Many publications were consulted in the development of these guidelines especially:

*Revisioning the Parish Pastoral Council*, Mary Ann Gubish and Susan Jenny, SC, Paulist Press.
*Pastoral Councils in Today’s Catholic Parish*, Mark F. Fischer, Twenty-Third Publications.

Additional resources are noted at the end of the Appendix.

Resources to supplement these guidelines will be found on the Honolulu diocesan website: [http://www.catholichawaii.org](http://www.catholichawaii.org) under “Consultative Bodies” and “Parish Pastoral Councils.”

For questions, training or more assistance, contact the

Office for Parish Resources:
Sharon Chiarucci
6301 Pali Highway
Kane‘ohe, HI 96744
808-203-6733
877-263-8855 x 733 (toll-free)
[schiarucci@rcchawaii.org](mailto:schiarucci@rcchawaii.org)
The parish pastoral council brings together lay people and religious who, together with the pastors, work jointly to build the parish as a living Christian community....

Through reflection, planning, animation and action, the parish pastoral council is the place where … ministries or services are brought forth that are needed for the growth of a living parish community.

(Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops: The Parish Pastoral council)
Basic Principles:

1. Jesus gives the Church a mission: go out to the whole world and preach the good news. Carrying out this mission challenges all Catholics to seek out and respond to the needs of their parishioners, their neighbors in surrounding communities and throughout the world.

2. Clear leadership is essential to the development, renewal, spiritual growth and resilience of the parish. Leaders help to articulate the particular mission of the parish and call others to leadership by supporting the many gifts the Holy Spirit has provided in the parish.

3. The foremost leader of the parish is the pastor.

4. Pastoral leadership encourages the fullest possible collaboration of clergy, religious, and laity in the common mission of the Church.

5. A pastoral council, grounded in faith and worship and trained in its responsibilities for visioning and pastoral planning, is an effective structure for collaborative leadership.
**A. Being the Body of Christ**

The example of Jesus’ social ministry, our baptism, and the encouragement from our popes and bishops reveal that, as Catholics, more is expected of us as faithful followers of Jesus. This is vital to our mission to preach the good news. The Catholic Church has a rich history of social teaching from Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (1891) to Pope Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate* (2009). All Catholics are called to reach out and respond to the needs in the parish, in the surrounding neighborhood, city, state, nation and world. We are also called to educate ourselves, surface issues, and collaborate with other groups who share our values. To be true to our call to be the Body of Christ in the world, we must seek to make a difference and act on behalf of those who cannot act for themselves: those whose voices are often not heard, those who suffer for their beliefs, and those who are marginalized. Where there is injustice, where there is need, our faith demands we take action to help address the quality of life for all peoples.

**B. Raising Awareness**

The pastoral council is one of the key groups to assist the pastor in raising awareness of this call to give witness to Jesus by the way we identify needs and structure our programs, in the stewardship of our personnel and financial resources, and in our response to the social justice needs and challenges of the communities around us. In the pastoral planning process, the active response of a parish to reach out and embrace these needs must be a significant focus for action. All committed baptized Catholics have the responsibility to assist one another within and beyond parish boundaries.
C. Supporting Human Dignity

Pastoral Councils are urged to take an active role in promoting the invitation of Catholic Social Teaching: “In a world where some speak mostly of ‘rights’ and others of ‘responsibilities’, the Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities met.”

*Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions: Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops*
I. The Parish

The parish provides a variety of services to parishioners to both help them grow in their faith and to challenge them to live the Gospel.

The pastor calls lay men and women to share responsibility for the life of the parish.

God provides the community with all the gifts needed to carry on the mission that Jesus left his Church.

Parishes give witness to Jesus by their concern and care for the community in which they reside and for the needs of the whole world.

What makes a parish vital and vibrant? What draws people to the parish to be nurtured in their faith life, challenged and supported to live that faith in the public arena? Active faith, good leadership and a welcoming community are some of the essential characteristics of a vibrant parish.

