

**Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines**  
**Diocese of Bridgeport**  
**June, 2019**

**Introduction:**

In the Diocese of Bridgeport, each parish is to have a Parish Pastoral Council whose function is to foster greater participation of the entire parish in the pastoral life and mission of the parish and the Diocesan Church.

The following principles will guide the work and formation of a Parish Pastoral Council:

1. The Parish Pastoral Council is a consultative body with the role of advising and assisting the Pastor in developing a pastoral plan and providing input on issues of pastoral concern.
2. The Parish Pastoral Council should be representative of the entire parish, recognizing and reflecting the parish's rich diversity.
3. The Parish Pastoral Council is to collaborate with parish committees and ministries that address specific areas of parish life such as worship, spirituality, evangelization, religious education, finance and service.
4. Under the supervision of the pastor, the Parish Pastoral Council should seek to develop a statement of purpose which reflects the identity and mission of the parish in light of the Gospel, Church teachings, the specific realities of the parish, and diocesan pastoral priorities.
5. In service to the Pastor, the Parish Pastoral Council carries out its function by:
  - a. Assisting him in the discernment of the needs, concerns, gifts and resources of the whole parish and its members;
  - b. Reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of existing programs;
  - c. Reflecting on Diocesan pastoral priorities and recommending how they can be implemented in the parish;
  - d. Developing a parish pastoral plan;
  - e. If needed, help develop a parish mission statement and periodically re-evaluating and revising it;
  - f. Recommending policies, procedures and programs which would assist in the implementation of the parish pastoral plan.

## **Norms related to the Formation of a Parish Pastoral Council**

- 1. Membership:** In addition to the Pastor of the parish, it is suggested that the Parish Pastoral Council be composed of twelve to fifteen members.
  - a. The Pastor is an *ex officio* member of the Council. The council cannot meet without him, unless authorized by the pastor to meet without him.
  - b. Other members of the Council include clergy, parish staff members and lay members of the parish.
  - c. Membership can be determined through a process of parish voting, guided discernment or direct appointment by the pastor.
  - d. Since the Council is to be representative of the entire parish community, its members ought to be active in the life of the parish.
  
- 2. Officers of the Council**
  - a. **Lay Chair:**
    - i. It is preferable that the Council elect a lay chair who is responsible in conducting the work of the Council's meetings. The election of the chair must receive the approval of the pastor.
    - ii. The chair is also responsible to draft a proposed agenda for each Council meeting, submit it for the pastor's approval and ensure that it is distributed in a timely fashion before the meeting is convened.
  - b. **Recording Secretary:**
    - i. It is advised that the Council also elect a recording secretary whose principle duty will be to take accurate, concise minutes of the Council's work.
    - ii. Such minutes, once approved by the pastor, can be distributed to the wider parish in any mode that seems appropriate to the respective community.
  
- 3. Term of Office**
  - a. Lay members of the council ordinarily receive a three-year term with the possibility of serving a second term of three years. Ideally, not more than one third of the Council's membership should be changed at one time.
  - b. In any newly formed Council, all members serve an initial three-year term. After this initial term, one third of the membership serves an additional year, one third serve two additional years, and one third serves a full additional term of three years.
  
- 4. Meeting Frequency:** Parish Pastoral Councils should meet at least four times per year, and best practices recommend six to eight times per year.

## **The Role of the Pastor**

The Pastor is the presider of the Parish Pastoral Council. He attends all meetings of the Council and participates in its discussion. When any issue is being considered, it is always preferable that Council seek a consensus. In such discussions, the Pastor is obligated to raise questions or objections relating to issues that could affect the outcome of the decision. If a consensus occurs and the pastor concurs, the Pastor will ratify the decision. If it is impossible for the Council to reach a consensus, it is the responsibility of the Pastor to make the final decision after considering all input.

## **Relationship with other Parish Organizations and Committees:**

### **A. Parish Finance Council:**

- a. Mandated by the Code of Canon Law, the Parish Finance Council is separate and distinct from the Parish Pastoral Council. Communication between the two Councils is, however, essential. To ensure that this communication is ongoing, it is recommended that a member of the Parish Finance Council be appointed by the pastor to also serve on the Parish Pastoral Council.

### **B. Other Parish Organizations:**

- a. Each parish has a unique organizational structure that allows ministry to thrive within it. Parish Pastoral Councils should not seek to supplant these organizations but collaborate with them as much as possible.
- b. Parish Pastoral Council members are encouraged to have a global view of parish life, a perspective that encompasses the entire mission of the parish. This view should include the concerns, needs and initiatives of all parish organizations and should seek to view these as parts of a larger whole.