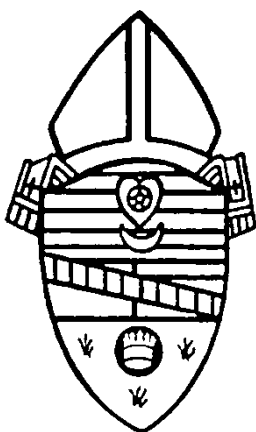


**HANDBOOK  
FOR THE  
PARISH COUNCIL MINISTRY  
  
THE DIOCESE OF STEUBENVILLE**



**Serving God  
through the  
Parish Council Ministry**  
August 1, 2008

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My Dear People:

## INTRODUCTION

The parish council plays a most important role in the growth and development of both the parish community and its ministry and that of the Diocese. This **Handbook for the Parish Council Ministry** responds to the need for a diocesan-wide commonality yet provides for flexibility in meeting varying parish circumstances.

In order to provide a clear understanding of the nature and role of the parish council, and to provide for the effective operation of the Council, these guidelines are divided into three main sections: *Parish Council Organizations*, *Parish Council Meetings* and *Reference Materials and Sample Forms*.

No single format, organization or process can be equally effective in every parish in the diocese. The needs, strengths, and resources of a parish will be influenced by its size, location and other circumstances. Thus timeliness and means of communication, for example, may be adjusted to meet the local parish circumstances.

But, being mindful that the parish is the heart of the ministry of the Diocese and the universal Church, care must be taken to implement diocesan policies, the documents of Vatican Council II and the Revised Code of Canon Law faithfully.

The use of capitalization in these guidelines, where it departs from standard English usage, is designed to help the council member focus on key concepts. The glossary can also help members gain a clearer understanding of concepts with which they are unfamiliar.

## **MINISTRY: A Call to Service**

### **What is the meaning of the Ministry of Parish Council?**

The parish council is a group of people who represent the entire parish. They have been called by the pastor and the People of God through the elective process in the parish to assist the pastor as an advisory group in service to and of the parish.

All Christians, through baptism, share in the responsibility for the extension of Jesus' ministry. This mission is to make God present to the world in which each Christian lives. Jesús set the tone for this ministry when He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (Lk 10:27)

Jesus did not call people into ministry to do their own thing, but rather as Paul tells us, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; one who teaches, in one's teaching; one who exhorts, in one's exhortation; one who contributes, in liberality; one who gives aid, in zeal; one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." (Rm 12: 6-8)

The Second Vatican Council in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity states: "In the Church there is diversity in ministry but unity of mission. To the apostles and their successors Christ has entrusted the office of teaching, sanctifying and governing in His name and by His power. But the laity is made to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ; they have, therefore, in the Church and in the world, their own assignments in the mission of the whole People of God." (Article 2)

The People of God, called to form a unity, have a communal ministry of witnessing to the presence of God

which far surpasses the sum of all ministries of the individual members. The parish is the place and the structure where this communal ministry of the People of God occurs.

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity also tells us (Article 3) that each of us has been given gifts in the Church and in the world for the good of ALL: here arises for each of the faithful the right and duty of exercising them in the freedom of the Holy spirit who 'breathes where He will' (Jn 3:8), and at the same time in communion with others in Christ, and with one's pastor especially. It is for the pastors to pass judgment on the authenticity and good use of these gifts, not certainly with a view to quenching the Spirit, but testing everything and keeping what is good (cf. 1 Th. 5:12, 19, 21)."

In this handbook, we recognize the responsibilities of the People of God in the Parish and the opportunity for all to enter into shared responsibility for the total welfare of the parish apostolate which is to serve the mission of Christ.

The parish council has been instituted in the parish community through which the People of God (the clergy, religious, and laity) actively fulfill their shared and specific responsibility in the work of the Lord. The Council is drawn from and is representative of the entire membership of the parish. Through serving in an advisory capacity to the pastor, it participates in the decision-making process of the parish to the benefit of all.

While Vatican Council II made references to Councils and their responsibilities in the apostolate of the Church, it also clearly stated the role of the pastor and his relationship with the laity.

"In dioceses, as far as possible, councils should be set up to assist the Church's apostolic work, whether in the field of evangelization and sanctification or in the fields of charity, social relations and the rest; (with) the clergy and religious working with the laity in whatever way proves satisfactory. These councils can take care of the mutual coordinating of the various lay associations

and undertakings, the autonomy and particular nature of each remaining untouched. Such councils should be found too, if possible, at parochial, inter-parochial, inter-diocesan level, and also on the national and international plane.” (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Article 26)

“Parish priests are in a special sense collaborators with the bishop. They are given, in a specific section of the diocese, and under the authority of the bishop, the care of souls as their particular shepherd.

“In exercising the care of souls, parish priests and their assistants should carry out their work of teaching, sanctifying and governing them in such a way that the faithful and the parish communities may feel that they are truly members both of the diocese and of the universal Church.” (Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, Article 30.)



## Parish Council Objectives

The establishment of direction is vital to the success of any organization. As a body representing all of the People of God in the parish community, your parish council should always seek:

1. To **FOSTER** unity within the parish;
2. To **HELP FORMULATE AND WORK** toward achieving the vision and mission of the parish;
3. To **PRAY AND REFLECT** together as members of a faith community at every meeting of the council, its committees, and in special formation activities in order to deepen each member's own spiritual life and to strengthen the spiritual bond among the members of this faith community;
4. To **EVALUATE**, under the pastor's leadership, the needs of the entire parish and its individual members;
5. To **COMMUNICATE** its activities to the parishioners and remain open to the people, so that parishioners may know and participate in the decisions made by the pastor in cooperation with the council;
6. To **PARTICIPATE** in the parish decision-making process on spiritual and temporal matters by reaching conclusions through open discussion and consensus, and relying on the expertise represented by the pastor and the entire membership of the council;
7. To **PROVIDE** these conclusions and an **ADVISORY** service to aid the pastor in making the decision on such matters;
8. To **COORDINATE** all parish programs and activities in a way that will serve the best interests of all the people of the parish;
9. To **ENCOURAGE** all that is spiritually and materially helpful to individual parishioners and the entire parish community;

10. To **PROMOTE**, not only its own programs and activities, but also those of the universal Church, the bishop, the diocesan offices, and the deanery pastoral councils.
11. To **PROVIDE** opportunities for dialogue among all of the members of the parish on issues vital to the welfare of the parish, the deanery, and the Diocese of Steubenville. This linkage is established through the deanery pastoral council.

## **The Parish Council and Members of the Parish**

Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, all are called to share actively in the redemptive works of Christ. There are many ways in which the individual can apply time and talent toward this end.

To a few, this means an acceptance of the responsibilities of serving as a member of the parish council; to many others, it means opportunities for involvement in the apostolate of the parish and support of programs and parish activities. For all in the parish community the parish council serves as an instrument that draws the laity, religious and priests together into the vital work of providing ways and means whereby the parish can strive to fulfill its Christ-centered mission.

The *general responsibilities of parishioners to the parish council* are outlined in the following:

1. All eligible laity should give serious consideration to becoming candidates for election to the parish council; they are expected to participate fully in the election process itself;
2. Because of their responsibilities to the mission of Christ and his Church, the laity of the parish are expected to become knowledgeable of the activities of parish council;
3. The laity should provide information, insights, and other contributions (e.g., prayer, research, etc.) on issues being considered by the council to make possible more meaningful council deliberation;
4. The laity should present items for the consideration of the council to the executive committee two weeks prior to parish council meetings, so that the council members can consider fully and prayerfully all agenda items before beginning deliberation;

5. It is expected that the laity will cooperate with the decisions made by the pastor in union with the parish council and, when necessary, offer constructive suggestions on decisions which can bring about a greater degree of effectiveness.

These general responsibilities should be communicated to your parishioners in various ways throughout the year to stimulate their greater involvement in the mission of the parish.

Before beginning or reorganizing a parish council, and then for several weeks each year prior to council elections, efforts should continue to remind the parish community of the role of the parish council, its spiritual and temporal responsibilities, and the importance of the membership on the council. This purpose may be served by a few words from the pulpit, supplemented by messages in the church bulletin each Sunday over a period of several weeks. Background material may be found in this handbook and in other readily available publications.

# Purpose, Function and Structure of Parish Council

## PURPOSE:

The parish council is an instrument of common counsel for advising the pastor as to the possible definition of goals and the determination of policies in all matters pertaining to the spiritual and temporal affairs of the parish. It will provide a forum for the exchange of ideas; and under the direction of the pastor, who represents the bishop, it will encourage, coordinate, unify and lead the whole parish community in making the Gospel known. The council is not an administrative body.