Catholics seek a variety of things from their parishes: the Eucharist and the Word which are the center of the Church’s life; the sacraments in which they encounter the living Christ; encouragement for their developing relationship with God; a faith community that shares their beliefs and values; development of and formation in these beliefs and values for themselves and their children; opportunities to engage with each other as they live their faith; and a place to gather to celebrate liturgy, to pray, to reconcile, to offer thanks, to be nourished for the days ahead.

Laypeople are called not simply to help their priests run their parishes, but to share fully in the responsibility of building up the Church. Benedict XVI

Catholics also seek opportunities to reach out to others to share Christ’s love and invitation to be one (Jn 17:21): to the poor, the homeless and hungry; to those in need; to those who grieve; to those who suffer from injustice and violence; to the alienated; and to those who have not yet heard the Word of God. Parishes provide their members with these opportunities through the parish food pantry, bereavement services, evangelization, legislative and other forms of advocacy, programs for inactive Catholics and those seeking Church membership, and many other ministries.
A. Shared Responsibility

Parishes can be overwhelmed with these responsibilities. It is to this challenge that a pastor calls committed lay men and women to share responsibility with him in the pastoral care of the parish through the work of a pastoral council. To be effective they must consider priorities and make plans to address them. The pastor, collaborating with his council, sets goals to achieve the mission of the Church. Parishioners are essential to this process of identifying issues, setting goals, implementing plans and systematically assessing and celebrating progress.

B. Spiritual Gifts

God would not leave his Church a mission without providing the gifts needed to carry it out. Helping parishioners identify and use their God-given gifts, inviting and involving all to contribute their time and talent as well as treasure is a primary pastoral work of the pastor and the pastoral council. It is in this way that the parish carries out the mission Jesus gave to his Church—to go out to all the world and proclaim the good news. This is how the parish gives witness to Jesus.

Through Baptism and Confirmation, the Holy Spirit endows each Catholic with gifts. Some are given to help each baptized person become more like Jesus (wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence and awe of God). Others, called charisms, are given for the sake of the community, to help build up the Body of Christ (leadership, administration, encouragement, evangelization, service, giving, healing, hospitality, mercy, music to name just a few) and to carry on the mission of the Church.

This will require a change of mentality, especially regarding laypeople -- to move from considering them to be the clergy’s collaborators to recognizing them as truly sharing responsibility for the existence and action of the Church.

Benedict XVI

Grace includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church. Catechism of the Catholic Church #2003

Pastoral Council Guidelines
October 2010
II. The Pastor

The pastor is the leader of the parish with his own unique gifts, talents and experiences.
The pastoral council is advisory and consultative to the pastor and helps him get to know the parish and to respond to the pastoral needs of the parish.
He clarifies the gifts needed for council ministry and helps form the council in both their spiritual and pastoral development.
He fosters successful council ministry by encouraging open dialogue among all members.

Mutual respect is critical to a successful relationship between pastor and council. Trust and respect are the foundations for effective leadership in the service of the parish community and the mission of the Church.

A. What is the role of the pastor in relation to his pastoral council?

The pastoral council is the pastor’s advisory and consultative body in the parish. By clarifying how this council can best serve his ministry he helps the parish understand the gifts needed by council members.

By conducting a parish-wide education process about the role of the pastoral council and the gifts needed by council members, by offering a discernment process for those nominated by others or by themselves to be council members, the pastor helps insure that those selected for council membership are suited for this ministry.

Every priest is unique. He brings his own gifts, talents, experiences and skills, as well as his training to his role as pastor. Parishioners are regularly challenged to welcome new pastors to their parishes, to get to know them and appreciate their particular gifts, and to learn to work with them effectively. Pastors assist this process by clarifying their own gifts as well as the gifts and talents needed by council members.

“The pastor provides direction in meeting the pastoral needs of the parish while at the same time listening to what the council advises, suggests, and creates.”
2009 Pastor Survey
B. Council Formation: Ongoing spiritual and pastoral development

Once council members are selected, the pastor helps form the council community through prayer and faith sharing, through continuing education about the Church, our Catholic faith, and the role of the council in the life of the parish.

