



**Interim Parish Pastoral
Council Guidelines
Diocese of Pittsburgh**

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Dear Friends in Christ,

More than 40 years ago the Second Vatican Council called upon all the baptized-clergy, religious and laity-to exercise their distinct but complementary roles in building up the body of Christ. We continue to develop new understandings of how such effective collaboration can take place in the Church, affirming that “there are many gifts but the same Spirit.” One important model of collaboration has been the consultative body typically referred to as the “parish council.”

Over the past 20 years, the majority of parishes throughout the Diocese of Pittsburgh have had a parish council, which in many cases served as a body that coordinated all the many ministries and activities of the parish. In recent years, however, parish councils have begun to evolve from groups that coordinate ministries and activities into Parish Pastoral Councils-planning bodies that lead the parish in articulating its mission and developing a pastoral plan for carrying it out. The Nineteenth Diocesan Synod in 2000 called for the establishment of a Parish Pastoral Council in every parish in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

To assist our parishes in making the transformation from parish councils to Parish Pastoral Councils, with the above-mentioned shift in emphasis, the Diocese of Pittsburgh has developed these Interim Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines. These guidelines will provide direction to pastors and Parish Pastoral Council members in understanding their respective roles and, most importantly, in forming Parish Pastoral Councils that help to provide effective leadership in our communities of faith.

These guidelines become effective on May 1, 2007, the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker, and will remain in effect for twenty-four months from this date of promulgation. During that time, all parishes are to implement a vibrant Parish Pastoral Council, as defined in these guidelines. In October 2008, eighteen months into this process, the diocese will consult with parishes as part of a formal evaluation of these interim guidelines to determine what, if any, changes are required in light of the actual experience of parishes in implementing the guidelines. During this period of implementation and evaluation, the diocese stands ready to assist parishes in transitioning from the parish council model to that of a vibrant Parish Pastoral Council; in providing ongoing education to councils where that transition has already begun; and in offering continuing formation to those with well established Parish Pastoral Councils.

With gratitude to the committee that worked so diligently to help develop these guidelines, and in solidarity with all the faithful of this diocese as we continue to “wait in joyful hope” for the appointment of our next bishop, I am,

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads “+ Paul J. Bradley”. The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley, D.D., M.S.W.
Diocesan Administrator
Auxiliary Bishop

March 26, 2007

Feast of the Annunciation (Observed)

Introduction

The experiences of Parish Pastoral Councils vary greatly. Some report a general satisfaction with the way in which all involved have taken up the task. Others report a lack of understanding as to the purpose of these bodies. Others note an abundance of good will but cite eventual frustration due to competing interests and lack of a common vision. Still others report that the meetings of this body are tiresome because they consist of repetitious reports and little meaningful interaction.

This present document addresses both the concerns about and the hopes for Parish Pastoral Councils. It is intended to assist pastors and parishioners who are seeking practical assistance in the formation of Parish Pastoral Councils that truly respond to the needs of the parish. (“Pastor” is used throughout this document to indicate the duly appointed leader of a parish. Thus, this title is meant to include administrators, moderators, and parish life collaborators.) These guidelines are also intended as a help to those who are seeking to re-focus an existing council.

The existence of a Parish Pastoral Council is mandatory in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. These Guidelines cite several elements of Parish Pastoral Councils (for example, membership, size, meetings, etc.). These elements must be considered by each parish. Given the differences among parishes in this diocese, the specific ways in which they are addressed will vary. Each parish, however, must clearly address these elements within the operative norms that are adopted. These norms are to be published and available to the parishioners.

As each parish implements these guidelines, it is expected that the pastor will be prepared to share the reasoning that led to the establishment of the specific norms governing the Parish Pastoral Council of the parish where he is pastor.

It is hoped that these pages will prove helpful to pastors and members of Parish Pastoral Councils. They are provided in view of the importance the Church places upon effective collaboration within the parish. They are written in confidence that they will be utilized to build up the Body of Christ in each parish in this diocese.



The Second Vatican Council clearly stated that the important role of all the members of the Church is rooted in the Sacrament of Baptism (see Article 3 of the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*). The Council went on to say that the Lord Jesus shared His mission with every member of the Mystical Body (Article 2, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*). Finally, the Council reminds priests that they are “to be sincere in their appreciation and promotion of the lay people’s dignity and of the special role that they play in the Church’s mission.” Priests are also told that “They should be willing to listen to lay people ... and recognize their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity” (Article 9, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*).

