

# DPC Parish Pastoral Council Guide

The Diocesan Pastoral Council has developed this guide to assist Parishes in the Worcester Diocese in forming (or reforming) Parish Pastoral Councils. Recognizing that not one size fits all, we have proposed several models depending on the size of the parish. The guide is NOT intended to be an exhaustive, detailed operations manual, nor even a set of by-laws. It is intended to be a more general overview of the purpose of a Parish Pastoral Council, with broad frameworks for helping parishes to accomplish their vision. The DPC would like to gratefully acknowledge Mark F. Fischer of St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, California, and his website [pastoralcouncils.com](http://pastoralcouncils.com), from which we have borrowed liberally in some sections of this Guide.

## I. Models for Parish Councils

### A. Small parish model

1. Small advisory group (**4-6 members**) consisting of people who are:

- Actively engaged in parish life
- Reliable; trustworthy
- Have a good sense of the parish's needs
- Selected by the pastor and asked if they would serve on the parish council and/ or recruited via announcement at Masses, or the parish bulletin

The pastor may define leadership roles within the council. Members may voluntarily assume leadership positions or the pastor may invite them to assume those roles.

2. Monthly meetings with a mutually agreeable time limit set by the pastor.

3. Meeting agenda items set by the pastor with input/suggestions from council members as the need arises. These may be:

- A sharing of the pastor's vision for his parish
- Pastor's concerns
- Plans for the parish that the pastor would like to discuss/implement
- Implementation of directives that come from the Bishop's office
- Concerns/issues brought to the pastor's attention by council members
- Pastoral planning ideas brought to the council by council members

## B. Mid-size parish model

1. Advisory group consisting of **7-12 members** who are:

- Actively engaged in parish life
- Reliable; trustworthy
- Have a good sense of the parish's needs
- Recruited via announcement at Masses, or the parish bulletin; invited to serve by the pastor of his own accord or at the recommendation of other council members.

The pastor may define leadership roles within the council.

Members assuming leadership positions may be elected and/or appointed.

2. Monthly meetings with a mutually agreeable time limit set by the council.

3. Meeting agenda items set by the pastor with input/suggestions from council members as the need arises. These may be:

- A sharing of the pastor's vision for his parish
- Pastor's concerns
- Plans for the parish that the pastor would like to discuss/implement
- Implementation of directives that come from the Bishop's office

- Concerns/issues brought to the pastor's attention by council members
- Pastoral planning ideas brought to the council by council members

### C. Large size parish model

#### 1. Advisory group consisting of **12- 16 members** who are:

- Actively engaged in parish life
- Reliable; trustworthy
- Have a good sense of the parish's needs
- Ministry heads
- Members of Staff – e.g. religious education department, parish school etc.
- Recruited via announcement at Masses, or the parish bulletin; invited to serve by the pastor at the recommendation of other council members. Some members may be appointed by the pastor
- Elected via parish-wide voting system held at all Masses on a given weekend

The pastor may define leadership roles within the council. Leadership positions may be by election only.

2. Monthly meetings with a mutually agreeable time limit set by the council.

3. Meeting agenda items set by the pastor with input/suggestions from council members as the need arises. These may be:

- A sharing of the pastor's vision for his parish
- Pastor's concerns
- Plans for the parish that the pastor would like to discuss/implement
- Implementation of directives that come from the Bishop's office
- Concerns/issues brought to the pastor's attention by council members

- Pastoral planning ideas brought to the council by council members

## II. Draft Pastoral Council Foundation Document

Again, this foundation document is NOT intended to be a set of by-laws or operating rules. The DPC can certainly help Parishes wishing to develop or revise by-laws with that task. The foundation document, however, is intended to describe the make-up and function of Parish Pastoral Council in a succinct manner easily understood by all. The beauty of its simplicity is that it will allow the Council to adapt itself to various roles a Pastor may ask of it.

A. Introduction: The Parish of \_\_\_\_\_ established its Pastoral Council on \_\_\_\_\_. The Second Vatican Council recommends the establishment of these councils. These councils at once acknowledge the right and duty of Catholics to express their opinions on what pertains to the good of the Church, and the desire of the pastor to acknowledge their wisdom, seek their prudent advice, and in that consultative fashion to share with the people his responsibility for the governance of the parish. This foundation document lays out the broad parameters of successful consultation, without the rigidity of organizational by-laws because it acknowledges that the council is NOT a governing body, but rather a highly valued consultative one.

B. Criteria for Membership: Keeping in mind the consultative function of the council, its members should be chosen, among other things, for their ability to investigate, consider, and recommend practical conclusions to the Pastor on matters pertaining to the good of the parish, and the Church. The members should be baptized Catholics in good standing with the Church. They should reflect the various geographic, social, cultural, professional and apostolic constituencies of the parish. They should, in their faith, their morals, and their prudence, serve as examples to the parish.

C. Membership Selection: \_\_\_\_\_ members are elected/selected for the council every \_\_\_\_\_ years. The election/selection process should be accomplished in a series of four assemblies to discern the needs of the parish as well. The first such assembly should introduce the work of the council, and the pastor may take the opportunity to share his motivations for establishing the council. The second assembly should be devoted to identifying the strengths (and perhaps weaknesses) of the parish, and those areas in which the council might help it develop. The third assembly should be devoted to a discussion of the attributes of the councilors. In parishes that choose to elect their members, this process should end in nominations. In parishes where the pastor may think it desirable to select some or all of the members, this meeting should still be used to solicit volunteers. The final assembly shall be the election of the members, in the spirit of prayer and discernment, or if selected an opportunity for the new members to reflect on their mission.