He provides direction to the council regarding the mission of the Church and the needs of the parish in line with the vision and mission of the diocese. He invites them to reflect with him on the issues facing the community both in the Church and in the wider community, to identify priorities and to propose practical responses to those needs and concerns.

C. Conditions for Success

Open dialogue in a setting in which the pastor and all council members feel safe to share their opinions and a willingness to listen to opposing viewpoints will foster discussion and decisions that are in the best interests of the whole parish.

The pastor also encourages council members to remain active in parish life, to continue listening to the parishioners about their hopes for the parish, and to encourage parishioners to know their own gifts and to get involved in the implementation of the goals set for the parish.
III. The Pastoral Council

The work of the council is rooted in prayer, faith sharing and study of pertinent documents. The council listens to the hopes and concerns of parishioners. They respond to these hopes and concerns by making concrete recommendations to the pastor and creating a pastoral plan to guide ministries, programs and events. The leadership of the council is distinct from the leadership of the pastor. They engage all parishioners in the ministries of the parish and ensure that opportunities to discern Spirit-given gifts are offered. There are particular gifts needed for council ministry.

The mission of Jesus and that of the Church, to make Christ known and to establish His Kingdom on earth, is the responsibility of every baptized individual. Through our Baptism and Confirmation and as members of the Body of Christ, we are all called to participate fully in the life and mission of the Church. As our Lord commissioned the first Apostles so also He commissions each one of us. “Go in the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15) Through Confirmation, each of us has received gifts of the Holy Spirit to use in the service of others. As members of the Body of Christ we are each called to share our unique gifts. Discerning spiritual gifts and offering those gifts in loving service is an essential part of living our Catholic faith.

A. Prayer and Collaboration

One way that priests, deacons, religious and laity collaborate in this mission is by placing their gifts at the service of the parish through the structure of pastoral councils.

They begin by praying together, sharing faith, studying pertinent documents of the Church; e.g., U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops documents on Youth and Young Adults, on Marriage and Family, etc. and of the diocese; e.g. the Road Map. With this understanding of the Church today and with their own experiences of their parish and community, they can listen to the issues and concerns of the pastor, the parishioners and the surrounding community.
B. Listening and Responding

A pastoral council examines and considers all that relates to pastoral work and offers practical conclusions on these matters, so that the life and activity of the People of God will be brought into greater conformity with the Gospel. (Paul VI)

Town meetings, focused gatherings with ministry members, and everyday conversations can provide a wealth of information to the pastor and the council members about issues of concern. With this information the council can offer the pastor informed reflections and concrete recommendations regarding these issues. Together they can develop a vision for the parish based on their understanding of both present and future needs of the parish and of the wider community.

When the council considers pastoral matters, it seeks to discern how God is present in the situation. It prays to discover how God invites the parish community to act. The council must be flexible and responsive to emerging needs and changing realities.

The goal is to bring the parish alive by responding to the Gospel. This work of the council becomes the method for ongoing parish development and renewal. It provides the training and ministry opportunities that will develop leadership for the current and future ministries called for by the parish mission.

C. Planning and Assessing Progress

Through ongoing pastoral planning, the council helps the parish maintain the integrity of its mission and the goals and objectives related to it. Programs and events continue to take place in the parish through the efforts of many dedicated parishioners, always in the context of the parish mission and its pastoral plan.

The council also has the responsibility of involving ministries, staff and parishioners in regularly assessing the work of the parish, documenting progress, reflecting on next steps and helping identify obstacles or additional resources needed to achieve parish goals. Ongoing assessment supports the completion and successful operations of programs and projects and will make the council’s yearly review an opportunity for parish-wide recognition of progress. Thoughtful review also reveals areas that need further support and attention. Helping the parish celebrate its accomplishments is an important function of the council. Celebrations can also recognize those parishioners already engaged as well encourage participation by those who are ready to be recruited.

