



Parish Finance Council Guidelines



2015

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PARISH FINANCE COUNCIL

CANON LAW

In the administration of the temporal goods of the parish, Canon 532 defines the role of the pastor as the authoritative representative of the parish. Canon 537 introduces the element of the Parish Finance Council as a mandated body having an advisory and consultative role with the pastor.

“Each parish is to have a Finance Council which is regulated by universal law as well as by norms issued by the diocesan bishop; this Council of Christian faithful, selected according to the same norms, aide the pastor in the administration of parish goods with due regard for the prescription of can. 532.”

In keeping with the directives of the revised Code of Canon Law, the Diocese of Des Moines presents the following guidelines for the organization and operation of a parish Finance Council.

MEMBERSHIP

The Parish Finance Council is about the life of a community of faith and, as such, its members should be members of that community of faith. The Pastor shall appoint members to the Finance Council, and also has the authority to remove members. As in other matters, the Pastor may use his discretion in the selection of qualified members from the parish community and the number of members.

1. **Representation** - Members should be drawn from the parish community and reflect its diversity. This requirement of parish membership may be waived by the pastor if special expertise is needed. Where appropriate, outside advice and counsel can be engaged when specific expertise is needed.

The Finance Council should draw upon the skills of parishioners who are knowledgeable in business, law, accounting, and communication. Persons with professional knowledge and experience in engineering, construction, maintenance, and purchasing could also make a significant contribution and should be recruited when available. Members should be chosen based on demonstrable skills or expertise in business, management, home finance, planning, administration, and law. Expertise can vary widely and include a business executive, accountant, lawyer, and small business owner. The unique talents within the parish community should be sought.

2. **Number of Members**- Membership should consist of no less than five members to actively engage in review, discussion, and resolution of matters. It may be helpful to increase the membership to share the tasks, form subcommittees, and to provide the ability to hold a meeting and vote on issues in the absence of a member.
3. **Preclusion to Membership**- Any person who may have a conflict of interest in view of other services, paid or unpaid, rendered to the parish and any person related to the parish priests are ineligible to serve as a member of the Parish Finance Council.
Members of the Parish Finance Council may serve in other volunteer service roles in the parish such as other committees or boards if, in the judgment of the pastor, such dual service will not create conflict of interest situations.

No parish employee or member of the family of an employee may serve on the finance council.

4. **Role of Parish Employee**- Parish employees are not members of the Parish Finance Council; they are staff and support the Parish Finance Council. Parish employees should be available to answer questions regarding parish programs, accounting, financial reporting, and internal controls. The Finance Council should be provided relevant information including financial reports (balance sheet,

income statement, detailed general ledger, budget to actual comparisons, loan balance payments and interest payments, investment of surplus funds, and status of fundraising drives) for council review.

The parish Business Manager or Bookkeeper should attend meetings in a consultative, non-voting capacity.

5. **Acknowledgement of Members-** Acknowledge members' contributions to the Finance Council and subcommittees at meetings, in the minutes, and in the bulletin.
6. **Confidentiality-** Members should maintain confidentiality on those matters designated as confidential. Materials such as agendas, meeting minutes, and review materials should not be disclosed if designated as confidential.
The Parish Finance Council may choose to go into an executive session if conducting business deemed to be of a sensitive nature. Written minutes are not to be taken during an executive session. Otherwise the meetings should be considered open in nature.
7. **Terms-** Members of the Parish Finance Council (excluding ex-officio members) are to be appointed for 3 year staggering terms. Following these initial appointments, succeeding members would be named to 3 year terms. Members may be re-appointed to a second 3 year-term. After a member has been off of the Council for two terms they could be appointed as a new member.
8. **Officers-** By virtue of his office, the pastor presides over the Parish Finance Council. He will appoint or through some process select, on an annual basis, a chairperson and a recording secretary.

MEETING MINUTES AND AGENDA

In striving for openness and accountability in its practices, meeting minutes summarizing the items discussed and the decisions reached should be recorded. Prepared agendas, distributed in advance, will keep meetings focused.

