



Role of the Parish Trustee



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PARISH TRUSTEES

PURPOSE

To provide guidance regarding the role, duties, and responsibilities of Trustees of Parishes within the Diocese of Des Moines.

DEFINITIONS

“**Bishop**” means the sitting Bishop of Des Moines (or the appointed Apostolic Administrator). *Ex-officio* President of the Parish Corporation.

“**Diocese**” means that certain corporate entity formed, maintained, and existing under Iowa Code 504.141 with the Iowa Business Name: “The Roman Catholic Diocese of Des Moines.”

“**Household**” means a person living in the same household of a responsible person.

“**Parish**” means a Catholic parish within the Diocese.

“**Parish Corporate Board of Directors**” (Board) means the Bishop, the Vicar General, the Pastor, and the two appointed lay Trustees of the Parish corporation and, according to the Articles of Incorporation, have the power to transact all business of the corporation.

“**Parish Finance Council**” means the canonical consultative body established in a Parish in accordance with canon 537 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the policy of the Diocese, which provides consultation to the pastor from a cross-section of parishioners to share their thoughts and insights on financial topics in service to the mission of a specific Parish.

“**Parish Pastoral Council**” means the canonical consultative body established in a Parish in accordance with canon 536 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the policy of the Diocese, which provides consultation to the Pastor from a cross-section of parishioners to share thoughts and insights in service to the mission of a specific Parish.

“**Pastor**” means a Parish Pastor or a parochial administrator, as the case may be. *Ex-officio* Treasurer of the Parish Corporation.

“**Trustees**” means the two lay members of the Parish appointed to serve as members and officers of the Parish corporation, in accordance with Iowa Code § 504.205.

“**Vicar General**” means the priest appointed by the Bishop as Vicar General. *Ex-officio* Vice-President of the Parish Corporation.

INTRODUCTION

Engaged parish trustees are vital to the life of a parish. In recognition of this important role, the Diocese of Des Moines provides this resource to parishes in order to provide greater clarity and understanding throughout this local Church.

CANON LAW

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/PIU.HTM>

Spiritual and Temporal Affairs

Can. 519 The pastor is the proper pastor of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share, so that for that same community he carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, also with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful, according to the norm of law.

CIVIL LAW

Nonprofit corporations, organization.

The governing statutes for religious corporations are set forth in Chapter 504 of the Iowa Code. The parish corporations in the Diocese of Des Moines constitute “religious corporations” as defined under Iowa Code § 504.141. After a parish corporation is initially formed through the filing of articles of incorporation by the bishop, the parish corporation is organized through an organizational meeting of the initial directors of the parish corporation whereby officers are appointed, bylaws adopted and any other business is conducted (Iowa Code § 504.205).

APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES

1. While the Bishop, Vicar General and the Pastor hold their membership on the Parish Corporate Board of Directors (“Board”) *ex officio*, the Trustees are appointed to membership by the Bishop, Vicar General, and the Pastor.
2. In practice, the Pastor submits the names of two lay parishioners to the Bishop and Vicar General requesting their votes for appointment. The appointment request must also indicate which proposed Trustee will serve as secretary.
3. Before making a recommendation to the Bishop and Vicar General, the Pastor must consult with the Parish Pastoral Council, the Parish Finance Council, or the Parish membership. Upon approval of the submitted names, the appointment document will be executed by the Bishop, Vicar General, and Pastor. The appointment document is to be preserved with the corporate records of the Parish.
4. The term of office of each Trustee shall be for three (3) years and shall be renewable one (1) time. No Trustee may serve more than two consecutive terms, for a total of six years. Trustee terms should be staggered. After a Trustee has been out of office for two terms they can be appointed as a new Trustee.
5. Trustees and their Household may not be employees of the parish, though it may be advisable at certain times for employees to attend meetings as non-voting participants.
6. Two persons living in the same Household cannot both serve as Trustees at the same time. It is not permitted to have one member of a Household serve as a Trustee while another member of the Household serves on another parish consultative body (i.e. Parish Council, Finance Council, or Board of Education). Requests for exception are to be made in writing by the pastor to the diocesan Chancellor. Approvals will only be granted for one year. In such allowances, confidentiality must be maintained (see Confidentiality and Removal of a Trustee sections, p. 7-8).
7. Trustees must be members of the Parish and should reside within the Diocese. It is strongly recommended Trustees be representative of parish demographics. Therefore, every effort

should be made to ensure that at least one Trustee be female and that minorities be represented consistent with the parish community.

ROLE OF TRUSTEES

1. Trustees are fiduciaries of the Parish corporation responsible for voting on corporate resolutions regarding all Parish business.
2. Trustees have the obligation to carry out their roles with appropriate confidentiality regarding sensitive Parish matters that come to their attention (see Confidentiality section, p. 7).
3. As a fiduciary, a Trustee owes the Parish certain legal duties:
 - a. Duty of Care: which is a responsibility that requires Trustees to make decisions in good faith and in a reasonably prudent manner
 - b. Duty of Loyalty: which is a Trustee's responsibility to act at all times in the best interests of the Parish.
 - c. Fiduciary Duty: which means a duty of utmost good faith, trust, confidence, and candor.
4. The Pastor should consult with the Trustees on all important Parish matters and the Trustees should be prepared to work with the Pastor in making decisions in these matters. Trustees serve a valuable function to the Board, providing not only support and counsel to the pastor, but also accountability and transparency on behalf of the parish community.
5. Trustees are to confirm, at least annually, from the Pastor that the Parish is fulfilling the Safe Environment requirements of the Diocese.
6. Trustees are expected to review the annual Parish Financial Report to the Diocese
7. Trustees should request from the parish councils the necessary information to ensure that the parish is properly planning to meet its financial obligations, including its obligations to the Diocese.
8. Duties of the Corporate Secretary (Trustee elected by the Board)
 - a. Record the minutes of all meetings, which shall be kept in the Parish corporation minute book;
 - b. Send minutes of Board meetings to the Pastor and other Trustee within ten days of the meeting;
 - c. Conduct, receive, and file all Parish corporate correspondence as directed by the Board.

