



PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL GUIDELINES

Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

TO: Priests & Pastoral Administrators
FROM: Most Rev. Anthony M. Milone, D D
DATE: May 26, 1996 - the Feast of Pentecost

Since the Second Vatican Council the Church has made greater efforts to consult among its membership. In parishes, the establishment of pastoral councils has provided the means for the People of God to express their needs and concerns. The Diocese of Great Falls-Billings issued guidelines calling for parish pastoral councils in 1985 during the time of then Bishop Thomas Murphy. I reaffirmed these guidelines in 1990. After many years of experience with councils, these guidelines have been re-examined and evaluated.

Please find enclosed the revised policy on Parish Pastoral Councils. In the past months it has been carefully reviewed by the Priests Council. This is not an entirely new policy, but is a revision and updating of the policy of 1990.

As of this date, I am happy to promulgate this as the official diocesan policy that replaces the policy of 1990.

I encourage you to share these guidelines with your pastoral council members. Efforts to review and study them as a group will be very beneficial. Assistance in understanding and implementing them is available to you through the Pastoral Outreach Team and I encourage you to take advantage of this help.

Thank you for your continued encouragement and support which you provide to your parishioners. May these guidelines support you in your efforts to listen to their concerns and needs.



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I. FORWARD

After the family, the parish is the most important form of community within the diocese. In the parish Christ's faithful are gathered together into one, under the direction of the pastoral leader, priest or parish life coordinator, who represents the bishop among them. Each parish, then, truly reflects, at the local level, the life and mission of the diocese and of the Catholic Church throughout the world. Most fundamentally the parish reflects how Gospel values are lived out by individuals, by families, by the community. The parish exists to assist parishioners in their Christian mission as followers of Jesus, Prophet, Priest and Servant-King¹.

The concept of a Parish Pastoral Council emerged from the ecclesiological principles of the Second Vatican Council. Documents issued by the Council stressed the need for church structures consistent with the Council's emphasis on the church as the People of God. To ensure the expanding role of the laity within parishes, structures were needed to facilitate new levels of cooperation between the clergy and the laity in sharing responsibility for the mission of the church.

Pastoral Council structures began to emerge throughout the world in the 1970s. With the promulgation of the revised Code of Canon Law (the First Sunday of Advent, 1983) Councils received official recognition by the church. Canon 536² provided direction to diocesan bishops with regard to Council formation. Bishops were advised that after consulting with their Presbyteral Councils, they could mandate the establishment of Parish Pastoral Councils in all parishes.

The parameters for such consultative bodies were to be determined by each bishop, and guidelines reflecting the spirit of the Second Vatican Council were to be drafted for promulgation within each diocese.

¹ Chapter 2 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Vatican Council II (*Lumen Gentium*) describes the understanding of the ancient designation of priest, prophet and king and its application to the role of the laity.

² Canon 536:

1. *After the diocesan bishop has listened to the presbyteral council and 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.*
2. *This pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop.*



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Bishop Anthony M. Milone recognized and approved the guidelines originally promulgated by then Bishop Thomas J. Murphy in 1985. With promulgation of this document Bishop Milone is renewing the diocesan commitment to Pastoral Councils. This revised text is based upon the experience of Councils throughout the diocese over the past ten years. In redrafting the guidelines the diocese acknowledges its indebtedness to the many parish leaders, lay and ordained, who have taken seriously the directive to establish effective Pastoral Councils within their faith communities.

Central to these guidelines is reaffirmation that the basic mission of each faith community, large or small, urban or rural, is to call its members to be followers of Jesus as Prophet, Priest and Servant-King.

II. PURPOSE OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

As Parish Pastoral Councils have evolved since Vatican II, the church has become better able to respond to questions regarding the reasons underlying formation of such Councils. While appreciating the fact that active Councils fulfill a wide range of purposes, the church gives primary consideration to the fact that the Parish Pastoral Council is a consultative body with which the pastoral leader interacts in order to identify and provide direction for the spiritual life, ministry priorities, broad goals, strategic planning and policy-making of a parish. In its origin the Pastoral Council is solidly based on theological principles for its existence and its activity. In serving on Councils, Catholic Christians are responding in a vital way to their Baptismal call.

Functioning as a consultative body the Parish Pastoral Council concerns itself with the following aspects of parish life:

- A. Promoting through parish life and through the action of the Council's Commissions the following of Jesus as Prophet, Priest and Servant-King;
- B. Building a community of faith able to make the church present and functioning within the parish's locale;
- C. Calling forth, enabling and empowering the charisms, gifts given by the Holy Spirit to individual members of the faith community for the good of all;
- D. Enhancing the quality of parish life and parish activity;



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- E. Facilitating growth of a community united in faith and witnessing to gospel values within the parish and within the everyday world of parish members;
- F. Giving the pastoral leader access to the best counsel that can be provided within the parish on issues affecting its life and mission.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL

At the very heart of the Council's service is the promotion of the pastoral life of the People of God within a given parish. Council members are called upon to form among themselves a unifying, loving, prayerful, mission-oriented community; a community which provides a model for the broader parish.