In the cause of the Kingdom there is no time for looking back, even less for settling into laziness. Much awaits us, and for this reason we must set about drawing up an effective...pastoral plan.... It is not a matter of inventing a new program. The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever....But it must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community. John Paul II Novo Millennio Ineunte #15 & 29
D. Understanding Distinct Roles

The pastor has many roles and responsibilities in the parish. He is the spiritual leader responsible for nurturing the faith life of all the members. He is also the administrator of the parish, responsible for the development of ministries that help the parish fulfill its mission. In their collaborative ministry, Pastoral council members must distinguish between their leadership role and that of the pastor. Council members are not responsible for the day-to-day actions of the staff, heads of ministries, and all others who are hired or appointed by the pastor to be responsible for parish operations. However the pastor and council members together provide guidance for the staff through their work of pastoral planning.

E. Engaging Parishioners

Council members must consider the ways in which they will be accessible and engage with parishioners. How will parishioners know council members and what their role is? How will parishioners know the process by which to bring issues and concerns to the attention of the Council? Council members need to be visible and approachable without overburdening themselves. Because the Council has the responsibility of listening to parishioners and bringing forward their needs and concerns, they must create opportunities, both formal and informal, for this to happen.

Helping the members of the parish discern their individual and collective spiritual gifts is also a pastoral responsibility that the council can collaborate with the pastor to address. There are many programs to aid in this discernment which should be part of ongoing faith formation in the parish.

F. Leadership Gifts Needed for Council Ministry

Everyone has gifts but not all gifts are suited to pastoral council ministry. Council members are parish leaders. They should have a commitment to developing their own spirituality and faith lives through prayer, study, reflection and sharing. They should also have a desire to help build a strong faith community that welcomes and engages everyone. Council members must have the care and concern of the whole parish in mind as they discuss and discern direction for the parish with the pastor. The ability to listen to all viewpoints, to discuss issues, to discern direction and make practical recommendations for the parish are important skills that council members should have or be willing to develop. Knowledge of Church teachings and diocesan initiatives should inform
discussions at council meetings. Respect for parish leaders and fellow parishioners, enthusiasm about the future of the parish, and a good sense of humor will also contribute to the work of the pastoral council.

IV. Responsibilities and Relationships

There are many leadership roles within the parish. Each leader has a distinct role and responsibility. Each leadership group maintains a respectful and collaborative relationship with every other leadership group.

A. The Pastor

The pastor is central to the sacramental life and overall well-being of the parish. Although he is encouraged and expected to collaborate with parishioners, he is, ultimately, responsible for the pastoral and finance councils, hiring staff, and approving heads of ministries. He empowers the council members to take on the role of leadership to enhance his own role as foremost leader of the parish. He consults with lay leaders in discerning direction for the parish.

In those parishes with a parochial vicar and deacon(s), the pastor should discern with them what will be their relationship with the pastoral council – whether or not they will meet with the council as ex-officio members.

B. The Pastoral Council

The primary responsibility of the Pastoral council is pastoral planning. The members prayerfully investigate and ponder issues of concern to the whole community and make recommendations to the pastor for goals and actions. Areas of concern include matters pertaining to the life of the whole parish: Leadership, Faith Formation, Worship, Social Ministry, Youth and Young Adults, Evangelization, Stewardship, and Community. The council is consultative and advisory to the pastor. Together they assess the work of the parish ministries in response to the pastoral plan, help the ministries address obstacles to implementation, and evaluate the work on the goals to determine if outcomes have been met.
C. The Finance Council

The Finance Council assists the pastor with the management of parish funds. Using the Parish Pastoral Plan as a guide, they do long-range financial planning to help insure that funds needed to achieve the goals are available. They work with parish ministry leaders to help them create budgets that reflect the goals for their particular ministries. If funds need to be raised, they oversee any development efforts in the parish. They monitor the spending of the funds and provide the Pastoral council with information needed for their assessment and evaluation responsibilities. They are a resource to the pastor.