## FUNCTIONS:

Some of the functions of parish council include:

1. To serve as the forum for common counsel on issues of interest to the entire parish;
2. To be a vehicle through which the parishioners become involved in the secular and spiritual life of the parish community;
3. To evaluate, under the pastor's leadership, the needs of the entire parish and its individual members.

## STRUCTURE:

### Membership:

The council has three types of members, with each member having one vote:

1. **Elected:** Lay representative of the parish elected from and by the eligible parish membership;
2. **Ex-officio:** Ex-officio members are non-voting members of council;
3. **Appointed:** The pastor, chairperson and/or executive committee should be authorized to appoint a maximum of three additional members

to assure adequate representation of the parish or of special expertise needed by the council.

The council should have a total membership large enough to be representative of the parish and to carry out the council's functions, but should not exceed 16 members. The number of elected members should be greater than the other two categories combined.

The Council should weigh the advantages and disadvantages of allowing more than one family member to serve on the council at the same time. The necessity or desirability will vary among parishes.

The pastor acts as president (or presider) of the council by reason of his office as pastor. As he presides over the Liturgy of the Word when a deacon or other lector proclaims the scriptures, so he presides over the ministry of the people and shares with them in their ministry.

The deanery pastoral council representative(s) will be ex-officio non-voting members of parish council unless they are already elected members to the council. These members serve a two-year term on the deanery pastoral council and provide necessary linkage for the consideration of deanery and diocesan issues. They are eligible for reappointment or reelection in accordance with the deanery pastoral council bylaws.

### **Term of Membership:**

1. ***Elected*** members should serve a two or three year term and be eligible to be reelected to no more than one consecutive term. Terms should be staggered so that half or one-third of the membership is replaced or reelected annually.
2. ***Ex-officio*** members remain members so long as they remain in that office.
3. ***Appointed*** members should serve a one-year term and be eligible to serve one more year as an appointee.

## **VACANCIES AND TERMINATION**

1. If a council member should be unable or unwilling to complete a term of office, the member should submit written notice to the executive committee.
2. Prolonged unexcused absences (e.g., three consecutive meetings) are cause for termination of membership. Such termination requires a two-thirds vote of the council members. The member shall be notified by the secretary of the pending action and has the right to be heard by the council before the vote is taken.
3. Vacancies are filled by a vote of council at the next council session in the best manner possible. The new member filling the vacancy remains eligible to serve two consecutive terms.

## **Organizational Year**

The organizational year is July 1 through June 30.

## **Guidelines for the Election of Voting Members**

Election Committee Formation: At the same time each year (stipulate in your by-laws), the council chairperson should appoint an ad hoc election committee from the Council which has the responsibility of planning, conducting and overseeing the election of new members for the coming year. The pastor should normally be a member of the committee.

### **Tasks of the Election Committee:**

1. Solicit nominees for council membership through some parish-wide process, insuring that the slate is representative of the entire parish.
2. Contact nominees to apprise them of the responsibilities of council membership; determine their willingness to serve and, if desired, obtain a statement from them on their view of the parish and its needs as well as biographic data.
3. Present to the parish the slate of candidates at least two weeks prior to the election. Since some candidates may not be well known, it is advisable to provide background data on each candidate.
4. Conduct the election according to the policies and procedures for elections in your by-laws, ratify the results, and publicize the names of those elected.
  - a. The entire parish membership (with optional minimum age) should be eligible to vote and eligible to serve on council.
  - b. Being sensitive to human feelings, care should be taken that the election does not result in one person being the only loser (i.e., have at least two more candidates on the slate than will actually be elected). All voting results are held confidential.



## **Council Officers and the Executive Committee**

The three officers of the parish council are the chairperson, vice-chairperson and secretary.

All officers should be elected at the beginning of the organizational year and the by-laws should clearly state their beginning and ending dates of office.

Whenever a new pastor is assigned, his first responsibility is to ratify the viability of the Parish Council relative to the diocesan *Parish Council Handbook* and take appropriate action.

The pastor or others who are employees of the parish, excluding teachers in the Catholic schools, should not be eligible to serve as officers of the parish council or as representatives to the deanery pastoral council.

Officers should be eligible for a second consecutive term only.

### **Duties of the officers include:**

1. **Chairperson:** Chairs all business meetings and oversees all the business activities of the Council;
2. **Vice-chairperson:** Assumes the role of the chairperson in his/her absence and assists in overseeing the council's activities;
3. **Secretary:** Keeps records for the council. The secretary is also responsible for the minutes of each meeting and transmitting them to the appropriate persons. It is recommended that a stenographer (or secretary to the Council) who is not a council member be appointed to take the minutes during the meetings to enable the secretary to participate fully in the council's deliberations.

The executive committee of the parish council is composed of the pastor, associate pastor, the three parish council officers, and a deanery pastoral council

representative. The committee serves as the leadership team for the council with the responsibility of reviewing council activities, planning Council activities including the agenda, and serving as an interim consultation group for the pastor between council meetings. They are all responsible to the pastor for the running of parish council meetings.

The deanery pastoral council representative serves on the executive committee in order to include on the agenda any items of import to the deanery and diocese, and to advise on proposed council activities which may affect or be affected by other deanery or diocesan activities.

## **ROLES**

### **Pastor and Parochial Vicars**

To understand more fully the role of pastors and parochial vicars, it is appropriate to review the unity, cooperation and relationship among the People of God called for by Vatican II in its **Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity**:

As sharers in the role of Christ the Priest, the Prophet and King, the laity has an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church. Their activity is so necessary within church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness. In the style of the men and women who helped Paul to spread the Gospel (cf. Acts 18:18, 26; Rm. 16:3), the laity with the right apostolic attitude supply what is lacking to their brethren and refresh the spirit of pastors and the rest of the faithful (cf. 1 Cor. 16:17-18).

Offering an obvious example of the apostolate on the community level is the parish, inasmuch as it brings together the many human differences found within its boundaries and draws them into the universality of the Church. The laity should accustom themselves to working in the parish in close union with their priests, bring to the church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which should be examined and resolved by common deliberation. (Article 10)

The pastor and parochial vicar(s), by nature of their assignment to the parish, share in the pastoral responsibilities for the spiritual well-being of the members of the parish.

The pastor, by virtue of his priestly office and canonical mission, has the ultimate decision-making authority within the parish. He can delegate some of his administrative authority to the parochial vicar(s), religious and laity of the parish according to the norms of Canon

Law; but he cannot delegate his personal responsibility for the care of the people entrusted to him by the bishop.

Before making a final decision on any issue considered by the parish council, the pastor is obliged to take into careful consideration the dialogue, insights and recommendations of the parish council. If he considers a particular recommendation to be unacceptable, he should clearly state to the council his position and reasons why he cannot accept the recommendation.

In accordance with diocesan policy, "If a major area of friction develops between the Pastor and the parish community or the council over an issue of serious concern, the matter may be referred to the local dean so he can act as arbitrator. Ordinarily the parish council or the pastor can call for the dean's assistance." (Diocese of Steubenville, Synod 1983, DPO 25)

As president (presider) of the parish council, the Pastor has the following responsibilities:

1. To attend all meetings of the parish council; meetings should be so scheduled that the Pastor will be available to attend and to listen carefully to the voice of the council.
2. To see that the council hears and applies the word of God in all its fullness to the issues under deliberation by the council;
3. To provide the biblical, doctrinal or canonical research necessary for the council to make sound and intelligent recommendations on issues where these factors may apply;
4. To enter into free and open dialogue with members of the council on all matters presented for deliberation in accordance with the meeting agenda;
5. To express and clarify to the council the higher-level policies of the Church, the bishop, the diocesan offices, commissions, departments and agencies which may relate to matters under deliberation by the council.

6. To serve as a unifier, mediator and coordinator within the council, making sure that all points of view on an issue are heard.

## **Religious**

By nature of vocation, dedication and experience, the religious assigned to or residing in the parish represent a great potential for serving the mission of the parish through the parish council. The expertise they can bring to the council's work related to the liturgy, religious education for children and adults, social service and other apostolic programs should not be overlooked.

The religious in the parish should be invited to attend council meetings, participate in open forum discussions, serve on council committees and otherwise serve as a resource for the special "know-how" the individual may have.

