

Questions to help a parish develop or revise existing guidelines for their own Pastoral Council Operations.

These should be reviewed periodically to determine if they are useful or need to be adjusted based on the experiences of the council. Guidelines should always be flexible to meet the changing needs of a parish and a pastoral council.

The possibilities offered here are for you to consider. They are **not** given as requirements. The council should discuss the pros and cons of the possibilities before adopting any of them. Your discussion may produce other possibilities.

The Office for Pastoral Resources can help parishes with the various ideas suggested here: discernment of nominees for pastoral council membership, training of meeting facilitators and recorders, developing forms and procedures for parish ministry evaluations and pastoral council evaluations, planning tools including hosting a parish assembly, creating goals for the parish, etc.

Basic Principles:

1. Jesus left 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.

Membership:

1. How many members would you like the council to have?

Possibilities: 9-12 members.

More than 12 may be too many voices in the discussion and fewer than 9 may mean not enough voices especially when people are absent from the meetings.

Question: Will the number include the pastor?

Ex-officio members such as parochial vicars, deacons, a finance council representative?

Recommendation: Parish staff and heads of ministries should not be members of the pastoral council. Each has a specific ministry in the parish and may be challenged to keep the needs of the whole parish in mind

and not just their own ministry. They can serve as resources to the council and be invited to meetings when information about their ministry is needed to make a recommendation.

2. What criteria do you want to have for membership?

Possibilities: People who are committed to developing their relationship with God and with the parish
Registered and practicing member who is in good standing with the Church
Reasonably involved in parish life (has been on one or more parish committees or served in one or more parish ministries)
Understands the mission of the Church today and the direction of the diocese and of the parish
Willing to work collaboratively, willing to listen to the pastor and other council members and to the parishioners
Willing to share his/her thoughts about the various topics on the council agenda
Someone who has the care and concern of all parishioners in mind when making recommendations to the pastor

3. How will the members be selected? This process can be used to elect a new council or replace outgoing council members on a yearly basis.

Possibilities: A discernment process that includes:

- Education of parishioners about the role of the council and the gifts needed by the members
- Nomination by parishioners (ask why they are nominating the person) – see sample nomination form in Selecting New Members resource
- Orientation sessions for nominees so they understand the work of the council before committing to the election or selection process
- Selection of council members either by parish vote, pastor and steering committee (or interim council members), nominee discernment or other process.

This discernment process is highly recommended.

*A more detailed account of this process is in the resource: **A Process for Selecting New Pastoral Council Members**, which is available from the Office for Pastoral Resources*

For replacement members: a process that includes:

- Asking parishioners for nominations
- Hosting a discernment process for all nominees

- From the list of approved nominees (they meet the criteria and have agreed to the nomination) the pastor and the continuing council members select the replacements using the needs of the council as criteria. Example: inviting a young adult or single parent or other parishioners who reflects an aspect of the parish that is not currently represented on the council.
- Or From the list of approved candidates (they meet the criteria and have agreed to the nomination), the parishioners elect the new council members.

Something to consider: If parishioners have discerned that they are called to council ministry but are not elected to the council, the pastor may ask them to be considered as alternates for the year in the event a selected council member has to leave. These alternates would be welcome to attend and participate in the monthly meetings but would not have a vote.

4. How long will terms of office be?

Highly Recommended: The basic term of office could be three years renewable once (if they are selected).

A mandatory one-year (at least) break after two terms.

For a new council, 1/3 of the members get a one-year term, 1/3 a two-year term and 1/3 a three-year term. This will provide continuity as council members cycle on and off the council.

Members with a one-year term could be eligible for reelection to two subsequent three-year terms. 2 year and 3 year members could be eligible for reelection to only one subsequent three-year term.

Something to consider: If a council member needs to be replaced, will the oncoming member only fill the remaining term of office? Will s/he be eligible for reelection to a second term?

Meetings:

1. How often will you meet?

Possibilities: Monthly for two hours. It is difficult to conduct council business in less than two hours particularly if the council takes prayer and faith sharing seriously (as it should).

