

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



Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils

Archdiocese of Saint Boniface

Revised - Sept 2019

Table of Contents

Terms and Definitions.....	3
Letter from the Archbishop.....	4
Introduction: A Vision for a Parish Pastoral Council	6
I. The Upper Room: A Biblical Image of a Parish Pastoral Council	6
II. Vatican II — The Church as Communion	7
III. An Opportunity and a Challenge for Parishes	8
Archdiocesan Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils	9
I. The Purpose of a Parish Pastoral Council.....	9
II. The Functioning of a Parish Pastoral Council	9
III. Qualifications of a Parish Pastoral Council member:	11
IV. Size of Parish Pastoral Council and Length of Terms:.....	11
V. The Meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council	11
VI. The Roles and Responsibilities of Parish Pastoral Council Members.....	11
VII. The Relationship with Other Parish and Diocesan Groups:	13
VIII. Guidelines/Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils	13
IX. Parish Vision and Mission:	13
APPENDIX 1: PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL OUTCOMES	14

Terms and Definitions

Consensus

Middle ground in decision-making, between total assent and total disagreement. Consensus is dependant on participants having shared values and goals, and on having a broad agreement on specific issues and overall direction. Consensus implies that everyone accepts and supports the decision. They understand the reason for making it.

Co-Responsibility

“The particular responsibility each person has within the Church is not separable from the responsibility that all Christians have by virtue of their baptism. ‘Because of the dignity flowing from Baptism, each member of the lay faithful, together with the ordained ministers and men and women religious, shares in the responsibility for the Church’s mission.’¹ A Christian cannot carry out this mission in isolation, but only in communion with the entire People of God.”²

Mission

The mission is an expression of the desires and intent. It describes what the parish needs to do to achieve the vision.

Pastor

The term *pastor* in this document includes pastors, parochial administrators, parish life directors and any individual or team appointed by the archbishop to oversee the functioning of the parish.

PPC

PPC is an acronym used for Parish Pastoral Council.

Vision

The vision states the parish’s overarching aspirations of what it hopes to achieve or to become.

¹ Saint John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 15.

² Episcopal Commission for Doctrine Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishop, *The Co-responsibility of the Lay Faithful on the Church and the World*.



April 10, 2019

Dear Pastors, Parish Life Directors, Members of Parish Pastoral Councils and all the Faithful of the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface.

**The Upper Room
Diocesan Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils
Revised April 2019**

Our goal is clear: the formation of parish communities of missionary disciples as called for by Pope Francis. Together we strive to live out the full mission of the Church, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and building up his reign of justice, mercy, love and peace. In all of this, **it is increasingly clear that in a parish, the two key sources and prime movers of all this are the Pastors or Parish Life Directors and the Parish Pastoral Council (surrounded by all the faithful).** It is a shared leadership of imagining and discerning where God is calling us, then a collaborative effort of planning and carrying out this will of God. **We must walk together.**

A Parish Pastoral Council is vital in the life of all our parishes; it is the principal avenue of consultation and planning in a parish. It is indispensable for fruitful leadership by the pastor; it is equally indispensable for all the lay people to properly exercise their co-responsibility for the mission of the Church. United with the pastor, the council members are to pray, reflect, and then guide and inspire the parish in defining the pastoral situation of the parish and the initiatives required to meet its particular needs.

Regardless of the diversity of our parishes – whether a large urban or a small rural parish, whether a bilingual parish or several parishes clustered together – all are best served by a Parish Pastoral Council that is vibrant and well structured.

The revised guidelines set out in this document are a tool for pastors, parish life directors and interested parishioners to: 1) form a Parish Pastoral Council; 2) analyze and renew the functioning of an already existing Parish Pastoral Council; 3) renew the vision and mission of a parish through communication and consultation.

The revisions made to the prior guidelines are the fruit of the work of the Archdiocesan Committee for the Renewal and Growth of Parish Pastoral Councils. As they have visited and aided parishes, they have continually sought to discover and set out those “best practices” that are already enlivening our parishes. This committee is always ready to visit parishes to help implement these guidelines.

In closing, I wish to underline the key element to everything that is to be lived in the parish. It is the primary condition of any possibility of true evangelization. I am speaking about communion, unity in faith and in charity, especially among all parishioners. The primary purpose of the PPC is to be the leader and guarantor of this communion, always trying to achieve as large a common vision and as strong a consensus of action as possible within the parish. 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.

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

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Albert LeGatt

+Albert LeGatt
Archbishop of Saint Boniface

... it is increasingly clear that in a parish, the two key sources and prime movers are the Pastors, Parish Life Directors and the Parish Pastoral Council (surrounded and carried by all the faithful).

