



IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL POLICY

“It is highly desirable that in every diocese a special pastoral council be established, presided over by the diocesan bishop himself, in which clergy, religious, and laity specially chosen for the purpose will participate. It will be the function of this council to investigate and consider matters relating to pastoral activity and to formulate practical conclusions concerning them.” (Vatican II, “Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church no. 27, p. 580)

The Bishop of Covington issued the following policy statement in the 2006 Synod Documents:

IV. Parish Administration

13 Pastors of parishes, appointed by the diocesan bishop, are entrusted with the pastoral care of a particular community within the diocese. They are responsible for the administration of parish programs, property and records. Under the authority of the bishop, pastors cooperate with diocesan offices and programs. They are responsible to establish consultative bodies, such as parish pastoral councils, finance committees and education commissions to seek advice and counsel regarding parish services and programs.

POLICY STATEMENTS

14. At a minimum, each parish will have the following:
- Parish pastoral council
 - Finance council
 - Parish Education Commission

15. The diocese will provide norms for the establishment and function of parish pastoral councils.

Therefore, recognizing that sound pastoral decisions are informed by the wisdom of the People of God, Immaculate Heart of Mary's Pastor, Father Rottman, reconstituted the pastoral council effective August 1, 2015. The documents of the Second Vatican Council recommended the establishment of such councils. They state that Catholics have a right and duty to express their opinion on what pertains to the good of the Church. Pastors should willingly consult their people, say the documents, and use their prudent advice. By establishing a pastoral council, the pastor acknowledges the wisdom of his parishioners and expresses his desire to share with them his responsibility for the governance of the parish.

2. Purpose

The parish pastoral council is to advise the pastor on practical matters of parish life and act as a steward of the mission of the Gospel. The council, with and under the direction of the pastor, develops goals and prioritizes them based on the needs of the parish, the Gospel, and the teachings of the Church. (*Diocese of Covington Parish Council Guidelines, Dec. 2017*).

The parish pastoral council, then, assists the Pastor in the consideration of pastoral matters, to consider them thoroughly, and to propose practical conclusions about them. The council's task is, first of all, to study those matters brought to its attention and shed light on them. Its second task is to reflect on them thoroughly, to discern their true nature, to evaluate and to ponder them. Its final task is to draw sound conclusions. The council presents these conclusions to the pastor in the form of recommendations. This threefold task of the council-investigating, considering, and recommending conclusions-is called pastoral planning. After the pastor has accepted the recommendations of the council, he directs their implementation. Council members may assist him, but strictly speaking, implementation is the responsibility of the pastor, not the council.

3. Scope

The scope of the council includes all the practical matters of parish life. There is, in short, nothing about which the pastor may not consult the council, apart from faith, orthodoxy, moral principles or laws of the universal Church. The council only recommends and offers advice to the pastor in a collaborative manner.

4. Criteria for Membership

Pastoral council members are appointed by the Pastor from the Parish membership, above all, for their ability to accomplish the main task of the council-the work of investigating, considering, and recommending practical conclusions. They are fully initiated Catholics at least 16 years old who are in good standing with the Church, who reflect the parish's various neighborhoods, social and professional groups, and apostolates. Finally, they are parishioners noted for their faith, good morals, and prudence.

5. Selection of Members

The IHM Pastoral Council consists of eight to twelve members, plus the Parochial Vicars and assigned Permanent Deacons (The Vicars and Deacons are not counted against the 12-member limitation). *Ex officio* members of the Council include the parish's Deanery Pastoral Council Representative as well as a member of the Parish Finance Council. Two of these twelve are chosen by the Pastor every three years through elections by the Parish. The election typically takes place on the last Sunday of September during the regularly scheduled Sunday Masses. Information about the Council and nominees will be published in the bulletins of the first three Sundays in September as follows: the first article introduces/reminds parishioners of the work of the pastoral council. The pastor explains his motives for establishing it and invites parishioners to express their hopes for it. Parishioners are also invited to nominate potential members to the Pastor. The second article identifies the strengths of the parish and those areas in which the council may help it to develop, and again asks for nominations. Nominees will be screened and approved by the Pastor. Only those nominees selected and approved by the Pastor will be placed on the ballot. The third article is devoted to a brief biographical sketch of the nominees, ideally a photo, and their reasons why they would like to serve the parish as a member of the Pastoral Council. The election is held during the Mass, after the homily, with pre-printed ballots. Voting is not restricted as to age.

The remaining six to eight members of the Council are appointed by the Pastor directly, and should be representative of the make-up of the Parish, given the expected qualities of the member.

In event of a vacancy, the Pastor may appoint a member to fill the remaining term, or simply leave the position vacant until the next September.

The Pastor will provide training for new members of the Council. Also, the Pastor will provide ongoing formation as needed.

The Pastor may choose to extend the term of any/all appointed members.