Context

☒ *The Second Vatican Council clearly stated that the important role of all the members of the Church is rooted in the Sacrament of Baptism.*

Since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, the Church has attempted to implement that vision. One way of doing so takes place at the parish

level. Thus, several modes of parish consultation emerged. Initially, “parish councils” were established as a means of giving parishioners a voice in the life of their parish. In the decades that followed, the experience of parish councils varied widely. With the promulgation of the *Code of Canon Law* in 1983, the Church gave a more definitive direction to these bodies:

“After the diocesan bishop has listened to the presbyteral council and if he judges it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish; the pastor presides over it, and through it the Christian faithful and those who share in the pastoral care of the parish in virtue of their office give their help in fostering pastoral activity” (Canon 536).

In addition, the statutes of the Nineteen Diocesan Synod reaffirmed previous legislation that “A Parish Pastoral Council shall be established in each parish of the Diocese in accord with the norms and policies issued by the Diocesan Bishop” (Statute 17, Nineteenth Diocesan Synod, June 11, 2000).

Therefore, the existence of a Parish Pastoral Council in each parish is a norm of law for this Diocese. The specific structure and function of that Parish Pastoral Council will depend on various factors unique to each parish. However, there are common elements of a Parish Pastoral Council that must be addressed in each parish. These common elements are described in the following pages.



Purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council

✠ *The concern of each member and of the Parish Pastoral Council as a whole is the welfare of the entire parish.*

The Parish Pastoral Council’s purpose is stated in Canon 536 (of the *Code of Canon Law*) as assisting in “fostering pastoral activity” within the parish. Therefore, the fundamental activity of the Parish Pastoral Council is rooted in an individual and corporate response to the activity of the Good Shepherd. The concern of each member and of the Parish Pastoral Council as a whole is the welfare of the entire parish. This is especially true in regard to community, worship and prayer, service, education, and leadership/administration.

The *Lay Ministries Handbook for Parishes and Institutions* was originally promulgated by Bishop Donald W. Wuerl on December 8, 1994 and revised in 2000. Therein is found the following description of the work of the members of Parish Pastoral Councils.

1. Actively seek information from the pastor, parish staff, and the parish at large regarding the pastoral needs of the parish community.
2. Assist in developing or reviewing the parish mission statement.
3. Advise the pastor in integrating the parish’s goals and priorities into an ongoing pastoral plan.
4. Recommend flexible strategies which support the parish’s goals and priorities.
5. Contribute to the evaluation of progress in achieving parish’s pastoral plan.

From these sources, one can see that the purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council is to assist the pastor and parish staff in fostering the pastoral life of the parish.

This differs greatly from earlier visions of “parish councils” which were often “activity” driven and functioned as a scheduling or coordinating body.

It is clear then that some former visions of “parish councils” have to be reformulated to take on a new function. See the Resources Section (R1) for a brief comparison of some common elements of both “parish councils” and the Parish Pastoral Council envisioned in these guidelines.

At the core of the identity of the Parish Pastoral Council are an ecclesiology and spirituality that embrace each one’s baptismal call and a sense of stewardship that challenges each person to use their gifts wisely and for others. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to be utilized by the entire Body of Christ. The Parish Pastoral Council differs from other organizations precisely because of this focus. It, like the Church itself, is mission oriented. The parish and its Parish Pastoral Council can never become a “club” turned in upon itself. The Resources Section (R2) provides a modern parable that illustrates this point.



While the *Code of Canon Law* directs the Parish Pastoral Council to be involved in “fostering pastoral activity,” the diocesan *Lay Ministries Handbook* cited previously focuses its work specifically on a “pastoral plan.”

Strategic Planning — The Pastoral Plan

The Parish Pastoral Council has a specific responsibility for the development of such a plan. It also has a unique vantage point from which that plan can be developed. Those who have utilized strategic planning and developed pastoral plans have found this process extremely helpful. It enables the members of the Parish Pastoral Council to candidly share their views in a way that not only brings problems or concerns to the surface but also commits the parish to a plan to address them.

The actual enterprise of developing such a plan has been found to be a very positive experience. Involving the entire parish and especially the Parish Pastoral Council can elicit a genuine and shared commitment to the future of the parish. The pastoral plan also serves to provide a direction for the work of the parish in a time when pastoral leadership may change.

