

**From the “Upper Room”  
to  
“the Ends of the Earth”**



**Revised Guidelines for  
Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC)**

**Archdiocese of Saint Boniface**

**November 24, 2015**

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BUREAU DE L'ARCHEVÊQUE  
OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

July 20, 2015

Dear Pastors and Parishioners,

It is with much hope that I come to the faithful of the Archdiocese to present the revised Guidelines for the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC).

A Parish Pastoral Council is vital in the life of all our parishes in its unique and distinctive role as the primary deliberative body of a parish. United with the pastor, the council members are to pray as our ancestors in faith did in the upper room, reflect as Jesus taught us throughout his life and then guide and inspire the parish with their gifts of wisdom, knowledge and understanding in defining the pastoral situation of the parish and the initiatives required to meet all its pastoral needs.

Regardless of the diversity of our parishes - whether a large urban or a small rural parish, whether parishes in a “family cluster” or bilingual parishes – all are best served by a Parish Pastoral Council. These “Guidelines” are here to guide parishes in the formation of a PPC.

And in doing so, the Council seeks to ensure the key element to everything that is lived in the parish and the primary condition of any possibility of true evangelization: its communion, its unity in faith and in charity, especially among all parishioners. Through a multitude of ways such as communication, consultation, efforts to achieve as large a consensus as possible, the primary purpose of the PPC is to be the leader and guarantor of this communion. Thus, the PPC becomes truly an instrument of the Holy Spirit leading and enabling the whole parish to proclaim the Good News of the love of Jesus Christ.

Along with the Guidelines a support structure is also in place in the form of resources from the archdiocesan Pastoral Centre. In addition, workshops are available for all pastoral regions to assist in the implementation of effective Parish Pastoral Councils. I pray that all parishes, all members of a PPC and all pastors and parish life directors will avail themselves of these resources.

May the Holy Spirit continue to guide us day to day.

Sincerely in Christ,

*+ Albert LeGatt*

+Albert LeGatt

## **Introduction: A Vision for a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC)**

Establishing a Parish Pastoral Council or re-visioning an existing council is an important opportunity for a parish to fully embrace and develop its mission. This requires more than simply establishing a new parish structure or program. It also involves a renewed vision of the parish and its mission. The essential features of this vision can be found in Scripture and in documents of the Second Vatican Council.

### ***I. The Upper Room: A Biblical Image of a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC)***

... they went to the room upstairs where they were staying [...]. All were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers. – Acts 1:13-14

The practice of gathering in council to develop the Church's pastoral mission goes back to the very beginning of the Church. The first "pastoral council" is described in the Acts of the Apostles. It took place in the "upper room" where the disciples gathered after Jesus ascended into heaven.

Jesus had already given them their mission: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) - but he had told them not to set out on this mission until they received the Holy Spirit. Trusting in the promise of Jesus, the disciples went immediately to the upper room to pray and await the direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. A few days later, when the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, the disciples immediately went out from the upper room to proclaim the Good News of Jesus in the streets of Jerusalem.

A careful reading of the Acts of the Apostles indicates that upper room gatherings did not cease with Pentecost. The disciples continued to gather in this way, especially when new developments raised questions about how to continue the mission of Jesus. Thus, in a few years, they became Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the then known world.

These "upper room" meetings are a model for today's Parish Pastoral Council - a regular gathering where pastor and parishioners pray and discern together how the parish community is to take up the mission Jesus Christ entrusted to it.

In the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface, parishes are called to become "Churches which go forth"<sup>1</sup>, where priests and laypersons work together towards the development of the Christian community and the spiritual growth of its members so as to share the Good News with all.

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<sup>1</sup> Theme used by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation: "The Joy of the Gospel"

## ***II. Vatican II – The Church as communion***

Today's Parish Pastoral Council originated in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council as an expression of the Council's agenda for the renewal of the Church and its mission. Key to understanding both the Council's agenda and the Parish Pastoral Council is the concept of "communion" – the word which Pope John Paul says, describes the "very essence" of the church in the Council's teachings.

