

“Conversations on the Journey”

Module IV: Building Blocks for Effective Parish Pastoral Councils

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Module IV: Building Blocks for Effective Parish Pastoral Councils

Agendas

Parish Pastoral Councils are guided in their ministry through the use of Council agendas. The creation of an agenda is the dual responsibility of the Pastor and the Parish Pastoral Council Chairperson. Put simply, an agenda:

- Identifies the focus for a specific meeting
- Calls for accountability to earlier discussions and actions
- Provides an opportunity for gathering data relating to pastoral services
- Creates a timeframe for the meeting
- Assigns responsibility for items listed
- Provides for classification of actions to be taken
- Reserves prayer time

The use of a well thought out agenda reduces the possibility of lost focus, distracting conversations and lack of follow-up on prior actions. An important step in the preparation of the agenda is the planning meeting between pastor and council chairperson. Focus for the preparatory meeting include:

- Prioritization of items to be addressed
- Assignment of time allotted for the discussion of topics
- Decision on the most effective vehicle of providing data for full council reflection
- Opportunity to assess availability of feedback from prior decisions
- Identification of desired prayer theme for this meeting

Identification of Focus for Meeting

Since the role of the parish pastoral council is to investigate, ponder and recommend action, it is a privileged place of consultation concerning pastoral issues. To adequately fulfill its mandate, the council needs sufficient time to reflect and weigh possible recommendations. For this reason it is best to limit the meeting focus to one major area of consultation. The agenda would allow time for three movements: presentation of the reality, time for reflection and sharing of insight, development of possible responses.

Call for Accountability to Earlier Discussions and Actions

Under *Old Business* the agenda names actions which were recommended and asks for accountability reports on these actions. This is essential for an effective Council. Decisions with no follow-up frustrate members and fail to further the life of the parish.

An Opportunity for Gathering Data Relating to Pastoral Services

Since the role of the council is to assist the pastor in assessing the efficacy of current pastoral outreach and services, it is appropriate for reports on such pastoral services to be provided to the Council. It is not the parish pastoral council's role to become engaged in the day to day operations of the parish but, rather, to see how effectively the parish is living its mission statement, is responding to need, and is fostering the life of the faith community.

Create a Timeframe for the Meeting Assign Responsibility for Items Listed

Agendas outline the length of the meeting and limit the topics to those which can be addressed within that time frame. It is helpful to assign timeframes to the various topics (i.e. Parish Festival Report: 15 min.)

In addition to assigning the time allotted, the agenda lists the name of the person/s responsibility for presenting the report or item. This is important so that persons assigned come prepared for the meeting.

Provides for Classification of Actions to be Taken

Not all items on the agenda are of equal importance. Some gain importance from urgency while others are important because of their significance in the life of the parish. In reviewing an agenda, items can be designated as:

Action Item:	Immediate or Long range
Information Item	Priority
Consultation Item	

Information items can easily be addressed through written reports to avoid lengthy presentations while still providing adequate data for the council.

Reserves prayer time

The heart of the parish pastoral council meeting is its prayer together. The agenda clearly safeguards the prayer time of the council and weaves it into the whole of the meeting.

Sample Agenda

St. Paul's Parish Pastoral Council
Agenda: September 20, 2008
Parish Center: 7:00 p.m.-- 8:45 p.m.

Prayer	[Carole]	20 minutes
Approval of Minutes:	[Ellen]	5 minutes
Old Business		
Parish Festival	[Dan]	15 minutes
Survey Update on Mass times [information only]		15 minutes
New Business		
Focus Issue: Outreach to Elderly		
Presentation of data	[Fr. Roy]	20 min
Process:	[Carole]	20 min
Appt. Committee [Action item]		10 min
Reports:		
Social Justice Committee	[Sara]	5 min
Youth Initiatives	[Frank]	5 min
Next Steps		10 min
Process Meeting:	[Carole]	10 min
Closing Prayer	[Carole]	

Consultation Focus

For pastors, the parish pastoral council provides a readily accessible, informed and diverse consultation circle. It is the primary responsibility of a parish pastoral council to advise pastors on pastoral priorities, needs and concerns. Pastors can most effectively tie into this expertise and wisdom by identifying the priority issues they wish to have explored.

In bringing a topic to a parish pastoral council, there are systematic steps to aid the process:

Step 1: The pastor presents the topic about which he seeks advice. The presentation includes:

1. Current status: *Example:* Over the past year six accidents have occurred in our parking lot during the time between Masses. One accident resulted in serious injury of children being dismissed from pre-school. How can this concern be addressed?

2. Time to identify the issues involved *Example:* Council reflects on what has been presented and asks questions for clarification. Once the issue has been clarified, the council shares what issues are involved in the situation.

Example: Is the time between Masses adequate to allow for clearing the parking lot prior to the next scheduled Mass? Are the procedures for the dismissal of children from pre-school sufficient to provide for their safety?

Step 2: The parish pastoral council suggests the next step needed to adequately explore the topic. Options for this step include:

1. Appointment of a committee to explore the issue and bring back additional data. This data includes possible implications for any suggested recommendations.

2. Full discussion of the issue at the meeting leading to the surfacing of recommended options.

3. Identification of other parties who should be consulted or who may have important information to add.

Step 3: The parish pastoral council sets a specific date for additional discussion and for a recommendation to be made to the pastor. As a norm it is important to present the topic for discussion at one meeting and to call for action on the item at a subsequent meeting.

Example: We will bring this back to the PPC in two months and come to a recommendation by November.

Part of Step Three is identifying who is responsible for gathering the data or generating recommendations for consideration.

Example: Ellen will consult with the pre-school director on safety measures already in place. George will work on a consultation process with the parish on adjusting Mass times.