☒ *Together with the pastor and parish staff, the Parish Pastoral Council is responsible to see to it that the pastoral plan is a living and working document and not merely words on paper.*

The role of the Parish Pastoral Council does not end with the development of the pastoral plan. Together with the pastor and parish staff, the Parish Pastoral Council is responsible to see to it that the pastoral plan is a living and working document and not merely words on paper.

The pastoral plan should be developed by means of a process often known as strategic planning. The Resources Section (R3) of this document provides a summary of the key elements of this process as well as examples of what such a plan might entail.



Leadership

The Biblical basis for leadership comes from the Lord who said: “I come not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45 and Matthew 20:28). This unique

Structural Elements of the Parish Pastoral Council

vision of leadership is best seen when the pastor serves the needs of all by welcoming the full use of the many gifts given in the faith community. The pastor should seldom if ever need to remind the community that he is the leader. This should be obvious from the way in which he exercises his ministry in liturgy and life.

So too, the parish community should see the members of the Parish Pastoral Council as leaders. But this is seen not because they hold power or make decisions, but rather because of their sense of service. The parish community should routinely see the members of the Parish Pastoral Council at worship and prayer. They should have an active part in some element of the parish's evangelization and outreach. Leadership must be seen as service, listening, and stewardship. There is no question that the members of the Parish Pastoral Council are parish leaders. How they lead is the challenge.

Consultation

The law and practice of the Church clearly envisions the Parish Pastoral Council as a consultative body. The ultimate responsibility for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the parish resides with the pastor.

However, the means by which the pastor seeks the advice of the Parish Pastoral Council can clearly demonstrate his respect for and need of the insights and advice of this body. The means by which the pastor invites candid discussion of key issues offers his vision of the importance of the role of the Parish Pastoral Council.

It is important to develop a sense of what is sufficiently important to bring before the Parish Pastoral Council. Routine matters are best decided at the level of pastor and pastoral staff. Some matters, however, require wide consultation. See the Resources Section (R8) for an elaboration of some of these areas.

☒ *The Parish Pastoral Council is a critical link in communication with the parish at large.*

Another function of consultation is providing information. The Parish Pastoral Council is a critical link in communication with the parish at large. Accurate and complete information regarding important issues of parish life should be given to the Parish Pastoral Council, which in turn will provide another means of disseminating accurate information throughout the parish.

Clarity

It is critically important that the role of the Parish Pastoral Council be clearly understood by each member as well as the entire parish. Each member of the Parish Pastoral Council must understand not only the role but also the qualities expected of members. They must also be aware of the elements of collaboration, discernment, consensus and stewardship which define the operation of the council.

Discernment

Decisions made within parishes are arrived at differently than those made elsewhere. Discernment is the word used to describe that unique process of decision-making. Discernment is a prayerful process involving the entire parish and especially the pastor, parish staff and Parish Pastoral Council.

Initially, the process involves a statement of the issues involved or the decision to be made. Discernment also involves careful consideration on the part

of all as to what gifts, talents and insights each brings to the discussion. Discernment also implies a vision that decisions made are to benefit the entire community and its welfare.

With a commitment to these aspects, members of the parish, the parish leadership and the members of the Parish Pastoral Council seek to respond to needs, answer questions and make recommendations within a process of clarity, reflection and prayer.

Membership

Within the *Lay Ministries Handbook for Parishes and Institutions* is found the following qualification for members of Parish Pastoral Councils. In the formation of a Parish Pastoral Council, these qualifications should be shared with the entire parish.

1. Fully initiated Catholics (having received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) who are registered and active in parish life, are in good standing with the Church and have reached the age of 18.
2. Persons with an understanding of and commitment to the Church as expressed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.
3. Committed to prayer, Gospel values and growth in personal holiness.
4. Knowledgeable about the life and teachings of Jesus, the mission of the Church and the distinctive characteristics of the parish, its ministries and its people.
5. Skilled in group process, interpersonal communication and collaboration.
6. Willing to participate in on-going faith formation.

In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, it is also necessary that all those considering membership on a Parish Pastoral Council understand that it is expected they will read, understand and sign the *Code of Pastoral Conduct*.

Members by Virtue of Office

Pastors (i.e., duly appointed parish leaders), as well as other clergy assigned to pastoral ministry within the parish (e.g., parochial vicar, deacon) must be considered members of the Parish Pastoral Council by virtue of their appointment.