The Council exercises its responsibilities by making recommendations to the pastoral leader as it engages in such pastoral activities as these:

- A. Leading the parish in formulating, maintaining and evaluating its evolving expression of mission in response to the movement of the Spirit (Appendix Five);
 - 1. Consulting with others in recommending priorities which emerge from a periodic needs assessment (Appendix Six);
 - 2. Establishing short and long-range goals and objectives based upon these pastoral planning priorities;
- B. Working to achieve the active involvement of all in the faith community, including the marginal, the alienated, and the unevangelized;
- C. Seeking ways to assist parishioners in the exercise of their rights and responsibilities as recognized in the New Code of Canon Law (Canons 208, 221.3);
- D. Helping the parish to identify with the broader church, e.g., by strengthening the relationship of the parish with the diocese, the Catholic Church in our nation and throughout the world;
- E. Furthering the ministerial efforts of the parish in worship, education, social service, evangelization, family life, communications, administration, ecumenism, stewardship and other important aspects of parish life (see section V);



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- F. Acting as a stabilizing force in the parish at times when parish members are particularly affected by change and transition.

IV MODE OF OPERATION

Basic to the operation of the Parish Pastoral Council is the willingness of Council members to inform themselves regarding church directives (e.g., canonical/diocesan policies, guidelines, communications) affecting their ministry within the parish faith community. This is an ongoing task.

The Pastoral Council typically functions in two ways: first, as a committee of the whole establishing mission statements, priorities, goals and objectives for the entire parish; and, second, through its commissions, promoting the following of Jesus as Prophet (Education Commission), Priest (Worship Commission) and Servant-King (Christian Service Commission). It functions in a variety of ways as is indicated below.

- A. The Council demonstrates its respect for the Baptismal call of each parishioner and for the service roles fulfilled by individuals and groups with whom it maintains specific relationships:

1. Pastoral Leader (Pastor/Parish Life Coordinator)

The Pastoral Council is a consultative body to the pastoral leader whose authority it recognizes and respects. A high level of cooperation between the pastoral leader and the Council benefits the parish which both are called to serve. As a full participant in all Council meetings, the pastoral leader has the opportunity and obligation to share with the members information that will affect recommendations they are considering. For this reason, the pastoral leader will rarely need to override a serious recommendation of the Council. If this is necessary, the pastoral leader shares with the Council the substantial reasons for his or her decision.

Ultimately, it is the pastoral leader who decides which recommendations suggested by the Council are accepted for implementation.



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2. Parish Finance Council

The Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council are distinct consultative bodies. Just as the Pastoral Council concerns itself with mission and the furthering of spiritual values within the faith community, the Finance Council concerns itself with placing the financial and other material resources of the parish at the service of its pastoral priorities. For each Council to fulfill its responsibilities effectively, mutual understanding and support between the two Councils is required. Therefore, good communication and close collaboration between the Councils are essential.

Respecting the specific responsibilities assigned to the Finance Council by Canon Law (Canon 537), the Pastoral Council works closely with the Finance Council. The two are interdependent, sharing concern for the life and mission of the parish.

The Parish Pastoral Council must exercise its responsibility to set priorities and to set short and long range goals in order to enable the Finance Council fully to exercise its role.

3. Pastoral Staff (Paid/Volunteer)

As a consultative body the Parish Pastoral Council is responsible for establishing directions and strategies to promote the pastoral life of the parish. Staff members (paid/volunteer) fulfill an administrative function in implementing the directions and strategies indicated by the Pastoral Council. Collaboration between those who set direction and those who fulfill an administrative role is essential for the well-being of the parish. Staff members serve in a resource capacity to the Council and to any of its Commissions that relate to their respective areas of ministry. In fulfilling its role, however, the parish staff is responsible to the pastoral leader and not to the Pastoral Council.

4. Others: Committees, Organizations and Groups

As a way of informing itself and maintaining a high level of cooperation within the parish and diocese, the Council collaborates with committees, organizations and groups as appropriate and helpful (e.g., Diocesan Pastoral Council, Parish Council of Catholic



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Women, Knights of Columbus, civic organizations, project leaders and committees, etc.).