## **All Parish Council Members**

The ultimate responsibility of parish council members, whether elected, ex-officio, or appointed, whether clergy, religious, or laity, must be the spiritual and temporal welfare of the total parish and not just to a specific concern, committee activity or issues relating to a particular parish group or neighborhood.

As a representative body, the parish council is encouraged to coordinate the diverse interests and talents of all parishioners. Only when all elements and points of view are made known before the council or its committees will the membership be able to generate a conclusion for a particular issue that will reflect the good of the whole parish.

The specific responsibilities of each member of the parish council can be summarized in the following:

1. To prayerfully reflect on the Gospel Values in order to better discern what God is asking of the parish;
2. To bring to the attention of the parish council executive committee issues of concern from any source in the parish so that the issue may be scheduled for regular council action if necessary'
3. To strive for consistent attendance at all meetings called for the parish council;
4. To maintain open-minded consideration for the welfare of the total parish on all issues before the council;
5. To participate fully in open forum discussions on issues brought before the council.
6. To participate in the decision-making process on the issues so that the council's recommendations will be submitted in consensus form to the pastor for his final decision;
7. To accept the conclusions formed by the council and the final decision by the Pastor in good faith and to work toward generating harmonious acceptance of the resolution by the whole parish;
8. To participate in individual and group formation activities provided for the parish council members' growth and development, both spiritual and secular. (Diocese of Steubenville, Synod 1983, DPO 27, 31)

## **STANDING COMMITTEES**

Every parish council will have at least four standing committees: Liturgy, Education, Justice and Social Concerns, and Buildings and Grounds. It is anticipated that all aspects of the spiritual and temporal welfare of the parish would fall under the responsibility of one or the other of these committees, either directly or through a subcommittee formed by special programs or events as required.

The finance council is not a parish council standing committee. The finance council in every parish is a separate entity responsible to the pastor and bound by diocesan guidelines for the finance council. It is recommended that a member of the finance council be present at every parish council meeting.

It is expected that each standing committee will have a member of the parish council, other than those on the executive committee, who will serve as liaison between the council and the committee. Parishioners, including youth, should be encouraged to serve as members and chairpersons of committees and subcommittees as needed. A subcommittee is responsible to and reports to its parent committee which in turn reports to the parish council.

Because of the obvious interrelationship of the four standing committees, it is the responsibility of the executive committee to coordinate committee activities and to provide opportunities for one committee to draw on the others for help and cooperation in the fulfillment of its objectives.

Standing committees assist the council by gathering and preparing information in report and proposal form so that the council can more effectively reflect on the ministry of the parish and discern future direction. These committees may also coordinate activities within their scope of concern, provide communication between various related groups and

individuals and make decisions about matters pertaining to their scope of concern subject to review by the council.

A standing committee is, therefore, primarily a planning group. Activities planned by a committee will normally be carried out by a subcommittee or other parish groups or individuals. For example, the education committee may plan an annual series of topics for the adult education program. The arrangements for each session (presenter, publicity, equipment, etc.) would be handled by a subcommittee or other group or individuals with special interest or expertise on the specific topic.

A brief description of the four standing committees and their suggested areas of concern are shown in the following:

1. **Liturgy:** Committee responsibilities would include all functions related to the official public liturgies of the parish and other public and private devotions. Specific areas of concern might include:
  - Celebration of the Holy Eucharist;
  - Administration of the sacraments;
  - Helping with the lectors, cantors, ushers, programs;
  - The use of liturgical music and the arts;
  - The choir(s);
  - Devotions of all kinds (e.g., rosary, novenas, special services);
  - Seasonal liturgical needs;
  - Updating of physical areas of worship as needed to conform to prescribed criteria (e.g., sanctuary, baptistery);
  - Cooperation with liturgical activities initiated by the diocese or deanery;
  - Cooperation with the guidelines provided by the Diocesan Liturgical Commission and the Diocesan Office of Worship.
2. **Education:** Committee responsibilities would include all functions related to the teaching of



Christian Doctrine at all levels in the parish.  
Specific areas of concern might include:

- Pre-school and daycare programs;
- Serve as liaison with the local parochial school board(s), elementary and/or secondary, and the parish council;
- Special education, elementary and secondary schools of religion (CCD/PSR).
- Adult education programs and discussion groups;
- Religious education recruitment and training programs;
- Cooperation with home and school groups;
- Special instructional preparation programs for the sacraments, including the RCIA;
- Cooperation with guidelines provided by the Diocesan Office of Education.

3. **Justice and Social Concerns:** Committee responsibilities would include all functions promoting Christian life in the parish related to the social/communal needs of the parish and local communities. Specific areas of interest might include:

- Cooperation with parish organizations in the promotion of their objectives;
- Cooperation with elements of local communities in the promotion of the common good;
- Cooperation with ecumenical programs;
- Programs for the youth, the aging, and the handicapped;
- Service programs for the poor, delinquent, ill, and destitute;
- Programs promoting the spiritual enrichment of family life;
- Programs relating to cultural and social growth;

- Cooperation with social action programs and services provided through the diocese, its agencies and the deanery.
4. **Buildings and Grounds:** Committee responsibilities would include all efforts to provide for the material needs of the parish. Specific areas of concern may relate to:
- Short-term and long-range parish planning;
  - Parish property and plant maintenance and repair;
  - Service contract, purchasing and resource requirements.

## **Number and Scope of Specific Parish Council Standing Committees**

There may be some question about the number of parish council standing committees and their scopes of concern. In most instances the Liturgy, Education, Justice and Social Concerns and Buildings and Grounds Committees will encompass all aspects of the spiritual and temporal welfare of the parish. An individual parish, however, may anticipate the need for additional standing committees due to its size, specific ministries, or other circumstance. Some principles that may help in looking at the committee structure of the parish council are:

1. Each parish has a "scope of concern" which includes all those ministerial activities that are presently going on in the parish, plus all future activities that are an essential part of the mission of the parish. Each parish council committee is responsible for a part of that total scope of concern.
2. There should be only as many standing committees as necessary and each of these should have a

broad enough scope of concern so that the total scope of parish ministry is included in one of the committees.

3. Similar kinds of ministerial activity should be grouped together in the same committee.
4. It may happen that a parish might have a special long-term but temporary situation or ministerial activity, or that the parish activities within a particular standing committee's scope of concern are too many or too complex for the committee's members to handle adequately. The following questions may help to discern the need for another standing committee:
  - Is this a unique scope of concern or does it fall within that of another committee?
  - Can other standing committees appropriately assist in this concern?
  - Would additional committee members be adequate?
  - Would a special ad hoc or subcommittee, responsible to a present standing committee, be appropriate?

## **Membership on Parish Council Standing Committees**

1. One member of the parish council who acts as liaison to the council. This is essential.
2. Parish staff, both paid and volunteer, who are responsible for an area of ministry pertaining to the committee.
3. Representatives of parish organizations or groups which have purposes or goals in common with the committee; for example: Senior Citizens' groups represented on the Justice and Social Concerns Committee.

4. Interested parishioners, who are willing to give input, work in particular ministries, or who reflect particular groups or perspectives in the parish.

Standing committees should be constantly renewing themselves with new members as needs arise and to provide a blend of continuity and new ideas.

# The Importance of Good Communications

Good communications are essential to the growth and development of the council and of the parish. There are three levels of communications to be considered:

1. **Communications *among members*:** The basic rules here demand open and candid sharing that allows and encourages everyone's opinion to be brought before council. It is important to establish a setting in which each member feels free to contribute around the table, thus eliminating the need for "parking lot post-meeting analysis."
2. **Communications with *committees*:** This is critical to the development of any program and in fact to the life of the parish. Since committees represent the apostolic development of the parish, their voice is very important. The council needs to be regularly in dialogue with committees and listening to and supportive of their activities.
3. **Communications with the *parish*:** The council needs to assess, define and use the most effective ways to learn of parishioners' concerns which ought to be brought to the council and to keep parishioners aware of the activities of the council, current on the council agenda, and knowledgeable about the processes and functions of the council. The vehicles to accomplish this vary depending on the size and circumstances of the parish. Some suggestions are offered in the following pages.