Every other month for four hours (Saturday morning, Sunday afternoon)

Quarterly for six hours: 2 hours on Friday night for prayer, faith sharing, perhaps Mass & dinner, sharing about what you are hearing from parishioners about the parish. 4 hours on Saturday morning to conduct the business of the council.

2. Will you have officers?

Possibilities: Chair, chair elect who will assume the position of chair at the end of the term or end of each year. This contributes to continuity on the Council.

How long will officers hold their positions? One year? Longer? Will this person be selected? By whom? The pastor? The full council? An anonymous ballot may be considered to avoid pressure and lobbying.

Could this be a rotating position? There are pros and cons to this. Some people do not have the gifts or skills to be an effective chair. The chair should be someone acceptable to the pastor.

A meeting recorder is essential. This person is responsible for keeping notes of the meetings, the items discussed, decisions made, follow-up work to be done and by whom, etc. These notes should accompany the agenda for the next meeting when they are sent to the members at least ten days prior to the meeting.

Because this task often prevents the recorder from participating in discussions, this could be a rotating position so no one person is burdened with the task for a year or it could be a parishioner who is not on the council.

Something to consider: A meeting facilitator can help the group stay focused on the agenda. The facilitator is not the chair but can remind the whole council when they are off track. See description of facilitator in the diocesan **Guidelines for Pastoral Councils**.

3. Who will set the agenda?

Possibilities: The chair could do this with the pastor and the recorder. Suggestions for agenda items for the next meeting should be sought from the council at the conclusion of every meeting.

An agenda team could be a standing committee. It could include the pastor, the chair, the recorder and a permanent or rotating

council member. They could meet in between meetings to determine the agenda and make sure it gets out to the members at least 10 days before the meeting.

Council Teams or Committees

1. Will you have various council teams or committees? Some of these could be ad hoc and others might be standing committees.

Possibilities: A prayer and ritual team who will insure that prayer and faith sharing happen at every meeting.
An annual retreat planning team.
A publicity team that keeps the parishioners informed about council matters and decisions.
A reelection committee .
Annual parish assembly planning committee, or
A parish pastoral planning committee.
A ministry assessment and evaluation team.
A pastoral council evaluation team.

These teams or committees could be responsible for creating a plan or time line for their area of responsibility. For example: the reelection committee would determine when the parishioners would be prepared for the next election process, when announcements would be made and nominations sought. The committee could be responsible for collecting nominations, contacting parishioners, setting up the orientation session(s) and conducting the election. They would determine if other members of the council or the parish need to be involved in any step. They would bring all their recommendations to the whole council for determination and approval.

A prayer and ritual team could be responsible for providing the prayer/faith sharing for a year. Or they could develop a schedule that involves every council member.

2. When you need an ad hoc committee for a short-term project, how will you develop them? Will you invite parishioners who are not on the council to be part of these ad hoc committees?

An ad hoc committee could be:
A committee to create a new ministry group that does not currently exist in the parish but is now needed. Example: Adult Faith Formation Ministry. A council member could chair the ad hoc committee and may invite a few parishioners to help develop a ministry job description and invite interested parishioners to attend an information meeting and recruit members to establish this new

ministry. When the ministry is in place, the council ad hoc committee dissolves.

Other Issues:

1. How will you handle members who do not attend meetings?

Possibilities: The pastor or appointed council member would meet with the absentee member to determine the cause and, if appropriate, ask the member to resign

Establish a number of meetings missed without cause that will lead to dismissing a council member.

2. How will parishioners submit ideas to the council for consideration?

Possibilities: Hold an annual (or semi-annual or quarterly) parish assembly for the purpose of inviting parishioners to submit ideas.

Refer the parishioners or his/her idea to the appropriate parish committee or ministry. Examples: Fund-raising requests or ideas go to the Finance Committee. Facilities requests or ideas go to the Building and Maintenance Committee. Faith formation questions go to the Faith Formation or Religious Education Board, etc.

Something to consider: It is generally not recommended that you invite parishioners to a council meeting for the purpose of submitting an idea. This could disrupt the agenda for the entire meeting.