

St. John the Evangelist Parish

Pastoral Council Foundation Document

1. Introduction

Recognizing that sound pastoral decisions are informed by the wisdom of the People of God, the St. John the Evangelist Parish pastoral council was established. The Second Vatican Council recommended the establishment of such councils. They state that Catholics have a right and duty to express their opinion on what pertains to the good of the Church. Pastors should willingly consult their people and use their prudent advice. By establishing a pastoral council, the pastor acknowledges the wisdom of his parishioners and expresses his desire to share with them his responsibility for the governance of the parish.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the parish pastoral council is to investigate pastoral matters, to consider them thoroughly, and to propose practical conclusions about them. The Pastoral Council represents the parishioners in a formal, procedural manner. Parishioners can contact any of the councilors to express any viewpoint on a church matter and that matter will be discussed at the next meeting. The council's task is, first of all, to study those matters brought to its attention and shed light on them. Its second task is to reflect on them thoroughly, to discern their true nature, to evaluate and to ponder them. Its final task is to draw sound conclusions. The council presents these conclusions to the pastor in the form of recommendations. This threefold task of the council-investigating, considering, and recommending conclusions-is called pastoral planning. After the pastor has accepted the recommendations of the council, he directs their implementation. Council members may assist him, but strictly speaking, implementation is the responsibility of the pastor, not the council.

3. Scope

The scope of the council is pastoral matters. These may include everything that pertains to the pastor's ministries of proclaiming God's word, celebrating the sacraments, caring for the faithful, promoting the mission of the Church to the world, and being a good steward of parish resources. The scope includes all the practical matters of parish life. There is, in short, nothing about which the pastor may not consult the council, apart from faith, orthodoxy, moral principles or laws of the universal Church.

4. Criteria for Membership

Pastoral council members are chosen, above all, for their ability to accomplish the main task of the council-the work of investigating, considering, and recommending practical conclusions. They are baptized Catholics, in good standing with the Church, who reflect the parish's various neighborhoods, social and professional groups, and apostolates. Finally, they are parishioners noted for their faith, good morals, and prudence.

5. Selection of Members

The pastoral council has a three-year planning cycle, and 12 members are selected for a three-year term. Six councilors are chosen from the Parish Representatives teams, balanced by the representative age groups. Six councilors are chosen from the various Parish Commissions or Committees.

6. Officers

The pastor presides at every meeting of the council. He consults, he accepts or rejects recommendations, and he develops the agenda with the council officers. The pastor and councilors select two officers from among their number. They are the chairperson (i.e. Pastoral Council President) and Secretary. With the pastor they develop the

council agenda. The chairperson facilitates council discussions, making sure that everyone speaks and is heard. The chairperson also oversees the work of the councilors between regular meetings, as needed. The secretary keeps the minutes. He or she ensures that they are sent, along with the agenda and supporting documents, to each councilor one week after every meeting.

7. Agenda

The chairperson develops the agenda with the pastor and council officers. It states the objectives for each meeting, the means and group process for reaching the objectives, and the resources needed to accomplish them. The agenda guides the meeting. If the pastor is dissatisfied with the consultation, he expresses his reservations and asks the council to clarify whatever remains obscure. After the necessary discernment, the pastor formally accepts or rejects the council's recommendations. He may then ask the parish staff or other parishioners to implement them.

8. Relation to the Parish Staff and Finance Council

The pastor consults others besides the pastoral council about parish governance. He relies upon the parish staff for their expertise and consults them daily about the management of parish operations. He may occasionally ask parish staff members to attend council meetings in order to put their knowledge at the service of the pastoral council. Moreover, the pastor relies on the finance council to develop, monitor, and report on the parish budget. Finance council members are chosen for their technical skill in realms of accounting and finance. The pastoral council, by contrast, offers practical wisdom. That is the ability to investigate pastoral matters in a general way, to reflect on them deeply in dialogue, and to propose conclusions appropriate to the parish.

9. Meetings

The pastoral council meets once every other month, normally including a summer recess. Meetings are two hours in length. Between the meetings, council members are expected to follow up the previous meeting and prepare for the next. This usually entails work on ad hoc committees and/or additional follow-up meetings.