- B. The Council communicates both within the parish using all the various means available (e.g., announcements, letters, bulletins, surveys, minutes of meetings, gatherings, home/parish visiting, etc.), and beyond the parish (e.g., with others in the vicariate, with specific offices in the diocesan structure, etc.) to seek or to share information.
- C. The Council respects the proper roles and responsibilities of its commissions, recognizing the right of commission members to report directly to the parish leader when recommendations fall within the scope of the commission's work when the impact on the parish is of a limited nature or when the recommendation suggested is already authorized in the parish goals and budget. When commission recommendations affect the whole parish either directly or indirectly they should be brought to the Parish Pastoral Council for review.
- D. Ordinarily, in deference to the life of the Holy Spirit animating its members the Council operates in a consensual manner. Council members are parish leaders who come together as baptized persons. As people of prayer, Council members exercise leadership not only because of their personal gifts, experiences, credibility and opinions but also because by listening to the voice of the Spirit speaking through each member and at work in the group as a community of faith, their discussions and judgments represent far more than the ordinary pooling of talents and ideas. Whereas secular bodies may operate from the principle of one person-one vote, or in response to a constituency of electors, Council members are called upon to serve in a spirit of discipleship as followers of Jesus.
- E. The Council acts in an accountable manner. It carries out its role, discharging its responsibilities and exercising its authority in terms of its proper relationship with the diocese, the pastoral leader and members of the parish-at-large.
- F. The Council conducts an annual self-evaluation, reviewing its fidelity to the parish mission statement and to the fulfillment of its purposes (Appendices Four and Five).



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V. PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL COMMISSIONS: An Overview of Structure & Tasks

Parish Pastoral Councils in the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings ordinarily have three commissions all of which are directed to ministry. The Worship Commission of the parish serves as a reminder that we are followers of Jesus who is High Priest and who calls us to be a priestly people. The Education Commission recalls the Prophetic ministry of Jesus and the prophetic role we are to play as disciples. The Christian Service Commission is devoted to the work of Jesus as Servant-King. Whether large or small, rural or urban, formally or informally structured, all viable faith communities of the diocese strive to reflect in life and in mission this three-fold character of those who follow Jesus, the Christ.

A. Purpose of Council Commissions

Each commission of the Pastoral Council addresses the community's priorities and goals within a particular area of parish life: worship, education or Christian service. Where a parish mission statement is in place the work of commissions is to facilitate and further that mission within each of the three key areas of parish life.

B. Scope of Commissions

All Council commissions are accountable to the Pastoral Council. Commissions make decisions in their respective areas of responsibility following the principle of subsidiarity (i.e., decisions are made at the most appropriate level of parish organization).

C. Membership

Commissions are usually made up of people already active in a specific area of ministry in the parish.

The size of a commission varies from parish to parish. Usually there are from three to ten members and, in parishes large enough to have paid or volunteer staffs, it is common for staff members to sit on commissions not as a member but as resource persons (e.g., a liturgist on the Worship Commission, a DRE on the Education Commission, etc.).



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One member of the commission serves as the link or liaison person with the Parish Pastoral Council. This person is an elected or appointed Council member who sits on the commission, attending its meetings, becoming knowledgeable about its ministry to the parish and informing him/herself of ways the Council is living out the parish mission statement. This liaison between the Council and its commissions is *key* to harmonious and unified parish life.

D. Meetings

Commissions meet periodically (in some parishes every other month) including in their membership those in the parish primarily responsible for a particular aspect of parish life (worship, education, Christian service). Worship Commission meetings, for example, might include a parish sacristan, cantors and musicians, lectors and Eucharistic ministers, ushers and ministers of hospitality, etc.

Care should be exercised in scheduling these, or any, parish meetings so that active parishioners will not become overextended. One solution might be to alternate between Council meetings (September, November, January and April) and commission meetings held on alternate months -- same weekday, same time, same place, same time-frame. Some parishes prefer to hold council and commission meetings on the same night with a refreshment break or potluck between. Maintaining a parish calendar helps members schedule meetings that are frequent enough without being excessive, helps members avoid scheduling conflicts and helps members and their families plan for and anticipate parish meetings.

E. Tasks

Commissions are most effective when they keep their tasks “do-able,” concrete, focused. Some basic functions of commissions:

1. Identify needs of the parish within the commission’s area of responsibility and in keeping with the parish’s mission statement.
2. Prioritize among these and discern what can be addressed realistically within a given time-frame and where inter-commission collaboration might further a priority.
3. Formulate a few, well-chosen short and long-term goals/objectives.
4. Research and explore options to implement goals (seek assistance from diocesan offices and other resources that can guide implementation processes).



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5. Communicate progress to the Pastoral Council through a contact person or liaison, through oral or written reports.
6. Maintain communication with the parish to further understanding, to educate, to elicit support and involvement.
7. Provide for on-going formation of commission members by planning in-service programs, reflection days, retreat experiences, attendance at workshops sponsored by the diocese, etc.
8. Propose a budget in keeping with the priorities of the commission and the mission statement of the parish faith community and make budget recommendations to the Pastoral Council.
9. Undertake a periodic evaluation of parish life from the perspective of the commission's services and efforts.