(...) communion (...) embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church. Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us, to make us all "one heart and one soul". It is in building this communion of love that the Church appears as "sacrament", as the "sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the human race."

Novo Millennio Ineunte, #42

A parish, as an integral community of the Church, exists to build up and serve this communion of love and, in so doing, announces the gospel of Jesus to the world. Communion is therefore at the heart of its pastoral mission. As the Parish Pastoral Council exists to foster the parish's mission, its origin, its mode of operation, and its goals can best be expressed by the word "communion". It seeks to nurture and build up a relationship of communion within a parish.

The first generation of parish councils following the Second Vatican Council tended to be administrative in nature, caring for parish finances, facilities, organizations and programs. Over the last 20 years most dioceses in North America have evaluated this experience and issued new guidelines for parish councils. These new guidelines are unanimous in proposing that councils shift their focus from parish administration to the pastoral mission of the parish. Hence the name "Parish Pastoral Council" is used rather than "parish council".

This shift of focus follows from the renewed emphasis of the Second Vatican Council on the mission of Jesus, whose mission has been entrusted to the whole Church and to all of its members.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

The members of the Parish Pastoral Council aim to make the parish the "home of communion"<sup>2</sup>, engaged in its mission to evangelize and make disciples.

### ***III. An Opportunity and a Challenge for Parishes***

When animated by the vision of Scripture and the Second Vatican Council, the task of establishing an effective Parish Pastoral Council offers a wonderful opportunity for a parish. It will also present many challenges. These challenges include:

- developing a renewed vision of the parish focused on the mission of Jesus Christ
- learning to plan and make pastoral decisions together in “the upper room”
- building relationships of trust and communion

Daunting as they may be, these challenges can be exciting occasions for growth and renewal in a parish community if the vision of the Parish Pastoral Council as an “upper room” experience and as a “servant of communion and evangelization” guides each step along the way.

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<sup>2</sup> John-Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* no. 43

## **ARCHDIOCESAN GUIDELINES FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS (PPC)**

What follows in these guidelines is an outline of the essential features of Parish Pastoral Councils. To assist pastors and parish communities with the task of establishing or re-visioning their own Parish Pastoral Councils, additional resources and aids will be available through the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre.

### ***I. The Purpose of a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC)***

a) Basic guidelines for Parish Pastoral Council are given in the Code of Canon Law:

Can. 536 §1. If the diocesan bishop judges it opportune after he has heard the presbyteral council, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.

§2. A pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by the norms established by the diocesan bishop.

b) A Parish Pastoral Council:

- exists to foster pastoral activity which is in accord with and expresses the mission of the parish;
- is a consultative body which serves and advises the pastor in his responsibility for the pastoral mission of the parish;
- is the main body for lay leadership in the pastoral life of the parish and, therefore, aims to engage and enable the whole parish community for fuller participation in the mission of the parish.

A Parish Pastoral Council is not intended to deal with finances or administration. These are the responsibility of the parish finance council. The two councils need to work closely together but maintain a clear separation of responsibility and personnel.

### ***II. The Functioning of a Parish Pastoral Council***

The Parish Pastoral Council is like no other organization. It acts as a compass to help the parish maintain the course of its mission. In consideration of the ‘upper room’ experience and the vision of establishing ‘communion’ and evangelization, we then understand that the proper functioning of a Parish Pastoral Council includes all of the following:

