

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS WITHIN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

*Promoting understanding of the
Church's mission and encouraging
people to explore possibilities for living
that mission in all aspects of their lives.*

WHY HAVE PARISH COUNCILS?

Parish Councils¹ are one of the structures which were strongly recommended by the Bishops of the Second Vatican Council. The purpose of the councils was seen as furthering the work of the Church by fostering the spiritual growth of parishioners and leading them to respond actively to their universal call to mission.

In dioceses, as far as possible, councils should be set up to assist the Church's apostolic work, whether in the field of making the gospel known and people holy or in charitable, social or other spheres.²

While some Pastoral Councils were in existence prior to the Second Vatican Council, the consequent growth of Pastoral Councils has been part of the post-conciliar movement toward shared responsibility and shared ministry. Pastoral Councils witness to the basic equality of dignity of all members by reason of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, highlighting the role of all to share in the saving mission of Jesus. Consequently, they show forth the reality that all are involved in continuing the work of Jesus which will proceed until God's values of love, justice and peace reign in the hearts and lives of the people of all nations.

¹ Historically the name Parish Council was the original term used. The growing emphasis on the pastoral focus of councils has resulted in the adoption of the term Parish Pastoral Council. The expanded name also helps to distinguish it from any other councils operating in the parish, such as the Parish Finance Council. Within the text, the shortened term Pastoral Council is used in most instances.

² Vatican II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, 26.

ROLE OF A PASTORAL COUNCIL

A Pastoral Council consists of the Pastor together with a group of parishioners chosen by the parish community. The Pastoral Council's role is to promote the Church's mission to live and communicate the love and values of Christ in our world. The Pastoral Council shares in the responsibility for the ongoing life and development of the faith community, working together with parishioners to provide support for their efforts to live as followers of Christ.

FUNCTIONS OF A PASTORAL COUNCIL

A Pastoral Council seeks to:

- enrich the quality of parish life
- provide opportunities for parishioners
 - to grow in holiness
 - to discover and live out their personal and community call to mission to live as Catholics who effectively transform society.

In order to fulfil its role, the Pastoral Council will:

- search out and respond to the hopes, ideas, needs and concerns of parishioners
- grow in knowledge and awareness of what is already happening in the parish
- encourage and support the good work of existing groups within the parish

- evaluate carefully information gathered in order to contribute towards the making of decisions that reflect the values of the gospel and the teachings of the Church
- set long-term and short-term pastoral goals for the parish
- provide opportunities for parishioners to grow in their relationship with God and with each other
- develop, implement and improve parish initiatives that assist parishioners in their continuing efforts to live as effective Christians in society.

PASTORAL ISSUES

Pastoral issues are those that impact on the lives of parishioners in the areas of:

- integration of their faith into everyday life
 - home, work, community
- nourishment and support of their faith as they strive to live as faithful disciples of Jesus
- outward focus for the development of a vital Christian community, actively engaged in Jesus' mission of service and influence in the wider world.