## **Parish Council “Do’s”**

### **DO...**

- Use the parish bulletin to publish advance meeting notices with major topics to be discussed.
- Use letters from the pastor and parish council to state particulars on major issues when warranted.
- Actively seek the opinions of parishioners on issues before council.
- Mail agenda and background material to parish council members in advance of the meeting.
- Invite and listen to committee participation in the workings of the council.
- Make parishioners “feel welcome” when they attend council meetings.
- Maintain open and candid dialogue with council.
- Limit the length of meetings.
- Always strive for consensus in decision making.
- Use announcements to clarify or inform the parishioners of important council decisions or other actions.
- Take steps to “tell it like it is” to parishioners as soon as possible after council actions take place.
- Publish parish council minutes.
- Consider publishing an annual (accountability) report of council plans, objectives, actions and accomplishments for distribution with the Sunday bulletin.

## **Parish Council “Don’ts”**

### **DON’T...**

- Assume people recognize the purpose and function of parish councils.
- Fail to let the whole parish in on the council’s goals and objectives once they are established.
- Forget that one of council’s main objectives is to promote parish unity and community.
- Take for granted that everyone in the parish already knows the facts about any issue under consideration.
- Fail to check diocesan guidelines or resources for possible implications on issues before passing information along to the parish.
- Neglect to ask for opinions from parishioners on an issue of major concern before council deliberates the issue.
- Forget to let parishioners know what the purpose is before asking for opinions on an important issue to be considered.
- Neglect committee processes.
- Take sides when seeking opinions or information.
- Fall into the habit of regarding “people” elements in a parish question as impersonal entities.
- Assume that the whole parish will know the results of council actions.
- Lose your sense of humor or prayerful spirit of discernment.

## Council – A Faith Community

Since the parish council is a faith community, meetings should be conducted in a spiritual setting that demonstrates that prayer and reflection are a significant element of the work of the council.

In this spirit every meeting should begin with a substantial community prayer. This can be prepared by a different council member each month. The process may be as simple as:

1. Reading of a passage from scripture (perhaps the Gospel of the day);
2. A brief period of quiet during which council reflects on the reading;
3. A discussion of the text.

Other formats may be followed but it is important to realize the prayer element of the meeting is not intended to be a quick recitation of a prayer or a deferral to the pastor to quickly call upon the Holy Spirit. The council needs to model a behavior that indicates to the parish the importance of our faith in **all** our activities.



# **PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS**

## **Preparing for the Parish Council Meeting**

It is the responsibility of the executive committee to prepare the agenda and agenda process as well as to be sure that the facility is adequate for the meeting.

Prior to the parish council meeting (10-14 days) the executive committee should meet to determine the agenda. In order to do so, the reports of all committees and any items to be brought to the council need to be submitted at this time. This schedule enables the executive committee to provide copies of the agenda and pertinent background information to council members with sufficient time for their prayer, reflection and seeking of input from parishioners.

An agenda is a tool for planning and directing a meeting. It helps to make the meeting time focused and productive, avoids confusion, indecision, frustration and wasted time. The most important question is, "Why are we meeting?"

## **Guidelines for Developing an Agenda**

1. Limit the number of items to be considered.
2. Group interest rather than vested interests should be reflected.
3. Prioritize items to be considered so that important issues are dealt with early (when time, concentration and energy are most available) and adequate time is allotted.
4. Clarify how each item is to be handled: Is it for information or are the council members to reach a recommendation, or is this the beginning discussion for a future decision?
5. Provide background information on agenda items whenever possible.

6. Committee reports should be reviewed in order to abstract any items for council consideration; but full reports should be distributed to council members in advance of the meeting to avoid the need to read them to council during the meeting.
7. Budget for each item so members will know how much time a discussion should require. (During the meeting work to stay within the time allotted.)

## **Sample Agenda**

AGENDA  
Parish Council Meeting  
August 1, 2008

<b>Time Allotment</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By Whom</b>
15 minutes	Ecumenical Lenten Service	Information, Discussion and Decision	B. Jones All All
30 minutes	Annual Budget	Information Discussion	J. Smith All

The executive committee should review the pre-meeting checklist prior to every parish council meeting.

## **A Pre-Meeting Checklist**

- ☐ Determine a meeting location and make proper arrangements.
  
- ☐ Prepare and distribute a meeting notice to include:
  - ☐ Name of Organization (Parish Council)
  - ☐ Time of meeting:
    - ☐ Time begin
    - ☐ Time adjourn (1 ½ to 2 hours max.)
  - ☐ Location of meeting
  - ☐ Day and time of meeting
  - ☐ Agenda of meeting
  - ☐ All resource materials for pre-meeting study by members
  - ☐ Carry out all needed physical arrangements for meeting:
  - ☐ Be sure that lighting is adequate
  - ☐ Arrange for proper heating or air conditioning
  - ☐ Be sure that tables and chairs are available and arranged as you wish in advance of the meeting.
  - ☐ Be sure the meeting location is unlocked in time for the meeting.
  - ☐ Be sure that any necessary sound system is available and operating.
    - ☐ Movie projector and extra bulb
    - ☐ Slide projector and extra bulb
    - ☐ Film strip projector and extra bulb

- ☐ Be sure all meeting materials are available:
  - ☐ Tape recorder      ☐ Note paper
  - ☐ Masking tape      ☐ Pencils
  - ☐ Blackboard      ☐ Newsprint
  - ☐ Felt pens      ☐ Tape cassettes
  - ☐ Extension cord      ☐ Chalk
  - ☐ Agendas
- ☐ Be sure arrangements have been made for any beverage or food.
- ☐ Contact all necessary persons to be sure that assignments of tasks at the meeting are accepted and clearly understood.

This check list may be used by groups other than parish council. It helps to make every meeting efficient and productive.

# Leadership and Meetings

## 1. Before the Meeting:

- a. Review the agenda and process;
- b. Be sure individuals are prepared for their responsibilities.

## 2. During the Meeting:

- a. Call it to order promptly, welcoming any guests;
- b. Call the group to prayer;
- c. Lead the group in reviewing priorities in the agenda and specify the time to be spent on each agenda item;
- d. Keep the group at the task (i.e., monitor the discussion and inform the group when it strays from the agenda item at hand);
- e. Work toward consensus on each agenda item:
  - i. Draw out the views of quiet members;
  - ii. Prevent talkative members from consuming too much time;
  - iii. When discussion becomes heated or opinions sharply divided, call time out for silent or group prayer to re-focus on the total welfare of the parish;
- f. Be attuned to feelings of confusion and try to clarify them;
- g. Check with the group whenever it seems appropriate:
  - i. Regarding satisfaction of the members with their participation;
  - ii. Regarding the decision-making being done;
- h. At the end of each agenda item:
  - i. Check to be sure that everyone who wanted to contribute to the discussion has had the opportunity.
  - ii. Check whether anyone is not clear about where the matter now stands;
  - iii. Summarize or ask someone else to summarize. Be sure that the secretary-stenographer has recorded the summary;
- i. Conduct or ask someone else to conduct an evaluation session during the last ten minutes of the meeting. Consider the following:
  - i. Did we accomplish our goals for the meeting?
  - ii. Did we use our resources effectively?

- iii. Did we avoid pitfalls, such as wasting time?
- iv. Have we assigned specific individual responsibility for necessary tasks?
- j. Call the meeting to a close promptly with a concluding prayer.

**3. After the Meeting:**

- a. Check with the secretary-stenographer to see that the minutes are clear and complete;
- b. Transfer left-over agenda items to the agenda for the next meeting;
- c. Establish the time and place for the Executive Committee meeting.

# TIPS FOR CONDUCTING A GOOD MEETING

Conducting a good meeting calls for a little bit of common sense applied to the so-called rules or order for meetings. The Parish Council meeting will be more productive in less time if some consideration is given to making use of the following suggestions:

- **GUIDE THE COUNCIL – DON'T DICTATE TO IT!** Officers should remember that guidance is one of the most important functions they serve.
- **BE FIRM IN A TACTFUL WAY!** This builds confidence in the leadership and encourages more productive participation.
- **FOLLOW THE AGENDA!** Doing so helps to keep the meeting “on stream” and less likely to be sidetracked.
- **DON'T BOG DOWN ON NEW ISSUES!** Chances are that new issues will require further study or committee action before all the necessary facts are in. Don't hesitate to refer them to committee for presentation at a later meeting.
- **DON'T BELABOR OLD ISSUES!** When discussions have amply covered issues to be decided, get to the resolution as quickly as possible using the consensus model of decision-making.
- **LET EACH MEMBER BE HEARD!** The chairperson should tactfully discourage “limelighting” by any one member during discussions...call for additional insights by inviting other members to address themselves to the issue.
- **STATE IN ADVANCE WHEN “CONSENSUS” IS TO BE USED!** When a particular policy or important issue is to be resolved by consensus, advise the membership in advance of discussions. This will help set the proper atmosphere for membership thinking and participation.
- **FACE UP TO AN IMPASSE – KEEP IT UNDER CONTROL!** On occasions when discussions concerning major issues become heated and consensus difficult to reach, keep controversy to a minimum.

