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GUIDELINES FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

Reverend and dear Fathers,

On January 6, 1986, Archbishop Roach issued a Clergy Bulletin requesting that each parish in this Archdiocese have a Pastoral Council. Throughout the more than twenty years that have passed, these Councils have proved to be a valuable help in fostering pastoral action at their respective parishes. Therefore, I wish to affirm the request that each parish have a Pastoral Council, with the following exception: parishes that are clustered may share a Parish Pastoral Council, provided that the Constitution and Bylaws for the shared Council has been approved through the process outlined in the 'Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils'.

I would encourage all existing Parish Councils to take this opportunity to review their Bylaws and Constitutions for conformity with the expectations of the 'Guidelines'. To assist with this, I am attaching the most recent version of the 'Guidelines'. These should be included as part of this Clergy Bulletin revision.

Given at Saint Paul, Minnesota, this 20th day of April, in the year of Our Lord 2010. All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

The Most Reverend John C. Nienstedt
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

Jennifer Haselberger
Chancellor for Canonical Affairs

INTRODUCTION:

On January 25, 1983, Pope John Paul II promulgated a new *Code of Canon Law* for the Roman Catholic Church. It marked a major step in the implementation of the Second Vatican Council.

The documents of the Council clearly teach that the sacraments of Christian Initiation- Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion- call the members of the Church to become involved in the threefold mission committed by Christ to the Church. All are called to praise (worship), to proclaim the Good News of Salvation (teaching) and to form communities of faith (serving). In other words, all are called to ministry within the Church.

The 1983 *Code* adopted this conciliar teaching and made it its own whenever it referred to the "Christian Faithful". This term, derived from the Council and incorporated into the *Code of Canon Law*, described the fundamental unity of all members of the Church, lay and clerical alike, in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The parish is the concrete realization of the Church for most Catholics. It is here that they experience Church. For the most part, therefore, ministry within the parish is the ordinary way in which members of the Christian Faithful exercise ministry. Such ministry takes a variety of forms, among them liturgical ministries (worship), Christian formation (teaching) and assistance in the establishment and implementation of parish policies and structures (serving).

The 1983 *Code*, again reflecting the teaching of the Council, described a parish as a definite community of the Christian Faithful established on a stable basis within a particular (diocesan) Church (Canon 515). The focus of this description of a parish is not on the parish as a *place where* but as a *people who*, that is, a community of the Christian Faithful.

The pastoral care of the community is entrusted to a pastor, under the authority of the diocesan bishop (Canon 515). This pastoral care includes the responsibility to preach the Gospel and nourish the Christian Faithful with the message of salvation, to celebrate the sacraments and lead the parish community in prayer, to encourage active participation in the sacred liturgy, to acknowledge and promote the proper role lay members of the Christian Faithful have in the Church's mission and to develop community leadership (Canons 528 and 529).

It is the whole parish community, priest and people, that is called continually to conversion, and through its own ongoing conversion calls those around it to newness of life in Jesus Christ the Lord. This conversion takes many forms. It is a response to the call to holiness given to all in Baptism, and it is a call to proclaim to itself and to others the message of salvation. It is expressed in works of charity, and effected through hearing the needs of our sisters and brothers as they seek life and holiness. It extends far beyond mere financial support, for it calls the parish to stand for justice and to support the poor. In summary, a parish must accept the serious responsibility of renewing itself and the whole social order with the spirit of the Gospel. Thus, it is appropriate for the whole parish community to be concerned about Christian formation and worship, marriage and family life, culture and education, labor and economic

justice, politics and freedom, the international order and world peace. The entire parish is to be concerned about life and ministry in the parish.

Responsibility for the mission of the Church is shared in differing, but equally valid, ways by those who are baptized and those who are ordained; the ministry of the members of the parish and that of its pastor are interdependent. This interdependence calls for the adoption of a new model of parish governance, one which includes broad consultation. It is in this light that these revised guidelines focus on Parish Pastoral Councils.