- **Community development, collaboration, and consensus.** One of the central goals of the council is to favor communion between parishioners, i.e. to develop a strong sense of community among them and in the entire parish. Key to building community is the collaborative manner in which the council functions, expressed by seeking to reach consensus in all decisions.
- **Prayer.** Like the disciples in the Upper Room, an effective council is rooted in prayer as it discerns and develops the parish's mission. Through prayer, the council seeks direction and empowerment from the Holy Spirit to take up the mission Jesus has given to the parish.
- **Enabling and calling forth participation.** Another vital goal of the Parish Pastoral Council is to engage the community as a whole in evangelization. This is done by calling all parishioners to witness to the Lord and participate more fully in the life of the parish in accord with their gifts and experience. It's also the role of the Parish Pastoral Council to recruit members for the Parish Leadership Team and other parish ministries and see to their training.
- **Needs assessment / reading the signs of the time.** One of its main tasks is to come to a fuller understanding of the pastoral needs of all people served by the parish. This involves "reading the signs of the time," i.e. how the gospel can be presented in a manner that speaks to the realities that people are living in a particular time and place.
- **Participating in the pastoral care of the parish and assuming responsibilities.** The priest (or his representative) and the council should designate pastoral responsibilities to individual council members. Those who assume these responsibilities are called coordinators and form the Parish Leadership Team.
- **Pastoral planning, developing and evaluating pastoral activities.** To carry out the mission and respond to the real needs of the parish, the council must propose appropriate pastoral tasks. These tasks are often described simply as pastoral planning, developing pastoral programs and services, and evaluating the effectiveness of pastoral initiatives. A diocesan document is at the disposal of the Parish Pastoral Council to help plan pastoral activities.
- **Investigate, reflect and recommend.** A council follows a practical course of action proposed for pastoral councils in Vatican II's Decree on Bishops (#27)
  - investigate the pastoral reality of their parish,
  - reflect upon / study it,
  - recommend their conclusions to the pastor.



### ***III. The Roles and Responsibilities of Parish Pastoral Council Members***

- **The pastor** is responsible for the pastoral mission of the parish by virtue of his appointment from the bishop. As the shepherd of the parish, he is the president of the pastoral council. However, his aim is to work in co-responsibility with other members of the parish and he therefore, solicits the opinions and active collaboration of the council. He also endeavours to involve the whole parish in its mission.
- **Council members** represent the whole parish not in a legal or democratic sense, but in their ability to attend to the pastoral realities and needs of the whole parish. Their main responsibilities are:
  - to assist the pastor so he can better carry out his responsibility for the life and mission of the parish;
  - to call forth fuller participation of the whole parish community in the pastoral mission of the parish;
  - to represent the parish at meetings of the Regional Pastoral Council.
- **The executive committee** is made up of the pastor as president of the PPC, the chairperson; the vice-chairperson, and the secretary. Their task is to prepare for and facilitate council meetings and to maintain close links and good communication with the whole parish community. They decide the pastoral concerns which the council will consider, including:
  - a process for how the issue will be addressed;
  - a timeline for the discussion;
  - a proposal for how the council's recommendation will be made (a resolution, report etc).

#### **The chairperson**

- facilitates meetings in a manner that allows for open dialogue and full participation to achieve consensus among council members;
- works with the pastor to prepare the agenda for council meetings.
- attends the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) twice a year.

#### **The vice-chairperson**

- assumes the duties of the chairperson when he/she is absent.
- attends the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) twice a year.

#### **The secretary**

- prepares material for meetings;
- keeps an accurate record of council meetings.

The executive is usually selected by the council. In some cases the secretary may not be a member of the council but a parishioner able to serve the council in this role.

- The Parish Leadership Team is comprised of the following eight people:
  1. The priest or Parish Life Director
  2. The Chair person of the Parish Pastoral Council
  3. The Chairperson of the Parish Financial Council
  4. The Coordinator of evangelization and healing ministry
  5. The Coordinator of liturgy, Sunday celebrations, adoration, and other forms of prayer and praise
  6. The Coordinator for hospitality and fellowship (unity)
  7. The Coordinator for faith education and spiritual growth (catechesis of adults, youth and children)
  8. The Coordinator for charity and justice (the Social Pastoral Mission).

The priest (or the Parish Life Director) attends the Parish Leadership Team meetings as is needed or as he sees fits. Subcommittees can be formed in order to implement the different activities related to the five pastoral domains and to the parish administrative and material needs (for example, the ministry of life and family, the youth ministry, communications, volunteers recruitment, etc.). Persons who are responsible for these subcommittees may be part of the Parish Leadership Team.