- **BACKOFF ... CALL FOR PRAYER AND MEDITATION ... GIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT AN OPPORTUNITY TO ENTER INTO IT.** It may be that the problem is lack of information on the issue. If so, it would be wise to table the issue for additional study prior to the next meeting.
- **RESPECT THE INPUT FROM VISITING NON-MEMBERS!** When parishioners visit the meeting, introduce them, ask for their brief insights on issues currently being deliberated at the end of the meeting. If they introduce new issues, refer them for Executive Committee action prior to the next meeting. By all means, be courteous and thank them for coming.



## RESOLVING ISSUES BY CONSENSUS

We must always remember the Parish Council's role in the decision-making process. The Pastor consults with the Parish Council, as the elected voice of the Parish, for advice on issues affecting the welfare of the parish.

By virtue of the office entrusted to him, the Pastor represents the Bishop and cooperates with him in exercising ordinary jurisdiction in the parish. At the parish level, the pastor has the responsibility for initiating policies and programs mandated by the Diocese; he must also be in a position to accept or reject proposals by others. According to Canon Law, he may delegate some of his administrative authority to others, but he cannot delegate his personal responsibility for the care of the people entrusted to him.

The Pastor's responsibilities are tremendous. The Parish Council can be of great service to both the Pastor and the Parish by helping to seek out the guidance of the Holy Spirit and acting in an advisory capacity in the true spirit of Christian Community.

**Parliamentary Procedure** In the world of business, government, and other sectors of our society, issues are frequently resolved through parliamentary decision-making in which the majority rules when 51% or other predetermined majority vote prevails. This system is workable when dealing with administrative and other minor routines, even though conclusions drawn in this manner very often make little or no provision for the welfare of the minority in the issue. When, however, the issue involves policies for the parish, and the intangible spirituality of each person in the parish is at stake, this system of parliamentary decision-making is inadequate. The Consensus-building process is far more desirable.

When dealing with spirituality and parish policies, the Christian community method of arriving at just conclusions is more effective. This method resolves issues through the Consensus Process and represents the most dynamic way in which the elected member exercises his or her responsibility to advise the pastor through Council's actions. The greater the decision to be made, the broader the Consensus should be.

**Consensus Process Defined** In the Consensus Process all aspects of an issue and possible alternative are explored, heard, and deliberated. The Chairperson actively encourages each member to share his/her thoughts on the issue. Time is taken for prayer and reflection when the issue is a sensitive one or opinions appear strongly divided. The Council moves toward recommendation seeking the total welfare of the entire parish, attempting to resolve the issue in this light. As the council moves toward a final recommendation, each member is again called upon to express his/her thoughts on the decision being made.

**Consensus Building** Participating in the parish decision-making process through Consensus calls for a definite procedure of action by the Council:

1. A thorough investigation of all factors in the issue should be undertaken, individually or by committee;
2. With the guidance of the Holy spirit, every effort should be made to achieve a deep understanding of the factors, using whatever talents and expertise are available in the parish community;
3. Full participation by council members and others in the parish in open forum discussions of the issue should then take place; each member should be invited to express the reasons why they take a given position;
4. The collective opinion, or Consensus, should then be called for and provided to the Pastor as an advisory service;
5. When Parish Council members work with the Consensus model, they must give concrete reasons as to why they agree or disagree with the Proposal being discussed.

**Results of Consensus**

Consensus incorporates the realization of the group:

- That the decision being made is the most acceptable under the circumstances;
- That the decision represents areas of agreement rather than of disagreement;
- That no one side or faction has been “defeated;”
- That the total welfare of the entire parish has been considered; and
- That each member of the group can consequently live with the final recommendation.

**Benefits of Consensus**

In Parish Council work, resolving issues by consensus means that:

- Emphasis has been placed on people and due consideration has been given to their growth in faith;
- Everyone in the parish has had an opportunity for input;
- The resulting conclusions should be of benefit, in varying degrees, to all in the parish;
- Everyone concerned should have little difficulty in living with the conclusion.

It does not necessarily mean, however, that everyone participating in the Consensus, those affected by it, or situations subject to the decision will achieve satisfaction to the fullest measure.

**Consensus and Communication**

When resolving issues by Consensus, one important fact should be remembered: The ultimate goal is to achieve Consensus of the whole parish. To strive toward this goal means that parishioners should also be involved in the decision-making process as much as possible. They should be invited and encouraged to provide insights on major issues of concern, with the Parish Council serving as the channel for their response.

In the same light, it may not be enough to merely inform parishioners of the ultimate decision. They should be informed that the decision was reached through consensus, not just a

majority vote. In the interest of building a responsive parish community, it may be advisable to share with parishioners many of the factors in the process leading to the decision, such as the information considered by the Council and the reasons upon which the conclusion and decision were based. In short. **COMMUNICATION AND DIALOGUE ARE INVALUABLE INSTRUMENTS** to be used to keep all in the parish informed, enthused, motivated, dedicated, and responsive to the mission of Christ. This is what the Christian Spirit of Community is all about!

# **ORDER OF BUSINESS FOR THE MEETING**

This suggested Order of Business develops the prayer life of the Council and handles business early in the meeting when the energy level and attention span of the members are at their best for serious deliberations.

## **1. OPENING COMMUNITY PRAYER**

In cooperation with the Pastor, Associate Pastor, and Council members, arrangements are made prior to the meeting for the selection of prayer, Scriptural text, and individual to proclaim the text.

## **2. MEDITATION: DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT**

- a. A brief few moments for quiet meditation on the message of the text;
- b. A call for discussion, questions, or comments regarding the meaning of the text;
- c. Concluding prayer of another form of community prayer.

## **3. ROLL CALL OF MEMBERSHIP**

- a. The Council Secretary calls the roll and notes the response on a continuing form;
- b. Notice is given of those excused from attendance and so noted on the continuing attendance form.

## **4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

- a. If the minutes of the previous meeting were distributed in advance (the preferred method), the Council Chairperson will call for corrections, additions, and approval.
- b. If the minutes were not sent or distributed in advance, the Chairperson will call for the reading of the minutes by the Secretary and then call for corrections, additions, and approval.

## **5. BUSINESS**

- a. Any new developments affecting Council's deliberations are presented;
- b. Presentation and explanation of new mandates or other information pertinent to the parish received from the Bishop, diocesan offices, commissions, or agencies;
- c. Information from the Lay Deanery Council representatives who will report on questions and receive input regarding lay Deanery Council meetings;
- d. Re-open issues held over from the previous meeting;
- e. Presentation of new issues for deliberation by the Council and all known facts pertaining to them; assignment to committee or individuals for pre-deliberation work, research, investigation, etc., if necessary.

## **6. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

- a. Those elements of a committee report which are necessary to the business deliberations in the meeting are presented at that time;
- b. The Chair now calls for discussion of committee reports which were sent in advance and/or reading of undistributed reports.
- c. Discussion results are defined and response to the committee is determined.

## **7. CLOSING COMMUNITY PRAYER: ADJOURNMENT**

- a. The closing prayer is led by a predetermined individual;
- b. The Chairperson calls for adjournment.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

At Parish Council meetings, Committee Reports help to provide an immediate insight into the Council's progress in serving the parish and a future reference background for the committee's activity. Committee reports should be sent in advance to the council members for their careful review. Copies should be available to the Executive Committee when they are developing the meeting agenda. Information from a committee report which deals with an issue on the agenda should be part of that deliberation. During the Committee Reports section of the meeting, the Committee Liaison will respond to questions and issues for clarification or discussion. In the event that the Committee Report was not distributed in advance, the Liaison will read the report at that time.

Committee Reports should be brief and to the point. Each should clearly identify the project, stated goal, time requirement, plan of action, and status to date. The following items may be considered in preparing an effective report by the Committee:

1. **Identify** the Committee by name;
2. **Indicate** the date of the report;
3. **Name** the Committee Project, Program, or Activity;
4. **State** the Anticipated Goal;
5. **Summarize** the Committee Work Done since the date of the previous report;
6. **Summarize** the Anticipated Committee Work for the immediate future;
7. **State** the Progress to Date made in relation to the stated time schedule for the project;
8. **Identify** Problem Areas affecting the work of the Committee;
9. **Recommend** Other Factors or Resources that should be investigated to facilitate the Committee's work.

