

“Conversations on the Journey”

Module V: Tools for Effective Pastoral Councils

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The Parish Mission Statement

One of the most important guides to parish life is the parish mission statement. A mission statement is a broad statement that identifies who you are, what you do and whom you serve. It unifies, motivates, and clarifies your purpose. The intent of a mission statement is to keep members and users aware of the parish purpose, in short, it is your reason for being. From the parish mission statement flow goals, objectives and strategies which move the whole to the fulfillment of the mission.

Good mission statements are clear, succinct and inspiring. They move persons to action. Why issues can be included in the statement but “how” issues are more properly named in goals and objectives.

Writing Your Statement:

Three elements are always included in the mission statement:

Who you are: We, people of St. Augustine parish, a Roman Catholic community comprised of persons from many traditions and cultures,

What you do: root our lives in the Eucharist. Through our words and deeds we proclaim the Good News of Christ, and use our time, talent and resources in the service of our brothers and sisters.

Who you serve: We reach out in love and service to each other and to those most in need especially those living the south Sacramento.

In writing such a statement, parish communities must take sufficient time to gather the insights of a broad cross section of the community, pray and reflect upon those insights and test for simplicity and clarity of language.

Living the Statement

Once a mission statement has been developed, there are three steps to make it into a living statement:

Understand it: Make sure that both the words and concepts are easily understood. To test its clarity, have a fifth grader explain it!

Promote it: Take pride in your statement. Make sure that parishioners know it and use it to guide their decisions. Publication of the statement in the bulletin and on websites is most helpful.

Use It: Encourage groups to use the statement as part of their prayer, to reflect on it and to test their planning against it. When decisions are being made by staff, parish pastoral council or finance council, ask how the decision furthers the mission.

<p>For Reflection: Identify the most important quality of your community. How would you incorporate that into your mission statement?</p>
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Parish Assemblies

In fulfilling the role of “investigating the pastoral reality and current needs”, the parish pastoral council may wish to sponsor a parish “town hall meeting.” Since the term “town hall meeting” is closely identified with the political sector, it might be more appropriate to use the term *Pastoral Forum* or *Parish Assembly* to let parishioners know that this a gathering rooted in faith.

The purpose of a pastoral forum is to provide parish members with the opportunity to discuss issues of importance to the life of the parish, to their communities and the diocesan church. The format of the meeting, lasting usually two hours, invites conversation and dialogue. Parish leaders assume the role of listeners unless directly asked by participants to respond to specific questions.

Two differing models for pastoral forums are possible. Both models share the same introductory elements:

- Welcome of participants
- Prayer time
- Introduction to the evenings focus

In model 1, the gathered participants all address a single topic. The format might include:

1. Short focused information sharing of data needed for discussion
2. Small group discussion by participants
3. Feedback on ideas or concerns voiced in the small groups
4. Open Mic

In model 2, a format called Open Space might be used. In this format participants divide according to interest areas: [e.g.] social outreach, marriage enrichment, youth activities, etc. A facilitator should be available for each group to assist with the discussion. When the time allotted for discussion is concluded, a representative of the small group reports on the conversation. Open mic. follows with an opportunity to clarify, affirm reports or add insight from the group.

Both Model 1 and 2 include two concluding steps: identification of next steps and closing prayer.

Pastoral forums require a meeting moderator, small group facilitators if needed and advance preparation of background information needed for informed discussion.

Activity

Using your parish mission statement as the focus, how might you plan a pastoral forum for your parish?

Survey Tools

Parish surveys are a tool to gather information from a broad cross section of a community. While some surveys are quick and easy to carry out, the information gathered from them can be non productive if the tool itself is not carefully crafted. Many parishes distribute survey instruments at the weekly masses while others might use telephone interviews. To be useful a survey must focus questions to obtain the desired information, define rankings if used and be limited to one page.

When using a rating scale of 1-5, it is helpful to define what each number means:

5. My highest priority
4. Important but not the greatest need
3. Good idea
2. Good if we have the resources to do it
1. Not helpful for our parish

A survey that asks a question like: "Would you participate in..." can be misleading if all items are desirable. No priority or limitation is set. The question would be better framed by asking: If you could participate in only two activities a month, which would be your two priority events? In general, open ended questions are most desirable but are more challenging to analyze.

