



## DIOCESE OF AUSTIN

---

### **Policy on the Pastoral Council**

*Effective 2005*

In order to serve the needs of the people of God in the Diocese of Austin and to be responsible stewards of the gifts given to the diocese, the Diocese of Austin issues the following policy:

*A Pastoral Council is to be established and is to be operative in every parish and mission in the Diocese of Austin.*

#### I. Nature and Purpose

- A. The Pastoral Council is to be a representative body of the faithful whose focus is on the whole community – its beliefs, its hopes, its joys, its needs, its sorrows, its concerns, its gifts, and its pursuit of the mission of the Church.
- B. The council provides a means for uniting the parish community in expressing its collective wisdom concerning pastoral plans and activities. The Pastoral Council is to guard against serving special interest groups.
- C. By reason of its existence, the Pastoral Council must read and reflect the "signs of the times" to those planning and/or implementing short-term and long-term pastoral policies and activities in the parish.
  - 1. Ordinary administration of the parish will be the responsibility of the administrative staff.
- D. By the fact that it is convoked by the pastor, the Pastoral Council must respond to his call and questions and offer the best consultation possible.
- E. The Pastoral Council's task is to give counsel and seek consultation.
  - 1. Good counsel is the result of full, holistic, and active consultation. Thus, the members of this group, along with the pastor, are called to reflect and consider pastoral issues for the common good and for the future. Their role is to understand, to reflect carefully and prayerfully and to seek consensus. However, under certain circumstances, the pastor and council may choose to attain a majority through voting to decide a course of action.

## II. Consultation

- A. Consultation acknowledges that all the Christian faithful share, in diverse ways, the mission of Christ.
- B. Consultation accepts that each of the Christian faithful is formed, reformed, and endowed by the Spirit with qualities and gifts that can strengthen the community.
- C. Consultation recognizes that both the ordained and the non-ordained have distinct roles.
  - 1. The ordained priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful are different not only in degree, but in essence.
  - 2. The roles of each are complementary in community because of their common bond in the Body of Christ.
- D. Because of its representative nature and consultative role, because it has been uniquely provided by the Church and convoked by the pastor, and because of its consensus-seeking process, the Pastoral Council should be a distinct group.
  - 1. The Pastoral Council function should not be assigned to a group that has a different function within the parish.

## III. The Diocese

- A. Ongoing training and workshops relating to the Pastoral Councils are available and accessible to clergy and laity throughout the diocese.

## IV. The Pastor

- A. The pastor, as the chief governing person and accountable to the Bishop, must preside at the Pastoral Council meetings and participate in its activities.
- B. The pastor is called to consultation by the Church. In this call, he must:
  - 1. In turn, call the Pastoral Council and seek counsel on pastoral matters affecting the life of the parish
  - 2. Experience and participate in the interaction that follows
  - 3. Be open, respectful, and receptive to the voice or voices of the parishioners
  - 4. Weigh seriously and respond appropriately to the collective wisdom or consensus of the Pastoral Council
  - 5. Make every effort to ensure the membership of the council is truly representative of the whole parish community
  - 6. Assist in the proper formation, training, and orientation of all council members

7. Ensure that the council's concerns reflect the whole Church (diocesan and universal) and its mission
  8. Facilitate council members' building their own community of faith, trust, and respect
  9. Assist in the preparation of council agenda
- C. The pastor should carefully consider the recommendations of the Pastoral Council and provide proper explanation to the council when acting contrary to its recommendations.
1. However, in matters that violate Church teachings or discipline, or in matters contrary to diocesan policy, the pastor, after appropriate explanation to the Pastoral Council, must withhold acceptance.
  2. In cases of non-acceptance of counsel, for whatever reason, the pastor's position and reasons for it shall be presented to the Pastoral Council in writing.
  3. Appeals may be made to the Bishop or his designee for clarification, consideration, or arbitration.
    - a. The Bishop or his designee will provide a written response to the appeal.
- D. In the absence of the pastor, the Pastoral Council can discuss matters but cannot make final decisions.
1. When a pastor leaves a parish through transfer, retirement, or death, all activity of the Pastoral Council ceases until the new pastor or assigned administrator reconvenes the council.
  2. A new pastor should seek counsel from the existing Pastoral Council to become more informed about the nature of the community.
    - a. He should be reluctant to dissolve the Pastoral Council, even though it is his prerogative to do so.