This third revision of the Archdiocesan Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils reflects the evolution in the role of pastoral councils. Where once they administered the various parish ministries, later they coordinated those ministries. Today, especially during this time of strategic planning, they are encouraged to become visioning bodies.

These Guidelines are published as a foundation and aid to parishes as they evaluate or form their own constitutions for Parish Pastoral Councils. They set forth certain fundamental principles for this evaluative or formative process. However, the final discernment regarding the appropriateness of a particulate constitution rests with the diocese bishop or his delegate.

GUIDELINE I: THE FORMATION OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS SHOULD ALWAYS INCLUDE PRAYERFUL REFLECTION.

Experience within the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis has shown that the Parish Pastoral Councils that have been effective have possessed a strong realization of the serious need for times of prayerful reflection on the ministry of pastoral service the Council offers the parish. This is especially true in light of the fact that Parish Pastoral Councils are primarily involved in the total ministerial life of the parish and not just in matters related to administration. It is only in prayer that the members of the parish and of the Parish Pastoral Council can come to a true appreciation of the Council's role as a visioning body.

GUIDELINE II: THE ROLE OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IS ESSENTIALLY PASTORAL.

The Parish Pastoral Council participates in the responsibility for pastoral ministry and not just in the administration of the parish. Its purpose and goals are extensive. It should research the needs, the ideas, the hopes, the life and activity of the people of God, so that the whole parish community can effectively carry out the mission of the parish and fully participate in the ongoing conversion that is central to its life. The Parish Pastoral Council should constantly evaluate the parish in its conformity to the Gospel and those constitutive elements of the Gospel which call for understanding the implications of justice. In this sense, the Parish Pastoral Council shares in the decision making process which assists the pastor in carrying out the leadership role that is his within the parish.

GUIDELINE III: PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS ARE CONSULTATIVE IN NATURE.

The Church encourages pastors to build a sense of community within the parish, and to promote the parish's communion with the broader ecclesial communities of the diocese and of the whole Church.

The Parish Pastoral Council assists the pastor in accomplishing these goals by offering counsel to him. This consultative responsibility is rooted in the obligation of all the baptized to pursue the common good of the Church. It is present in the emerging consensus flowing from the combined gifts and multiple experiences of the people of God.

GUIDELINE IV: MEMBERSHIP OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL IS TO BE TRULY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PARISH.

The number of members of the Parish Pastoral Council will vary depending on the parish and its size, character, and needs. Care should be taken to assure that its membership reflects a pastoral sensitivity to the whole faith community, taking into account the following requirements.

Eligibility to serve on Parish Pastoral Councils is limited to practicing Catholics in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church and its bishops. In other words, eligibility for service on the Parish Pastoral Council is limited to fully initiated Catholics who are not restricted from full sacramental participation or are otherwise under canonical penalty or censure.

Council members can be identified through a process of discernment, appointment by the pastor, or election. Discernment and appointment are appropriate to consultative councils. Election is appropriate to councils which are more deliberative in nature.

The constitution of the Parish Pastoral Council should contain a clear description of the selection process. It is important that the terms of office be spelled out and that allowance be made for continuity, so that the total membership of the council would not leave office in the same year. It is also highly recommended that successive terms of office be limited to assure that there is a genuine rotation of membership on the Parish Pastoral Council.

GUIDELINE V: THE PASTOR IS TO PRESIDE OVER THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL.

Canon 536, n. 1, prescribes that the pastor presides over the Parish Pastoral Council. In virtue of his office, the pastor makes the final decision regarding whether and how to implement the recommendations of the Council. In making this decision he is guided by the universal law of the Church, diocesan statutes and civil law.

While the pastor is actively involved in the decision making process, the Council may select from among its members a chairperson who conducts the meetings. There are several advantages in doing so. This model expresses the underlying theological principle of collegiality, that is, representative members of the parish forming one body with their pastor in caring for the life and ministry of the parish. The selection of a chairperson stands as a visible sign of shared responsibility. Finally, from a practical point of view, when the pastor is freed from conducting the meeting, he is at the same time enabled to be more attentive to the thoughts, ideas and plans that are being expressed.

GUIDELINE VI: THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL AND THE PARISH FINANCE COUNCIL ARE INTERDEPENDENT.

The Parish Pastoral Council is responsible for the pastoral vision and ministry of the parish (worship, ministry, etc.); the Parish Finance Council, mandated by Canon 537 of the *Code of Canon Law*, is responsible for parish financial administration. The Parish Pastoral Council is to be representative of the whole parish in its membership; membership on the Finance Council looks to persons skilled in finances, civil law and business (Canon 492).

Despite these distinctions, the two councils are interrelated because both are concerned with the life and ministry of the parish. The Parish Pastoral Council looks to the Finance Council for the resources needed to implement its vision; the Finance Council looks to the Parish Pastoral Council for the development of the vision of the parish. This interdependence can be realized in more than one way:

EXAMPLE 1: The Finance Council is established canonically as a separate body, but functions as a committee of the Parish Pastoral Council.

EXAMPLE 2: A representative of the Finance Council attends all meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council to insure that each council is informed of the plans and principles of the other.

GUIDELINE VII: THE CONSTITUTION OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL SHOULD INCLUDE ONLY THOSE OFFICERS NEEDED FOR THE EFFICIENT FUNCTIONING OF THE COUNCIL.

The officers serve the Parish Pastoral Council by coordinating its meetings and facilitating the implementation of its decisions. It is recommended, therefore, that there be only those officers needed for the efficient functioning of the Parish Pastoral Council.

GUIDELINE VIII: THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL SHOULD ESTABLISH THOSE COMMITTEES OR COMMISSIONS WHICH WILL DIRECTLY ASSIST IN THE WORK OF THE PARISH.

Committees are the usual way in which bodies such as a Parish Pastoral Council research data for their deliberations and implement their vision. Some committees are standing

committees, caring for ongoing needs of the council such as membership or finances; others are *ad hoc*, that is, related to specific concerns. Care should be taken lest committees be established which have no specific function or work. Standing committees and their specific responsibilities should be included in the Constitution. Their function should be reviewed regularly.

GUIDELINE IX: THE CONSTITUTION IS THE DOCUMENT WHICH GOVERNS THE OPERATION OF A PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL.

From all that has been said, it is apparent that the constitution of the Parish Pastoral Council governs its operation. Therefore, it is essential that each parish have a carefully prepared constitution for its Council. The following information should be included in the constitution:

1. **The Name of the Organization.**
The proper corporate name of the parish should always be used rather than an abbreviation (e.g., "The Parish Pastoral Council of the Church of Saint John" is preferred to "Parish Council of St. John's Church").
2. **The Council's Purpose.**
Here, the focus of the constitution would be on the Council's role in offering counsel to the pastor on matters affecting the life and ministry of the parish community.
3. **Membership.**
The constitution should state explicitly how the membership is constituted. It should express clearly the qualifications for and the term of office of each member. It should also make provision for vacancies by reason of death, resignation, inability to continue in office or some other cause.
4. **Officers.**
The constitution should designate the officers of the Parish Pastoral Council, the manner of their selection, term of office and general responsibilities.
5. **Meetings.**
The constitution should specify at least the minimum number of meetings each year and their regularity, as well as the principles governing open meetings as opposed to executive sessions.
6. **Committees.**
The constitution should name the standing committees and their responsibilities.

7. **Amendments.**

The constitution should describe clearly the requirements to be fulfilled to amend the constitution and by-laws.

8. **By-Laws.**

By-laws govern the conduct of business of the Parish Pastoral Council, including rules governing elections, the conducting of meetings, etc.

**GUIDELINE X: THE CONSTITUTION OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS
MUST BE PRESENTED TO THE ORDINARY OR HIS
DELEGATE FOR CONFIRMATION.**

Canon 536 places the establishment of Parish Pastoral Councils under the governmental authority of the Diocesan Bishop. The confirmation process allows him or his delegate opportunity to discern whether or not particular constitutions correspond with these Archdiocesan Guidelines.

Contact the Chancellors Department at 651-291-4437 or
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