D. The Parish Planning and Building Committee for Repair, Maintenance and New Construction

The Parish Planning and Building Committee is responsible for the maintenance of the facilities to provide a safe, clean, comfortable, and inviting environment. In their work of listening and recommending, the pastoral council may identify areas of concern regarding the facilities, but those concerns are to be referred to this committee for response. Similarly, the finance council will be responsible to assist this committee with establishing a realistic budget needed for repair or new building. Pastoral and finance councils are kept informed about needed repairs and maintenance but are not responsible for the actual work involved.

E. The School Board

In parishes with a school, the school board assists the pastor and principal in the important ministry of Catholic education. They do so by assisting in developing and maintaining a smooth-running school that is accountable in its mission, providing for representation and input from appropriate groups within the school community and the parish. The Pastoral council members are collaborators with the pastor and school board in developing and enhancing the partnership between the parish and the school and in modeling and representing the faith community that surrounds and permeates the school. This partnership can aid in the growth and development of the school and help affirm its distinctively Catholic Christian character.
F. The Parish Staff (may include volunteer heads of ministries)

Staff members have the responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the parish. They are critical to the implementation of the pastoral plan and should be an integral part of the planning process by providing information and education, as needed, about the various parish ministries. In turn they listen to the findings of the council and collaborate on developing goals to meet the expressed concerns of the parishioners. The council can be a resource to the staff when obstacles in achieving goals are encountered. Together they can find resources to aid in the implementation process or, if needed, adapt the goals to a more achievable outcome. The council supports the staff and encourages them to avail themselves of continued learning opportunities to strengthen the skills needed for their ministries. The staff, however, is accountable only to the pastor.

G. A Ministry Council

Where ministry leaders of core parish ministries (worship, religious education, social ministry, stewardship, evangelization, leadership development, etc.) are volunteers, not staff members, the pastor might consider establishing a Ministry Council. This council would include parochial vicars, parish staff and the directors or coordinators of parish ministries. Sharing their plans and activities on a regular basis will enhance communication within the parish and will contribute to the implementation of the parish pastoral plan. Reports of these meetings can be shared with the Pastoral and Finance Councils. Although not necessary, a representative from the pastoral council and finance council could sit in on these meetings and assist the pastor in conveying information from these meetings to their respective councils.

Once or twice a year, a joint meeting of all members of the Pastoral, Finance and Ministry Councils could be held to share information about progress on goals, challenges to be met and recommendation of new goals to be established.

A Note about Communication

Respectful and collaborative relationships will be strengthened by regular communication between and among all these parish groups including parishioners. Use of many different venues for communication; e.g., parish bulletins, newsletters and websites, email, social networking sites such as Facebook, ministry reports, etc. will increase the probability of information getting to a wide audience.
V. Roles within the Pastoral Council

There are distinct roles within the pastoral council. Understanding and effectively fulfilling their appropriate role will contribute to the successful functioning of the council. Some roles may be filled by parishioners who are not members of the council.

A. Presider - the Pastor

The pastor presides over the council but leaves the running of the meeting to the chair. He works with the chair and the recorder to prepare the meeting agenda in advance. He attends all meetings and seeks information and recommendations regarding the life of the parish. He brings issues to the council and also encourages the members to raise issues they have identified in their interactions with parishioners. He participates in all council deliberations, listening to the ideas and recommendations of the council members and offering his own reflections on their suggestions and recommendations. He has the responsibility for decision-making and for listening to the council members. His decision-making is informed by the contribution of Pastoral Council members. He nurtures the spirituality of the council by encouraging time for prayer and faith sharing at every meeting and providing an annual retreat for council members.