6. Officers

The pastor calls a meeting and presides at every meeting of the council. Absent the Pastor, the Council will not meet. The Pastor consults, he accepts or rejects recommendations, and he develops the agenda with the council officers. The pastor and councilors select three officers from among their number. They are the chairperson, vice-chairperson, and recorder. With the pastor they develop the council agenda. The chairperson facilitates council discussions, making sure that everyone speaks and is heard. The chairperson also monitors the work of the councilors between regular meetings. The vice-chairperson assists the chairperson and facilitates meetings in the chairperson's absence. The recorder keeps the minutes of the Council's actions and recommendations. He or she ensures that they are sent, along with the agenda and supporting documents, to each councilor at least one week before every meeting. The recorder also makes and files a permanent paper copy of minutes.

Although the pastor is the presider, he shares leadership of the council with its officers. To be sure, the pastor has legal responsibility for the parish. He alone has the legal right to speak on its behalf. But his final decision is only one part of decision-making. The other parts include research, reflection, and the development of recommendations. And in these parts, the officers of the councils may exercise leadership. They aid in the operation of the council.

The pastor is to review the parish pastoral council guidelines with the members of the council annually.

Recommendations made by the council to the pastor should involve consensus. Consensus is a process of deliberation that requires open dialogue, listening, prayer, and discernment. The pastor will consider the advice and recommendations of the council in his decision making. Whatever form this takes, the pastor always retains the responsibility for the final decision.

7. Operation

The pastoral council has a three-year strategic planning cycle, and members are selected for a three-year term. The pastor defines the theme of the planning cycle during the September meeting. In the beginning of the council's second and third year, the members facilitate a parish assembly (Town Hall Meeting) to report on the council's progress and to elicit the advice of parishioners.

The Council will assist the Pastor in reviewing/updating the Parish Strategic Plan on an ongoing basis, as well as provide evaluations on progress.

The Pastor may, from time to time, find it necessary to appoint *ad hoc* committees to further the work of the parish and work with the Parish Pastoral Council. All committees are accountable to the pastor.

If the pastor of the parish dies, resigns, or is transferred, the council is suspended until a new pastor or parochial administrator has been appointed and reconvenes the council. Meetings should take place at least quarterly.

8. Agenda

The pastor develops the agenda with the council officers. It states the goals for each meeting, the means and group process for reaching the goals, and the materials needed to accomplish them. The agenda guides the meeting. It begins with a review of the minutes of the previous meeting and concludes with a brief evaluation. If the pastor is dissatisfied with the consultation, he expresses his reservations and asks the council to clarify whatever remains obscure. When he is satisfied with the consultation, he formally accepts the council's recommendations. He may then ask the parish staff or other parishioners to implement them.

The agenda should guide the meeting.

9. Relation to the Staff and Finance Council

The pastor consults others besides the pastoral council about parish governance. He relies upon the parish staff for their expertise and consults them daily about the management of parish operations. Indeed, he may occasionally ask parish staff members to attend council meetings in order to put their knowledge at the service of the pastoral council. Moreover, the pastor relies on the finance council to develop, monitor, and report on the parish budget. Finance council members are chosen for their technical skill in realms of accounting, finance and business. The pastoral council, by contrast, offers practical wisdom. That is the ability to investigate pastoral matters in a general way, to reflect on them deeply in dialogue, and to propose conclusions appropriate to the parish.

The parish finance council is mandated by canon law. Canon 537 states, “Each parish is to have a finance council which is regulated by universal law as well as by norms issued by the diocesan bishop; in this council the Christian faithful, selected according to the same norms, aid the pastor in the administration of the parish goods with due regard for the prescription of Canon 532.”

The parish finance council is to provide counsel to the pastor concerning the administration of the parish finances and the budget.

While open communication between the parish pastoral council and the finance council is essential to ensure that the envisioned parish direction and priorities can be supported within the financial limits of the parish, any confusion between the roles belonging to each council is to be avoided.

As parish staffs grow, they often take on jobs formerly done by the pastoral council. Each is in danger of stepping on the toes of the other. The solution is sound leadership by the pastor. He must distinguish between those technical questions that require expert opinion (i.e., the opinion of his trained staff or the expertise of the finance council) and the more general questions that do not require expert advice. If the questions are technical, he should consult technical experts. But if the pastor wants to know what decisions will unify the community, increase its momentum, and make best use of parish volunteers, he should consult the pastoral council.

10. Meetings

The pastoral council meets once a month from September to May and as needed by the Pastor. Meetings are two hours in length. Between the monthly meetings, council members are expected to follow up the previous meeting and prepare for the next. This usually entails work on *ad hoc* committees. The first meeting of the new pastoral council is dedicated to the call, mission and training of the newly-chosen members. During the final meeting of each year, the councilors reflect on the progress of the parish’s strategic three-year planning cycle.