

Pastoral Council Foundation Document and Operating Procedures

St. Joseph Catholic Church ~ Rockdale, Texas

1. Introduction

Recognizing that sound pastoral decisions are informed by the wisdom of the People of God, the documents of the Second Vatican Council (SVC) recommended the establishment of pastoral councils. These documents state that Catholics have a right and duty to express their opinion on what pertains to the good of the Church. Pastors should willingly consult their people, say the SVC documents, and use their prudent advice. By establishing a pastoral council, the pastor acknowledges the wisdom of his parishioners and expresses his desire to share with them his responsibility for the governance of the parish.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the parish pastoral council is to investigate pastoral matters and issues, to consider them thoroughly, and to propose practical conclusions and solutions about them. The council's task is, first of all, to study those matters brought to its attention and shed light on them. Its second task is to reflect on them thoroughly, to discern their true nature, to evaluate and to ponder them. Its final task is to draw sound conclusions and solutions. The council presents these conclusions and solutions to the pastor in the form of recommendations. This threefold task of the council - investigating, considering, and recommending conclusions is called pastoral planning. After the pastor has accepted the recommendations of the council, he directs their implementation. Council members may assist him at his request, but strictly speaking, implementation is the responsibility of the pastor, not the council. The council possesses only a consultative vote. The pastor can either accept the council recommendations or reject them when making his decision on any particular matter. The pastor is to consult the pastoral council on questions of greater importance to the parish, but failure to do so, however, does not result in the invalidity of his juridical acts.

3. Scope

The scope of the council is pastoral matters. These may include everything that pertains to the pastor's ministries of proclaiming God's word, celebrating the sacraments, caring for the faithful, promoting the mission of the Church to the world, and being a good steward of parish resources. The scope includes all the practical matters of parish life. There is, in short, nothing about which the pastor may not consult the council, apart from faith, orthodoxy, moral principles or laws of the universal Church.

4. Criteria for Membership

Pastoral council members are chosen, above all, for their ability to accomplish the main task of the council - the work of investigating, considering, and recommending practical conclusions and solutions. They must be baptized Catholics, in good standing with the Church, who reflect the parish's various neighborhoods, social and professional groups, and apostolates. Finally, they are parishioners noted for their faith, good morals, and prudence.

Other requirements for eligibility on the council include that a person must be at least 18 years of age, must have also received the Sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation, and be EIM compliant. The pastor is to promptly remove a member who is not eligible to serve.

5. Council Membership

A. Selection of Members

The pastoral council consists of seven lay members serving a staggered three year term (*section 5B*) plus the pastor, deacon, and any other clergy/seminarian assigned to St. Joseph (*clergy are ex officio members without voting rights*).

The Seven Lay Members:

Three Representative Members - One from each of the following organizations: The Knights of Columbus, The Ladies Altar Society, and The Guadalupanas. Each organization will choose their respective representative by any means they deem appropriate for their organization. New representative members must be chosen by each group in January of the appropriate year, ready to participate in the council beginning in February.

Three Elected Members - One from each of the three weekend Masses: English Sunday Mass, Spanish Sunday Mass, and the Saturday Evening Mass. New members are nominated by their fellow parishioners and elected in January each year. They must be ready to participate in the council beginning in February.

One Appointed At-large Member - The pastor will solicit for, and appoint a willing member of the parish for a three year term. He should choose an appointee with the goal of balancing the representation on the council; so that, the council is a comprehensive cross-section of all the parishioners at St. Joseph. At any time during the term of the appointed member, the pastor may appoint a different parishioner to replace the previously appointed member. The pastor may also ask the appointed member to serve up to five years.

Members will not be allowed to serve consecutive terms, unless this provision is waived by the pastor for good reason. Members, however, can serve more than one term, just not consecutively.

Any member - representative, elected, or appointed may resign from the council with good reason. They must submit a letter of resignation to the pastor a month prior to their resignation, if at all possible. The pastor has the sole authority to accept the resignation. After the acceptance of any resignation, a new member will assume the role based on the type of member resigning – representative, elected, or appointed. Either a new representative will be sent by the affected group, a new nomination and election will be held, or a new appointment will be made by the pastor. There may be other unforeseen reasons a member cannot fulfill his or her duty. Members may be removed from the council by the pastor if they incur more than 50% meeting absences in any one year, at the sole discretion of the pastor. In any of these instances, the member will be replaced as described in the selection processes above.

A paid employee of the church may not be a member of the pastoral council. The employees of the parish will meet with the pastor in staff or other type meetings as the pastor deems necessary.

B. Membership Terms

Each year, in January one of the three Representative Members will be replaced by a new member from the same group as the member being replaced, so that all groups are still represented on the council.