Selection

While parish councils were formed by elections in the past, more common today is the formation of a Parish Pastoral Council by means of some process of discernment. This process might entail all or some of the following:

- Publication of the vacancies and the need for members for the Parish Pastoral Council together with a clear statement of the duties of members and the qualifications sought.
- Solicitation of names of those who feel qualified and willing to be considered for membership (those who submit their own names).
- Solicitation of additional names (submitted by parishioners, parish staff or current pastoral council members).
- Some process of administrative review by the pastor to insure that a sufficient spectrum of the parish is represented by the names submitted and that those persons are capable of exercising a role that is consultative, collaborative and includes the welfare of the entire parish.

☒ *While parish councils were formed by elections in the past, more common today is the formation of a Parish Pastoral Council by means of some process of discernment.*

Once a full list is compiled and reviewed, it can be submitted to the sitting Parish Pastoral Council for its advice and recommendation. That can be sought in various ways. A sample process of discernment and selection is provided in the Resources Section (R5).

Size of the Council

Experience has demonstrated that the size of the Parish Pastoral Council should not be so small as to not accurately reflect the entire parish community nor so large as to become unworkable. In general, councils should consist of between six (6) and fourteen (14) members (in addition to the members by virtue of office).

Length of Service

It is important to state clearly the length of service expected of Parish Pastoral Council members. In general the length of service should not be so short as to preclude genuine contributions nor so long as to prevent the natural process of Parish Pastoral Council rotation. The length of service suggested is four (4) years. Experience has shown that terms can be renewable depending on the needs of the given Parish Pastoral Council and the wishes of its members.

Formation of Pastoral Council Members

Provision should be made for orientation or “in-service” opportunities for new Parish Pastoral Council members. Experience has found that including new as well as sitting members assists in reaffirming the purpose and identity of the council. See the Resources section of this document for assistance in this area.

☒ *Periodic formation sessions for Pastoral Council members is highly recommended.*

Periodic formation sessions for Pastoral Council members is highly recommended. These opportunities do not treat the ordinary business of the council but rather focus on such matters as: communal prayer, deepening of the sense of purpose, or skills necessary for the effective operation of the Parish Pastoral Council.

Meetings

Meetings should take place in relationship to the work that is to be accomplished. Experience has shown that Parish Pastoral Councils that meet less than quarterly lack consistency and cohesion. Parish Pastoral Councils that meet too frequently risk being bogged down in minutiae and overworking their members.

It appears that somewhere between quarterly (four times a year) and bimonthly (six times a year) is helpful and consistent with the experience of many parishes.

Meetings should be scheduled as to reflect an entire cycle of planning and parish life. An agenda should be provided with meeting reminders sent a week before the scheduled date and time.

A recorder should be appointed to record the principal actions and recommendations of the Parish Pastoral Council (not every word and detail of the proceedings). The minutes of meetings should be made available to the parishioners in some convenient form.

The context of Parish Pastoral Council meetings varies. Some parishes have meetings open to parishioners (with the option for executive session if necessary); others have found it more conducive to council effectiveness and cohesion not to do so. Some parishes admit observers who are able to speak (and not vote) while in other parishes observers are admitted but are not able to speak or vote. What is critically important is that the operating norms of each Parish Pastoral Council clearly state the admission policy for its meetings.

Relationship of the Parish Pastoral Council to the Parish

The Parish Pastoral Council is to provide counsel to the pastor. In order to do so, each member must be an active part of the life of the parish. By involvement in worship and other aspects of parish life, members hear the concerns, hopes and vision of the parishioners. In this way they are able to provide informed advice. It is important that parishioners see the members of the Parish Pastoral Council as approachable, balanced and disposed toward the good of the parish.

Relationship of the Parish Pastoral Council to the Parish Staff

Experience has shown that members of the parish staff are not to be members of the Parish Pastoral Council either appointed or ex-officio. The effective work of Parish Pastoral Councils seems best served when the parish pastoral staff is seen as staff to the council. In this way their attendance at Parish Pastoral Council meetings will provide needed information and enable them to hear the advice of council. While the voice of the staff may be helpful, it is important the appointed members of the Parish Pastoral Council be able to independently formulate their unique advice to the pastor. It is presumed that the parish staff has ample opportunities to do so in a separate process.