D. Officers: The pastor should preside at every meeting of the council. He consults, that is he is free to accept or reject council recommendations after prayerful reflection. He develops the agenda in consultation with the officers, which the pastor and the council will select from among their number. They are the chairperson, the vice-chairperson, and the clerk. The chairperson, or in the absence of the chair, the vice-chairperson, shall facilitate the discussions at the meeting, and monitor any work of the councilors between meetings, with the assistance of the vice-chair as desired. The clerk should keep the minutes of the meetings, and should endeavor to send them to the members with the agenda a week prior to each meeting.

#### E. Functions of the Pastoral Council

Section 1 Being reactive and advisory to the Pastor regarding:

- Any issues, documents and/or matters relating to parish functions (ecclesial, spiritual, pastoral, educational, ministerial, liturgical, and administrative), which may be referred to the Pastoral Council by the Pastor.

Being proactive and advisory to the Pastor regarding:

- Any issues, documents and/or matters relating to parish functions (ecclesial, spiritual, pastoral, educational, ministerial, liturgical, and administrative) which the Council determines to be of importance to the well being of the parish as to warrant consideration by the Pastor and possible action.
- Any issues, documents and/or matters relating to diocesan functions (ecclesial, spiritual, pastoral, educational, ministerial, liturgical, and administrative) which may be brought to a Pastoral Council member's attention by members of the faithful in the parish as to warrant consideration by the Pastor and possible action.

Section 2      Prayerfully and thoughtfully investigate and consider issues, documents and information pertaining to the pastoral activity of the parish.

Section 3      Offer timely input and recommendations to the Pastor based on their own wisdom, knowledge, experience, and love of God in their lives, taking into account the wisdom and knowledge gained through their participation in various communities and ministries, as well as their interactions and dialogue with the People of God in their parish.

Section 4      Informally listen, gather and discern information from individuals, parishes, ministries, deaneries, institutions, ecclesial groups, and community groups within the parish, and present such information to the Pastor at the Council meetings.

Section 5      Identify needs and priorities of parishes, ministries, deaneries, institutions, community groups and other groups within the parish, and recommend actions to fulfill these needs.

Section 6      Study, review, prayerfully reflect upon and evaluate any information and/or documents presented by the

Pastor, Council members, and or invited presenters, and offer timely input/recommendations when requested.

Section 7 Collaborate with the Pastor in giving concrete advice, suggestions, recommendations, input, and/or feedback concerning matters pertaining to living out the mission of Christ in the diocese.

Section 8 Act as representatives of the people of God in the parish (not just in one particular deanery or geographic region): the laity, religious and clergy.

Section 9 Provide a channel of mutual communication between the People of God in the parish and the Pastor.

Section 10 Parish Council members are not to use membership as a means of demonstrating status and authority when expressing personal views on matters concerning the local, national and worldwide Church. Doing so may result in termination of membership, at the discretion of the Pastor after consultation with the Executive Board.

F. Operations: This foundation document is deliberately silent as to the mechanical operations of the council, which you might find in a set of by-laws. For parishes, whether due to their size or other factors, might find such specificity desirable, the council may consider whether by-laws also are necessary or appropriate. Parish councils may wish to consider a planning cycle consistent with their term, their relationship with staff and the finance council and other church committees, but they should not serve as simply a “super board of directors” operating the other church ministries. The frequency and duration of the meetings may vary according to the needs of the parish, but it is recommended that the council meet at least monthly from September to May, and as needed over the summer. Meetings should be kept to a reasonable 2 hours in length which can be accomplished by limiting the meetings to the work of the committee, rather than making them “monitor”

meetings where they simply receive reports from other committees and ministries. Ad hoc subcommittees should be used whenever possible to gather such information, so that the council can more efficiently carry out its work of consultation and deliberation with the pastor.

### III. Mission Statement for Pastoral Councils

The DPC suggests that a good first step after the formation of the Parish Pastoral Council (or after the reformation of one) is to develop a Mission Statement to communicate the role and Mission of the Council to the Parish. For those Parishes that already have a Mission Statement, the DPC suggests periodically revisiting it to make sure it remains a vital and active part of Parish life. Some things to consider:

- A The mission statement for a parish should seek to promote and implement all that will strengthen, expand and deepen the life of the Christian community in each parish.
- B The mission statement should be:
  - 1. Clear enough so that its intent is obvious
  - 2. Flexible enough to allow for interpretation
  - 3. Short, clear, and understandable
  - 4. Generally, the mission statement should only be a few sentences
- C Dimensions of the mission statement should:
  - 1. Proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ
  - 2. Build up a community of love
  - 3. Celebrate the liturgies of praise and thanksgiving
  - 4. Serve others in the name of Jesus Christ
- D Once established, the mission statement should be promoted in parish bulletins and/or the newsletter, as well as websites and other social media.
- E Different facets of the parish life should work together towards achieving the mission statement of the parish.