## SUGGESTED PARISH COUNCIL INSTALLATION CEREMONY

The Installation Ceremony could be held immediately prior to Sunday Mass, after the Entrance Procession, following the Homily, or at some other suitable time when a good cross-section of the parish community is in the parish church.

If the Parish Council members are seated with their families among the people and called to the Sanctuary for the Installation Ceremony, this would symbolize their being called from and by the Community of God to serve the community. An option would be the seating of the Council members together in the first pew(s).

All members, whether elected, ex officio, or appointed are installed.

## INSTALLATION CEREMONY

Pastor: My dear people, we gather here to install the members of our Parish Council for their term of office. Priests are reminded of the great gifts the laity brings to the church in cooperating to carry out the mission of Christ on earth. We quote from the Second Vatican Council Decree on the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, Chapter Four, Article 37: **“The Laity have the right ... to fulfill its mission for the life of the world.”** (Read the full excerpt indicated from the above as found on Pages 64 and 65 in “Documents of Vatican II by Abott, or Pages 394 and 395 in “Vatican Council II” by Flannery.)

It is in this spirit that we ask you all and, in particular, the members of the Parish Council who represent the Christian Community known as the Parish of \_\_\_\_\_

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Pastor: Do you promise to abide by the spirit of Christ as revealed to all in the gospels, the documents of Second Vatican Council, and the pastoral instructions of our Most Reverend Bishop?

Members: We do promise.

Pastor: Will you strive earnestly to further your own spiritual good and that of the parish council and to advance the good of your neighbor and of the Church of Christ?

Members: We will.

\* \* \* \* \*

Note: If the ceremony is to include the official installation of Council officers, include the following 3 questions and answers. If not, proceed to conclusion, "In the spirit of . . . ."

Pastor: M\_\_\_\_\_, as the elected Chairperson, will you conduct all meetings, be a member of all committees, designating their liaison persons?

Chairperson: With the grace of God and to the best of my ability, I will so do.

Pastor: M\_\_\_\_\_, as the elected Vice Chairperson, will you perform all the responsibilities of the Chairperson in his/her absence and serve as an aide to the Chairperson?

Vice Chair: With the grace of God and to the best of my ability, I will do so.

Pastor: M\_\_\_\_\_, as the elected Secretary, will you keep a record of Council proceedings and minutes, be responsible for Council correspondence, and maintain attendance

records, as well as any other records kept by the Council?

Secretary: With the grace of God and to the best of my ability, I will so do.

\* \* \* \* \*

Pastor: In the spirit of the holy St. Francis of Assisi, I ask all members of Parish council to recite his prayer as a pledge of their concern for the good of our Parish and the Universal Church.

Members: "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy;  
O Divine Master, grant that I may now  
Seek so much to be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal life."

**(END OF INSTALLATION CEREMONY)**

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**NOTE:** It is the intent of this glossary not only to define the terms in a general way, but also to relate their meaning to the Parish Council.

**ADVISORY:** A word describing a function of an individual or group whose purpose is to provide advice, opinions, or conclusions on issues related to the leadership responsibilities of another individual or group.

**APOSTOLATE:** The responsibility or mission of an apostle (one who is sent on a mission.) For example: The laity are members of an apostolate concerned with the mission of Christ in the Universal Church; the parish apostolate is first of all the mission of Christ under the spiritual care of the bishop of the diocese and extended to his delegates, the priests of the parish and, in a general way, to each parishioner.

**APOSTOLIC WORKS:** Specific works, services, or activities within the apostolate that serve the mission of Christ. For example: The administration of the sacraments, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, CCD programs for children and adults, religious vocation programs, and so on.

**CHAIRPERSON:** The elected member of the laity who is responsible for conducting the business of the meeting in an orderly and fruitful manner.

**COLLEGIAL:** A word describing a group of persons, each vested equally in power and authority, engaged in work of a common purpose. For example: The Parish Council is a collegial body engaged in the mission of Christ, serving as an advisory group to the pastor of the parish to aid him in fulfilling his responsibilities to all in the parish as defined by Canon Law and diocesan statutes.

**CONSENSUS:** A conclusion drawn or opinion formed by a group of people after all aspects of an issue and possible alternatives have been heard and deliberated. It incorporates the feeling of the group that: The choice made is the most acceptable under the circumstances; the decision represents areas of agreement rather than disagreement; no one side or faction has been defeated; each member of the group can live with the final conclusion.

**CONSULTATIVE:** A word describing a function of one who seeks advice or opinion. For example: A pastor exercises a consultative function when he seeks advice, opinion, or conclusion on specific issues from the Parish Council. (Also see advisory.)

**ELIGIBLE PARISH MEMBERSHIP:** Registered members of the parish who are in full communion with the Church. A parish may consider a minimum age for voting or election, such as the age of Confirmation or legal majority.

**PARISH COUNCIL:** A group of persons, representing all facets of the parish community, which meets as a collegial body with each member equal in voice, power, and authority. They strive for consensus as an advisory voice to the spiritual leader, the pastor, in order to set parish policy, determine objectives, set goals, and otherwise foster the spiritual growth of the parish community.

**PARISH STAFF:** Paid or volunteer members of the staff who have management responsibilities for parish programs or areas of ministry.

**PASTORAL WORKS:** From the Latin, "Pastor," meaning shepherd, and from the frequent references in Scriptures by Christ to the role of the Good Shepherd. Pastoral works are general and specific activities related to a spiritual shepherd or overseer who has the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of

all the souls entrusted to his care. For example: A Bishop teaching a doctrine; administering the Sacraments, particularly Confirmation and Holy Orders; parish visits; and so on. A Pastor teaching the gospel, parish liturgical services, administering sacraments, providing the spiritual and moral guidance, and so on.

**PRESIDER:** The Pastor. As he presides at the Liturgy of the Word when the deacon or lector carries out his or her ministry of proclaiming the Word, in a similar fashion the Pastor presides at the Council meeting over the ministry of the people unifying, mediating, clarifying, coordinating, and focusing the Council's deliberations within Gospel values.

**SHARED RESPONSIBILITY:** The principle that each member of the Church has a right and duty to assist the Church, giving in proportion what he can of his time, talents, and treasure so that its mission among mankind will become more effective. For example: Through the Sacrament of Baptism, each is privileged and called to share actively in the redemptive work of Christ; some as spiritual leaders (Pope, Bishop, Priests) with the responsibilities of leadership and decision; others as individuals or as members of groups (Priests' Council, Sisters' Council, Lay Deanery Council, Parish Council) with the responsibilities of aiding and supporting the leadership in working toward achievement of the spiritual goal.

# SAMPLE BY-LAWS

The By-Laws of \_\_\_\_\_ Parish Council

Ratified on \_\_\_\_\_

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Parish Council of \_\_\_\_\_ Parish is called by our Pastor and our parishioners to model the Christian community, to advise our Pastor on parish matters, and to provide leadership through prayer, discernment, and our individual talents in advancing the mission of our parish and coordinating its ministries in order to better meet the spiritual and temporal needs of our parish and community. We rely on Jesus, our model, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the intercession of our patron saint, and the prayers and assistance of our fellow parishioners as we strive to fulfill our mission.

## ARTICLE I

### Organization

#### A. Name of Organization

This organization is known as the Parish Council of (parish), (city), Ohio, hereafter called the Parish Council.

#### B. Purpose

The Parish Council is an instrument of common counsel for the definition of goals, determination of policies, and execution of programs in all matters pertaining to the spiritual and temporal affairs of the parish. It provides a forum for the exchange of ideas. Under the direction of the Pastor, who represents the Bishop, it encourages, coordinates, unifies, and leads the whole Parish Community in making the Gospel known.

### **C. Function**

1. The spiritual development of the Parish Faith Community.
2. Support of the Pastoral Team.
3. Coordination of parish activities, projects, and programs.
4. Share in the participative decision-making.
5. Communications, both internal and external, to the parish itself.
6. Long and short-range total planning for the parish, establishing goals, and objectives, and monitoring their implementation.

## **ARTICLE II**

### **Membership of the Parish Council**

#### **A. Types and Number of Members**

1. The Parish Council will have \_\_\_\_\_ members elected by the Parish-at-Large. Any parishioner who is registered with \_\_\_\_\_, in full communion with the Church, and \_\_\_\_\_ years of age or older is eligible to vote for and to serve as a Parish Council member.
2. The Lay Deanery Council representative(s) will be ex-officio member(s) (non-voting) unless otherwise elected to the Council.
3. The Parish Council may appoint no more than three additional members to Parish Council to assure total parish representation and the expertise needed by the Council.
4. Representing the entire parish, all members of the Parish Council participate in the life, work, consensus-building and decision-making processes of the Parish Council.