Relationship of the Parish Pastoral Council to the Parish Finance Council

The vision of the universal law of the Church as well as these Guidelines is that the Parish Pastoral Council is the primary consultative body to the pastor in matters which touch the pastoral life of the entire parish. It is, however, not the only body which provides advice.

The Parish Finance Council has a unique role in the law of the Church in that it must be consulted by the pastor on those matters of import which pertain to the financial stewardship of the parish and the use of the contributions of the faithful. While the Parish Pastoral Council may be informed in a general way of the parish's financial status, it is important that it deal with pastoral life and that the Parish Finance Council deal with financial matters. This division of tasks would seem to preclude the "temporalities committees" of the former parish council model.

The unique role of the Parish Finance Council should be safeguarded and there is no need for duplication of such activities within the Parish Pastoral Council. At most, some occasional general reports regarding parish finances can be transmitted to the Parish Pastoral Council members for information. Detailed discussions of financial matters should not be taken up at Parish Pastoral Council, as that is the role of the Parish Finance Council.

☒ *While the Parish Pastoral Council may be informed in a general way of the parish's financial status, it is important that it deal with pastoral life and that the Parish Finance Council deal with financial matters.*

Relationship of the Parish Pastoral Council to the Diocese

It is important for the members of the Parish Pastoral Council to appreciate the role of the individual parish within the Diocese and the Church universal. The mission of the Diocese must be integrated into the mission of each parish. The vision and norms of the diocese must also be reflected in each parish and understood by each Parish Pastoral Council member. An adversarial or contentious spirit between a Parish Pastoral Council and the Diocese serves neither and does not reflect the best interests of the Body of Christ.

Other Relationships

In a similar way, additional advisory groups (such as those related to a parochial school, building projects, etc.) should clearly respect the competences of the Parish Pastoral Council and Finance Council as they provide advice to the pastor.

Council Leadership

The universal law of the Church envisions that the pastor presides at meetings of the full Parish Pastoral Council. Since the Parish Pastoral Council is his chief consultative body, it is unlikely that the full council would meet without the pastor. Since the pastor “presides” at the meetings of the council, many pastors chair the actual meetings. This has become more routine since Parish Pastoral Council meetings should not involve complex gatherings conducted according to Robert’s Rules of Order. Some pastors have found that chairing the meeting enables them to focus the discussion and enable as many members as possible to take part. It can also assist in the formation of a spirit of discernment and consensus and help to avoid partisanship on issues.

Other pastors have found that “presiding” does not necessarily imply chairing the meeting. If this is the case, a member of the Parish Pastoral Council may be chosen to chair meetings of the council (giving the title of facilitator may be appropriate).

In any case, the pastor clearly must be present at the meeting and is responsible for seeing that the meeting is conducted in a manner that ensures respect for all members and their thoughts.

Committees

In many former models of parish councils, committees were frequently found (e.g., finance, education, apostolate, etc.). There is no provision within universal law or diocesan statutes that either recommends or forbids such committees. However, several points should be considered.

Many report that Parish Pastoral Councils with a committee structure tend to lack vision of the whole and meetings consist mostly of lengthy reports by committees and not discussion of the larger issues that affect the parish as a whole.

Some report that membership on committees tends to fragment the Parish Pastoral Council into interest groups and diminish the entire council’s responsibility for the pastoral plan as a whole.

Committees may be necessary within the parish but they need not be committees of the Parish Pastoral Council but rather parish committees whose membership is open to all parishioners. Individual Parish Pastoral Council members may become a part of such committees should they choose to do so. Many parishes find that the establishment of such parish committees better serves the needs of the parish. In any case each committee has a staff liaison who facilitates communication with the parish staff and assists in the working of the committee within the parish as a whole.



In former models of “parish councils” decisions were important and they were arrived at by garnering support from various constituencies and assuring that one’s position had sufficient votes.

Process of Consensus

With a view to the spirituality underlying the Parish Pastoral Councils, such processes seem most at home in partisan politics and not the life of the Church. In the midst of some form of prayer or faith sharing, arriving at a consensus is a mode most appropriate to Parish Pastoral Councils. Arriving at a consensus is the means by which the members of the Parish Pastoral Council clearly define the issues to be discussed and explore them in a climate of respect, trust and collaboration. After all have had an opportunity to contribute to the discussion, there is a need to move to a conclusion.

This implies that the Parish Pastoral Council determines a recommendation that does not involve the notion of winning and losing or “who has the most votes,” but rather one of achieving substantial agreement on principles and general direction.



