



Pastoral Council Guidelines



2021

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Vision.....	2
Mission.....	2
Fundamental Assumptions.....	2
Principles.....	3
Guidelines	
Reflection.....	4
Planning.....	4
Animating/Acting.....	4
Assessment/Planning.....	4
Decision Making.....	4
Membership.....	5
Roles and Functions.....	6

PASTORAL COUNCILS

INTRODUCTION

The Diocese of Des Moines has a rich history of pastoral councils dating back the late 1960s when the first councils were established at the direction of Bishop Maurice Dingman. Since those early days, members of pastoral councils have, in close collaboration with their pastor, been active participants in identifying the needs of their parish community and developing plans to respond to those needs.

VISION

We envision a process of transforming all baptized Christians, clergy and lay, into maturing persons knowing themselves in community, growing in their relationship to God, lived in individual and shared ministry responses to their Baptismal call (Task Force Committee on Lay Ministry Development, Adult Faith Formation Process, November 20, 1997).

MISSION

The Pastoral Council provides pastoral planning for the faith community it serves. Through extensive prayer, listening and learning the council assists the pastor in identifying and assessing the gifts and needs of the faith community; to clarify the parish's mission; and to develop and initiate pastoral plans to serve this mission for the Kingdom of God.

FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS

1. **The direction is set.** The model set forth in these guidelines was established by Bishop Joseph Charron in consultation with the Diocesan Pastoral Council at that time.
2. **We are mature Christian adults.** The document and any processes coming from it respect the use of adult models of faith formation, discernment, collaborative ministry and leadership development.
3. **Initial and Ongoing Formation** in this model will be required of priests, staffs and lay leadership around the diocese.
4. **Inclusive of all.** A consistent model of pastoral leadership and planning will be used at all levels of the diocesan church.
5. **Principle Centered vs. Structured/Organizational model.** Continuity and direction come from the acceptance and living out of principles. This allows for a high degree of adaptation and flexibility within the faith community.
6. **Visioning/Mission vs. Management/Administrative/Maintenance model.** Pastoral planning comes from identifying genuine pastoral needs and the discerning, forming and calling forth the gifts of people to serve those needs (i.e. collaborative ministry).

NB: Throughout this document the term "Pastor" also refers to Parish Administrators and Directors of Parish Life, whenever appropriate.

PRINCIPLES

Pastoral Councils are founded on the following principles:

1. **Baptismal Call-** Through baptism, every Christian is called by God to share his/her gifts to further the mission of Jesus Christ. The four essential calls are to *Holiness, Community, Mission/Ministry and Christian Maturity*.
2. **The Mission of Jesus Christ for the Church-** The mission of Jesus Christ for the Church consists in 1) the Proclamation and active Witness of the Good News of Jesus Christ through acts of mercy and justice; 2) the Experience and Celebration of the mystery of Christ's presence in Christian community through Word and Sacrament; and 3) the Conversion/ Transformation of individual hearts and the world.
3. **The Mission of a Pastoral Council-** In consultation with the pastor, the Pastoral Council discerns plans, animates and guides the active response of the local faith community to the mission of Jesus Christ.
4. **Collaborative Ministry-** Collaborative ministry, as facilitated by a Pastoral Council, involves identifying, calling forth, utilizing and unifying the gifts of *all* baptized Christians to fulfill the authentic pastoral needs within the faith community and beyond.
5. **Centrality of the Pastor-** The pastor is central and essential to "shepherding" the activity of a pastoral council.

Pastoral governance is primarily the pastor's responsibility. The Pastoral Council exists to advise him on the needs of the faith community, clarifying its mission and pastoral plans to serve those needs.

The pastor is the presider of the council. The pastor leads the council in prayer, builds a climate of trust and shares with the council important and particular problems and needs of the faith community.

6. **Consultative Bodies-** Pastoral Councils are consultative to the pastor. Consultative bodies allow for the Church - clergy and laity- to listen to the Spirit who is leading the Church.

Consultative structures, such as parish pastoral councils, are a significant means for the church to give practical expression to shared responsibility. Consultative bodies allow for the Church - clergy and laity- to listen to the Spirit who is leading the Church and speaking to her through the gifts and experience of all parishioners, as well as through office and ordination.

7. **Subsidiarity-** The pastor and Pastoral Council honor and respect the legitimate spheres of competency and responsibility amongst the various levels of the entire faith community. The subsidiary body always exists to protect and enhance the common good of the whole body.

GUIDELINES

Pastoral councils are effective when their efforts follow certain guidelines.