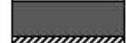

Each year, in January one of the Elected Members will be replaced with a new elected member from the same Mass as the member being replaced, so that all Masses are still being represented on the council.

Every third year, unless decided differently by the pastor (*section 5A*), a new At-large Member will be appointed by the pastor.

Using the description of normal terms given above, once set up, each member will serve a three year term. The terms will be staggered so that only two or three members are replaced in any given year. The following chart shows how the process of the three year staggered term is initiated and then normalized for all members of the pastoral council:

Terms of Service		Initiation Period			Normalized Period...						
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8...		
Representative	Knight of Columbus										
	Altar Society										
	Guadalupanas										
Elected	Saturday Mass										
	Sunday English Mass										
	Sunday Spanish Mass										
Appointed At-large											

Pattern of 3-Year Terms Continues

 = Initial member term
 = 2nd member term
 = 3rd member term

Initiation Period:

- Year 2:** New KC member
New Saturday Mass member
- Year 3:** New Altar Society member
New Sunday English Mass member
- Year 4:** New Guadalupana member
New Sunday Spanish Mass member
New Appointed member

C. Officers and Responsibilities

The pastor is, *ex officio*, the president and presides at every meeting of the council. He consults, he accepts or rejects recommendations, and he develops the agenda with the council officers, if desired. The pastor and members select three officers from among their number. They are the facilitator, vice-facilitator, and secretary. The facilitator helps maintain order and directs the council discussions based on the agenda, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and be heard. The facilitator also monitors the work of the members between regular meetings. The vice-facilitator assists the facilitator and assumes his or her duty during meetings in the facilitator's absence. The secretary keeps the minutes. He or she ensures that the minutes are sent, along with the agenda and supporting documents, to each member at least one week before every meeting. The secretary also works with the parish's administrator and/or web master (if there is one) to ensure that the minutes and the agenda are available to the parishioners in a timely manner.

6. Meetings and Operation

- > Meetings will begin and end with prayer.
- > Meeting dates and times are decided upon by the pastor with input from council members.
- > Meetings may not be officially held without a quorum of half of the council members present. According to these operating procedures, a quorum equates to four members. Without a quorum, any votes taken and any recommendations or decisions made in a meeting are invalid and must be brought up again at the next meeting. The meeting may still be held as more of an informational meeting at the discretion of the pastor. Or, the meeting members may be dismissed by the pastor and a new meeting scheduled.
- > Meetings are to be held once per month or at the discretion of the pastor with a minimum of four meetings per year (quarterly). The agenda should always begin with a reading of the minutes from the previous meeting and motions and approval of those minutes with or without agreed upon changes, using parliamentary procedures.
- > The meeting will proceed as per the pastoral agenda with the pastor leading the meeting with the help of the facilitator.
- > If voting is required on any issue for recommendation purposes for the pastor, the voting method will follow parliamentary procedures with a simple majority of those present determining the outcome. The pastor can accept or reject the outcome of the vote, as the council is merely an advisory body to the pastor. If the pastor rejects the recommendation of the council on any matter, he must explain the reason for his decision to the council.
- > Other committees will be formed as necessary to accomplish the goals of the pastor for the parish using pastor chosen recommendations from the pastoral council. Pastoral council members may or may not be involved in these committees based on their willingness to volunteer and/or appointment by the pastor. The pastor has the final word on the makeup of any committee. Other non-council parishioners will be encouraged to become involved in committee work on behalf of the parish.
 - > The meeting may be opened to the general parish population at the discretion of the pastor, but should normally be a closed meeting. Parishioners should be encouraged by council members to give input on meeting agenda items prior to the commencement of the monthly meeting. This is why it is important to publish the meeting agenda in a timely manner before the meeting date.
- > The meeting agenda and minutes should be published, timely, in any or all of the following ways: in the weekly bulletin, on the website, on the church bulletin boards.
- > All other aspects of the parish council operation that are not outlined in this document may be discussed by the council, recommended to the pastor, and decided upon by the pastor. A regular procedural vote during a council meeting may be needed to gain consensus for recommendation.
- > There should be a combined pastoral council and finance council meeting at least once per year with the goal of clear communication of the parish's financial standings and obligations, so that the pastoral council can provide more informed recommendations to the pastor for his consideration.

7. Changes to Operating Procedures

Any changes to the operating procedures outlined in this document, Section 4 – Section 6, must be discussed and voted on by the pastoral council with 5 out of the 7 members (excludes the pastor) agreeing on the proposed change. This change, if agreed upon, would then be officially recommended to the pastor who has the authority to accept or reject the change.