

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Service on parish pastoral councils is a most serious responsibility. It is also a marvelous opportunity. It presents to the follower of Christ the unique possibility of being an instrument for the sanctification and salvation of souls. To be such an instrument, however, is not automatic. It requires that the pastor and his council share a common focus. Here is that focus. How can we cooperate with Christ in building up the faith of this parish community so that every single person, man, woman and child, is more open to the Person and the message of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

PRAYER

To be faithful to this task requires, above everything else, that the pastor and his council be men and women of prayer. I am not speaking of that perfunctory prayer which sometimes can accompany our various meetings. The pastor and the members of his council should make prayer for their deliberations a part of their daily life. At Mass, at Holy Communion time, in personal visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and in special times of prayer for the parish council, the help of Christ should be sought so that all will take their responsibility seriously, and so that His guidance and His will remain paramount.

DISCERNMENT

Distractions can easily draw Church leaders away from their proper goal. Such pulls are often subtle and even unconscious. For example, popularity can become our main purpose. We may tend to see the parish council as a secular or civil body, which it is not. True discernment helps us to resist such distraction. What will help us to stay on the proper road, in addition to intense prayer, will be the effort to keep before the council a common goal. The goal is always this: The building up of the Body of Christ, or that segment of it which is our particular parish. Prayer helps council members to see that it is the dynamic activity of Christ which is critical, and the closer we remain to Him, the more likely we are to give sound advice to the pastor.

Each council member and each priest should hope that, when a council term is over, there have been initiatives which have brought the parish closer to one another and, above all, closer to Christ. If this is kept constantly before us, and it is the pastor's first responsibility to highlight this goal, then the parish council for your particular parish will be an instrument of God's grace. Let us all pray constantly that this will happen in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

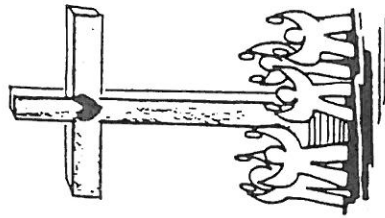
These parish council guidelines have undergone a period of consultation of over two years. They are now finalized and I hereby promulgate them to be effective on the First Sunday of Lent, February 12, 1989. I place them in the hands of Our Lady, Mother of the Church, asking her prayers for all our parishes and for all who bear the serious responsibility of advising their pastors.

Sincerely yours in our Lord,

John M. Dikny

Most Reverend John M. D'Arcy

Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils



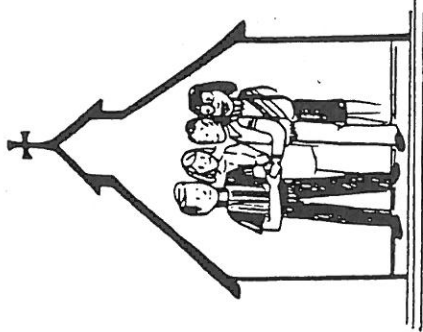
The Parish

A parish is a definite community of the faithful. Its members are called to communion with the most Holy Trinity and with one another. The parish is established on a stable basis within a diocese by the diocesan bishop. The pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its very own shepherd. He is called to care for the parish after the manner of Christ the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the flock. The pastor works and acts in communion with and under the authority of the bishop who has appointed him.



The Pastor

The pastor should be seen as sent by Christ through the bishop to shepherd the flock in the name of Christ. In the words of Pope John Paul II, he is "not chosen by the community, but is a gift of Christ to the community." In order to teach, lead and sanctify and be a true father of the parish family, all part of his divinely-given vocation, he needs the advice, counsel and help of dedicated, wise and balanced advisors.



Parish Councils

As of the first Sunday in Lent, February 12, 1989, every parish must have a parish pastoral council in place according to these guidelines to give advice and counsel to the pastor.

The title in each parish will be similar to the following: "St. Mary's Pastoral Council".

It must be clearly understood in each parish (Canon 536) that the parish council is consultative and advisory to the pastor.

The primary goal of the pastoral council is to help every member of the parish to grow to the fullness of his or her Christian vocation.

The parish council is separate from the parish finance committee, which has a distinctive agenda concerned with temporalities and administration.

The purpose of the pastoral council is not to legislate, but to counsel and advise the pastor in the area of pastoral activities, to help the pastor identify pastoral needs in the parish, to assist him in planning pastoral programs and the improvement of pastoral services. The fundamental question always before the pastoral council then is: How can all members of this parish be brought closer to Christ?

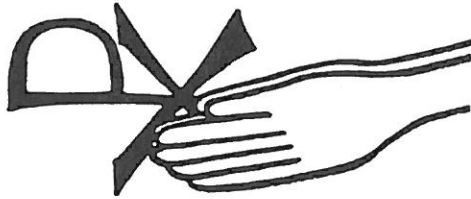
The following is a list based on the responsibilities of the pastor as outlined in Canon Law (Canons 528-529) upon which the pastoral council should reflect, research and advise the pastor.

1. What should be done to promote spiritual development of the entire parish?
2. What should be done to improve instruction in the faith and in catechetical formation for everyone?
3. How can we reach out to those who have fallen away

from the practice of their faith?

4. How can Catholic education of children and young adults be strengthened and improved?
5. What can be done to strengthen our ecumenical ties with members of other faiths?
6. What efforts should we promote for further evangelization, especially to reach the unchurched?
7. How can true interior and exterior participation in the Sacred Liturgy, especially the Sunday Eucharist, be improved?
8. How can we promote use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
9. What can be done to enhance programs of preparation for the Sacraments?
10. What should be done to promote gospel values in daily life, including issues of social justice?
11. How can we promote respect for human life from the moment of conception?
12. What can be done to foster vocations to the priesthood and to religious life?
13. How can we promote devotion to the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament?
14. What can be done to strengthen family life?
15. How can the prayer life in the parish, both private and public, be strengthened?
16. What can be done to welcome newcomers to the parish?
17. What efforts can be initiated or strengthened for home visiting and the building of community?
18. What is the situation concerning the spiritual and corporal works of mercy in the parish, especially the visiting of those who are ill, elderly or dying? How can these efforts be improved so that more people are involved in these works which are so close to the heart of Christ?

19. What is being done within the parish for the afflicted, the lonely and those who are poor? What efforts now exist and what improvements should be made?
20. How can Catholic family life be strengthened?
21. What can be done to help the lay person understand his or her vocation in the Church and in the world?
22. What should be done in this parish to strengthen our relationship with the bishop, with ongoing diocesan pastoral efforts, and with the Holy Father and the world-wide church?



Procedures

The above areas must constitute the focus of the pastoral council in each parish. Procedures should be kept as simple as possible. The reason for this is so that the pastor and his advisory council get right to the pastoral tasks and become immediately involved in the mission Christ is giving to the parish.

The pastor is not a member of the parish council, but receives advice from the council. This is typical of the structure of an ecclesial advisory body. The pastor is the "primary selector" of the items for the agenda, but the members are free to recommend agenda items to the pastor.

The work of the council should be determined by the pastor to whom the body is advisory. The ability to listen, both pastor to council and council to pastor is essential to the work of the pastoral council.

Finally, when there is no pastor, there is no council in the parish. When the parish loses the pastor (through death, retirement, transfer, etc.), the pastoral council ceases to exist until the new pastor reconvenes the council. The new pastor may reconvene the previous council or may choose to establish a new one. At any rate, he should establish a pastoral council within six months of the date of his appointment.