1. **Reflection** - Every Pastoral Council must engage in ongoing faith formation.
 - a. **Quality Prayer** – All Pastoral Council activity and community life is rooted in a prayerful relationship and response to God. Communal prayer is celebrated thoughtfully and intentionally, reflecting the life and experience of those present and the community at large. Council members spend quality time reflecting on their own faith lives and spiritual development. Individual members trust in the support of the community/group. Generally, this prayer should be Lectionary based.
 - b. **Learning** – Some time is given to learn more about what our faith teaches and how it calls the community to respond to the mission of Christ in daily life. The Council reflects upon the theological, moral and liturgical wisdom of the Church, especially the Church's social teachings.

This may involve the study of Sacred Scripture; church documents from the Holy See, the National Conference of Bishops, the diocese; the Catechism; and writings that give insight into parish, community/society, and ministry.

2. **Planning** - The Pastoral Council develops an evangelizing, living, Christian community through:
 - a. **Prayerfully Discerning** God's desire in all aspects of pastoral planning;
 - b. **Listening** to people of the faith community and **Identifying and Assessing** the genuine gifts and pastoral needs of people, especially the alienated, marginalized and poor, in their local, regional and world communities;
 - c. **Articulating a Shared Mission** for the faith community in reference to those pastoral needs, wisdom of the Church and the mission of Jesus Christ.
3. **Animating/Acting** - Pastoral Councils call forth and animate those ministries, services and programs that are necessary to realize the mission of the faith community. This is done through **Identifying, Calling Forth and Coordinating the Gifts** of people in service to that mission. The basic and ongoing activity of the Pastoral Council is to empower others in the faith community.

Council members are not to assume the duties and tasks that are the responsibility of the entire parish community, but rather they seek to enable each member of the faith community to accept personal responsibility for the shared mission of the community.

4. **Assessment and Planning** - The Pastoral Council assesses the ministry of the parish in light of the parish mission statement and goals through an annual review. The pastor and the Pastoral Council ensure the continuation of all pastoral ministry by continually discerning, developing, renewing and empowering the mission and ministry of the baptized.
5. **Decision Making:** At all times the guidelines, authority and function of the Pastoral Council are subject to the teachings of Sacred Scripture, the Canon Law of the Church, solemn pronouncements of the Holy Father, the decrees of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the local bishop.

In light of this, the actions of the Pastoral Council will have significant effect only when there is some form of ratification by the pastor. Ordinarily this ratification occurs in the normal course of discernment

and decision-making within the council. When, in the pastor's judgment, the council is departing from the norms of Church law, the teachings of the Church, or a known policy of the diocese, it is his obligation to clarify points of law and policy for the council. The pastor ultimately has the right and obligation to grant or withhold approval of council decisions.

This authoritative pastoral office seeks to preserve unity within legitimate diversity. In the parish, the pastor is sent by the bishop to oversee, in his name, the life of that unique community of faith and bind it by word and sacrament into the communion of faith that is the local church, into communion with the universal church and its Supreme Pastor, the Bishop of Rome.

6. **Membership:**

- a. The membership of a Pastoral Council includes a wide variety of people. They reflect a cross-section of people from the faith community, without being representatives of specific groups, causes or agendas. The members' objective is to always strive for the common good of the people they serve - to seek the best interest of the entire community of faith. Staff members employed by the parish do not serve as voting members of the Council but may be called upon to serve as valued resource persons.
- b. With the perspective of the New Evangelization, the Pastoral Council should be particularly attentive to calling forth new members who may be uninvolved, isolated or marginalized within the faith community, such as: youth, elderly, ethnic minorities, single-adults, divorced and the poor.
- c. Depending upon the specific needs and gifts of the faith community and the direction of the pastor, the Pastoral Council may have either staggered or concurrent membership. The recommended length of membership is three (3) years and may be extended for a second term of three years.

If the entire membership of the Pastoral Council remains the same throughout one specific time period (perhaps 3 years), a process for the transition of membership should be in place to ensure continuity. One or two members could mentor the new council as consultative, non-voting members for one year.

- d. After an entire council or individual members have served their tenure (perhaps after 3 years), new membership may be called together in the Fall of the year (September). In the parish, a new pastor is then able to have several months to familiarize himself with the community.
- e. Of most importance, membership of the Pastoral Council should be selected, elected, or appointed on the basis of a *discernment of gifts* that are necessary for pastoral council members to possess. The pastor and parish leadership facilitate the discernment and selection of potential members. Members are designated in a manner determined by the pastor.

Everyone is uniquely called and gifted by God. While no one has all the gifts, all the gifts necessary for ministry and service exist within the faith community. The gifts of potential council members for pastoral leadership might encompass some of the following:

- 1) *Qualities* of faithfulness - actively deepening their personal relationship with Jesus Christ shared in Christian community, courage, integrity, self-giving, generosity, compassion, hope and joy.
- 2) *Skills* for effective communication and listening, creative discernment and articulation of a vision, working collaboratively with others, and supporting and challenging others to answer their baptismal call.

- 3) *Values* of ministry, generosity of self, compassion, justice, reflection/prayer, self-knowledge, self-evaluation, humility, integrity, simplicity, peacefulness, and balance.