V. The Pastoral Council

- A. Each Pastoral Council is to develop in writing its own organizational and functional norms as prescribed within the limits of diocesan norms.
1. These parish norms make clear the purpose, scope, and role of the Pastoral Council as well as address the size of the council, membership criteria, selection process, and leadership.
  2. Unnecessary complexity is to be avoided and the procedure for amending the parish norms should be defined within them.

- a. These norms and subsequent amendments will be reviewed by the dean or Bishop's designee.
- B. Each Pastoral Council is to formulate a parish vision/mission statement, goals, and objectives (after gathering input from the members of the parish).
  1. The vision/mission statement, goals, objectives, and norms will be readily available to the members of the parish and evaluated at least annually by the Pastoral Council.
- C. Each Pastoral Council should determine its leadership by an appropriate process.
  1. Such leadership should include a Chair and a Recorder.
- D. Because of the Pastoral Council's unique existence, there is a perpetual eliciting of the needs and concerns of the community.
  1. Each Pastoral Council, therefore, has the dual obligation to perceive and to deliberate.
  2. Thus, each Pastoral Council should meet a minimum of once a quarter as well as when called by the pastor.
- E. Each Pastoral Council member must make a special effort to understand and to implement the consultative process.
  1. In this process, all members are to share their wisdom regarding the issues before the council.
  2. Although a common conclusion among the members is not required when functioning as a consultative body, the process of seeking consensus is very helpful in providing quality consultation.
- F. Each Pastoral Council must take time to develop spiritually so as to be more keenly aware of the Spirit's presence and functioning within the council and within the whole parish community.
- G. Each Pastoral Council needs to interact closely with the parish Finance Council to assure the pastor and the parish membership that finances are available to support the council's goals and objectives.
- H. Each Pastoral Council is to ensure that social justice starts at the parish by striving for openness and ethical accountability in its business practices.
- I. Each member of the Pastoral Council must attend the necessary training that provides a full understanding of the functions of the council, its interrelationships with other parish organizations, and its responsibility to the Church as a whole.

- J. If any parishioner feels strongly that the pastor or Pastoral Council has not followed the intent of these diocesan norms, the parishioner may appeal through the following process:
1. A formal letter signed by the parishioner(s) will be submitted to the Pastoral Council describing their concerns and why they feel the intent of the diocesan norms were not followed.
  2. The pastor and the Pastoral Council have an opportunity to correct or resolve the appeal.
  3. If resolution of the appeal is not obtained to the satisfaction of the parishioner(s), the Pastoral Council will vote either to reconsider the appeal or send it to the Dean for resolution.
    - a. Simple majority vote of the Pastoral Council will prevail.
    - b. The parishioner's letter, the minutes of the Pastoral Council meeting discussing the appeal, and a statement by the pastor and/or the Pastoral Council on their position in the matter are forwarded to the dean for his deliberation.
  4. If not resolved by the dean, all documentation, including the dean's position, is sent to the Bishop for deliberation and ultimate resolution.
    - a. The Bishop will respond in writing within 30 days.

## VI. Membership Qualifications

Members must:

- A. Be baptized Catholics (in rare circumstances an exception can be made with the approval of the pastor)
- B. Be registered in the parish
- C. Have demonstrated a commitment to the parish community
- D. Commit themselves to spiritual growth
- E. Commit themselves to skills development as part of the Christian leadership process
- F. Be willing to commit the necessary time and energy to offer effective consultation
- G. Be familiar with programs of various diocesan commissions or standing committees
- H. Be willing to participate in group training and formation