Targeting your survey

A second consideration in using parish surveys is target audience. From whom do you want to hear? If you are surveying your parish on marriage enrichment programs, you might wish to identify responding groups: newly weds, 1-5 years married, 5-15 years, 15-25 years, 25-40 years, over 40 years. You may also wish to see if couples in second marriages have special needs. Without narrowing the audience, information can lead to false conclusions or lead a parish to start a program that is not really needed.

Survey Monkey

In the age of internet, survey monkey is a tool that parishioners can use from their home. A free account allows you to create simple surveys and obtain basic analysis of results. More extensive survey work can be done on a monthly subscription basis. To access this service you would go to www.surveymonkey.com. A free account requires a user name and password; a contact email address and a time zone. You then follow their directions. The tool allows for the use of 16 types of questions. When the survey is complete, you then use a collect responses tab to determine how to distribute the survey. Finally, survey monkey has an analyze results tab that allows you to access the findings.

****Always have a test group take the survey before distributing to test for clarity, problem questions and adequacy of responses.**

Intra-Parochial Collaboration

One of the greatest challenges in pastoral life is bringing integration and unity to the multiple programs and organizations within a parish community. The more dynamic the parish, the greater the intentionality needed to be sure that all aspects of its life and outreach are interconnected and focused on a common vision. Factors such as busy schedules, lack of adequate common planning and failure to see the interrelatedness of all parish activities can lead to competition, fragmentation, conflicting priorities and a sense of “mine” rather than “our”.

Three areas of intra-parochial collaboration are especially important:

Parish Pastoral Council and Finance Council

The Parish Pastoral Council and the Finance Council are the two major advisory bodies in the parish. The PPC focuses upon pastoral life and needs while the Finance Council focuses the stewardship of parish monies and resources. The pastor is the common link between the two groups. It is helpful for the PPC and Finance Council to have a joint meeting prior to the budgeting cycle. At this meeting members of the Finance Council can hear the pastoral priorities and objectives recommended by the PPC while the PPC can gain a realistic idea of what resources might be available to achieve its goals. Both can mutually seek ways that needs might be addressed while using good stewardship. Since the pastor links both groups, it is not necessary to have a designated liaison between the two groups.

Faith Formation Leadership

The duty of proclaiming the Word is a major responsibility of the parish. The pastor fulfills his responsibility through homilies, providing for the faith formation of youth and adults, fostering the life of prayer and study in the parish. Leaders in faith formation include the school principal, the coordinators of religious education for youth and adults, the youth minister and others as designated by the pastor. Religious formation programs touch the whole family and require collaboration among all these groups. It is helpful for the leaders within a parish to meet quarterly to see which program elements are appropriately shared, which are unique and how the formation can be integrated. Calendaring is a major element of this collaboration. The liturgy coordinator is also an important collaborator in this conversation especially when liturgical rites are involved.

Parish Outreach

The social outreach of a parish provides another opportunity for cooperation. Rather than seven different drives for the needy going on simultaneously, it is helpful to focus all the energies on a common need through the planning and coordination of efforts.

Parishes with Mission Communities

The shape of parish communities is undergoing change. In many areas the single entity parish has given way to parishes comprised of multiple mission communities or merged faith communities where one pastor has responsibility for multiple faith communities under the umbrella of one parish. In these emerging structures the elements of unified vision, inter communities cooperation and joint planning have increased importance. Equally important is honoring and addressing the unique needs and character of each community within the parish.

In a multi-mission parish the parish pastoral council looks to the whole of the community. To accomplish this end, membership of the PPC is a balance between members who represent the constituent communities and members at large. It is advisable to have community advisory councils for each mission to offer advice on issues specific to that community. The leadership of those councils bring any issues that impact the whole to the PPC for consultation and direction.

The areas addressed by the PPC relate to the following areas:

- Parish mission statement
- Over-all pastoral needs of the parish
- Strengthening a sense of solidarity among all entities
- Undertakings that unify the parish
- Emergent trends
- Recommendations on conflicting needs, requests and issues that arise among the various communities
- Fostering collaboration and sharing among all programs

The same principle would apply for parishes having distinct language groupings within the whole. Outreach to the specific community needs its own advisory group but leadership from that group needs to be part of the PPC to ensure the unity and harmony of the whole. Like the representatives of separate geographic missions, representatives from language or cultural groups bring the needs and wisdom of the group to the PPC but join with the total membership in looking at the pastoral needs of the whole.

Reflection: As you reflect on the call of PPC members in multi-mission parishes, what qualities of leadership are required of members? What training might be necessary for persons to move from strictly representing their group to representing the vision of the whole?