It is absolutely necessary that the norms that govern the Parish Pastoral Council be clearly formulated and published. These norms are the means by which parishioners understand the function, membership and responsibilities of the Parish Pastoral Council. The norms also govern the way in which members are chosen and meetings are conducted. A sample of such norms is provided in the Resources Section (R4) of this document.

Operative Norms

A check list of the necessary components is also given in the Resources Section (R6). These are the elements that must be addressed in some way by every parish in the formulation of norms for the Parish Pastoral Council. These operative norms can be made available on the parish web site together with the names of those who serve on this council. A copy of these norms must be provided to the dean.



One of the chief functions of the Parish Pastoral Council is to evaluate progress on the parish’s strategic plan. This evaluation may take many forms, but it is an extremely important function.

Evaluation

In addition, to ensure the on-going effectiveness of the Parish Pastoral Council, some form of evaluation should be established. This may take the

form of an end-of-year open discussion or the members may be asked to complete an evaluation form periodically. A sample form is provided in the Resources Section (R7).

In addition to an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Parish Pastoral Council itself, it may be helpful for the Parish Pastoral Council to occasionally conduct a general discussion of parish life. There are many tools by which this task can be accomplished. One such tool is provided in the Resources Section (R7).



***Interim Parish Pastoral
Council Guidelines
Committee***

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley, VG
Very Reverend Frank D. Almada, VE
Very Reverend Harry R. Bielewicz, VF
Reverend Charles S. Bober
Very Reverend David J. Bonnar, VF
Deacon Joseph Compomizi
Very Reverend Lawrence A. DiNardo, VE
Mr. John Flaherty
Dr. Mary Ann Gubish
Mr. Ray Hartung, Jr.
Reverend Ronald P. Lengwin
Dr. Arlene McGannon
Dr. Karen McIntyre
Ms. Susan Rauscher
Sister Patricia Rogan, OSF
Reverend Louis F. Vallone

Resources

Comparison of “Parish Councils” and Parish Pastoral Councils

Parish Council

To influence the decisions that are made by faithfully representing various interests and groups within the parish (often by attempting to “balance the power” of the pastor and pastoral staff).

Church law permits and diocesan statute demands a council in each parish. People want some representation in decisions.

The Parish Council seeks to approve and coordinate all parish activities. It also seeks to represent the interests of various organizations and groups within the parish and to ensure that their concerns have a hearing.

Often enough people are elected because of their loyalty to groups and their ability to argue effectively and win.

Organization, establishing policy and determining how the parish runs is its primary focus. There is often a special emphasis on finance and property.

The Pastor is usually present but need not be. Officers usually include a President, Vice President, and Secretary.

Robert’s Rules of Order apply, and almost every issue is put to a vote. Votes of Parish Council could be seen as decisions in fact (even before the pastor has a chance to review or approve them).

Decisions are made at the Parish Council meetings and implemented by the Parish Council and its members and committees.

Meetings eventually are attended only by Parish Council members. Too often, the parish at large is unaware of the proceedings.

Parish Pastoral Council

To ensure that the parishioners, as co-workers and advisors to the pastor and pastoral staff, have a voice and active role in their parish and take that responsibility seriously.

By baptism, all Christians have a part to play in the life of the Church and the direction of their local parish community.

The Parish Pastoral Council assesses the needs of the parishioners and advises the pastor and pastoral staff accordingly. It develops long and short range goals (using elements of the strategic planning process).

People are appointed because of their dedication to the welfare of the parish, their talents and ability to work for the good of all.

The Parish Pastoral Council is future-oriented, carefully utilizing the tools of listening, assessment and planning to establish an on-going pastoral plan and evaluation of the outcome.

The Pastor presides at Parish Pastoral Council meetings. There may be officers but only one is essential: that of a secretary who records the results of discussions.

The work and good order of the parish is the priority. Discussions take place with respect for all. The spirit is one of consultation and collaboration. Decisions are made through discernment, discussion and consensus.

The Parish Pastoral Council assists in developing a pastoral plan which is then implemented by the pastoral staff, parish committees, volunteers, organizations and parishioners.

While offering advice to the pastor and parish staff, the Parish Pastoral Council is accountable to the parish at large. Some system of reporting should be established.