VII. Determination of Council Members

- A. For adequate representation and effective operation, the Pastoral Council should consist of at least five (5) and no more than twelve (12) lay representatives.
- B. Pastoral Council members are to be determined by the parish community using an appropriate process as specified in the parish norms.
- C. Although each council member represents the whole parish, each Pastoral Council should be representative of all ages, ethnic groups, and genders.
  - 1. In addition, the pastor may supplement the council by appointing other members for balanced representation of the parishioners.
    - a. The number of such appointments may not exceed one-third of the number of council members determined by the parish community.
  - 2. In regard to representation, involvement of active and interested parishioners, who are open to the needs of the whole parish community, has to be a high priority.
  - 3. A strict representation of all age groups or certain special interest areas seems to place emphasis in popular vote rather than what is most important and best for the operation of the council in carrying out its mission.
  - 4. Sound judgment needs to be exercised to reflect sensitivity to the representation issue.
- D. The Pastoral Council may be formed through a process of discernment, election, or by a combination of appointed and elected members provided that the number of appointed members does not exceed one-third of the membership.
  - 1. The members should be people that are willing to commit themselves toward improvement in parish life.
- E. Each Pastoral Council will include in its norms a procedure for dealing with council members who fail to uphold their responsibilities.
- F. Pastoral Council members and/or pastors will develop a procedure on how to fill vacancies.
  - 1. This procedure is part of the Pastoral Council's norms.

- G. It is important that the parochial vicars (associate pastors) participate in these council meetings.
1. Their roles are distinct from that of the parish staff persons employed by the pastor due to appointment by the Bishop. “As co-workers with the pastor and sharers in his solicitude, they are to offer service in the pastoral ministry by common counsel and effort with the pastor and under his authority.”  
(c. 545, § 1)
  2. The parochial vicar shares in the pastoral care of the parish and assists the pastor in his pastoral duties.
- H. The Pastoral Council provides consultation and support to the parish staff.
1. Staff members assist the pastor in the administration of various parish programs.
  2. In light of their administrative role, it is inappropriate that they would also serve as members of a body whose express purpose is counsel and consultation.

#### VIII. Terms of Office

- A. Terms can be from two (2) to five (5) years.
- B. Pastoral Council members’ terms may be staggered by year or all members’ terms may expire simultaneously.
- C. The specifics of the terms of office and the number of consecutive terms that a Pastoral Council member may serve should be addressed in the parish norms.

#### IX. Meeting Agendas

- A. An agenda should be prepared prior to each meeting to enhance conducting the meeting in a professional manner.
1. The pastor and chair should set the agenda.
  2. It should be posted in a place convenient for inspection by the parishioners at least one week prior to the council meeting.
  3. Names and phone numbers of council members may be listed on the posted agenda so parishioners can contact council members and express their views on the agenda items to be discussed.
  4. Special meetings are exempt from the posting requirement.

#### X. Openness and Confidentiality

- A. Meetings of the Pastoral Council should, to the extent possible, be open to parishioners who may wish to attend as observers unless their input is requested from the council.

1. The parish norms should emphasize that active participation in the consensus building process during the meeting is reserved for the Pastoral Council members.
- B. Confidentiality is another major issue that the Pastoral Council must address in their norms. An atmosphere of openness is important but some situations and matters discussed by the council should be kept confidential.
  1. For some circumstances requiring confidentiality, the council may choose to meet in a "closed" or "executive" session.

## XI. Communicating Council Proceedings

Each Pastoral Council will establish a procedure of reporting to the parishioners the results of the council meetings.

- A. This may be accomplished through the weekly bulletin, through a newsletter, by assembly, by published meeting minutes, or other means of communication appropriate for the parish.

## XII. Commissions

The effectiveness of the Pastoral Council can be enhanced by the development of commissions.

