



What You Need to Know About the Parish Pastoral Council

The Council is a thoughtful body that is forward looking and assists the pastor in developing a vision for the parish. This often requires periods of prayer and reflection. The Council is concerned with the bigger picture rather than the day to day operations of the parish.

1. Service on the Council involves taking on a leadership function in the parish. To lead involves responsibility for the whole. That means that service on the leadership council requires focusing on the good of the whole parish community. To the extent that you get distracted by particular issues of individuals or groups of persons, you may compromise your effectiveness on the Council.
2. Leadership involves both supporting the community and stretching it. If leadership only supports and affirms, the system will become slack and fail to grow. Challenge and growth may be sacrificed to popularity. If leadership only stretches, it can pull people beyond their capacity and cause resistance. Leadership could become autocratic, substituting personal interests for the genuine good of all.
3. As leaders, the members of the Council are called to fulfill two needs that may be in tension:
 - (a) the need to be inclusive, to listen intently and appreciate what the parish is experiencing and presenting, and
 - (b) the need to use personal responsibility and judgment, making recommendations which might not enjoy popular support with the members of the community.
4. The Council agenda is designed to facilitate the supporting and stretching functions of leadership. The agenda leads members to the question: "Now that we know what the challenges are, what is our best judgment about ways to achieve the common good?"
5. Although Council policies and procedures attempt to protect it against the risks of extremes, balance ultimately lies within the character of the members of the Council. Sensitivity that is not currying favor and courage that is not arrogance depend on the moral qualities of the members.
6. Accepting a role on the Parish Council, makes you accountable to all of the people of the parish - regardless of gender, geographic situation, type of ministry, age, years of service, ethnic origins, or any other criteria - for your wisest assessment of the good of the whole. To imagine yourself as a representative of a constituency would be to reduce yourself to a mouth piece for others, alienating you from your own integrity and selfhood. This could destroy the atmosphere of wholeness through interdependence required by the Council, exposing the Council and the parish to the conflict of competing interest groups.
7. Acceptance of responsibility on the Council can involve being supported and affirmed but also being stretched into a new identity.
8. Internalizing a new identity involves conversion and on-going growth at the deepest level of personhood rather than conceptual understanding. Members of the Council are encouraged to accept this challenge to conversion and growth.
9. All members of the Council are peers and share collegial responsibility. Special competencies or experience (such as academic degrees, age, tenure or particular training) do not confer special status on a group member. Special skills or talents may be brought to the assistance of the group but they may not be used in a way that diminishes the value of the participation of others.

10. The processes exercised by the Council for the good of the parish depend on wisdom - that is: intuition, lived experience, sensitivity to symbols, and the ability to imagine potential or probable consequences as they interact with factual data. These processes may involve reading articles from national experts; listening to presentations from outside consultants; time-consuming discussion; and sharing opinions prayerfully with others. A commitment to enter whole-heartedly into these processes is required of all Council members.
11. The kind of recommendations the Council makes involve vision, mission, goals, policy or broad strategy. The Council does not make programmatic decisions, decisions which apply policy to concrete situations, or decisions concerning the operations of the parish.
12. The work of the Council requires a special atmosphere, generous allocation of time, and processes that allow everyone to participate.
13. The atmosphere must be reflective, allowing ideas to mature and evolve under sensitive analysis. It requires methods that balance the spiritual and psychological needs and gifts of the members. Because the recommendations of the Council can have a wide impact on the parish they are weighed carefully.
14. The processes employed to bring issues from open-ended exploration to genuine closure are designed to respect the needs of individuals and the body as a whole so that the issue is neither forced to pre-mature closure nor allowed to remain endlessly unresolved.
15. The Council makes recommendations to the pastor based on a consensus of the group. Consensus means that all support the recommendation even though some may not consider it the best recommendation. Consensus depends on the honesty and integrity of all involved. Investigation must be thorough, the facts must be presented, doubts must be expressed, and all questions must be explored in order to reach a consensus.
16. The work of the Council cannot be rushed. It takes time.
17. Accepting service on the Council requires that attendance at all meetings will be a high priority with members. Meetings are scheduled well in advance so that absences reflect true emergencies.