This three step process is helpful for larger issues. Consultation on smaller items can be done within a single meeting provided all the needed data has been gathered.

For Reflection: How might this process be helpful in assessing the parish's response to Synod recommendations?

In what way can this process help balance immediate action items with long range growth?

Ease of Reporting

Extended verbal reports on the activities of varied study and action groups can unduly prolong Parish Pastoral Council meetings. While it is important to keep the PPC informed on pastoral initiatives such as establishing new forms of adult education, providing meals for the hungry or changing liturgical missalettes, it is not always necessary to make presentations on these items. Councils can be informed through written reports which are circulated with the preceding meetings minutes. Time for questions and clarifications can then be provided on the PPC agenda.

Report Format

Most groups can report quarterly instead of monthly. A rotational schedule of reports can be developed at the beginning of the year. This format provides more time for the Parish Pastoral Council to focus on a few reports instead of a large number of them.

SAMPLE REPORT

Name of Committee or
Group: _____

Date: _____ Person Submitting Report: _____

Briefly summarize key developments since the last reporting period
[Include progress made on any recommendations forwarded to you by the Parish Pastoral Council]

Identify any immediate concern that you would like the Parish Pastoral Council to address:

At this time are there any long range concerns that you would like to submit for Parish Pastoral Council consideration?

Minutes

Minutes are an essential element of all Parish Pastoral Council meetings. They provide both a history of parish pastoral council discussions, actions and processes as well as a reminder of responsibilities flowing from council action. In the view of these two functions, minutes need to contain specific information. They record:

1. A listing of topics addressed during the meeting
2. A brief summary of history/context
3. Any actions or decisions taken
4. Names of persons responsible for following-up on decisions
5. Dates for accountability reports for these items

Minutes are approved by the Parish Pastoral Council at the next meeting for the following reasons:

1. to ensure their accuracy,
2. to call the group to accountability,
3. to provide an archive document for the future.

Sample Guide for Minutes

Date of meeting: June 8, 2008
Names of those in Attendance Fr. Ron, Carol, Frank, Audrey, etc.
Corrections to prior minutes

Agenda Items:

1. **Mass Survey:** Due to accidents between Masses, a survey was conducted to see if more time could be provided between liturgies. Dan reported that a survey of parishioners showed that they would prefer Sunday Masses at 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. After discussion a consensus was reached that it was advisable to adjust the Mass schedule from four Sunday Masses to three.

Action Taken: Council recommends a change in Mass schedule beginning September 6th. Advance publicity will be needed. Sign needs to be changed. Ministry schedule will need to be adjusted.

Person Responsible: Fr. Ron to confirm decision. Carol will see to banner for outside church. Frank will check on signage. Audrey will notify the person in charge of ministry assignments.

Report Due: All responsible will report by August 5th meeting. Audrey will notify after change is confirmed.

2. **Serving Meals to Homeless:** The Council received a proposal from the St. Vincent's Society to begin serving meals to the homeless every Wednesday evening. Meals would be served from 5:30 through 7:00 from the parish hall.

The Council raised the following questions for clarification:

- a. Are there any city regulations that must be addressed?
- b. In what way would this impact our adult education program that uses the parish hall?
- c. How would on-going funding be provided?
- d. Are there sufficient volunteers to sustain the effort?
- e. Is this a duplication of services?

Action Taken: The St. Vincent's Society was asked to return to the Council with information on the five questions raised.

Person Responsible: Bob Richards, President of SVS will return to give the updated presentation. He will also bring a representative from a parish already providing this service

Report Due: By August 5th meeting of the parish pastoral council

3. **Report on Altar Servers:** The Coordinator of Altar Servers proposed to limit the age of servers to youth between the ages of 12-18. The Liturgy Committee directed that this proposal be brought to the PPC for consultation.

Action Taken: Action on this item is postponed until the following are provided:

- a. rationale for the limit
- b. data on the current availability of servers
- c. tentative recommendation from the liturgy committee

Person Responsible: Directed back to the Liturgy Committee

Report Due: Update in November

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 9 p.m.

Next Meeting: August 5th

Parish Pastoral Council Training

Efficient, insightful and vital Parish Pastoral Council do not just happen. They are the result of prayerful selection, careful planning and good formation. The way in which a Parish Pastoral Council functions is significantly different than the manner in which business or civic groups function.

The reality of the Parish Pastoral Council as a ministerial group requires that its members understand:

- The Church's vision of Parish Pastoral Councils
- The diocesan guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils
- Role of the Parish Pastoral Council in the life of the parish
- The relationship between the Parish Pastoral Council and the pastor
- The theological aspects of its ministry
- The meaning of a discerning body
- Communication skills that facilitate gathering wisdom from all

This understanding is fostered through training processes provided by the Diocese of Sacramento, individual retreat days for the Parish Pastoral Council, resources available from the Diocese of Sacramento as well as nationally. The calendar of the Parish Pastoral Council should build these training opportunities into its schedule.

Among the most used formats for training are: retreat experiences, focused training, discussion of resource materials, and diocesan training opportunities. The Diocese of Sacramento has prepared for all Parish Pastoral Councils guidelines, *Diocese of Sacramento, Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines, Nov. 2005*, and a four module self-directed study on Parish Pastoral Councils.

If a parish elects to begin its year with a Parish Pastoral Council retreat, it is helpful to use a three part format: one-third prayer and reflection; one-third community building among members; one-third focusing on the mission and work of the Parish Pastoral Council. Another helpful retreat format is to reflect on the mission statement of the parish. Members may be invited to see how they live that mission in their own lives and how it is lived as a parish community. A listing of resources has been included in this packet.