**B. Term**

Elected members will serve a two (three) year term and are eligible to be reelected to one additional consecutive term.

1. Terms will be staggered so that one-half (one-third) of the elected members are replaced or re-elected each year.
2. Terms will correspond in their beginning and end with the organization year, July 1 through June 30.
3. Ex-officio members will serve as long as they occupy that office.
4. Terms of the Lay Deanery Council representatives will be in accordance with the By-laws of the Lay Deanery Council.
5. Appointed members will serve a one-year term and are eligible to serve one additional consecutive year as an appointee.

**C. Vacancies and Termination**

1. Replacement of any vacancy on the Parish Council will be filled by a vote of Parish Council no later than the next regularly scheduled meeting.
2. If a Council member should be unable or unwilling to complete a term of office, the member should submit a written notice to the Executive Committee.
3. Membership requires attendance at all regular meetings. Any member absent from three regularly scheduled meetings without having notified an officer of the reason will be subject to termination. The member shall be notified by the Secretary of the pending action and be given an opportunity to be heard by the Council in private session before the Council votes on the termination. A two-thirds vote of the Council is required for termination.



## **ARTICLE III**

### **Nominations and Elections**

In \_\_\_\_\_ of each year at the Parish Council meeting, the Chairperson of the Parish Council will appoint an ad hoc election committee from the Council which has the responsibility for planning, conducting, and overseeing the election of new members for the coming year. The Pastor will be a member of the Election Committee.

#### **A. Tasks**

1. Solicit nominees for Parish Council membership through a parish-wide process insuring that the slate is representative of the entire parish.
2. Contact nominees to apprise them of the responsibilities of Parish Council membership, determine their willingness to serve, and obtain a statement from them on their views of the parish and its needs as well as biographic data.
3. Present the slate to the parish along with data at least two weeks prior to the election.
4. Offer adequate opportunities for the parish to meet the candidates.
5. Conduct the election according to the policies and procedures for elections, ratify the results, and publicize the names of those elected.
6. Elections for Parish Council will be completed during the two months prior to the end of the organization year. Newly elected members will attend the remaining Parish Council meetings of the year as guests to become familiar with the processes and work of the Council.
7. Newly elected members will take office at the beginning of the organization year.

#### **B. Policies and Procedures for Elections**

1. All registered members of the parish who are in full communion with the Church and \_\_\_\_\_ years of age

or older are eligible to vote for Parish Council members.

2. The entire parish should be provided a convenient opportunity to participate in nominations and elections.
3. Secrecy will be provided in the elective process.
4. When members are elected at-large, a simple plurality should suffice.
5. In consideration of human feelings, the election process will be designed so that the election does not result in one person being the only loser.
6. The election process will normally require approximately six weeks to complete as follows:

**Week 0** Announce the coming elections and the nomination process.

**Week 1** Conduct an open nomination for Council candidates.

**Week 2** Begin contacts to fill the slate of candidates.

**Week 3** Continue contacts; solicit nominee statements and background data.

**Week 4** Pass out information sheets on candidates at all Masses; provide opportunity for the parish to meet the candidates.

**Week 5** Hold elections at / after all Masses.

**Week 6** Announce election results at all Masses.

## **ARTICLE IV**

### **Organizational Year**

- A. The organizational year will be July 1 through June 30.
- B. The parish Council will ordinarily meet monthly at a time and place determined by the Executive Committee.

## ARTICLE V

### Officers

- A. Appointed members and ex-officio members are not eligible to serve as officers of the Parish Council.
- B. All officers are elected by the members of the Parish Council at the beginning of the organization year.
- C. All officers serve a one-year term and are eligible to serve one additional consecutive term in the respective office.
- D. At the annual \_\_\_\_\_ meeting, the transition of officers will occur.
- E. Officers will include:
  - **Chairperson** who is responsible to chair all business and executive sessions and to oversee all activities of Parish Council.
  - **Vice Chairperson** who assumes the role of the chairperson in his/her absence and fulfills other responsibilities as delegated by Parish Council.
  - **Secretary** who is responsible for the records of Parish Council and transmitting the minutes of meetings to the appropriate persons.
  - **Stenographer or Secretary** to the Council is appointed by the Pastor to take the minutes during meetings, enabling the Secretary of the Council to participate fully in the Council's deliberations. The Stenographer assists the Secretary of the Council in maintaining adequate records and reports and publishing them for the members of the parish-at-large. The Stenographer to Parish Council has neither voice nor vote at Parish Council sessions.

## **ARTICLE VI**

### **Executive Committee**

- A. The Executive Committee will be composed of the pastor, a Lay Deanery Council Representative, and the three officers of Parish Council.
- B. The responsibilities of the Executive Committee are:
  - 1. Serve as leadership for Parish Council;
  - 2. Prepare agenda;
  - 3. Serve as interim consultation group for the Pastor on behalf of Parish Council and where decisions in an emergency situation are required;
  - 4. Call special meetings as needed.
- C. A Record will be kept at the Executive Committee activity and this record made available to Parish Council at its next session for clarification.
- D. Executive Committee meetings will occur prior to each Parish Council meeting.

## **ARTICLE VII**

### **Quorum**

- A. A quorum will consist of a simple majority of Parish Council Members present at the meeting.
- B. A majority of the members of the Council present at the meeting is sufficient to conduct business.

## **ARTICLE VIII**

### **Committee and Parish Council Relationships**

- A. The Standing Committees shall be represented on Parish Council by a liaison appointed by the Parish Council.

- B. Any elected or appointed Parish Council member may be selected as the liaison to a Committee.
- C. Specific action groups and sub-committees are responsible to and report to the Parish Council Standing Committee with responsibility for that scope of concern.

## ARTICLE IX

### Standing Committees of Parish Council

- A. General guidelines regarding the Parish Council Standing Committees:
  - 1. The number of committees should be reflective of the major concerns of the parish and help to guarantee selection of the most qualified committee members.
  - 2. The Standing Committees are responsible for:
    - a. Collecting information;
    - b. Reflecting on the information;
    - c. Evaluating alternatives;
    - d. Reporting findings to the Parish Council and making recommendations;
    - e. Coordinating activities within their scope of concern;
    - f. Providing communication between various groups and individuals;
    - g. Making decisions about matters pertaining to their scope of concern, subject to review and approval by Parish Council.
- B. The following Standing Committees are established for Parish Council and shall conduct their affairs in cooperation with the Pastor, Pastoral Team, and Parish Council.
  - 1. **LITURGY.** Committee responsibilities would include all functions related to the official public liturgies of the parish and other public and private devotions.
  - 2. **EDUCATION.** Committee responsibilities would include all functions related to the teaching of Christian Doctrine at all levels in the parish.
  - 3. **JUSTICE AND SOCIAL CONCERNS.** Committee responsibilities would include all functions promoting Christian life in the parish related to the social / communal needs of the parish and local communities.

4. **BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS.** Committee responsibilities would include all efforts to provide for the material needs of the parish.

## **ARTICLE X**

### **Conduct of Meetings**

- A. The Order of Business shall be:
  1. Call to Order; welcoming of guests;
  2. Opening Community Prayer;
  3. Meditation and discussion of the text;
  4. Roll Call of the membership;
  5. Review of previous meeting's minutes and review of agenda;
  6. Business, including necessary parts of Committee and LDC reports;
  7. Standing Committee reports; Lay Deanery Council report;
  8. Comments from attending parishioners;
  9. Meeting evaluation and review of tasks and personnel assigned;
  10. Closing Community Prayer; Adjournment.
- B. In keeping with the concept of shared responsibility to the parish and each other, Council members should always make the total welfare of the parish their prime objective and strive for consensus on each issue. The principle of Discernment will be used in the making of decisions; the complete listening to all opinions, prayer (if the decision is a sensitive one or if members are unable to reach consensus); and finally a poll or re-poll of the members present. In the event of an impasse in the view of the Parish Council Chairperson, Robert's Rules of Order Revised may then be invoked.
- C. In accordance with Diocesan Policy, "If a major area of friction develops between the pastor and the parish

community or the council, over an issue of serious concern, the matter may be referred to the local Dean so that he can act as arbitrator. Ordinarily, the Parish Council or the Pastor can call for the Dean's assistance." (Diocese of Steubenville, Synod 1983, DPO 25)

## **ARTICLE XI**

### **Amendments**

Amendments to these By-laws may be proposed at any regular meeting of the Parish Council by any member. The proposed amendment will be read at two consecutive meetings. After the first reading, the proposed amendment is to be presented to the parish via the parish bulletin so that there is opportunity for parish input. The Council will vote on the amendment after the second reading. A two-thirds majority vote of the Parish Council is required to pass a proposed amendment.

