

FUNCTIONS OF THE PASTORAL COUNCIL

1. EVANGELIZATION

The council focuses on the essential mission of the Church, evangelization, proclaiming the Word. *Evangelization is the thread that runs through all of the Church's efforts and, therefore, should be an essential part of all the efforts of the council.

- Evangelization is the reason for our ministries.
- Education proclaims the Good news.
- Liturgy celebrates it.
- Pastoral care and justice ministries extend the Good News to those who are wounded or suffering.
- Finances and Administration focus on responsible stewardship and organization for proclaiming the Good News.

2. VISION AND PLANNING

The Pastoral Council becomes a means for articulating the dreams and needs of parishioners and the local community in carrying out the mission of the Church. After input from parishioners, the Council articulates a vision for the parish which helps focus the work of the council and parish. It develops a pastoral plan built on these dreams, needs and vision.

The council's task is to help the parish to understand better its responsibility to carry on the mission of Christ in the world. The council listens to the people, assesses the needs in their local, regional and world community, studies church teachings, and recommends goals and priorities in the shape of a long-range pastoral plan.

Pastoral Planning has five elements which are reviewed each year:

1. Vision/Mission Statement
2. Parish Goals (Needs Assessment)
3. Objectives and Strategies
4. Implementation
5. Evaluation

All of the above involves as many parishioners as possible so that participation brings ownership to the final results. Meetings and/or surveys are carried out in a spirit of prayerful reflection and discernment. The results of the planning and evaluations are always shared with the parish community as quickly as possible.

3. RECOMMENDING

The Christian faithful *"share in their own way in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ. They are called to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the church to fulfill in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each one.*

Consultative bodies in the church, composed of clergy and laity, listen to the Spirit who is leading the church and speaking to her through the gifts and experiences of all parishioners, as well as through the ordained ministers;" *"The Pastoral Council has only a consultative vote and is regulated by the norms laid down by the diocesan bishop.* The Pastoral Council, as a consultative body, investigates pastoral matters, considers them thoughtfully and gives strong recommendations to the pastor, who is working with them.

Recommendations of the pastoral council, made after prayer, study and dialogue, enable the pastor to make the best decision for the good of the parish.

In a particular instance when a pastor cannot accept the final recommendation, further discussion takes place to see if an alternative decision can be reached.

In a collaborative process, where there has been open communication and mutual agreement between pastoral council and pastor in the steps leading to a recommendation, it would be rare for the pastor coordinator not to accept the final recommendation of the pastoral council. However, where there remains an unresolved disagreement between the pastoral council and the pastor, an appeal may be made (2/3's vote of the entire pastoral council) to the Vicar in their region.

4. UNIFYING

The parish strives to become a community of faith. However, it is realistic to expect that tensions and conflicts will arise in parish communities because of varied factors. A unifying council acknowledges the tension and works to resolve it. The council members witness to the Lord's call to unity by building community within its membership through dialogue and prayer. At the same time the council consistently calls the parish community to unity.

5. COORDINATING

The pastoral council, through its commissions, connects with all the groups and activities taking place in the parish. This calls for a good communication system that allows up-to-date information to be made available to all. Time needs to be given to develop such a system, whether by newsletter, parish bulletin, web site, or announcements at weekend masses. A yearly calendar of events and activities enables a council to better support the programs. It allows coordination of dates, times and places. It also prevents major activities taking place at the same time.

Open lines of communication, a sense of mutual respect, and a shared commitment to the purpose and goals of the parish are necessary if the pastoral council is to fulfill its coordinating role. The pastoral council serves as a liaison between the pastor and parishioners.

6. STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship is a **way of life** -- the wise use of all that we are and have, knowing that what we are and what we are becoming comes from God. Stewardship starts with the personal need of each one of us to return to God a truly grateful portion of our time, talent and treasure in thanksgiving for all the blessings He gives us. Stewardship is another way of worshipping, praising and thanking God.

Stewardship, like Evangelization, should permeate everything we do. Yet, unless the Pastoral Council gives this responsibility to one structural group, there is a high probability that nothing will happen. Councils are urged to discuss their understanding of Stewardship and decide what they wish to emphasize. If education is the emphasis, it can be placed as a committee under Religious Education. If talents are the emphasis, the Social Justice Commission will be used. In some parishes it has been placed under the Evangelization Commission.