PARISH CORPORATE BOARD MEETINGS

1. It is required that the Pastor and two Trustees convene a meeting at least two times per year to discuss relevant board topics and the status of Parish finances.
2. The Pastor should provide an agenda to the Trustees in advance of each meeting. The agenda should provide for the approval of the minutes from the prior meeting and for discussion of "new business," "old business," Parish finances and other topics to be considered by the Board. While not part of the Corporate Board, when present Parochial Vicar(s) should attend meetings as part of their professional development.

PROXIES

A proxy is a written document executed by the Bishop and Vicar General, as *ex-officio* members of the corporation, to be used at a meeting which they are unable to attend, giving the authority to the Pastor, the third *ex-officio* member of the corporation, to cast their votes in favor of a specific corporate resolution stated in the proxy.

Actions requiring a proxy include the following acts of extraordinary administration, as required by Canons 1281, 1291-1294, and 1295, 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
- A commitment of parish resources over \$25,000

Requests for proxies for acts of extraordinary administration require consultation with the parish pastoral council (providing minutes of meeting(s) where consultation occurred) and the consent of the parish finance council (providing minutes of meeting(s) where the consent occurred and showing the vote).

All projects undertaken in parish churches or chapels or related to liturgical questions require the explicit permission of the bishop, or his delegate, regardless of cost.

All construction projects of \$50,000 or more require engagement with the Diocesan Building Commission.

For acts of extraordinary administration, the bishop will engage additional consultation according to the following schedule:

- Between \$250,000 and \$3,500,000 – Consent from the Diocesan Finance Council and Diocesan College of Consultors
- Above \$3,500,000 – In the case of alienation (cc. 1291-1294) and canon 1295 transactions, consent from the Diocesan Finance Council and Diocesan College of Consultors and approval from the Congregation for the Clergy

CONFIDENTIALITY

Trustees shall not intentionally disclose or use nonpublic information acquired in their capacity on the Board for any purpose unrelated to their duties. "Nonpublic information" means information that is not available to the public.

The records of Board meetings and actions will be maintained confidentially. No documents will be disseminated unless specifically approved by the Pastor.

Trustees agree to be bound by the confidentiality and nondisclosure provisions of these protocols, both during and after their term of office as Trustee.

All files, records, and other documents coming into the possession of Trustees during the course of their service will be maintained in such a way as to ensure their confidentiality and safekeeping.

REMOVAL OF A TRUSTEE

If a Trustee becomes unfit for the duties of the office, or incapable of performing such duties, the Board shall have the authority to remove the Trustee permanently from the Board and as a Trustee of the Corporation. **Causes for which a Trustee may be removed from membership are:** physical inability to perform the duties of the office; prolonged neglect to perform such duties, or to perform them properly (Role of Trustees, #3, p. 5); persistent refusal to observe in the transaction of the business of the Board, the statutes and rules of the Diocese, or the rules of the general and recognized discipline of the Roman Catholic Church; violation of Confidentiality as outlined in the above section, or **public personal conduct at variance with the laws of said Roman Catholic Church.**

EXECUTION OF DOCUMENTS

Deeds, mortgages, contracts, evidences of indebtedness, documents of whatever form affecting the property of the Corporation, or entailing upon it a monetary obligation, shall **when duly authorized by the Board**, be signed and executed by the President and the Secretary, **and by none other or others in their stead**, unless such other or others be duly empowered to that effect by the **unanimous** vote of the Board.

LIMITS OF AUTHORITY

No Director, unless authorized by the Board, shall have the power or authority to sign notes or other evidences of debt or to contract liabilities binding on the Corporation. No Director, without a special authorization from the Board, shall be presumed to have the power or permission to act as agent of the Board; and no contract made and no liability assumed by a Director in the absence of such special authorization shall be other than that Director's own personal contract or liability, and no mere custom or practice of any member or any Director of the Board, separately or collectively, shall be construed as establishing a legal agency binding on the Board.

ROLE OF TRUSTEES IN RELATION TO PARISH FINANCE COUNCIL

Discussions about parish councils frequently generate questions regarding **the role of parish trustees**. The trustees are appointed Directors of the civil corporation registered with the state. Their role fulfills civil statute requirements. Trustees are not required to serve on pastoral or finance councils. However, it is encouraged that one Trustee serve the parish Finance Council as a non-voting participants.

At the pastor's discretion, and particularly in smaller parish contexts, a lay trustee may serve on the parish Finance Council as a voting participant.

ROLE OF TRUSTEES IN RELATION TO PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

The Board should communicate with the Parish Pastoral Council on all important matters pertaining to the pastoral care and temporalities of the parish, but the Parish Pastoral Council shall have no legal vote in the transaction of the business of the Corporation.

It is encouraged that one Trustee serve the Parish Pastoral Council as a non-voting participant.

At the pastor's discretion, and particularly in smaller parish contexts, a Trustee may serve on the Parish Pastoral Council as a voting participant.

<https://www.dmdiocese.org/resources/parish-governance>

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