7. **Roles and Functions** (in relation to Pastoral Councils):

a. **Pastors/Administrators and/or Directors of Parish Life:**

In general, the role of pastor is exercised in the context of service - "Servant Leadership". Servant leadership empowers the members of the faith community to participate more fully in the life and mission of Jesus Christ in the world and challenges the laity to serve in leadership/ministry roles.

As the *Presider* of the council, the pastor communicates his vision and wisdom to the group not merely by his excitement and enthusiasm, but by leadership. He actively consults with the council by defining problems, exploring solutions, and discerning which solutions are best for the community. He focuses the task at hand and frees the gifts of the councilors, thus guiding the development of the vision of the faith community.

The pastor seeks the practical wisdom of the council to discover the most genuine and urgent needs. By asking the right questions, he empowers the council members to get at the truth; unveils the areas in which more reflection is needed; opens the door to mission; invites the council to ownership and responsibility of the pastoral ministry of the faith community.

The Pastoral Council meets only when the pastor (or his delegate) is present. The Pastoral Council only exists and functions when a pastor is installed in the faith community.

- b. **Chairperson:** The Pastoral Council, through a process of discernment, selects the Chairperson. The Chairperson, under the direction of the pastor, coordinates the preparation of the agendas for meetings; and calls and facilitates any gathering of the Council.
- c. **Recording Secretary:** The pastor, in consultation with the Pastoral Council, will appoint a Recording Secretary to the Council. The recording secretary is responsible for taking and distributing minutes of any official gathering of the Pastoral Council. This person is not a member of Council, but will follow any guidelines of group process and confidentiality established by the Council.
- d. **Pastoral Council Executive Committee:** The pastor, as presider, appoints members of the Pastoral Council (one or more) to serve on an Executive Committee along with the Chairperson. This committee develops and prepares the agendas for the meetings; and, in extra-ordinary situations, can consult with the pastor in the name of the entire Council.
- e. **Parish Staffs:** The pastor is the overall administrator for the pastoral staff and coordinates the implementation and ongoing maintenance of the ministries of the faith community. He does this in collaboration with the pastoral staff, administrative boards, committees, church groups and any others called upon to serve the faith community in that capacity.

Pastoral staffs are the primary resource for furthering the goals and objectives of the Pastoral Council by working with committees and groups in the faith community.

- f. **Committees:** The Pastoral Council, through its planning efforts, calls forth and/or recognizes all standing and ad-hoc committees. Committees are made up of individuals who have the necessary gifts to serve the particular pastoral needs of the faith community. Generally, committee members are not members of the Pastoral Council. The pastor and the pastoral staff have the responsibility of ensuring

the direction, resources and ongoing formation of the committees.

The distinctive and proper role of the Council is to establish the general direction and mission for the entire parish or to approve directions developed by committees or other groups in the faith community for their area of ministry.

Once the Council has determined a direction, action becomes the responsibility of a specific committee or group, which should have the freedom to create plans or establish guidelines and policies that will best realize this direction.

The Pastoral Council will undertake an annual review of all standing committees to understand how the committees are achieving their particular goals within the broader mission and goals set forth by the Council. Any committee or group may request or be requested to offer a report on its activities.

The committees always operate within the principle of subsidiarity. If committees do their research well, and choose wise alternatives, they facilitate a Council's decision-making and avoid a source of conflict. The Pastoral Council, on the other hand, places on its agenda only those matters which require further general discussion and/or a direction by the Council. A functioning committee structure allows a Pastoral Council the freedom to examine broader issues and plan for the future.

- g. **Parish Finance Councils:** In each parish there is to be a council for financial affairs which, in addition to universal church law, is regulated by norms established by the diocese. The Finance Council shall offer its technical and administrative skills in fiscal matters to advise and assist the pastor and whomsoever he should designate in the administration of parish goods. The Finance Council seeks to provide stewardship for the pastoral plan or mission articulated by the Pastor and the Pastoral Council.
- h. **Parish Corporations:** Every parish is established as a legal corporation in the state of Iowa. A legal corporation is necessary to conduct civil business; that is, to own property, make contracts and incur debts. Each parish corporation will consist of the Pastor/Administrator/Director of Parish Life, the Bishop, the Vicar General of the diocese, and two (2) parish Trustees which are appointed by the pastor and approved by the bishop. The Pastoral Council may offer input to the Corporation in matters pertaining to the pastoral care and temporalities of the parish but shall have no legal vote in the transaction of the business of the Corporation.
- i. **Church groups (Knights of Columbus, Altar and Rosary, etc.):** All recognized groups within the faith community are accountable to the pastor and Pastoral Council for living out the mission of the faith community within the context of their particular activities.

Guidelines established in 2001
Guidelines updated in 2010
Guidelines update in 2014
Guidelines updated in 2015
Guidelines updated in 2021