- A. Additional participation of parishioners in parish administration can be increased by having parishioners as members of commissions.
- B. The structural configuration of commissions of the pastoral council can vary depending on the explicit needs of the parish. Each parish should consider the configuration that best meets its needs. Two possible alternatives are presented here.
  1. A parish may have the following commissions:
    - a. Spiritual Development Commission  
Areas of concern: liturgy, ecumenical activities, retreats, etc.
    - b. Community Concerns Commission  
Areas of concern: community activities, social action, interparochial, and diocesan cooperation.
    - c. Education Commission  
Areas of concern: all formal educational efforts of the parish, adult, religious education, school, etc.

d. Family Life Commission

Areas of concern: marriage preparation, marriage encounter, social activities of the parish, recreational programs, family counseling, etc.

e. Youth/Young Adult Commission

Areas of concern: youth programs, active involvement of youth/young adults in parish life and leadership, need for clergy, etc.

f. Administration Commission

Areas of concern: communications (bulletins, public relations), studying, recommending, undertaking financial programs as determined by the Parish Council, maintaining parish properties, programs, activities, facilities, etc.

g. Evangelization Commission

Areas of concern: spreading the Gospel, reaching out to non-Catholics and alienated Catholics, etc.

h. Stewardship Commission

Areas of concern: Giving of time, talent, and treasure in support of local parish, diocese, and universal Church.

2. Since Our Lord was a priest, a prophet and a king, the Pastoral Council may have as a minimum the following list of commissions:

a. Priest Commission

Areas of concern: all committees, organizations, and matters dealing with worship

b. Prophet Commission

Areas of concern: all matters dealing with teaching

c. King Commission

Areas of concern: all matters that deal with service

C. It is recommended that the coordinators of each committee or organization actually participate in his or her respective commission.

D. The pastor is an *ex-officio* member of all commissions.

- E. A Pastoral Council member may serve on one or more of the various commissions.
  - 1. Commission chairs and commission members are appointed by a process outlined in the norms for the Pastoral Council. Members of commissions, who are not Pastoral Council members, do not actively participate in the consensus building process at council meetings.
- F. The Pastoral Council and the commissions are units of service not of authority.



## DIOCESE OF AUSTIN

---

### **Policy on the Finance Council**

*Effective 2005*

In order to serve the needs of the people of God in the Diocese of Austin and to be responsible stewards of the gifts given to the diocese, the Diocese of Austin issues the following policy:

A Finance Council is to be established and is to be operative in every parish and mission in the Diocese of Austin.

#### I. Nature and Purpose

- A. The preceding document on Pastoral Councils relates to consultation in the parish.
  - 1. Consultation is at the heart of the decision-making process.
  - 2. Consultation does not pertain to the issue of who holds authority in the Church; it does pertain to the way that authority is exercised.
  - 3. Consultation recognizes that all the baptized are called to share in the governance of the Church, each in a way proper to that person.
- B. The 1983 Code of Canon Law has introduced a new and separate consultative body to parish life. "In each parish there is to be a finance council which is governed, in addition to universal law, by norms issued by the diocesan Bishop." (c. 537)
- C. The purpose of the parish Finance Council is to provide the pastor with a group of Christian faithful who will aid him in the administration of parish goods according to these norms.
  - 1. While distinct from the Pastoral Council of the parish, this Finance Council is to serve the goals and objectives set forth by the Pastoral Council, both being guided by the mission statement of the parish.

#### II. Consultation

The consultation of the Finance Council is parallel to consultation of the Pastoral Council.

### III. The Diocese

- A. Training will be conducted at the diocesan level for pastors and laity in regard to the duties and responsibilities of Finance Councils.
  - 1. These training sessions include budgeting, accounting, financial management, and financial reporting.
- B. When Pastoral Council workshops are held, the Finance Council will also be included in those workshops.
  - 1. One of the workshop agenda items may be the interrelationship of the two councils.

### IV. The Pastor

- A. The pastor, as the chief governing person and accountable to the Bishop, must preside at the Finance Council meetings and participate in its activities.
- B. The pastor is called to consultation by the Church. In this call, he must:
  - 1. In turn, call the Finance Council and seek advice on financial matters affecting the life of the parish
  - 2. Experience and participate in the interaction that follows
  - 3. Be open, respectful, and receptive to the voice or voices of the parishioners
  - 4. Weigh seriously and respond appropriately to the collective wisdom or consensus of the Finance Council
  - 5. Assist in the proper formation, training, and orientation of all council members
  - 6. Insure that the Finance Council's concerns reflect the whole Church (diocesan and universal) and its mission
  - 7. Facilitate Finance Council members in building their own community of faith, trust, and respect
- C. The pastor should consider carefully the recommendations of the Finance Council and provide proper explanation to the council when acting contrary to its recommendations.
  - 1. However, in matters that violate Church teachings or discipline or in matters contrary to diocesan policy, the pastor, after appropriate explanation to the council, must withhold acceptance.
  - 2. In cases of non-acceptance of counsel, for whatever reason, the pastor's position and reasons for it shall be presented to the council in writing.