The Finance Council should plan meetings in advance by developing an annual schedule of meeting dates and times. This will increase participation by members.

1. **Recording of Meeting Minutes-** Minutes should be recorded and archived as part of the parish permanent record. One member of the finance council is to act as secretary in keeping minutes of the meeting.
2. **Use of Agendas and Review Materials-** Meeting agendas should be prepared in advance of the meeting by consultation of the Pastor and Finance Council Chair. The agenda should list the major items for discussion. Supplying information in advance to members will lead to productive meetings.
3. **Schedule Meetings-** Meetings should be scheduled at least once a quarter, or more frequently if required. Some parishes use a format of the finance council meeting every other month with subcommittees meeting on the off months. Meeting times and dates should be predicable, such as a day and week of each month.

Formulate a communication method among officers to deal with Finance Council matters between meetings. The Parish Finance Council does not meet in the absence of the pastor.

4. **Record Retention-** The parish should retain meeting minutes, agendas, handouts, reports, and materials reviewed during meeting for future reference by either internal or external parties.

CONSULTATIVE BODY TO PASTOR

The Finance Council works closely with the Pastor, who is accountable to the Bishop for the administration and stewardship of the temporal goods of the parish. Consultation is at the heart of the decision-making process – sharing information, listening, contributing to the discussion, and promoting consensus. The Finance Council does not have any authority to act without the knowledge or agreement of the Pastor.

Although the pastor is not obliged to follow the recommendations of the Finance Council, the pastor should not act against such advice, especially when there is consensus, unless there is an overriding reason. In other words, the prudent pastor would not ignore the advice of the Finance Council unless there was a serious reason to do so. When acting contrary to its recommendations the pastor should provide an explanation.

RESPONSIBILITIES

After studying matters of financial concern, the Finance Council recommends policy. It is not the function of the Parish Finance Council to implement policies. The pastor and parish staff carries out implementation of policies. The Finance Council offers financial advice, planning, and direction. It helps to find and manage the resources to fund parish projects and programs under the Pastor's leadership. The following are recommended areas for consultation.

1. Extra-ordinary acts of administration should be reviewed by the parish finance council before seeking the approval of the Bishop as required by Canon 1281. These acts are defined by the Bishop and would include the acquisition and alienation of real property, collateralization or mortgaging of real property, the sale of religious artifacts that would be considered as part of a parish's patrimony, and a commitment of parish resources over \$25,000 or 5% of the annual ordinary income, whichever is higher.
2. Provide guidance for parish accounting systems, including the diocesan required computer systems with at least one member with read only access to the accounting software.
3. Periodically review internal controls and the policies and procedures of the parish accounting and financial functions to identify correct procedures and irregularities. The areas reviewed should include the administration of bank and investment accounts, Mass collection procedures, cash receipts, cash disbursements, petty cash, and assisting in the development and maintenance of job descriptions.
4. Review financial reports at least quarterly:
 - a. Statement of Financial Position - balance sheet
 - b. Statement of Revenue and Expenditures - income statement comparison to budget - regularly reviewed to determine that the parish is operating within its budget. This includes the school and religious education programs if applicable.
 - c. Trend reports: contributions, school revenue, program results (e.g. religious education), and revenue and capital campaign results.

