



ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE STATE OF HAWAII
DIOCESE OF HONOLULU
WITNESS TO JESUS

Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Honolulu

[November 15, 2018]

Background

Code of Canon Law, canon 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.”

Purpose

The purpose of the parish pastoral council is pastoral planning and creating a vision for the future of the parish. The council is consultative and advisory to the pastor. Members prayerfully investigate and discern issues of concern to the whole parish and make recommendations to the pastor for goals and actions. Areas of concern include matters important to the whole parish: evangelization, faith formation, stewardship, leadership, worship, social ministry, youth and young adults, marriage and family life, and community life. They regularly assess the progress and issues relating to the implementation of the parish pastoral plan. They identify obstacles to implementation and identify ways to address and overcome the obstacles. Strong emphasis and support for the parish’s stewardship efforts is vital.

Requirements

1. Every parish in the Diocese of Honolulu is to have a parish pastoral council. Exceptions to this require the written permission of the bishop.
2. When a new pastor is appointed, the pastoral council from the prior pastor remains in place to help with the orientation of the new pastor. This will help the pastor understand the history and culture of his new parish. In exceptional circumstances and with the written permission of the bishop, a new pastor may dissolve the existing council. A new council is then to be formed as soon as possible.
3. The parish pastoral council is to have statutes (canon 94 §1) which define its purpose, composition, leadership, and methods of operation. The statutes are to be drafted by the council in accord with these norms and must be approved by the pastor. Any revision of the statutes also requires the approval of the pastor.
4. Any parochial vicars or deacons assigned to the parish are *ex officio* members of the council.
5. The parish pastoral council is to meet at least once per quarter.
6. Because the pastoral council is advisory to the pastor, it does not meet in the absence of the pastor.

Guidelines and Best Practices

- Membership qualifications are to be defined in the statutes.
- Size of the council will vary depending on the size of the parish, but it should ordinarily include at least five lay persons in addition to the clergy.
- Members are ordinarily baptized Christians who are in full communion with the Catholic Church and are firmly committed to developing their relationship with Jesus Christ in the Church he founded and in the mission he entrusted to his Church.
- Members ordinarily are registered and involved members of the parish who are willing to listen to differing opinions and work collaboratively for the good of the parish.
- The involvement of parish staff members on the council should be defined in the statutes. Some staff may be designated as *ex officio* members of the parish pastoral council (e.g., the director of religious education, the school principal). If parish staff members serve on the council, care should be taken that they do not dominate discussions or circumvent the nature of the council as an advisory group to the pastor composed of parishioners.
- Selection of non-*ex officio* members can be by election, appointment by the pastor, or a combination of the two methods, as established in the statutes. A discernment process is recommended for all candidates. (Refer to Pastoral Council Discernment Process on the catholichawaii.org website under the Office of Pastoral Planning for assistance.)
- The statutes should assure that the members of the council are representative of the entire parish and its various ministries so that the council is a microcosm of the parish. However, once serving on the council, all members should be mindful of the good of the entire parish, not just a particular ministry.
- A liaison with the parish finance council and other councils or committees may be appointed by the pastor or chosen by the council.
- Terms of office are to be defined in the statutes. The statutes ordinarily state that non-*ex officio* members serve for a specific term (e.g., three years, renewable once). This allows different parishioners to participate in parish leadership and new ideas to emerge. Terms ordinarily are staggered so that there is both continuity and freshness.
- The leadership of the council and their terms of office are defined by the statutes. The pastor is always the president of the council. However, the pastor normally leaves running of the meeting to the council chair. The following three roles serve as a guide:
 - Chair: The chair is to conduct the meeting, keep it focused on the agenda topics and timeline, and ensure everyone has the chance to speak. The chair should facilitate setting ground rules with the members to ensure all members respect and listen to one another, especially when individuals have disagreements. He or she also helps the group develop recommendations to present to the pastor.
 - Vice Chair: The vice chair assists the chair and conducts the meetings in the absence of the chair.
 - Recorder: The recorder maintains a summary of council discussions and recommendations and sends the minutes of the last council meeting and the new agenda to all members at least a week before the next meeting. The recorder also files a copy of the approved minutes in the parish archives.
- Agenda: The pastor, the chair, and other persons specified in the statutes are to set the agenda for the council meetings.
- A member of the council is to lead prayer or some faith sharing before or during each meeting.

- Discussions center on pastoral and spiritual issues (for example, the renewal of the parish in stewardship; outreach to the unchurched, disaffected, or uninvolved Catholics; inclusion of youth and young adults in the mission of the parish; motivation of parishioners to be engaged in the public arena on issues of life, family, and morality).
- Review of the parish pastoral plan and its implementation should be a regular part of the agenda.
- Planning events and directing ministries are not normally the type of items that a parish pastoral council addresses.
- Potential new topics and carryover items can be identified at the end of every meeting for the next meeting's agenda.
- Communication: It is important for the council to keep parishioners informed as to what issues are being addressed and, if appropriate, to solicit the views of others in the parish community. Publicizing the agendas and minutes and scheduled listening sessions can help accomplishing these objectives.
- Members are responsible to come prepared to discuss agenda items. They are also responsible to present issues to the pastor and council that they have identified through listening to the parishioners. Once a decision is made by the pastor, they have the responsibility to support the decision and to help parishioners understand it.
- The parish pastoral council should not do the work that is proper to the parish finance council, stewardship committee, building committee, or any other group in the parish that has its own particular area of responsibility. At the same time, the parish pastoral council will need to have good structures of communication with all of these groups so that its proper role of pastoral planning can be enhanced.