3. Appeals may be made to the Bishop or his designee for clarification, consideration or arbitration.
  - a. The Bishop or his designee will provide a written response to the appeal.
- D. In the absence of the pastor, the Finance Council can discuss matters but cannot make final decisions.
  1. When a pastor leaves a parish through transfer, retirement, or death, all formal activity of the Finance Council ceases until the new pastor or assigned administrator reconvenes the council.
    - a. A new pastor should seek counsel from the existing Finance Council to become more informed about the nature of the community.
    - b. He should be reluctant to dissolve the Finance Council, even though it is his prerogative to do so.
- E. Each Finance Council is to develop in writing its own organizational and functional norms as prescribed within the limits of diocesan norms.
  1. These parish norms make clear the purpose, scope, and role of the council as well as address the size of the council, membership criteria, selection process, and leadership.
  2. Unnecessary complexity is to be avoided, and the procedure for amending the parish norms should be defined within them.
  3. These norms and any subsequent amendments will be reviewed by the dean or Bishop's designee.
- F. Each Finance Council member must make a special effort to understand and to implement the consultative process.
  1. In this process, all members are to share their wisdom regarding the issue being considered.
  2. Although a common conclusion among the members is not required when functioning as a consultative body, the process of seeking consensus is very helpful in providing quality consultation.
- G. Each council must take time to develop spiritually so as to be more keenly aware of the Spirit's presence and functioning within the council and within the whole parish community.
- H. Each council needs to interact closely with the parish Pastoral Council to assure the pastor and the parish membership that finances are available to support the council's goals and objectives.

- I. Each council is to ensure that social justice starts at the parish by striving for openness and ethical accountability in its business practices.
- J. Each individual member of the Finance Council must attend the necessary training that provides a full understanding of the functions of the council, its interrelationships with other parish organizations, and its responsibility to the Church as a whole.

V. Membership

- A. The Finance Council is to consist of not less than three (3) parishioners who are Catholic (in rare circumstances an exception can be made with approval of the pastor) and are known contributors of their time, talent, and treasure.
  - 1. If possible, they should possess experience or expertise in business, finance, or law and be committed to the work of the Church.
  - 2. They should also represent the whole parish community to the extent feasible.
- B. Members are freely appointed by the pastor for a minimum of three (3) years, with renewable terms or until there is a change of pastors.
- C. Persons who could have a conflict of interest are excluded from membership.

VI. Meetings

- A. The council shall have a minimum of four (4) meetings per year.
  - 1. Additional meetings are held as needed.

VII. Responsibilities

The Finance Council shall:

- A. Assist the pastor in the administration of parish goods in accordance with the norms of Canons 1281 through 1288
- B. Assist the pastor in the preparation of a yearly budget of income and expenditures
  - 1. The proposed budget is to be shared with the parish Pastoral Council.
- C. Assist the pastor in the preparation of an annual financial report of revenues and expenditures for dissemination to the parishioners.
  - 1. A parish may choose to provide more frequent reports.
- D. Review the parish income and expense report quarterly and make recommendations as necessary to see that the expenses are in within the limits of income received and available

- E. Assist parish commissions, boards, and organizations in preparing and submitting annual budgets
- F. Study parish revenues and make recommendations for increasing revenue to meet both parish and diocesan goals and objectives
- G. Study parish expenses and make recommendations to minimize expenditures within the parish
- H. Familiarize themselves with all diocesan fiscal policies and assist the pastor in meeting these obligations
- I. Encourage support of parish and diocesan stewardship programs
- J. Be consulted on all expenditures other than normal operating expenditures

VIII. The Finance Council, like the Pastoral Council, is a unit of service, not authority.