- d. Review the payments of any loans and Diocesan assessments for propriety.
5. The Parish Finance Council shall assist in the preparation each year of an operating budget. This can be done either through a budget subcommittee of the Finance Council or through the entire Finance Council. This annual budget should be reviewed by the Pastoral Council and approved by the Finance Council with Pastor having the final approval.
6. The Parish Finance Council shall create and monitor the parish investment policy for surplus and restricted funds.
7. The Parish Finance Council shall assist in assuring that the following fiscal functions are performed:
 - a. Timely payment of debt and interest payments.
 - b. Timely payment of vendor invoices.
 - c. Investment of surplus funds.
 - d. Assure adequate revenue through various means such as tithing, parish fundraisers, and planned giving programs.
 - e. Review donations received with a restriction placed on it. Establish a written policy on contributions, the Diocesan Development Office can provide assistance.
 - f. Establish and promote a system of online giving.
8. The Parish Finance Council should provide assistance in the formulation of a financial report to the parish community, as required by Canon 1287.
9. Many parishes and schools have groups using the parish name and/or parish tax identification number. Examples include Altar and Rosary Society and Home and School. Review the activities of the parish auxiliary groups and verify cash balances of bank accounts. Annually meet with auxiliary groups to review the reporting of past year's activities and a review of the budget for the coming year. Assess the accounting practices and internal control procedures in use, consolidate bank accounts as much as possible and verify there are no activities that might jeopardize the tax exempt status of the church.
10. Complete and submit the Annual Financial Report to the Bishop by September 15th.
11. Consult on the construction or renovation of parish facilities, the sale or purchase of parish property, and lease agreements. To ensure that the parish buildings and property are adequately maintained, the Finance Council assists the pastor in planning for repair, replacement, or service of property and equipment. The use of a sub-committee could be very helpful.
12. Establish and maintain a safety committee to develop emergency plans, review transportation activities and general risk management programs and recommendations.
13. Oversee the use and maintenance of computer hardware and software. The use of a sub-committee could be very helpful.

14. Review fundraising activities, such as raffles, bingo, and concession sales for acquisition of required licenses, support documentation for tax filings, and actual tax filings.
15. The Finance Council shall review the long range planning objectives of the Parish as they relate to the ability of the Parish to fund those goals and maintain fiscal integrity.
16. The Finance Council should make itself aware of the policies in the Parish Employment Policy Manual to ensure the policies are being properly implemented within the parish (expected completion date Fall 2015).

SUBCOMMITTEES

It often makes sense to divide the Finance Council into subcommittees to deal with responsibilities and duties. The magnitude and complexity of the different subcommittee responsibilities depends upon the size, resources, obligations, and needs of each particular parish.

Possible subcommittees of the Parish Finance Council are:

1. Budget Subcommittee
2. Facilities and Maintenance Subcommittee
3. Safety and Security Subcommittee
4. Financial Planning and Development Subcommittee
5. Technology Subcommittee

RELATIONSHIP TO PASTORAL COUNCIL

Since the Parish Finance Council relates to the administrative responsibilities of the pastor, it should not be a part of the Parish Pastoral Council structure. However an officer from the Parish Finance Council may serve as an ex-officio member of the Parish Pastoral Council. Communication between the two councils is essential to share information regarding the parish finances and to implement the pastoral plans.

The Finance Council is distinct from the Parish Pastoral Council. An appropriate means of communication should be developed between the Parish Finance Council and the Parish Pastoral Council. This should be done so as to ensure that the Parish Finance Council does not enter into areas of policy and mission, which are the prerogative of the Parish Pastoral Council. The Parish Finance Council advises on the adequacy of resources to accomplish the mission of the parish, and on the financial policies and procedures, such as internal controls.

CHECKLIST OF MAJOR ACTIVITIES:

1. Annual Budget Process: (*Expected time period: January – June*)
 - a. Project and plan resources for coming fiscal year.
 - b. Review program budgets: Church, School, Religious Ed etc.

2. Financial Review: *(at least quarterly)*
 - a. Review all financial reports and compare to annual budget.
3. Accounting/Internal Control Procedures: *(ongoing)*
 - a. Review internal control and accounting procedures to verify that best practices are being followed.
4. Auxiliary Groups *(at least quarterly)*
 - a. Review revenue and expenses for all auxiliary groups.
5. Compliance Oversight *(Expected time period: November – December)*
 - a. Confirm that the following forms are filed on time:
 - 1) W-2's and 941's for any employees
 - 2) 1099's for services provided to parish/school by appropriate entities
 - 3) Bingo, Pull tabs, raffles and other events that may be subject to taxes.
 - 4) Annual housing letter to priests on staff
6. Parish Annual Report to Parishioners etc. *(Expected time period: after fiscal year end)*
 - a. Review report before it is presented to the parish community.
7. Complete and return the Annual Financial Review/Report (AFR) to the Diocese by September 15th.

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