Letter from Archbishop LeGatt to all Pastors and other participants at Deanery Meetings, April 2018

Introduction: A Vision for a Parish Pastoral Council

Establishing a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) 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

The practice of gathering in the 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.

... 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)

Jesus had already given his disciples 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 gathering 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’s witnesses to the ends of the then known world.

These “Upper Room” meetings are a model for today’s PPCs—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 forth³,” where priests and laypeople work together, in co-responsibility, towards the development of the Catholic community and the spiritual growth of its members to share the Good News with all.

II. Vatican II — The Church as Communion

Today’s PPC originates from the outcome 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 PPC is the concept of “communion”—the word which Saint John Paul II 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 PPC exists to foster the parish’s mission, its origin, its mode of operation, and its goals can best be expressed by the word “communion”. Communion seeks to nurture and build up a relationship in faith and in charity 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. Most dioceses in North America have now 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.”

³ Theme used by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation: “The Joy of the Gospel.”

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 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)

III. An Opportunity and a Challenge for Parishes

When guided by the vision of Scripture and the Second Vatican Council, the task of establishing an effective PPC 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
- building relationships of trust
- learning to plan and make pastoral decisions together as in “the Upper Room”

Daunting as these challenges may be, they can be exciting occasions for growth and renewal in a parish community if the vision of the PPC as an “Upper Room” experience and as a “servant of communion and evangelization” guides each step along the way.⁴

⁴ See Appendix 1: Parish Pastoral Council Outcomes.

Archdiocesan Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils

What follows in these guidelines is an outline of the essential features of a PPC. They are to assist pastors and parish communities with the task of establishing or re-visioning their own PPC. Additional resources and aids are available on the Diocesan website and through Pastoral Services.

I. The Purpose of a Parish Pastoral Council

Basic guidelines for a PPC 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.

A PPC:

- aims to engage and enable the whole parish community to a fuller participation in the mission of the parish;
- exists in co-responsibility with the pastor to foster pastoral activity in accordance with and which expresses the mission of the parish.

A PPC is not intended to deal with finances or administration. These are the responsibility of the Parish Administration Board. 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 PPC acts as a compass to help the parish maintain the course of its mission. It is vital in the life of all our parishes in its unique and distinctive role as the primary deliberative body of a parish. In co-responsibility⁵ with the pastor, the council members are to pray as our ancestors did in the “Upper Room.” They are to reflect as Jesus taught us throughout his life, to 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.

⁵ See Terms and Definitions on page 3.

In consideration of the “Upper Room” experience and the vision of establishing “communion” and evangelization, we then understand that the proper functioning of a PPC includes all of the following:

- **Prayer and discernment.**
Like the disciples in the “Upper Room,” an effective council is rooted in prayer as it leads the parish to discern and develop its mission and to fulfill that mission.
- **Community development, collaboration, and consensus⁶.**
One of the central goals of the PPC is to favour 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.
- **Needs assessment and reading, “the signs of the time.”**
One of the PPC’s main tasks is to come to a fuller understanding of the pastoral needs of all people served by the parish and to define these needs. This involves “reading the signs of the time,” i.e. how the church should listen to, and learn from, the world around it and speak in a manner that reaches people’s realities.
- **Calling forth and enabling participation.**
Another vital goal of the PPC is to guide and inspire, 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 accordance with their gifts and experience.
- **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 initiatives. These tasks are often described simply as pastoral planning, developing pastoral programs and services, and evaluating the effectiveness of pastoral initiatives.
- **Investigation, reflection and recommendations.**
A council follows a practical course of action proposed for PPCs 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.

⁶ See the Terms and Definitions on page 3.

III. Qualifications of a Parish Pastoral Council member:

- is a practising Catholic;
- understands the purpose of a PPC and its function;
- is committed to the mission of the whole parish, not just a particular group or interest;
- works well with others;
- has good communication skills;

Ideally the council members should reflect the diversity of the parish such as age, gender, ethnicity.

IV. Size of Parish Pastoral Council and Length of Terms:

- The size of the PPC may vary according to the size and diversity of the parish. However, the maximum number of members would normally be 12. Circumstances may call for a greater number.
- A common practice is a three-year term with terms staggered so that, 1/3 of the council is renewed each year.
- 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 PPC may serve two or more smaller parishes which are served by the same pastor.

V. The Meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council

- At each meeting, time is given for prayer and spiritual reflection.
- The PPC should meet regularly, such as monthly or as required.
- Council decisions/recommendations should be made by consensus, i.e. each member of the council is able to support it to some degree.

