

PASTORAL COUNCIL GUIDELINES

Revised and Updated May 2013



Representing
Saint Michael Roman Catholic Parish (Cooks Creek)
Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish (Garson)
Oakbank Catholic Community

INTRODUCTION

On April 25, 2012, Archbishop Albert LeGatt decreed new Guidelines for Pastoral Councils (www.archsaintboniface.ca). The document called “**The Upper Room**” (UP) is part of the Spiritual and Pastoral Renewal of the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface. “*A Parish Pastoral Council is vital in the life of all our parishes in its unique and distinctive role as the primary deliberative body of a parish. United with the pastor, the council members are to pray as our ancestors in faith did in the upper room, reflect as Jesus taught us throughout his life and then guide and inspire the parish with the gifts of wisdom, knowledge and understanding in defining the pastoral situation of the parish and the initiatives required to meet all its pastoral needs.*” (UP, p. 3)

The essential features of the vision of a Pastoral Council can be found in Scripture and in documents of the Second Vatican Council. Because of a changing reality of parishes in a “family cluster”, we need to work together as ONE. We are not in competition but we come TOGETHER where the talents and charisms of all are recognized and valued. As Christ’s disciples, the baptized acknowledge their personal vocation, respond affirmatively to invitations to share their talents and charisms, and are committed to their relation with Christ.

That is why a new Pastoral Council was created in 2012 for the parishes of Saint Michael (Cooks Creek), Sacred Heart (Garson) and Oakbank Catholic Community.

MISSION

Our mission is to build up and serve in communion of love and, in so doing, announce the gospel of Jesus to the world. Communion is therefore at the heart of our pastoral mission. It seeks to nurture a relationship of communion within our Christians communities in love, justice, peace, and reconciliation.

DEFINITION

The Pastoral Council is a consultative body representing Saint Michael Parish (Cooks Creek), Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish (Garson) and Oakbank Catholic Community. We serve and advise the pastor in his responsibility for the pastoral mission and aim to engage and enable the whole Christian community for fuller participation in the mission of Jesus Christ. A Pastoral Council is not intended to deal with finances or administration. These are the responsibility of the Parish Finance Council.

THE FUNCTIONING OF A PASTORAL COUNCIL

The pastoral council is like no other organization. In consideration of the vision of establishing 'communion', we then understand that the proper functioning of a Pastoral Council includes all of the following:

- **Community building, collaboration, and consensus**
The central goal of the council is the service of communion – to develop a strong sense of community among its members. The key to building community is the collaborative manner in which the council functions, expressed by seeking to reach consensus in all decisions.
- **Prayer**
An effective council is rooted in prayer as it discerns and develops the mission. Through prayer, the council seeks direction and empowerment from the Holy Spirit to take up the mission Jesus has given to us all.
- **Enabling and calling forth participation**
A council works to call forth and enable all members to participate more fully in the life and mission of Jesus Christ in accord with their gifts and experience.
- **Needs assessment / reading the signs of the time**
One of its main tasks is to come to a fuller understanding of the pastoral needs of all people where they serve. This involves “reading the signs of the time,” i.e. how the gospel can be presented in a manner that speaks to the realities that people are living in a particular time and place.
- **Pastoral planning, developing and evaluating**
In response to the real needs of the area, the council must propose appropriate pastoral responses. These tasks are often described simply as pastoral planning, developing pastoral programs and services, and evaluating the effectiveness of pastoral initiatives.
- **Investigate, reflect and recommend.**
A council follows a practical course of action proposed for pastoral councils in Vatican II's Decree on Bishops (#27)
 - investigate the pastoral reality of the area,
 - reflect upon / study it,
 - recommend their conclusions to the pastor.
- **Implementing pastoral activities**
The main responsibility of a pastoral council is to recommend pastoral activities, not to implement those activities. Implementation is the responsibility of the whole parish community led by the pastor. Council members who do become involved in implementing council recommendations should do so not as council members but on the same basis as any other member of the parish.

THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PASTORAL COUNCIL MEMBERS

- **The pastor** is responsible for the pastoral mission of the assigned area by virtue of his appointment from the bishop. As the shepherd, he presides over all pastoral council activities, as he is the council president. He seeks the wisdom and advice of the council in order to better exercise his responsibilities as pastor.
- **Council members** represent the whole pastoral area not in a legal or democratic sense, but in their ability to attend to the pastoral realities and needs of the whole pastoral area. Their main responsibilities are:
 - to assist the pastor so he can better carry out his responsibility for the life and mission of Jesus Christ;
 - to call forth fuller participation of the whole pastoral area in the pastoral mission of Jesus Christ;
 - to represent their pastoral area at meetings of the Regional Pastoral Council.
- **The executive committee** is made up of the pastor as president of the Pastoral Council, the chairperson; the vice-chairperson, and the secretary. Their task is to prepare for and facilitate council meetings and to maintain close links and good communication with the whole pastoral area.
 - **The chairperson** facilitates meetings in a manner that allows for open dialogue and full participation to achieve consensus among council members; works with the pastor to prepare the agenda for council meetings.
 - **The vice-chairperson** assumes the duties of the chairperson when he/she is absent.
 - **The secretary** prepares material for meetings; keeps an accurate record of council meetings.

