral Council each year
- regularly attend vicariate meetings
- submit a one page report of vicariate affairs to the Bishop's office at least two weeks prior to each meeting of the diocesan pastoral council
- assist the Episcopal Vicar in encouraging vicariate communication and cooperation
- contribute to the success of diocesan initiatives and planning as directed by the Bishop
- 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 Diocese

Accountability

The Bishop presides over the council and meetings are facilitated by a designated chairperson

Commitment

Renewable, three-year term of service. Diocesan Pastoral Council meetings are held quarterly on Saturday mornings. Vicariate meetings are scheduled by the Episcopal Vicar.

Benefits

- a stake in the future of the Diocesan Church
- relationships with other committed Catholic leaders across Western New York
- satisfaction from assisting the Church realize a vibrant future in this community
- development of various leadership skills
- contribution to strong vicariate leadership
- use of personal gifts for the good of the Church

At Large Representative - Position Description

The pastoral council is a body of laity and clergy of the Diocese with whom the Bishop consults regarding pastoral concerns. 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 the pastoral council to coordinate activities. The council carefully investigates, prayerfully considers and consensually recommends action to the Bishop regarding the pastoral concerns facing the Diocese (e.g. strategic plans and particular diocesan initiatives). This council also serves as a liaison between the vicariates, various cultural, ministerial and generational interest groups and the Bishop's Office.

Qualifications

- a person of prayer in full communion with the Church
- active in one's parish and the relevant organized activities of their interest group
- confidence in God's presence and leading of the Church
- tolerance of differing views and ability to listen carefully to others
- willingness to participate fully and honestly
- ability to think strategically about the future needs of the Church in Western New York
- prudence and the ability to maintain confidentiality

Responsibilities

- attend quarterly meetings of the Diocesan Pastoral Council each year
- regularly attend meetings and activities associated with the group which they represent
- submit a one page report of any significant events to the Bishop's office at least two weeks prior to each meeting of the diocesan pastoral council
- encourage communication and cooperation between the diocese and the group which they represent
- contribute to the success of diocesan initiatives and planning as directed by the Bishop
- 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 Diocese

Accountability

The Bishop presides over the council and meetings are facilitated by a designated chairperson

Commitment

Renewable, three-year term of service. Diocesan Pastoral Council meetings are held quarterly on Saturday mornings.

Benefits

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

DPC - Appendix 4
Diocesan Pastoral Council
Meeting Format
(Approximate Time: 2 hours)

Prayer (10 minutes)

A volunteer will be asked to plan and lead prayer at each meeting.

Overview (5 – 10 minutes)

The chairperson will make a brief statement regarding meeting outcomes, explain the process, and propose the minutes of last meeting for approval. This is also a time to address any necessary procedural questions.

Formation or Pastoral Planning (45 – 60 minutes)

This time can be used for study on a timely issue (e.g. evangelization, parish and vicariate vitality, planning, or effective consultation). This time can also be used for consideration of a synodal study, diocesan-wide initiative, or planning time for long-range diocesan priorities. Information for this work will be provided in advance by the Bishop's office.

BREAK (10 minutes)

Open Conversation with the Bishop and Consideration of Vicariate Affairs (30 - 40 minutes)

All reports are to be submitted two weeks in advance to the Bishop's office and distributed prior to a meeting. Time during the meeting is allotted to discussion of particular items of common interest (e.g. cooperative event planning). Due to time constraints, council members will be asked to read the reports prior to the meeting be prepared to clarify or answer any questions regarding the report.

Bishop Remarks (10-20 minutes)

The Bishop will have an opportunity at this time to advise the council regarding ongoing issues facing the Diocese. Some of this time may also be useful in vicariate or committee work as it is determined appropriate by the Bishop in consultation with the executive committee.

DPC - Appendix 5

Diocesan Pastoral Council

Diocese of Buffalo

Mid-Term Evaluation

| | EXCELLENT | POOR |
|---|-------------------|------|
| PRE-MEETING | | |
| Agenda prepared | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| Agenda and supporting materials provided well in advance of meeting | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| Meeting planners have sufficient diocesan support to plan and execute meeting | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| MEETING | | |
| Meeting space clear and organized | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| Welcome and hospitality | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| Meeting facilitators competent and confident to lead meeting | 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 discussions and decisions | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| People leave meeting with a sense of satisfaction and achievement | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| POST-MEETING | | |
| Minutes are complete, accurate and instructive | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| Minutes are distributed within ten days after meeting | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| Delegated responsibilities are completed by those assigned | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| Attendees have accurate contact information for one another | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| OTHER | | |
| _____ | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |
| _____ | 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 | |