VI. The Roles and Responsibilities of Parish Pastoral Council Members

- **The Pastor⁷** 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 PPC. However, his aim is to work in co-responsibility with the PPC and other members of the parish and he therefore solicits the opinions and active collaboration of the PPC. He also works to involve the whole parish in its mission.

⁷ See the Terms and Definitions on page 3.

The PPC serves as his consultative body, and he may accept or reject a council's recommendation. With few exceptions, he approves them. If he chooses not to accept the recommendation, a clear account of his reasons must be presented. Reasons for non-acceptance could be that it is contrary to the teachings of the Church, Canon law, civil law or diocesan policies.

- **The Executive Committee** is usually made up of the Pastor as President of the PPC, the Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson, and the Secretary. It may include the Past Chairperson in an advisory capacity.

The executive is usually selected (or elected) by the members of the council. Their task is to prepare for and facilitate PPC meetings and to maintain a close relationship with parish and diocesan groups.

- **The Chairperson:**
 - works with the Pastor to prepare the agenda for council meetings;
 - facilitates meetings in a manner that allows for open dialogue and full participation to achieve consensus among council members;
 - attends or ensures that someone from the PPC attends the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) meetings twice a year.
- **The vice-chairperson:**
 - assumes the duties of the chairperson when he/she is absent;
 - attends the DPC meeting twice a year.
- **The secretary⁸:**
 - prepares material for meetings;
 - keeps an accurate record of meetings.
 - is not normally staff.
- **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. It is the responsibility of the entire council to:
 - assist the pastor so he can better carry out his responsibility for the life and mission of the parish;
 - call forth fuller participation of the whole parish community in the pastoral mission of the parish;
 - attend or ensure that someone from the PPC attends presentations, meetings or workshops that deal with PPCs, and shares the information received;
 - remain informed of pastoral priorities proposed by the Diocese and other committees at the level of the diocese and the region;
 - encourage spiritual growth and leadership formation of parishioners.

⁸ The secretary does not necessarily have to be a member of the PPC. A parishioner may serve in this role.

VII. The Relationship with Other Parish and Diocesan Groups:

- **The Parish Finance Council** has distinct responsibilities from those of the PPC and functions independently of it. However, the two bodies need to work together closely and develop clear mechanisms for regular communication, such as:
 - exchange of minutes of meetings;
 - have members who serve on both bodies or have a representative of one attend the meeting of the other;
 - have a joint meeting at least once a year;
 - prepare an annual parish budget together, specifically the portion of the budget which pertains to pastoral activities.
- **Parish staff:** The PPC is not responsible for directing the work of parish staff. Staff is accountable to the Pastor.
- **Parish groups or organizations:** Good communication between the PPC and all other parish groups is essential. If council members are associated with another parish group (Knights of Columbus, CWL, Catechism program, Adult Faith Formation Group, etc.), they should understand they do not represent that group on the council, but rather the interests of the whole parish.
- **The Diocese:** A PPC needs to keep informed of pastoral priorities proposed by the diocesan Church. It should maintain active representation and good two-way communication with the Diocese and other committees at the level of the diocese, the deanery, and the region.

VIII. Guidelines/Constitution for Parish Pastoral Councils

Each PPC is encouraged to develop their own “Guidelines”, applying the diocesan guidelines to the circumstances of their parish.

IX. Parish Vision and Mission:

If the parish does not have a Vision⁹ and Mission¹⁰ statement, it is recommended that the PPC embark on a process that would include the whole parish. Both statements support each other, but the mission statement is more specific.

It is recommended that the parish vision and mission statement align with those of the diocese.

⁹ See Terms and Definitions on page 3.

¹⁰ See Terms and Definitions on page 3.

APPENDIX 1: PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL OUTCOMES

As a consultative body to the Pastor, the PPC:

- Will have established a climate of prayer, reflection, collaboration and consensus.
- Will have established a collaborative, co-responsible relationship with the Pastor, serving and advising the pastoral mission of the parish.
- Will have recognized the Pastoral needs of all in the parish.
- Will have established a Vision/Mission/Beliefs statement reflecting the Archdiocese's vision of turning the parish into a church that evangelizes & makes disciples.
- Will have established an Action Plan for developing & evaluating pastoral activities in accordance with and which express the mission of the parish.
- Will have engaged the community as a whole by recognizing the charisms (talents) of all and by encouraging participation in ministries.
- Will have invited active participation in leadership roles on the PPC.
- Will have worked collaboratively with the Parish Administration Board.
- Will have encouraged and participated in diocesan workshops/orientations to support and inform the mission of the parish.

(Based on Upper Room document & Vision for the Parishes, Sept. 2017.)