PURPOSE

MOTIVATION

ROLE

MEMBERSHIP

SCOPE

MEETINGS AND OFFICERS

PROCEDURES AND DECISION-MAKING

IMPLEMENTATION

COMMUNICATION

A Modern Parable

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occurred, there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea and with no thought of themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved and others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money to support its work. New boats were bought, new crews were trained and the little lifesaving station grew.

Some of the members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members and they decorated and furnished it beautifully because they used it as a sort of club.

Few members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The lifesaving motif still prevailed in this club's decoration, and there was a symbolic lifeboat in the room where the club initiations were held. About this time a large ship wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. There were dirty, sick and obviously poor. The beautiful new club was in chaos. So the property committees immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all sorts of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes as had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club and yet another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that sea coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most people drown.*

* The above parable has been edited from that written by Theodore O. Wedel, appearing in "Evangelism: the Mission of the Church to Those Outside Her Life," *The Ecumenical Review*, October, 1953, p 24.

MISSION STATEMENT

Why do we exist and what is our purpose?

This should seldom change although it should be the subject of reflection and re-evaluation. The mission statement should define major activities of the institution or group.

VALUES

For what do we stand, what are our principles?

These are the qualities of the group or institution which tend to set it apart, make it unique, or give it its grounding.

RESOURCES

What do we possess to assist us in accomplishing our tasks?

These are the assets within a group which provide the possibility of accomplishment of the agreed-upon tasks.

OBJECTIVES

What do we want to accomplish?

These are the principal goals of the group or institution. They speak of what we intend to accomplish. They set the direction in a rather “long term” view. They should change little over the course of the time set to accomplish them. They should expand upon and flow out of the “Mission Statement” and be translated into specific strategies.

STRATEGIES

How do we accomplish the objectives?

These are the means by which we meet our objectives and tell us how we are going to accomplish them. They should generate and be supported by action plans (together with time lines and responsibilities). They should have the life needed to accomplish the objectives and should not be subject to continuing change within that process.

ACTION PLANS

What are the specifics of our strategies?

These action plans must include time lines and specific responsibilities (“who does what and when?”).

***Sample of Parish
Pastoral Council
Operating Norms***

1. In accord with the universal law of the Church and diocesan statute, a Parish Pastoral Council is hereby established for Saint Bridget Parish to advise and collaborate with the pastor and pastoral staff on matters related to the pastoral welfare of the parish with special attention given to planning, evaluation and fostering participation in parish life.
2. Parish Pastoral Council membership shall consist of no fewer than eight (8) and not more than ten (10) members. Should members be unable to fulfill a term, the pastor shall appoint replacements as needed. At no time should the Parish Pastoral Council be composed of less than eight (8) members.
3. An appointed member must be a registered parishioner who has received the sacraments of initiation and is active in the practice of the Catholic faith.
4. The term for appointed members is three years (renewable), beginning in January.
5. Regular meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council take place in the following months: January, March, June, September and November. Other meetings may be scheduled by the pastor as needs arise.
6. The Parish Pastoral Council may suggest the formation of any committee it deems necessary.
7. The ordinary operative mode for the deliberations of the Parish Pastoral Council shall be to arrive at a consensus. There may at times, however, be the need for an actual vote of the membership.
8. The Pastor shall preside at all meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council.
9. A secretary / recorder shall be appointed to record the principal actions and significant points of deliberation at Parish Pastoral Council meetings.
10. Discernment, collaboration and consensus characterize the deliberations of the Parish Pastoral Council.
11. Appointment of new members takes place in the manner outlined in the following chart. (*Next Page*)

- September*** All current members whose terms are due to expire are asked if they wish to be considered for appointment to another term on the Parish Pastoral Council.
- September*** All current members of the Pastoral Council are asked to submit names of parishioners who might be asked to consider appointment on the Parish Pastoral Council.
- September*** All pastoral staff members are asked to submit names of parishioners who might be asked to consider appointment on the Parish Pastoral Council.
- October*** All parishioners are invited to submit names of those whom they feel might be considered for appointment to the Parish Pastoral Council. They may submit their own name or someone else's.
- November*** The pastor shall review all the names submitted from all sources to ensure that the list of names reflects the size and complexity of the parish and that the candidates are capable of serving the wide needs of the parish.
- November*** At the November Parish Pastoral Council meeting, all members present will be asked to review the list of names. Members will then be asked to recommend those they feel can best serve the needs of the Parish Pastoral Council. The council will be asked to recommend the number of names needed to fill the existing vacancies. Those names are presented to the pastor for appointment to Parish Pastoral Council for a term of three years (beginning in January).
- January*** An installation ceremony shall precede the January meeting.