F. Officers

Each commission is served by a chairperson who convenes and chairs meetings, gathers items for the agenda and collaborates closely with the Pastoral Council liaison in order to keep the Council informed regarding the ongoing work of the commission, and by a secretary who assists the chairperson in publishing and circulating the agenda and takes minutes at meetings. The person serving as Pastoral Council liaison may also serve as a commission chair if chosen by a commission to do so. Staff members, however, are ineligible to serve as commission officers.

G. Mode of Operation

Commissions accomplish their work by gathering information, by discernment and prayerful reflection, by sharing wisdom -- all within a consensual process. Commissions are inclusive, strategizing to inform and involve others in the parish in commission ministry. They are strong on collaboration and communication, aiming always to be open, flexible, and creative. Agendas include:

- **PLANNING** prepare, think, gather information, anticipate questions, welcome options;
- **INSERVICE** learn, grow, attend workshops, read on commission topics, use diocesan and other resources and speakers;



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- **INFORMATION** deal with informational reports briefly, keep folks informed, don't belabor points, communicate;
- **DECISIONS** gather facts, seek opinions, discuss, pray, postpone if necessary, seek consensus, keep the common good in mind;
- **FEEDBACK** listen, don't take offense, accept praise and blame, rejoice in strong points, address weaknesses.

H. Terms

There is great diversity among parishes regarding terms of office for commission members. In smaller parishes there may be a particular group that focuses on worship, for example, with a chairperson selected annually to report to the Pastoral Council. In larger or more highly-organized parishes the commission members might serve for three years, much as a Pastoral Council member would serve. A term may be renewed on a repeated basis.

VI. PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL COMMISSIONS: FUNCTIONS

EDUCATION COMMISSION

Typical Activities/Responsibilities (*Following of Jesus as Prophet*)

- exercise servant leadership
- attend to Mission of parish
- assess parish needs for formation/catechesis in faith
- take steps to grow in familiarity with church teachings
- study and follow diocesan guidelines in education/catechesis
- oversee parish life as it pertains to:

catechesis	youth ministry
adult ed	sacramental prep
- oversee instruction for sacramental preparation
- subscribe to recommended publications
- utilize printed materials from recommended publishers
- take advantage of diocesan programs
for example:

CLI	Youth Conferences	summer camp
TEMPUS	FORUM	scripture study
lectionary	Thieltges grants	renewal/retreat



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- pursue opportunities for ongoing education/formation
 - provide for periodic evaluation
 - grow in familiarity with varying approaches to/methods of catechesis

WORSHIP COMMISSION

Typical Activities/Responsibilities *(Following of Jesus as Priest)*

- exercise servant leadership
- attend to Mission of parish
- grow in familiarity with liturgy documents and diocesan guidelines for celebration of liturgy and the sacraments (including first celebration of the sacraments)
- utilize LTP materials and other recommended resources
- learn what is essential to liturgy preparation and oversee celebration of sacraments
- review how liturgies for RCIA are celebrated
- assess, attend to spiritual and renewal needs
- oversee liturgy preparation and scheduling: e.g.
 - lay leaders of prayer sacristans cantors
 - ministers of hospitality choirs lectors
 - proclaimers of the Word servers musicians
 - eucharistic ministers
- promote appropriate environment, art for worship
- encourage celebration of sacraments at Sunday Eucharist
- foster communication, collaboration, consultation
- seek opportunities for education and formation
- provide for periodic evaluation
- be mindful of the domestic church

CHRISTIAN SERVICE COMMISSION

Typical Activities/Responsibilities *(Following of Jesus as Servant-King)*

- exercise servant leadership
- attend to Mission of parish
- grow in familiarity with Church social teachings
- study bishops' pastoral letters on action for justice
- foster a "spirituality of justice" through worship, prayer
- be sensitive to the community's experience of:
 - poverty alienation joblessness
 - hunger abuse isolation



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housing	crime	farm and rural issues
gangs	prejudice	discrimination
ill health	neglect	powerlessness, etc.

- foster networking, communication, collaboration
- utilize adult formation and education processes
- set reasonable, measurable goals
- act, where possible, on behalf of justice
- seek to transform unjust structures
- provide for periodic evaluation

VII. APPLICATION OF THESE GUIDELINES

This document sets forth broad principles governing the working of Parish Pastoral Councils throughout the diocese. It is the task of every parish to adapt these principles to its particular circumstances and to reflect them in its Council Constitution.

Approved by Most Reverend Anthony M. Milone
Bishop of Great Falls-Billings
May 26, 1996