#### ***IV. The Meetings the Parish Pastoral Council***

- the pastor and the chairperson are responsible to call meetings and to prepare the agenda
- the pastor is the president of the council, but it is recommended that the chairperson facilitate the meetings.
- the council as a whole should meet two or three times a year between September and June inclusively.
- the council members who are part of the Parish Leadership Team should meet once or twice a month depending on the time of year and the current activities.
- significant time is given at each meeting for prayer and spiritual reflection.
- whenever possible, council decisions/recommendations should be made by consensus i.e. each member of council is able to support it to some degree.
- the pastor does not usually “vote.” Since the Parish Pastoral Council serves as his consultative body, he may accept or reject a council recommendation, but with few exceptions, he would approve them. If he chooses not to accept their recommendation, he should give a clear account of his reasons to the council.

## ***V. The Selection of Members to the Parish Pastoral Council***

### **Qualifications of a Council Member**

- is a practicing Catholic,
- understands the purpose and method of operation of a Parish Pastoral Council,
- is committed to the mission of the whole parish, not just a particular group or interest
- works well with others,
- has good communication skills.
- ability to represent the overall needs of the whole parish community and not a particular group or interest only;
- the council members should reflect the diversity of the parish e.g. gender, age, ethnic and social background, etc.

If council members are associated with another parish group, they should understand they do not represent that group on the council but rather the interest of the whole parish.

### **Methods of selection**

The following process is recommended:

- educate the parish on the purpose of a Parish Pastoral Council and role of council members, as well as that of the Parish Leadership Team.
- prepare a process of discernment for proposed candidates to consider their gifts, availability, etc.
- invite volunteers and/or nominations from the parish
- meet with the candidates to clarify the role of the Parish Pastoral Council
- decide on the method of selection if there are more candidates ready to serve on PPC than the open positions: (election, appointment etc.).

### **Size of council and length of terms**

- the size of the Parish Leadership Team usually consists of 8 members, but more members can be added if their qualifications, talents and experience can help accomplish the mission of the parish.
- the size of the whole council (Parish Leadership Team and the other members) varies from 10 to 15 members. This is a common suggestion with possibly more for larger, diverse parishes and fewer for smaller parishes.
- a common practice is a three year term with terms staggered so that each year 1/3 of the council is renewed.
- normally, it is stipulated that an individual may serve only 2 consecutive 3 year terms on council.

- in the interest of providing better pastoral services, a single Parish Pastoral Council may serve a cluster of smaller parishes which are served by the same pastor.

## ***VI. The Relationship with other Parish or Diocesan Groups***

- **The Parish Finance Council** has distinct responsibilities from those of the Parish Pastoral Council and functions autonomously from it. But the two bodies need to work together closely, consult each other and develop clear mechanisms for regular communication such as :
  - exchange of minutes of meetings and resolutions;
  - have members who serve on both bodies;
  - invite a representative of one council to attend the meeting of the other;
  - agree to consult with each other before taking important decision;
  - prepare an annual parish budget together, in particular that portion of the budget which pertains to pastoral activities.
- **Parish staff** The Parish Pastoral Council is not responsible to direct the work of parish staff. The work of parish personnel is to implement the plans and recommendations of the council but they are accountable to the pastor. There should be close collaboration with staff and they should be consulted when a pastoral activity for which they have responsibility is being discussed by the council. Normally, parish personnel are not members of the Parish Pastoral Council.
- **Ministry groups and parish organizations** These groups need to implement the recommendations of the Parish Pastoral Council but the ultimate responsibility lays with the pastor working more directly with the Parish Leadership Team. Good communication between the Parish Pastoral Council and all other parish groups is essential. Parish groups and organizations should be consulted when the Parish Pastoral Council considers a pastoral issue that concerns them.
- **The diocesan Church** A Parish Pastoral Council needs to keep informed of pastoral priorities proposed by the diocesan church. It should maintain active representation and good two way communication with Parish Pastoral Council and other committees at the level of the diocese, the deanery, and the region.

## ***VII. The Guidelines or Constitution for Parish Pastoral Council (PPC)***

Each Parish Pastoral Council is encouraged to develop more specific guidelines or a constitution which apply diocesan guidelines to the specific circumstances and practices of their parish. Resources for developing Parish Pastoral Council guidelines are available through the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre.