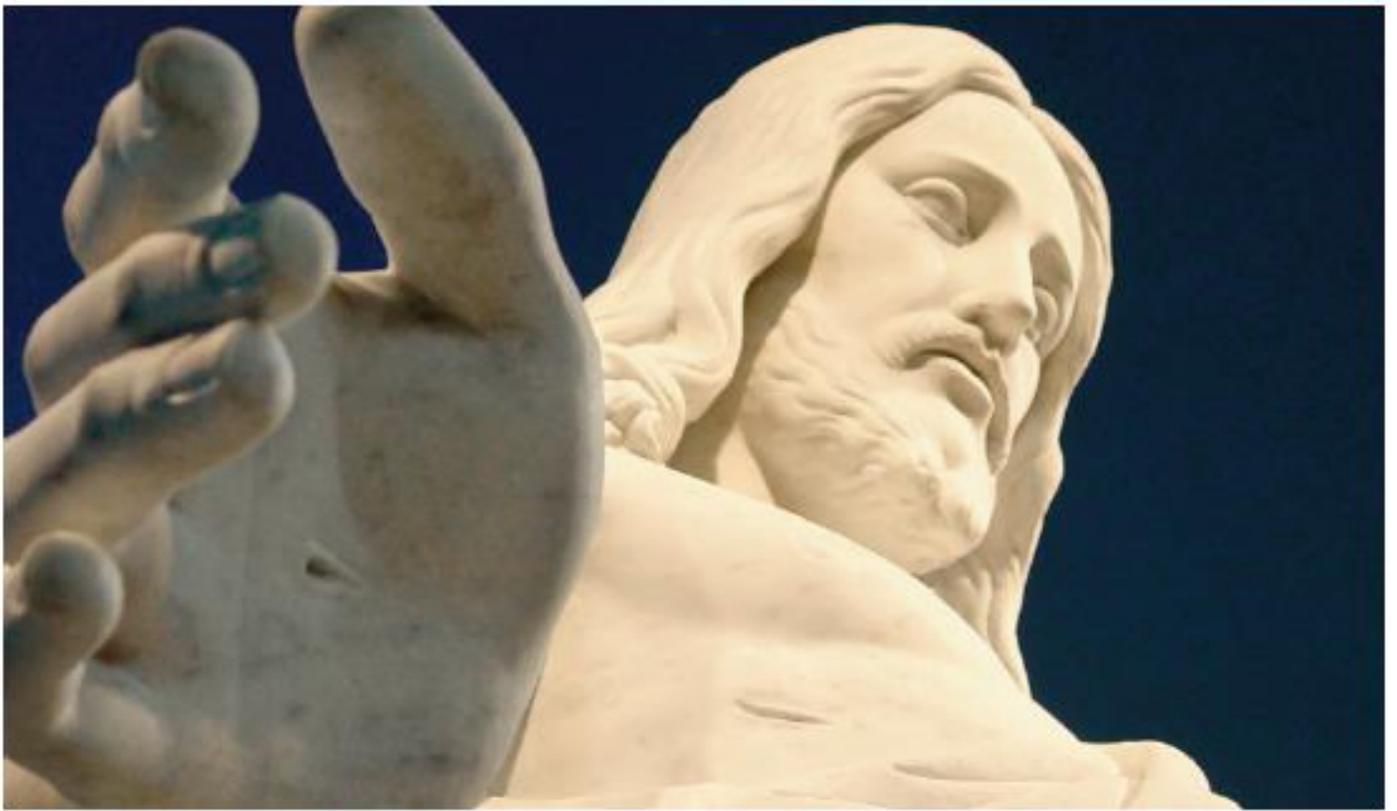


# THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL



# SYNODALITY:

CALLING ALL  
TO PARTICIPATE  
IN THE  
MISSION OF CHRIST  
AND THE  
LIFE OF THE CHURCH



ARCHDIOCESE  
*of* NEWARK



# THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

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*The acts of synodality do not look so much like sweeping dogmatic definitions  
as they do finetuning how the Gospel is applied to the signs of the times.*

—CARDINAL JOSEPH TOBIN

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## MESSAGE FROM CARDINAL TOBIN

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Pope Francis is calling for the Church to go back to its roots of synodality. With its roots in two Greek words meaning “same road”, synodality is a method and process of discussion and participation in which the whole people of God can walk together by listening to the Holy Spirit and participating in the life and mission of the Church.

Pope Francis describes synodality this way:

*The journey of synodality is the journey that God wants from his church in the third millennium. A synodal church is a listening church, aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn.*

We want to practice synodality at all levels of the Archdiocese to ensure that listening and dialogue can take place. Some examples already in practice are councils that directly advise the Archbishop, such as the Council of Priests, College of Deans, the Archdiocesan Pastoral and Finance Councils and the V Encuentro. Others offer advice to those responsible for specific areas of archdiocesan life, such as Catholic education, catechetics, youth and young adult ministry, etc.

The parish mirrors diocesan councils with the finance and parish pastoral councils, ministry councils and various advisory groups. The members should always invoke the Holy Spirit, given to all of us by baptism, confirmation, and the other sacraments. Without a humble openness to the Holy Spirit, the work of synodality is nothing more than gathering opinions. All these councils provide pastors and parish leaders with advice by listening to “what the Spirit is saying to the Church” through the experiences of their sisters and brothers.

It is my expectation that each parish of the Archdiocese will have a pastoral council and find ways to listen to their fellow parishioners, seeking their advice regarding the best ways to make the Gospel alive in the hearts of all.

We want to continue to form strong Catholic families, young adults, and adults as missionary disciples – those who can witness their faith in love and action. We want to see parishes continue to remain close to their people, gathered by the Word, nourished by the sacraments, transmitting the faith to new generations and serving the poor and forgotten.

These guidelines offer useful models as well as ideas to create energetic councils that will produce solid pastoral strategies for spreading the Gospel and engaging parishioners in the life and mission of the church. This is the synodality that “*God wants from his church in the third millennium.*” Let us take a long and hope-filled view in our parish planning and evaluation.

May God bless you in all your efforts to bring about a renewed Church – *Forward in Faith Together: Our Road Ahead.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R." The signature is written in a cursive style.

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R

## INTRODUCTION

### What Makes a Parish Successful and Full of Vitality? It Takes a Village!

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“It takes a village” to make a difference and nurture our parishioners in the faith and to create vital, energetic parishes. We all belong to the village, of the parish and the global Church. It is up to all of us to make Christ present in the world. The pastor, staff and parish pastoral council work together to assure that the mission of Christ is paramount in people’s lives and that, through baptism, all are called to be part of the mission, bringing it to all in varied ways. Scripture tells us that it takes many to be the Church, the Body of Christ, and bring vitality to our parishes. In Romans we read,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. Romans 12:4

Again in 1 Corinthians:

But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the extent of the full stature of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Successful parishes come in every size and style: large, medium, small; urban, suburban and rural; many resources, few resources; clustered, merged, multi-cultural. Size and style are not important but what matters is intention. How the people view their parish is key. How the pastor, staff, parish pastoral and finance councils and key lay leaders view and guide the parish, is what can lead a parish to “success.” It starts at that very basic level of intention – WHY are we here and WHY do we do what we do as a parish community. That leads to WHAT and HOW.

The “intentional” parish knows who and what it is and why it has the mission to create disciples of Jesus. Being intentional means that parish leadership takes time to reflect and plan, develop and evaluate in an organized and regular fashion. Regular meetings of parish staff, parish pastoral council, finance council and ministry leaders all contribute to the sense of direction, goals, and good ministry that a parish has. The intentional parish is about “excellent parish ministry” in the name of Jesus Christ.

#### Definition of Vitality

Vitality is defined as having a lively and animated character, with a power of enduring, and the capacity to live and develop. This is what we want for our parishes, the energy and vision to determine the Why of parish life and the energy to move it forward and serve all.

A recent study by FADICA (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities), a consortium of Catholic funders, focused on parish vitality. The goal of this year-long initiative

was to identify the characteristics and practices of parishes with vitality, surface innovative approaches to fostering and measuring it, and explore questions about vitality. They identified four primary focus areas: Word, Worship, Service, and Leadership along with the development of a strong Community.

After meeting with many people and parishes the study identified specific characteristics that give parishes vitality. Vital parishes:

### **Are innovative**

- Grounded in the tradition and basic teachings of the church, is open to and actively seeks out new ways to listen, work with diverse groups, lead, respond, and adapt.
- Actively engage new solutions to difficult problems so that they can meet the needs in their faith communities and the world around them in creative ways.

### **Have excellent pastors**

- Have the desire, qualities, and skills to work collaboratively and co-responsibly with staff and parish leaders.
- Know how to be servant leaders, recruiting, affirming and empowering people.
- Have the relationship skills needed to listen, to communicate, and respond pastorally.
- Have the adaptability to meet the continuously changing context in which they find themselves.

### **Live the faith in service**

- Reach beyond the four walls of the parish with opportunities to meet the spiritual, human and emotional needs of those who are marginalized, hungry, homeless, hurting, or in need.
- Live out the call to form missionary disciples. The baptized often respond by reaching out to the less fortunate on the local, national, and international levels.

### **Have leadership teams**

- Recognize the essential contribution of the laity to the ongoing life of the church.
- Usually staff but sometimes active parishioners, share responsibility for the life of the parish with the pastor. This group, when actively collaborating with the pastor, often does creative and innovative brainstorming, can have difficult conversations, provide timely and frank feedback, and assist the pastor in making difficult decisions.
- Is reflective of the various cultures in the parish; balanced with women and men, young and the old; and open to the changing and complex nature of today's parish life.

### **Have a holistic, compelling vision**

Pastoral leaders have a vision for parish life which includes

- engaging in relational ministry; fostering authentic relationships within the parish community; ensuring the proclamation of, and formation in the Word; Worship that nurtures one's relationship with God; and Service that reaches both parishioners and the community outside the parish walls.

- the focus is on the faith and spiritual life of adults who in turn are co-responsible for the vision and life of the community.

### **Place a priority on the Sunday experience**

- Focus on the gathering of the community on Sunday to hear God’s word, celebrate and share the Eucharist, and be sent forth in service.
- Place a priority on the key elements of the 3 Hs – Hospitality, Homily and Hymns
  - ✓ Hospitality: the felt experience of welcome and hospitality for all.
  - ✓ Homily: an uplifting homily that is applicable to the daily lives of parishioners.
  - ✓ Hymns: quality liturgical music that engages the hearts and voice of members.

### **Foster spiritual growth and maturity**

Parishes recognize a wide multiplicity of ways in which the People of God journey to and build their relationship with Jesus.

- Provide a variety of opportunities to engage people in the parish.
- Listen to and build relationships with members of the community who are proud of their parish.
- Take ownership for the life and development of the community.

### **Utilize online communications tools**

Good, interactive, and culturally sensitive websites are critical, as well as the proper use of social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

- Offer short, daily video blogs or podcasts on the day’s readings, or topics of interest.
- Use available interactive, online catechetical lessons for all ages.<sup>1</sup>

### **Take a Fresh Look**

Each of these areas demand a fresh look from our parishes and this can be done by collaboration between parish staff and Parish Pastoral Council. Working together you can implement simple steps to look at what you are already doing and what works, then to take a deeper look into what is not being done and what can be developed. To help you get started in discussing these areas, please see pages 36-37 in the Appendix for a helpful worksheet.

### **Survey: Maintenance or Mission**

Do simple surveys to assess how parishioners view the parish, how the parish assists them in their spiritual journey, deepening their relationship with Christ, using their gifts and talents, and putting them in service to others. Surveys can be done at Mass, having parishioners fill out cards. An online survey using Survey Monkey, personal interviews or focus groups are other ways to gather feedback.

In compiling the feedback, you can ask, do parishioners see us in maintenance or mission mode? Are we doing what we always have done, or are we responding to the times and the needs of today. These are excellent and essential questions and correspond to the WHY

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<sup>1</sup> Mogilka and Jewel, Open Wide the Doors to Christ: Executive Summary, FADICA, 2018, p. 4

question asked above. When we can take “a long, loving look at the real,”<sup>2</sup> and be totally honest in what we see, we can move forward and take steps to renewal and vitality.

Following the compilation and analysis of the answers, a parish assembly might be held to engage parishioners in feedback and to assist in determining vision, priorities, and goals for the next few years. This is a process for developing a pastoral (strategic) plan for the parish.

The FADICA study found that many parishes are lively and full of vitality. That vitality, however, is not simply the result of doing more of what has worked in the past. Rather, parishes with vitality are open to listening and responding in new ways to the changing culture in which we live and the deep needs found there.<sup>3</sup> These parishes depended upon engagement of all – pastor, leadership, and parishioners living out their baptismal call as disciples.

Parish leaders called forth the gifts of women and men, young adults, and all age groups, ethnicities, and cultures to join together, to assess needs, build on what went before and develop innovative thinking to create a sustainable and energetic parish. Building parish vitality takes intentionality, fortitude, and perseverance. The role of leadership is not maintenance but rather, MISSION; making the mission of Christ real and developing the roles of parishioners – the missionary disciples – in co-responsibility for the mission.

In summary, a quick guide to a successful parish through People, Mission, and Structure:<sup>4</sup>

#### Engage and Invite People

- Engage people
- Find out what they are thinking
- Include them in a dreaming process
- Make hospitality and welcome a priority
- Celebrate great Sunday liturgy
- Preach excellently
- Visit homes

#### Mission Reaching Out to All

- Develop a great web site
- Reflect on the mission of Jesus
- Do a “dreaming process” with the parishioners
- Develop your vision and goals to advance the mission of Jesus
- Make the parish a holistic place of formation
- Be a community of social justice: advocacy and direct service
- Develop Stewardship as a model of conversion and mission

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<sup>2</sup> Fr. Walter Burghardt, SJ on contemplation, <https://thejesuitpost.org/2012/01/where-is-the-love-or-prayer-a-long-loving-look-at-the-real/>

<sup>3</sup> Mogilka and Jewel, Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Murnion, Philip J., New York, National Pastoral Life Center, 1981.

- Create small faith groups in all of the parish ministries and organizations through theological reflection

#### Structure to Lead and Guide

- Develop leadership
- Collaborate with others and keep working at it
- Evaluate the effectiveness of parish leadership and ministries
- Be intentional in all you do

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

### ARTICLES OF UNDERSTANDING

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The Articles of Understanding are meant to assist you in having excellent parish pastoral council (PPC) meetings. Rather than creating by-laws, this is a simple method to allow you to organize, reflect, and assess the mission and needs of your parish. Articles of Understanding may be reviewed periodically and amended as needed by the consensus of the members of the parish pastoral councils (PPC).

### Why Parish Pastoral Councils?

#### **Baptism and Confirmation**

Through Baptism and Confirmation all are called to exercise both their right and responsibility to participate fully in the life and mission of the church. This mission of the church is rooted in the mission of Christ who commanded everyone – clergy, religious, and laity - to “Go forth into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all of creation.” (Mark 16:15)

#### **Calling Forth Disciples of Christ**

The essential work of a parish is to call forth disciples of Jesus; to form parishioners in the faith and to act as Jesus did. The parish provides parishioners the opportunity to encounter Christ, develop their spirituality and commit to living as Christ calls us to. The PPC assists pastor and staff in calling forth disciples of Christ, assessing needs and suggesting ways to support and accompany all parishioners on their spiritual journey. This includes present and future planning, evaluation of what is already in place, and enhancement of opportunities for disciples to discover their gifts and put them at the service of all.

#### **Synodality**

Synodality, a relatively new term in church, calls all members to contribute. Clergy, religious and laity are called to collaborate on furthering the mission of Christ and the church. Synodality creates the opportunity to listen to all and provide opportunities to listen to the Holy Spirit and the people of God, discuss, discern needs, and move forward. Pope Francis understands this as walking together and accompanying each other on the spiritual journey and living out our call by Christ as his disciples.

Synodality, as defined by the International Theological Commission in 2018, is “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.”

Pope Francis describes a synodal church as a “listening Church knowing that listening is more than feeling. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. We must all listen

to the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Truth to know what the Spirit is saying to the Church.... This is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium.”<sup>5</sup>

The PPC, finance council, and all other parish advisory groups, contribute to an attitude of synodality, openness, discernment and collaboration by finding ways to include as many members of the parish in listening sessions and other means to assess the needs and celebrate the accomplishments of the parish. Synodality allows all to express the impact the parish community, worship and ministry has on them and on their families.

### **Vocation of All the People of God**

This vocation of all the People of God, the community of believers in Jesus Christ, to promote the Reign of God on earth permeates the teachings and spirit of the documents of Vatican Council II. All members of the Church, laity, religious and clergy according to their proper charisms and roles collaborate in the responsibility for fulfilling its mission. Vatican Council II urged active involvement in the life of the church by emphasizing the principles of collaborative responsibility, consultation and lay participation.

*The laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the church, their activity is so necessary within church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness.*

*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 10*

*Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their service and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart.*

*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 30*

### **The Pastor**

The pastor needs to consult with the laity who in turn have the right to express their views and concerns to their pastor. An important structure initiated to foster this collaboration in the mission of the church by all its members is the parish pastoral council. The PPC assists pastors in achieving the cooperation of the parishioners and staff in the task of carrying out the mission of the church on the parish level.

While the parish pastoral council is not explicitly mentioned in the documents of Vatican Council II the theological principles which underlie it are clearly enunciated and a rationale for its development is given.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/43786/pope-francis-announces-a-2022-synod-on-synodality>

*...by reason of the knowledge competence or pre-eminence which they have the laity are empowered indeed sometimes obliged to manifest their opinion in those things which pertain to the good of the Church. If the occasion should arise this should be done through the institutions established by the church for that purpose and always with truth, courage, prudence and with reverence and charity towards those who by reason of their office represent the person of Christ.*

*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 37*

## **The Code of Canon Law**

The 1983 Code of Canon Law gives juridic value to Vatican Council II's teaching on the vocation and mission of the People of God and provides structures to express and encourage collaborative responsibility at every level of ecclesial administration.

Canon 208 speaks of everyone's responsibility to work together in the building up of the Body of Christ.

*In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function.*

*Code of Canon Law 208*

Canon 519 calls for the pastor to develop structures which incorporate the principles of collaborative responsibility and of consultation with the staff and parishioners.

*The pastor is the proper shepherd of the parish entrusted to him exercising pastoral care in the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan Bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share; in accord with the norm of law he carries out for his community the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing, with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful.*

*Code of Canon Law 519*

This Canon emphasizes the role of the community which gives meaning to the office of pastor and it places him in the context of mutual collaboration with the staff and parishioners in promoting the mission of the Church. Canon 536 specifically deals with PPCs.

*After the diocesan Bishop has listened to the presbyteral council and if he judges it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish; the pastor presides over it and through it the Christian faithful along with those who share in the pastoral care of the parish in virtue of their office give their help in fostering pastoral activity; this pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms, determined by the diocesan bishop.*

*Code of Canon law 536*

It is envisioned that the parish pastoral council is to be a major consultative body in the parish which advises the pastor who presides over the council. It is composed of lay parishioners, parochial vicars and representative parish staff members who carry about the pastoral functions of the parish. The purpose of the PPC is to foster full participation of the entire parish in the life and mission of the church which reflects the mission of Christ who was sent "...to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners..." (Luke 4:18)

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Our gratitude to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for permission to use and add to this material.

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# PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL GUIDELINES

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## **The Parish Mission Statement**

Every parish probably has (or should have) a mission statement. The purpose of a mission statement is to let the world know how your parish lives out its missionary call from Christ. The essential element often missing is how you engage with the mission statement in your ministerial and pastoral planning. The mission statement should be your main guide.

As the PPC looks at the needs and activities of the parish it is important to consult the mission statement and see if plans follow your ideal. Depending on when your mission statement was originally developed, the PPC may study it and discern if it is up to date with where the parish is spiritually and demographically, and what might need to be added or enhanced.

Also, the PPC, along with the parish staff and ministries, should set yearly goals for how they will intentionally live out the mission statement in the coming year or two.

The following parish mission statement was developed after a time of prayer and discernment, reflecting on the characteristics the PPC felt best described the parish and what they wanted to reflect to both parish and larger community. They kept it simple and to the point.

## **Sample Parish Mission Statement**

As a family of faith, St. Joseph Parish welcomes everyone to encounter Jesus Christ  
through Word, Worship, Community, and Service.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, we are changed for the better  
and sent forth as disciples of Christ to continue his work in the world.

## **Purpose of PPC**

The purpose of the PPC is to guide the mission of the parish. The PPC develops and recommends parish pastoral plans. The PPC does this by studying the present and future needs of the parish and by evaluating parish programs, organizations, and activities in light of the parish mission statement. The parish faith community participates in the universal mission of the Church through Word, Worship, Community and Service.

In addition, the PPC reflects on the Archdiocesan pastoral vision and priorities and recommends how they can be implemented in the parish. The PPC can suggest new programs, ministries and activities that may help the parish carry out its mission. The PPC shares responsibility with the Parish Finance Council for evaluating and enhancing financial health and providing for the ministerial needs of the parish. Through its wisdom and advice, the PPC assists the pastor in his leadership role.

## **Membership of PPC**

The PPC consists of the pastor, parochial vicar, and possible staff members, and 9-15 parishioners who will represent the parish. Members should reflect the parish's demographic diversity. One of those members should also be a member of the Finance Council.

## **Selection of Members for PPC**

The pastor invites individuals to serve on the PPC. Those already serving on the council make recommendations to the pastor of possible candidates to fill vacancies. It is important that a selection of people who represent the population of the parish be invited to serve on the PPC. This includes various cultures, genders, and age groups.

There are two suggested ways to recommend members: a discernment process and a nomination process.

### **1. Discernment Process**

If the PPC is already formed and looking for new members, the current members should reflect on the needs of the parish and the PPC to see who could fulfill a role. For example, you may want to have a person who works in communications to "get the word out" regarding the good news about the parish.

To do a discernment process is simple. Discuss what you need and who would bring the gifts or skills to the parish and PPC. List the names and prioritize the list. Then the pastor or chairperson of the PPC calls and invites each person. If a person cannot join the council at this time, move down the list.

### **2. Nomination Process**

It is also possible to ask various parishioners and those going to Mass to surface names of people with skills and leadership ability whom they suggest to be part of the PPC. Discuss the suggested names and prioritize the list. Then the pastor or chairperson of the PPC calls and invites each person.

## **Terms of Membership**

The term of office is three years for members of the PPC. Members may be re-appointed after a one-year absence. One third (1/3) of the Council will be appointed each year. In the event a member cannot fulfill a full term, the new member will complete the originally established number of term years. New members will begin on July 1 (or the date you determine). The pastor, parochial vicar, and possibly a staff member, will serve as long as they are in their stated positions.

## **Special Committees**

Special committees may be established and appointed on an as-needed basis to meet the goals of the parish mission statement. In the event a project needs volunteers, non-members of the PPC will be recruited to work on such projects. Again, the purpose of the PPC is for planning, not task oriented or running events unless specific to parish growth.

## **Meeting Leaders**

A good idea is to have three “facilitators” at each meeting: a chairperson, a secretary, and a timekeeper. The timekeeper position can be rotated at each meeting. The purpose of the timekeeper is to ensure that the meeting ends on time.

## **Duties of Meeting Leaders**

The chairperson meets with the pastor in advance to set the agenda and leads the meeting. If the chairperson is absent the secretary will act as chairperson and a member of the council will volunteer to fill in as secretary for the meeting.

The chairperson is responsible for sending out the agenda at least three days before the meeting and it is a good idea to ask council members if they have something to add to the agenda, describing if the item is an announcement or for discussion, and approximately how long discussion will take.

The secretary keeps the minutes of the meeting and sends copies to all members within ten days. The secretary is responsible for updating the Articles of Understanding for your parish and distributing them to all if there are changes.

The timekeeper announces when it is 8:30 PM (or a half hour before the end of the meeting) to let the members know they have 30 minutes to complete their agenda. The timekeeper may also be responsible for provided simple refreshments during the meeting if that is the choice of the group.

## **Selection of Leaders**

The chairperson and secretary will be chosen at the June meeting. Each will serve a term of one year, beginning in July or the date you choose. Terms can be extended twice. The Council will decide the method of selection at its June meeting.

## **Choosing Timekeepers**

Timekeepers may be rotated at each meeting in alphabetical order, excluding the chair and secretary.

## PPC Meetings

**A. Attendance.** Members will meet regularly on a monthly basis on a designated day. In the event of an emergency a special meeting may be called at any time. Members are expected to attend all meetings. A member's failure to fulfill his/her responsibilities to the group will result in the group's discussion of the member's situation and his/her continuing on the council.

**B. Duration/Time.** 7:30 - 9:00 pm (or whatever times you determine). At the group's discretion the meeting may be extended a half hour. A timekeeper shall announce when it is 8:30 PM or a half hour before the meeting is supposed to end.

**C. Structure.** Meetings will follow a set agenda to be set by the pastor and the chairperson. Each meeting's agenda should include the following:

- Icebreaker
- Gathering Prayer, Scripture (or other pertinent readings) and Faith Reflection
- Review of the Minutes
- Ongoing Parish Planning:  
For example: Appreciative Inquiry:
  - What are we successful at?
  - What do we need to do to ensure greatness?
  - How can we best engage parishioners in the life and mission of the parish?
  - What does our parish need at this time to fulfill the mission of Christ?
    - e.g., Parish Needs Assessment, Welcome Ministry, other
  - How will we determine what the needs are?
- Evaluations of Recent Activities
- Other Discussions
- Pastor's Comments
- Sending Prayer

An appropriate break will be taken if necessary. The meetings will remain flexible to accommodate the needs of the group.

## D. Decision-making

Decisions are made by consensus and prayerful reflection.

*"Consensus is a group process for decision making in which all come to a common understanding and agree to support the decision of the whole."*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gubish, Jenny, McGannon, Revisioning the Parish Pastoral Council, Mahwah, Paulist Press, 2001, p. 57.

Although the PPC is advisory, as a group, it is trying to discern the will of God for this parish at this particular time in history. The discernment process allows the members of the council to gather input for a matter, discuss the matter thoroughly, prayerfully reflect on the decision to be made, review all of the areas to be considered, and then come to a decision.  
(See pages 27 --33 for more on consensus and decision-making)

### **E. Communication**

The Parish Pastoral Council shall report with highlights of the meetings to the parish through the parish bulletin, website, Facebook or other methods the PPC may decide.

It is not necessary to post actual minutes. Rather a summary of discussions, decisions and plans would be helpful to parishioners.

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Created by Rev. Thomas Iwanowski and Sr. Donna L. Ciangio, OP

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## CHAPTER TWO

# LEADING MEETINGS EFFECTIVELY

Ideas for Parish Staffs, Ministries, Parish Pastoral Councils, Finance Councils, Ministries and more...

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### Steps to Get Organized

#### 1. Meeting Frequency: Set dates for regular monthly meetings

- Determine the best day to meet
- Determine the best time to meet; try to stick to 90 minutes
- Determine if you need extraordinary meetings, e.g., a 3-4 hour meet planning



#### 2. Timing: Begin and end on time

- Begin meeting promptly at designated time: e.g., 7:30 PM even if everyone is not gathered yet. This will help the members know that their time and schedule is taken seriously
- Finish the meeting on time and save unfinished agenda items for the next meeting.
- The Facilitator (or Chairperson) may have to prioritize the agenda with the group to see what can be saved till the next meeting

#### 3. Plan an agenda and stick to it

- Use the same format for all of your meetings
- Send out agenda ahead of time
- Begin with a welcome and any necessary introductions
- Follow with prayer and faith reflection (10-15 minutes)
- Go through agenda items putting a time limit on each
- Conclude the meeting with prayer

#### 4. Environment

- Remember why you are meeting:  
To furthering the mission of Christ through this Parish  
Carrying out a particular task in this mission
- Prepare the meeting space (a committee could do this)  
Make it business-like but inviting  
Create an atmosphere for prayer: candle, Scripture, attractive cloth, plant or flowers or symbol  
Prepare table and chairs  
Create a welcoming atmosphere for your brothers and sisters
- Give people the opportunity to meet and greet each other
- Determine if you need refreshments before or after the meeting

#### 5. Role of the Chairperson

Acts in the person of Christ

- Building unity
- Facilitating the meeting to move the agenda
- Balancing between efficiency and discussion

- Letting constructive discussion happen
- Determining if a committee should be formed to work out details and bring them back to the next meeting
- Bringing the discussion back to the point if it has strayed off topic
- Suggesting further action be taken for certain issues and adding to the next agenda until project is completed

#### **6. Role of the Meeting Participants**

- Participate fully
- Prepare your part of the meeting; e.g., report, proposal, etc.
- Stick to the agenda
- Observe meeting etiquette

#### **7. Role of the Secretary**

- Takes notes that are clear
- Prepares and distributes minutes to members before the next meeting
- Other general secretarial duties

#### **8. Role of the Ministry Delegates** (if ministry persons are invited to speak or represent a ministry)

- To be a liaison between the Parish Pastoral Council and the ministry/organization
- To support and promote the parish vision and the community building efforts of the parish through their particular ministry/organization

#### **9. Concluding the Meeting**

- Chairperson or other can summarize the main decisions and action plan
- Evaluate and debrief the meeting. E.g., How did it go? What do you feel we accomplished? Is there anything significant that we learned or did? Did we spend too much time on one area? Did we spend too little time on any area? etc.
- Set date for the next meeting and remind everyone of the date, time, & place
- Thank everyone for his/her contribution
- Sending Prayer

## Preparing an Agenda

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### Sample Agenda

- Welcome 2 minutes
- Introductions and Ice Breaker 10 minutes
- Gathering Prayer and Faith Sharing 15 minutes
- Items for Discussion 20 minutes
- Items for Action 20 minutes
- Committee reports 15 minutes
- Announcements 5 minutes
- Evaluation and Conclusion 5 minutes
- Sending Prayer 1 minute

Meeting is approximately 90 minutes

### Requesting Items for the Agenda

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Items for Discussion	Time Needed
1.	___ minutes
2.	___ minutes
3.	___ minutes

Items for Action	Time Needed
1.	___ minutes
2.	___ minutes
3.	___ minutes

Announcements	Time Needed
1.	___ minutes
2.	___ minutes
3.	___ minutes

<b>Name</b> _____
<b>Email</b> _____
<b>Mobile</b> _____

## Sample Meeting Format for Parish Staffs, Groups, Ministries or Boards

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*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

Matthew 18:20

Parish and church board meetings should never be just dry old boring meetings! We gather to meet in the name of Jesus – at least that’s what we should be doing – furthering His mission!

One of the principles of coming together is that we are GATHERED and SENT in the name of Jesus. Our agendas are embedded in the middle of prayer. This way prayer and reflection surround our efforts to make the Gospel integral to all we do. We should leave the meeting feeling like we shared and gained new insights. Try a new way of organizing your meetings.

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### Welcome by the Pastor and/or Chairperson

#### Ice Breaker

This is a “getting to know you” exercise and is meant to be light and seasonal.

For example:

- What has been one highlight of the summer for you?
- What is your favorite dessert?
- What is your favorite Christmas carol?



If you are meeting for the first time as a new group, you could do a one minute bio. For example:

#### Getting to Know You! “One Minute Bio”

Your name, something about yourself (married, family, etc.) your education, hobbies, ministry and how long you have been at the parish.

#### Gathering Prayer

All parish meeting should gather with prayer. Prayer should be appropriate for the particular meeting and always include Scripture or something relevant to the meeting from a document of the church or guidelines for the particular ministry or seasonal feasts. *See example* A simple reflection question should be included.

Method: If the group is small, you may have all share their reflection together. If the group is over 6 or more people, they can share in twos or threes.

Following a few minutes of sharing, call the group(s) back together and ask if anyone wants to share what they heard in their group. Close with a short prayer and move to your agenda

#### Meeting Agenda

What you determine for your agenda

#### Sending Prayer

At the end of the meeting, the prayer should reflect being sent out to further the mission of Christ through our particular ministry. A sign of peace may also be shared.

## **SAMPLE Agenda**

### ***Parish Mission Statement***

*As a family of faith, St. Joseph Parish welcomes everyone  
to encounter Jesus Christ through Word, Worship, Community, and Service.  
Guided by the Holy Spirit, we are changed for the better  
and sent forth as disciples of Christ to continue his work in the world.*

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1. **Ice Breaker:** Who is someone you know whom you admire for their faith and fortitude?
2. **Prayer / Reflection:** Mission Statement Prayer with Faith sharing
3. **Guest Speaker:** (for info on a particular topic)
4. **Follow up / Feedback – example:** Revised Mass Schedule & Sunday Evening Mass Survey Results
5. **Update:** Welcoming Committee Development – Sub-Committee (Donna and Gerry)
6. **Forward in Faith: Our Road Ahead –** PPC Action Items
7. **Special PPC Meeting: Saturday June 5** – 9:00 to 12 Noon for planning
8. **Solicitation Request** from Boy Scouts
9. **Financial Update** from Finance Council Representative
10. **Next Regular Monthly Meeting** – Tuesday June 15 at 7 PM

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## Sample PPC Parish Planning Half Day Retreat

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### Agenda

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8:30 – 9:00	Light Breakfast Welcome and Ice Breaker: Team building exercise	
9:00 – 9:20	Prayer / Reflection	
9:20 – 10:15	Discussion – How do we make St. Joseph Parish a place <i>“Where people are changed for the better!”</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✦ What are the greatest needs of this parish as we look at the next three years?</li> <li>✦ What do we want to focus on to engage our parishioners and attract new people?</li> <li>✦ Ministries that we are looking to start/revive: What are our desired outcomes for each? How can these be achieved?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Welcome Ministry <span style="float: right;">Sr. Donna</span></li> <li>2. Website <span style="float: right;">Zach</span></li> <li>3. After Mass Coffee and Speaker Series <span style="float: right;">Phil</span></li> </ol> </li> </ul>	
10:15	Break	
10:25	Updates	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Planning Days and Goals <span style="float: right;">Fr. Tom</span></li> <li>• Other reports/or discussion</li> <li>• Introduce updated Mission Statement to the Parish <span style="float: right;">Phil</span> Mission Statement prayer at all meetings</li> <li>• Day of Service Plans <span style="float: right;">Phil</span></li> </ul>	
11:15	Parish Pastoral Council Goals for the coming year	Phil
12:00 Noon	Sending Prayer	Fr. Tom

**Mission Statement of St. Joseph Parish**  
**As a family of faith,**  
**St. Joseph Parish welcomes everyone to encounter Jesus Christ**  
**through Word, Worship, Community, and Service.**  
**Guided by the Holy Spirit, we are changed for the better**  
**and sent forth as disciples of Christ**  
**to continue his work in the world.**

## Sample Opening Prayer and Scripture Reflection

### *Good Seed – Good Ground*



**Focus:** The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

**Ice breaker:** What kind of gardening do you do? Tomatoes, flowers, houseplants, other?  
What are the special things that you do to get the plant matter to grow?

### **Gospel** Mt 13:1-9 (Short form)

A reading from the Gospel of Matthew...

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea.

Such large crowds gathered around him

that he got into a boat and sat down,

and the whole crowd stood along the shore.

And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying:

“A sower went out to sow.

And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path,

and birds came and ate it up.

Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil.

It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep,

and when the sun rose it was scorched,

and it withered for lack of roots.

Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it.

But some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit,

a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.

Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

The Gospel of the Lord



### **Reflection question:**

As a parish pastoral council, what seeds have we sown, what more seeds do we need to sow, and what are our fertilizing methods?

### **Prayer**

Loving Lord,

You proved yourself as a leader in your ministry.

As a council devoted to your people,

help us to be good listeners and visionaries,

seekers to find what your people of our parish need to grow

and to further your mission in our parish and beyond.

Do not let us get mired in petty details and things that distract and detract.

Rather, let us focus on nurturing the good seed

so that our parish may bear much fruit.

We ask this in your name. Amen



# CHAPTER THREE

## EXPLORING A CONSULTATIVE MODEL

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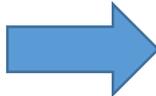
The PPC provides us with a model of collaboration. Working together, clergy, religious and lay leaders seek new and creative methods to live fully the Christian mission in the context of contemporary life. The PPC has a unique role to play in encouraging people in the parish on the journey of faith. In its leadership role, the members help translate the pastoral mission into the ongoing life of the parish.

The PPC is not administrative. Rather, its role is to assure that the people of God are formed in the faith and live their roles as disciples of Christ. The PPC has the responsibility to consult with parishioners, create collaboration among parish ministries and groups, and build consensus to assure that the mission of Christ is fulfilled in that particular parish. The model below explains the difference between administrative and consultative models.

### Moving from a Model of Administration to Consultative Model

#### **Administration**

Coordinating ministries  
Administrating  
Committee reporting  
Working in silos  
Voting on issues  
Operations and policies



#### **Consultation**

Articulating the mission  
Visioning and being prophetic  
Active listening  
Collaborating  
Building consensus  
Focusing on prayer & discernment of a pastoral plan

#### ★ **Discussion**

As a PPC, discuss the differences between the two models and how well you are following the consultative model.

### **Characteristics of a Parish Pastoral Council**

The PPC is essential to the parish. Therefore, members need to understand their roles and take time to study and discuss what each characteristic means. As new members join the council, time should be devoted to new member orientation to assure that the work of the council is clear and that all understand purpose, goals, and work in progress.

### **Key Characteristics of a Parish Pastoral Council are:**

#### **1. A Parish Pastoral Council is Prayerful**

The PPC strives to provide sufficient time to reflect on the Gospel (and other pertinent readings) so they more clearly understand Christ's ministry in order to bring his mission into the life of the parish. Prayer is critical to the work of the parish council and a considerable portion of each parish council meeting should be set aside for prayer and formation. The PPC must listen to the

active presence of the Holy Spirit in each person and the group. Communal prayer and faith sharing are the best way to foster a spiritual environment for the council.

**Practical Suggestion:** *The PPC spends time in prayer and faith sharing at the meeting. Prayer can take 15 minutes or so with ample time for reflecting on the Gospel or other pertinent resources. Prayer is essential to the work of the council and should frame the meeting: Ice Breaker, gathering prayer, Gospel reading, faith sharing and at the end of the meeting, prayer of intercession and sending Prayer. Twice a year, a longer meeting with prayer and community building are very helpful.*

## **2. A Parish Pastoral Council is Pastoral**

Through Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist all Christians are called to serve the people of God. The ministries of word, worship, community, and service are basic to the practice of being pastoral and defining ministry in the parish community. PPCs strive to find the best resources and methods to serve the people of the parish as they fulfill the mission of the church in this parish and particular time and place.

**Practical Suggestion:** *The PPC should meet with parish staff, catechists, heads of ministries, and other advisory groups to understand the scope of ministry, what each ministry does, their present goals, plans for the future and resources they might need.*

## **3. A Parish Pastoral Council is Representative**

Each PPC member needs to listen to parishioners and then faithfully presents those expressed concerns, ideas and questions to the PPC, thus representing the tenor of the community. The group strives to understand all aspects of the parish so that the faith needs of parishioners are met.

**Practical Suggestion:** *PPCs need to identify the demographics of the parish and local community. Town planning boards are a good place to research numbers of people, cultural groups and movement in and out of the area.*

## **4. A Parish Pastoral Council is Discerning**

The PPC makes decisions in an atmosphere of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit. It is guided by a firm faith-oriented value system. The PPC works to determine how the mission of Jesus and the Church is accomplished in the parish community and how it models its actions to the parish, local community, and world in response to the mission.

**Practical Suggestion:** *PPCs can assess and determine needs of the local community and/or archdiocesan charitable works to contribute to projects that need support.*

## **5. A Parish Pastoral Council is Prophetic**

The PPC needs to have the courage and foresight to set the direction of the parish community, challenging the parish to grow in response to the Gospel. This task will involve patience as the prophetic voice of the Holy Spirit calls for change and growth within the community. This

prophetic work is not predicting the future but interpreting the path that the parish is to follow on its current faith journey in response to the Gospel. Being prophetic is about envisioning the parish community which God desires for us.

**Practical Suggestion:** *PPCs can organize focus groups and a survey to engage parishioners in prayerful discernment and discussion on parish successes and needs.*

## **6. A Parish Pastoral Council is Empowering**

The PPC solicits the contribution of the expertise and talents of the parish members to foster the faith growth of the individual, the parish, and the broader community. This growth in faith means learning more about people in the parish as well as calling and affirming them in living out the mission of the church in their daily lives, individually, in their families, and as a faith community.

**Practical Suggestion:** *PPCs can sponsor a gift discernment event to help parishioners discover the gifts and talents given to them by God and how they can use them in service as disciples of Christ.*

## **7. A Parish Pastoral Council is Collaborative**

The PPC challenges itself as well as individual members, the staff, committees, organizations and other groups in the parish to work together. A clear, common understanding of the parish's mission fosters collaboration. The parish will strive to seek ways to collaborate with other parishes, community organizations and congregations to foster the common good of the broader community. In society and in the church the demands of the future will stretch limited resources. Collaboration is an effective way to meet those needs and to utilize the resources.

**Practical Suggestion:** *The pastor should be the leader in collaboration, working with PPC members to assess and strategize about the successes and needs of the parish. All work together in an Appreciative Inquiry style<sup>7</sup>, including all ethnic and cultural and age groups. As Jesuit strategic planner, George Wilson wrote: Inclusion = Ownership = Commitment.*

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Our gratitude to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee for permission to use and add to this material.

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<sup>7</sup> "Appreciative Inquiry is about the coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives "life" to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential." (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005, p.3)  
[https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/appreciative\\_inquiry](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/appreciative_inquiry)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CONSENSUS PROCESS

#### DIALOGUE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

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Consensus is a creative and dynamic way of reaching agreement in a group. A group committed to consensus aims to dismantle a sense of power and control derived from an absolute structure or hierarchy. A process of consensus values the common good, not simply the majority rule. At its heart consensus is based on listening and respectful dialogue among equals. Consensus means working with each other in partnership.

In order to be able to arrive at consensus, a group must first build a sense of community. Strong relationships are nurtured when all are open, honest, and willing to trust others. In order to trust someone, people need to spend time and get to know each other. Making sure that you pray together and read and reflect on scripture deepens the connections in the group. In this way, members find commonalities, understanding and grow together as a community of faith.

#### **Why do we use consensus rather than majority rule?**

Bishop Robert McElroy from San Diego reflected on the issues within the American Church in 2019. In a lecture at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, he stated that in the United States there is a

“a ‘culture of maintenance’ pervades our decision making. We are the inheritors of vast institutions, structures, buildings and financial commitments that were established in a prior age. We are also the inheritors of patterns of decision making that place enormous value on how decisions were made in the past as a guide as to how they should be made today. These two realities create in the church a powerful force of *inertia* that often makes *maintaining the status quo* a higher imperative than constantly renewing the priorities of the church in the light of the Gospel as applied to today's ecclesial and societal situation.”

#### **★ Discussion**

We often hear that parishes are in “maintenance mode rather than mission mode.”

- What does this phrase mean to you?
- In what ways does this apply or not apply to your parish?

As a PPC, Jesus calls us to listen to all the voices in our community. We are also called to be prophetic; to imagine an alternative way of participating in community life. Consensus is a radically different manner of organizing society or sharing power. It invites more people to the table where decisions are made. It unleashes creativity and encourages innovation. It also creates a sense of co-responsibility and accountability for strategies and actions. It's no longer just the “guy at the top” who owns the outcome, but rather everyone in the group is co-responsible.

Changing the way we make decisions is an initial step which can lead us to a more equitable, just society globally. In fact, the principles of Catholic Social Teaching call us to consider the common good and to create a more just society. We begin this transformation of society first within our own parish, calling people to understand the Gospel and the mission of Jesus through his words and actions.

Consensus is a collective opinion derived when everyone works together. True consensus is evident after a decision is made. Consensual decisions enjoy broad ownership and commitment for implementation. It seeks not only the agreement of most participants, but also the inclusion of objections as a way to ensure greatest accuracy. In this way consensual decisions foster unity of purpose. Groups that reached consensus can speak with unity despite disagreement. Consensual decisions take the most time but are optimal. Consensus is achieved when every member can say *“I have had an opportunity to express my views fully and they have been thoughtfully considered by the group. Even though this solution may not be the one that I believed was optimal, I think it will work and I support it.”*

When seeking consensus, differences of opinion are not only tolerated, they are encouraged. In consensual decision-making, differences of opinion are seen as ways of gathering all available information and options regarding an issue. Articulating the differences clarifies the issues and often forces the group to seek a better alternative. Consensual decisions are often the most successful decisions because they are well thought out and end up having the strongest support. In consensus, everyone accepts the decision, has ample chance to influence it, understands it and therefore, supports it.

### **Dealing with Debate**

It can happen that while working on consensus, a group can generate two opposing options. Sometimes one person or a small group does not agree. This is evident when those with an objection restate their opposition repeatedly. With such an impasse invite the group to set both options aside and perhaps look for a third way. This third way is generated out of the rationale, values or benefits named for the two opposing positions. The group can then be engaged in creating the third option using this objective criterion in order to include the concerns or values identified by everyone. Remember to clarify objectives and to strive for understanding.

### **What if consensus is difficult to reach?**

- If the discussion is “going around in circles,” drop the matter and continue the meeting. Return to it later.
- If there seems to be missing information, do further research and gather more data before trying to complete the consensus process. Postpone further discussion until all have had the opportunity for prayer and reflection.

### **What if I am the one who is outside the circle of agreement?**

#### **Think about this:**

- Am I considering what is best for all?

- Do I understand all the data given? Have I carefully justified your reasons for disagreeing?
- Can I say, “Well, I don’t agree completely, but I see the validity of your position and I can live with that?”

These questions can help each person in the group reach “common good” conclusions and provide an exercise to think more deeply about needs and solutions.

### **What kind of attitudes can help or hinder the process?**

#### *Helps*

- openness
- honesty
- respect for the truth in everyone
- patience
- enthusiastic support for the outcome
- spiritual outlook and reliance on the Holy Spirit

#### *Hinders*

- rigidity of opinions
- hostile or suspicious minds
- determination to win
- sabotaging the process: “Why do we have to do it this way?”

### **Six Steps for Arriving at Consensus**

After an issue has been presented and necessary background information has been given, the facilitator does the following:

1. Invites clarifying questions.
2. Summarizes for the group what the clarifying issues are.
3. Invites someone to begin the discussion.
  - using “I” statements, when an individual introduces an idea or opinion as to how the issue may be approached
  - another individual responds to that statement (as a good listener would) and adds ideas or reactions of their own, using “I” statements.
  - a third individual develops ideas further, using “I” statements until all have offered their wisdom.
4. Keeps discussion on the topic and, if there is a need, rephrases complicated or confusing comments.
5. Summarizes points of agreement and points of difference.
6. After judging that consensus may be possible at a given time, tests for consensus by asking: Is there anything else of importance to be offered that has not been said? Also, if there are serious areas of disagreement, invite individuals to be ready to state their position

on the issue, give reasons for their position, and perhaps present alternate solutions.

The discussion continues until the areas of disagreement are reduced or eliminated. If the group cannot reach consensus because more information is needed, one or more persons are delegated to gather the information within a certain time frame, e.g., by the next meeting.

Consensus is achieved when all participants agree that they have been heard and their positions have been affirmed, thus allowing them to support the prevailing opinion.

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Our gratitude to the Diocese of Buffalo for permission to use and enhance this material.  
*Diocesan Guidelines, 2019.*

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESOLVING CONFLICTS

#### OPTIMIZING FOR THE COMMON GOOD

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Conflict is a fact of life. Conflict can be destructive or creative. The challenge for the PPC in the face of conflict is to commit to finding ways to resolve the conflict in a spirit of mutual charity and with interest in the common good above all else.

Working through differences requires an atmosphere of trust. Trust results when individuals operate from the human values of respect, honesty, courage and integrity. Real change can happen in a parish and its members when conflicts are resolved in an atmosphere of human trust.

For Catholics today, framing meetings in a spirit of prayer and gospel reflection, encourages members to assure that decisions are made in the light of faith and the example of Jesus. Prayer and honest reflection together, build trust and keep a group focused on what is essential for the community it serves. Praying with the Sunday, daily gospel, or other pertinent readings inspires the group to see needs and make decisions in the light of Scripture and Catholic teaching.

Resolving conflict is important for every individual or organization. As a Church, gospel values call us to stretch our understanding of that process. In addition, gospel values challenge us to love and to forgive one another - to heal, not just settle our differences. Real reconciliation can happen in a parish and its members when an atmosphere of trust exists.

Unresolved conflict drains life from the parish. Moving on without healing, love and forgiveness can result in permanent brokenness in the parish community. Resolving conflict by paying attention to both human values and gospel values strengthens relationships among people in the parish and community. It moves them closer to making their vision a reality.

Parish policies should enhance conflict resolution and should include three principles:

1. Deal with conflict as soon as possible
2. Brainstorm creative solutions
3. Follow the principle of subsidiarity which means that conflict should be dealt with at the most immediate level possible. The first effort should always be to resolve grievances and disputes between the two persons or groups who are in conflict.

All of this will make for a stronger PPC and parish as we seek to welcome and engage people as disciples of Jesus Christ and enjoy a deeper relationship with him.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DECISION MAKING: A WAY FORWARD

#### Tools for A Successful Meeting

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The heart and goal of the PPC is to create and sustain vibrant faith communities which are rooted in gospel values. The way forward for a parish may not always be clear. There may be several needs calling for parish discernment. Often the question might be “What shall we focus on first?”

As we seek to answer this question, the PPC should use a consensus process. While this is conceptually simple, there are two impediments that make it difficult to achieve. The first impediment is inexperience by some parish leaders with a non-confrontational decision-making model. Modern media bombards us with models of conflict: through talk-radio; investigative reporting, reality television programming, and sometimes even governments. There are few models of decision making today which do not revolve around someone protecting “their rights,” even to the point of belligerence.

Another impediment to wise decision making is time. It takes time to prayerfully and reflectively listen to others and consider options which are useful for the common good. Society often seems obsessed with instant gratification and “efficiency.” Deliberations which do not produce quick results may be judged unproductive. The following presents some information as PPCs strive to reach consensus on important issues.