## **EVALUATION**

Evaluation is at the heart of the **work** of the Parish Council. For the Council to be truly representative and effective, evaluation must also be at the heart of the **life** of the Council. A Council member's self-evaluation, evaluation of the needs and strengths of the Parish, and evaluation of the workings of the Council are important to the growth of the Council, to the growth of each member of the Council, and to the total welfare of the entire parish.

The following pages offer a possible format for each type of evaluation. Such evaluations might be done at the beginning of the organization year, at the end of the year, as part of a Council retreat or other formative activity, or at other appropriate times. It is not recommended that all three types be done simultaneously; but you may wish to do one or another more than once during the year.

The Parish Council Member Self-Evaluation is designed to help the member assess his/her areas of strength and of needed growth.



The Parish Evaluation might be used personally or the results might be confidentially tallied and shared with and discussed by the Council to help the Council better understand the parish community, its strengths, and its needs.

The evaluation of Council Meetings is designed to help the Council assess its own strengths and areas of needed growth. In this light, it will be most helpful when the results are tallied, shared, and discussed by the entire Council.

## **PARISH COUNCIL MEMBER SELF-EVALUATION**

**NOTE:** After reflecting on each statement, assign one of the numbers from the Rating Scale that describes your reaction to the statement shown.

<b><u>RATING SCALE</u></b>	
<b><u>NUMBER</u></b>	<b><u>MEANING</u></b>
5	Agree strongly
4	Agree generally
3	Agree somewhat
4	No opinion
3	Disagree somewhat
2	Disagree generally
1	Disagree strongly

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### **AS A MEMBER OF OUR PARISH COUNCIL, I . . .**

- \_\_\_A. Believe I understand the role of the Council in helping to develop a better Christian Community in our Parish.
- \_\_\_B. Regard my Council membership as an obligation of service to all the members of my parish.
- \_\_\_C. Try to keep informed of the needs and problems of the parish.
- \_\_\_D. Discuss issues with other parishioners to learn their opinions.
- \_\_\_E. Believe I am well-informed about people, diocesan programs, and other resources available to help the Council in its work.
- \_\_\_F. Try to maintain a strong prayer and spiritual life to help me meet my obligations as a Council member.
- \_\_\_G. Believe I understand the Pastor's responsibilities to the parish.
- \_\_\_H. Am well aware of the advisory role of the Council to help the Pastor meet his responsibilities.
- \_\_\_I. Make a special effort to attend Council meetings.

- \_\_\_J. Participate in the open forum discussions on issues brought before Council.
- \_\_\_K. Always support the Pastor's decision on issues deliberated by the Council.
- \_\_\_L. Accept my share of responsibility in acting as a voice of all the people of the parish.
- \_\_\_M. Believe our Council maintains a proper spiritual atmosphere for its meetings and work.
- \_\_\_N. Think our Council recognizes the importance of seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit to aid it in its work.
- \_\_\_O. Am interested in the need for planning and setting goals for the Council in fulfilling its work.
- \_\_\_P. Readily serve and take an active part in Council committee work.
- \_\_\_Q. Take an active part in the programs established by the Council for the parish.
- \_\_\_R. Help to provide progress reports and evaluations to the Council for those programs in which I have a responsibility.
- \_\_\_S. Understand the meaning of "consensus" and why it best serves the parish community in resolving issues.
- \_\_\_T. Believe that my experience and know-how are being put to good use in Council work.
- \_\_\_U. Readily defend decisions arising out of Council deliberations as best for the entire parish, even though I may not totally agree with the decisions in all aspects.

## PARISH EVALUATION

**NOTE:** After reflecting on each statement, assign one of the numbers from the Rating Scale that describes your reaction to the statement shown.

### RATING SCALE

<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>MEANING</u>
7	Agree strongly
6	Agree generally
6	Agree somewhat
5	No opinion
4	Disagree somewhat
2	Disagree generally
1	Disagree strongly

- 
- \_\_\_A. Our parishioners have a spirit of Christian concern for each other.
- \_\_\_B. Our parishioners understand the relationship between the Parish, the Diocese, and the Universal Church.
- \_\_\_C. Our Parish Community is aware of the objectives and goals of the parish.
- \_\_\_D. Our parishioners accept changes to improve the spiritual aspects of the parish.
- \_\_\_E. The Parish community supports the Parish Council in its work.
- \_\_\_F. Parishioners are generally interested in serving as members of Parish Council.
- \_\_\_G. Parishioners participate in electing Parish Council members.
- \_\_\_H. The Parish Community responds to the spiritual programs and opportunities developed through the Council.
- \_\_\_I. The Parish Community shows interest in the social programs and activities developed through the Council.

- \_\_\_J. When asked, parishioners provide insight on issues to be deliberated by the Parish Council.
- \_\_\_K. When opportunities arise, parishioners attend Council meetings and participate in the dialogue on issues.
- \_\_\_L. When asked, parishioners serve on Parish Council committees.
- \_\_\_M. The young adults of the parish are active in the work of the parish.
- \_\_\_N. Our parishioners are aware of the potential they represent in serving the mission of the parish.
- \_\_\_O. Our Parish Community has a general awareness of diocesan services and programs available for its use.
- \_\_\_P. Parishioners generally participate in special liturgical services when held.
- \_\_\_Q. Members of the parish support the financial needs of the parish.
- \_\_\_R. Parishioners generally respond to our religious education programs for parish children
- \_\_\_S. Our parishioners work together to build a spirit of Christian Community.

## PARISH EVALUATION

**NOTE:** After reflecting on each statement, assign one of the numbers from the Rating Scale that describes your reaction to the statement shown.

<u>RATING SCALE</u>	
<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>MEANING</u>
7	Agree strongly
7	Agree generally
6	Agree somewhat
5	No Opinion
3	Disagree somewhat
2	Disagree generally
1	Disagree strongly

- 
- \_\_A. Council meetings are well planned in advance.
  - \_\_B. An agenda is prepared for each meeting.
  - \_\_C. Ample advance notice is given regarding meeting time and place.
  - \_\_D. Every effort is made to schedule meetings so that priests and members can attend.
  - \_\_E. Our average meeting attendance is good.
  - \_\_F. Minutes of previous meeting are sent in advance to members.
  - \_\_G. Resource persons and materials are arranged for in advance of meeting and included on agenda.
  - \_\_H. Meetings generally start on time as scheduled.
  - \_\_I. The proper spiritual atmosphere is set at the start of the meeting.
  - \_\_J. Meetings are conducted in an orderly, business-like manner.

- \_\_\_K. Efforts are made to minimize interruptions and non-essential discussions during the meeting.
- \_\_\_L. Members are encouraged to participate in open discussion.
- \_\_\_M. Other parishioners and guests are introduced and made to feel welcome.
- \_\_\_N. Other parishioners and guests are invited to offer comments on issues.
- \_\_\_O. New issues brought up are referred to the Executive Committee for consideration on the agenda at a later meeting.
- \_\_\_P. The Pastor is afforded ample time to report his decisions on prior issues.
- \_\_\_Q. The Pastor is afforded ample time to explain new diocesan mandates, services, resources, and new parish circumstances.
- \_\_\_R. We rely heavily upon the Pastor's direction for discussing issues.
- \_\_\_S. We attempt to learn all sides of an issue before acting on it.
- \_\_\_T. Committees are asked to prepare reports in advance of meetings.
- \_\_\_U. Committee reports are detailed sufficiently to eliminate misunderstandings.
- \_\_\_V. Written copies of committee reports are given to the Council Secretary.
- \_\_\_W. Insights on issues are solicited from other parishioners or organizations when needed.

- \_\_\_X. If complete information on an issue is apparently lacking, the issue is deferred for Council action at a later time.
- \_\_\_Y. We generally furnish committees and/or parish organizations with ample information and resource data for programs authorized by Council.
- \_\_\_Z. Too much meeting time is spent on parish financial problems.
- \_\_\_AA. The average length of our Council meetings is about right.
- \_\_\_BB. The Council keeps the parish informed as to its work and actions.