B. Chair

The chair works with the pastor and the recorder to prepare the agenda for council meetings. S/he conducts each meeting keeping the council focused on the agenda and encouraging everyone to participate in the discussions. S/he sets ground rules with council members to insure that all members respect one another and listen to one another, especially when individuals have strong disagreements about issues. S/he designates a member to lead the council in prayer and faith sharing before each meeting. S/he helps the group arrive at recommendations on issues under consideration and present recommendations to the pastor.
C. Recorder

The recorder, who may or may not be a council member, works with the pastor and chair to prepare the agenda. S/he maintains a record of all council discussions and recommendations, and sends both the agenda and the minutes of the previous meeting to all council members at least ten days prior to the meeting to give them time to reflect and prepare for active participation. S/he can assist with the development of the agenda by identifying topics that were not resolved at previous meetings. S/he files a copy of the approved council minutes in the permanent parish archives.

D. Facilitator

A council chair acts as a facilitator for council work, but may also be supported by a skilled facilitator who may or not be a member of the council. A facilitator's responsibility is to help insure that the group stays focused on the agenda, fulfills its tasks and responsibilities, and sees that all members are invited to participate. A facilitator can also enable the council chair to take an active role in discussion and decision-making. A facilitator is not required but can be an asset to a council by calling them back to the agenda if a discussion strays, or calling the group to prayer when discussions get difficult.

E. Council Members

All council members have a responsibility to come to meetings prepared to contribute to the discussion of each agenda item. They are also responsible for bringing issues to the pastor and council that they have identified in their own listening throughout the parish between meetings. Once a decision has been made, they have a responsibility to support that decision and to help parishioners understand it. Because of this responsibility, it is critical that they freely share their thoughts about issues so that all considerations become part of the pastor's final decision.
VI. Pastoral Planning

Pastoral Planning is the primary role of the Pastoral Council

The strength of a Pastoral Council lies in its ability to draw upon the whole of the parish community in the creation of a focused, priority driven plan that guides decision-making and action on the part of all members of the community. The pastoral plan is the blueprint for action. It grows out of a careful assessment of where the parish is now and where its members want to be as a faith community. The pastoral plan builds on strengths, identifies needs, sets priorities in a timeline and includes opportunities to systematically check and report progress to the parish community as a whole, and to the Diocese. Carrying out a pastoral plan requires the time and energies of parishioners, ministries, committees, staff, as well as the attentive support of the Pastoral council under the leadership and guidance of the pastor.

A pastoral plan provides a new pastor with information about the goals and actions the parish is currently implementing. It gives him information about the various parish leaders and their committees and ministries that are responsible for the implementation of the various goals. It can help provide stability and continuity in pastoral transitions as well as being a support for a new pastor as he gets to know the parish and the parishioners. A well-crafted pastoral plan gives the Pastoral Council the opportunity to assist a new pastor with his transition. As they learn about his particular leadership gifts and skills and as he learns about theirs, opportunities for new collaborative efforts can be developed and supported.

It is in the local Churches that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified — goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary resources — which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mold communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture. John Paul II Novo Millennio Ineunte#29
Pastoral Planning Essentials

What is Pastoral Planning?

1. It is taking stock of who we are:
   • As a parish within the Diocese of Honolulu and part of the universal Church.
   • As an organization within the community in which the parish exists.
   • As parishioners within the parish.

2. It is asking:
   • What is God asking us to do now?
   • What is our mission?
   • What are our hopes and dreams for the future of our parish?
   • What are our values and what behaviors do we want to see from each other because of those values?

3. It is systematically and realistically looking at where we are now and where we want to be in 2, 3, 5 and 10 years.

4. It is creating some concrete goals that help us move toward our vision and carry out our mission.

5. It is thoughtfully identifying priorities, inviting the active support of the whole community in taking action on those goals, not leaving them on the shelf.

6. It is assisting our parishioners to identify their gifts in relation to our goals and engaging them in action.

7. It is assessing our progress on a regular basis, communicating successes and challenges and adjusting our actions as needed.

8. It is evaluating our outcomes to determine when the goal has been achieved and celebrating our accomplishments across our parish community.

9. It is about making all of this a regular part of parish life.