#### Levels of Decision Making

In *Recreating the Parish*, authors Carol Holden, Thomas Sweetser, and Mary Beth Vogel present an outline of different ways of reaching decisions based upon the number of people involved, the emotional level, available time, available financial resources, and authority to make decisions.

##### 1. Nitty-Gritty: Delegating

**Useful when:** Decision is about specific details, small issues, limited influence

**How to use:** Let those in charge take care of the decisions. Allow freedom of work and movement

##### 2. Small Matters: Voting

**Useful when:** There are issues with little conflicting emotion; need vote of confidence

**How to use:** Voting is for confidence and support. Help people to take ownership of the decision. There is no need to hang up the meeting over these matters. (*Caution* - if strong emotions are displayed about an issue, potentially dividing the group, move to the next level of decision making.)

##### 3. Larger Matters: Consensus

**Useful when:** There are one or more issues about which the group has strong emotions and when the issues have the potential to divide the group. These issues need thought and discussion.

Time must be available to consider options. Group members must be willing to listen to each other and be influenced by each other.

**How to use:** All must state their views on the issue - silence blocks openness. The only voting allowed is a straw vote (or a “leaning” to gage opinion, not a decision) to assess attitudes. Group members must seek out differences of opinion to explore all options. No group member should “give in” just to avoid conflict. The final decision must be acceptable to all, meaning that everyone can “live with it” and support it.

#### **4. Big Matters: Discernment**

*In this case, if a member of the PPC, is skilled as a facilitator, he or she may lead the meeting process. However, this may be the time to engage an outside facilitator.*

**Useful when:** One or more issues affect an entire community and many will have strong emotions over the outcome of the decision.

**How to use:**

State the problem or situation. Consult with those involved and develop a possible solution. Take time in prayer and reflection and list all the reasons *against* the solution. Take additional time in prayer and reflection and list all the reasons *for* the solution. Eventually the solution will arise from the group. If not, continue the process.

#### **5. Problem Solving: Finding Creative Alternatives**

**Useful when:** There are large issues that need a good group effort to come up with creative alternatives.

**How to use:** The group states the need (*not* the solution) and envisions what the ideal future can look like when the need is met. List what is already being done to reach the ideal. Think of all the ways of reaching the ideal. Brainstorm and be creative. Then select the best way(s). Be specific: what?; for whom?; when?; how often?; where?; by whom?; and how much?.

#### **When should our PPC use a formal consensus process?**

A formal consensus process should only be used when discerning major decisions that are intended to establish goals and objectives for the future. It should not be used for operational issues or day to day decisions. Most of those operational issues should not be brought to the council.

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Our gratitude to Carol M. Holden, D. Min, Thomas P. Sweetser, S.J., and Mary Beth, Vogel, M.P.S. for permission to use this material. Taken from *Recreating the Parish: Reproducible Resources for Pastoral Ministers*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996.

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## APPENDIX

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### SAMPLE Prayer Using the Mission Statement for Prayer and Reflection

Since the Mission Statement is integral to the parish and all ministries, it is essential to use it as part of prayer and reflection at meetings. Below is a sample to use. Reflection questions can be changed depending on the groups using it. Parishes have reported that it is highly successful to write prayer based on its mission statement and helps staff and parishioners be familiar with it and use it as a guide.

Notice that the Mission Statement derives from the mission statement of the Church, the great commission of Jesus to go forth to reach all.

### St. Joseph Parish - *where people are changed for the better!*

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#### The Great Commission of Jesus

All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.  
Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,  
baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit,  
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.  
And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

#### Mission Statement of St. Joseph Parish

As a family of faith, St. Joseph Parish welcomes everyone  
to encounter Jesus Christ through Word, Worship, Community, and Service.  
Guided by the Holy Spirit, we are changed for the better  
and sent forth as disciples of Christ to continue his work in the world.

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Leader	Let us prayerfully pray the words of our Mission Statement...
All	As a family of faith, St. Joseph Parish welcomes everyone to encounter Jesus Christ through Word, Worship, Community, and Service. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we are changed for the better and sent forth as disciples of Christ to continue his work in the world.
Reflection	<p><i>Use a question or two that are appropriate for your group's meeting...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>+ What words of our mission statement are particularly meaningful to you at this moment. Why?</li> <li>+ How is Jesus calling you to use your gifts to contribute to the building up of our parish?</li></ul>

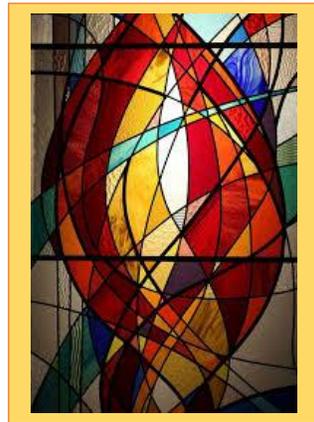
- + How are you and the parish being called by God to be a force in the community to call people to Christ, spread the Gospel and help others with daily needs?

Leader Let us take a moment of silence,  
asking God to inspire us as we seek to forward  
the mission of Jesus as the community of St. Joseph Parish...

*Pause to pray for specific needs of your ministry ...*

Leader Loving God, give us the insight, wisdom and courage  
to make our parish community a place  
where all are welcome  
and unity is primary.

All So that all may come to know and embrace the call  
to truly be your disciples and carry out your mission.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son. Amen



*Come, Holy Spirit!*



# ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

## Parish Vitality Services

### Parish Pastoral Council Workshop



#### Part One: Introduction

### Recent Study by FADICA – Summer 2020

#### What gives a Parish Vitality?

Vital Parishes:	We Do	We need to do
Are innovative		
Live the faith in service		
Have excellent pastors		
Have leadership teams		
Have a holistic, compelling vision		
Place a priority on the Sunday experience		
Foster spiritual growth and maturity		
Utilize online communications tools		

- In General, I would rate the vitality of our parish as:

1  
Lowest

3  
Getting there

5  
Full of Vitality

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- Looking at the Vitality characteristics from the study, what do you need to concentrate on?



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## Writers

- Sr. Donna L. Ciangio, OP
- Rev. Thomas Iwanowski
- Milissa Else

## Diocesan Guidelines

- The Archdiocese of Philadelphia
- The Archdiocese of Milwaukee: *Parish Council Manual; Living Spirit; Leading with Grace, Wisdom, Vision*, 2000.
- The Diocese of Buffalo: *Diocesan Guidelines*, 2019.

## PPC Manuals

- Carol M. Holden, D.Min, Thomas P. Sweetser, SJ, and Mary Beth, Vogel, MPS: *Recreating the Parish: Reproducible Resources for Pastoral Ministers*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996.
- Gubish, Mary Ann, and Susan Jenny, SC, with Arlene McGannon. *Revisoning the Parish Pastoral Council: A Workbook*. New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2001.

## Cover Design

Gerarda Panek, OP

## Drawings

Pages 17 & 20 by Pam Keating

## Archdiocesan Office of Research and Planning

For those seeking to learn more about the community in which their parish is centered, our Archdiocesan Office of Research and Planning can help you dissect some of the census data for your local area. The data is not religion specific, but it can help you know the population trends happening around your parish.

**Contact** - Mark Howard: [Mark.Howard@rcan.org](mailto:Mark.Howard@rcan.org)