THE MEETINGS OF THE PASTORAL COUNCIL

- The Pastoral Council meets monthly, from September to June.
- Significant time is given at each meeting for prayer and spiritual reflection
- In the past, parish councils often operated according to Robert's Rules of Order. Today, agendas should reflect the emphasis on pastoral issues, a lived faith and consensus decision-making.
- The pastor does not usually "vote." As the Pastoral Council serves as his consultative body, he may accept or reject a council recommendation. Normally, a pastor should accept the recommendations of his council. If he chooses not to accept their recommendation, he should give a clear account of his reasons to the council.

THE SELECTION OF MEMBERS TO THE PASTORAL COUNCIL

In the interest of providing better pastoral services, a single pastoral council may serve a cluster of smaller parishes which are served by the same pastor. Since our pastor has three postings, it is important to have members representing each place. The council members should reflect the diversity of the parishes e.g. gender, age, ethnic and social background, etc. In addition to the pastor, the Pastoral Council shall be comprised of seven (7) members:

- Four (4) from Saint Michael Parish (Cooks Creek)
- Two (2) from Sacred Heart Parish (Garson)
- One (1) from Oakbank Catholic Community

Qualifications of a council member

- is a practicing Catholic
- understands the purpose and method of operation of a pastoral council
- is committed to the mission of Jesus Christ
- works well with others
- has good communication skills
- ability to represent the overall needs of the whole pastoral area and not a particular group or interest only

If council members are associated with another parish group, they should understand they do not represent that group on the council but rather the interest of the whole parish.

Methods of selection

At one time, almost all parishes used elections to select new members. Today a variety of networks are employed to choose members of the Pastoral Council. Because some form of discernment in selecting council members is encouraged to ensure that the gifts necessary for a collaborative and mission-oriented process are placed at the service of the church, the following process has been recommended:

- educate the parish on the purpose of a Pastoral Council and role of council members
- receive nominations from the present Pastoral Council members
- meet with nominated candidates to clarify the role of the Pastoral Council
- discern the proposed candidates considering their gifts, availability, needs of the Pastoral Council (example: replacing a specific vacancy)
- a candidate is then selected by appointment by the whole Pastoral Council.
- Appointments of new members will be done every year in May.

Length of terms

Each member hold a three (3) year term with terms staggered so that each year 1/3 of the council is renewed. An individual may serve only 2 consecutive 3 year terms on council. The Pastor with the Parish Council will also appoint a member to replace members that have vacated their positions. In order to ensure continuity, the new member fills the vacancy for the remainder of the corresponding term. Only after an absence of three years, can a past member can be re-appointed to Council.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PARISH OR DIOCESAN GROUPS

The Pastoral Council is not a body of representatives of the various parish organizations. Instead, it is a representative body of the whole community. As such it exists to assist the pastor in the articulation of the parish mission, the identification of goals that flow from it and the definition of objectives for reaching said goals. In other words, parish organizations and committees exist to implement the work of the Pastoral Council. Good communication between the Pastoral Council and parish organizations is essential. Parish groups and organizations should be consulted when the council considers a pastoral issue that concerns them. Not only should the Pastoral Council evaluate the work of the organizations (CWL, K of C, Liturgy, Catechism, etc.) but the organizations, themselves, need to be aware of council recommendations. It is suggested that once a year different leaders of organizations meet with the Pastoral Council.

Parish Finance Council has distinct responsibilities from those of the Pastoral Council and functions independently of it. The two bodies need to work together and develop clear mechanisms for regular communication.

Committees - From time to time there is a need to form various committees. Standing committees might include religious education, liturgy, adult faith, social justice, outreach and so forth. Periodically an *ad hoc* committee might be required to deal with a special research project (e.g. youth concerns, evangelization opportunities, etc.). At least one Pastoral Council member should participate in any *ad hoc* committees in order to provide the necessary link to the council.

Ministry groups and parish organizations - These groups exist to implement the recommendations of the Pastoral Council but responsibility for implementation rests with the pastor working directly with the groups.

The diocesan Church - A Pastoral Council needs to keep informed of pastoral priorities proposed by the diocesan church, the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface. It should maintain active representation and good two way communication with Pastoral Councils and other committees at the level of the diocese, the deanery, and the region.