***Checklist of Essential
Elements of Operating
Norms***

- Introduction or Context (Overview of Parish Pastoral Councils in the Church)
 - Purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council
 - The Pastoral Plan (how plan should be developed, evaluated and updated)
 - Structure of the Parish Pastoral Council
 - Leadership
 - Consultation
 - Discernment
 - Membership
 - Committees
 - Selection
 - Size
 - Terms of Office
 - Opportunities for Formation
 - Meetings
 - Staff to the Parish Pastoral Council

***Areas of Parish Life
Where Consultation of
the Parish Pastoral
Council is Necessary or
Helpful***

1. Formulation of the parish's Pastoral Plan (strategic plan)
2. Recommendation for new members of the Parish Pastoral Council
3. Any aspect of worship which affects the entire parish (e.g. Mass schedules, times for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, devotional practices, etc.)
4. Major changes in Sacraments of Initiation (e.g. manner or times for reception of First Confession, First Communion or Confirmation).
5. Any initiatives for major construction or renovation in parish plant.
6. Any initiatives in closing parish buildings or thoughts on selling parish property.
7. Establishing parish policies (e.g. regarding use of buildings, renting of parish property, permitting soliciting or sale on parish property).
8. Any issues that might be divisive of the parish community.
9. Beginning any new parish programs or discontinuing those in operation.

Sample Pastoral Plan

RESOURCES

Guidance of the Holy Spirit
 Traditions of our Catholic faith
 Diversity of our community
 Wisdom of our elderly
 Youth and dynamism of our community
 Generosity of our parishioners
 Dedication of parish clergy and staff

MISSION STATEMENT

Saint Bridget Parish, a Catholic community of faith, seeks to live the presence of Jesus Christ by the way we worship God, celebrate the sacraments, proclaim the Gospel, and serve one another and our neighbors. Established as the Roman Catholic parish serving those living in the boroughs of _____ and the townships of _____ we seek to live out our Christian life as a vibrant community of hospitality, spiritual enrichment and service.

VALUES

The Word of God that challenges us
 The Eucharist as central to our lives
 Life, at all stages, is a precious gift
 The moral teaching of the Church
 The family as the domestic church
 Our commitment to social justice
 Our solidarity with those in need

OBJECTIVE 1

To ensure that our communal worship is the center of our life and the strength of our parish.

STRATEGIES:

1. Celebrate the liturgical feasts and seasons as fully as possible.
2. Provide liturgical experiences addressing various ages and needs.
3. Incorporate varied musical forms, choirs and instruments in our worship.
4. Consider ways to foster adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.
5. Encourage appropriate celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confessions).

OBJECTIVE 2

To provide a full, varied program of education and faith formation for all parishioners.

STRATEGIES:

1. Provide options for Religious Education (CCD).
2. Provide a wide range of continuing education opportunities.
3. Consider sponsoring varied forms of retreat experiences
4. Make the RCIA a priority.
5. Consider collaboration with other parishes in the Adult Education ventures.

OBJECTIVE 3

To be a faith community known for its hospitality and friendliness.

STRATEGIES:

1. Provide special seating for those with special needs at liturgies and other functions.
2. Provide a full range of social activities to get people better acquainted.
3. Provide maximum information to parishioners about parish and parish life.
4. Enable "home-bound" to be in contact with the parish and parishioners.
5. Consider periodic newsletter highlighting people of the parish.

OBJECTIVE 4

To establish stewardship as our personal and parochial response to God's gifts to us.

STRATEGIES:

1. Foster stewardship as the common and consistent response to God's gifts.
2. Encourage parishioners to become involved in parish ministries and activities.
3. Continue parish accountability by means of accurate, clear, consistent financial reporting.
4. Make full use of all parish buildings.
5. Establish on-going maintenance of buildings.

OBJECTIVE 5

To establish evangelization and outreach as priorities.

STRATEGIES

1. Provide appropriate formation for laity to participate in ministry of evangelization.
2. Provide full range of welcome and service to the unchurched.
3. Provide outreach activities to those who have left the Catholic Church.
4. Provide for the needs of the poor and disadvantaged.
5. Assist in meeting needs of elderly and home-bound.

ACTION PLANS:

Action plans must include time lines and specific responsibilities ("who does what and when?").

