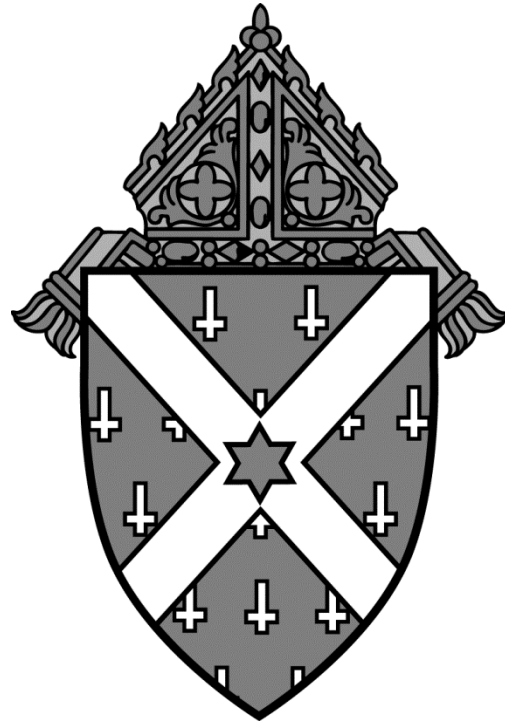


# Diocesan Policies for Parish Pastoral Councils



DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

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## **1. REQUIREMENT, PURPOSE, RESPONSIBILITIES AND OBJECTIVES**

- 1.1 **Requirement.** The Code of Canon Law states that a Pastoral Council “is to be established in each parish” if the diocesan bishop “judges it opportune” (c. 536 §1). Accordingly, the Bishop of Little Rock has decided that each parish is to have a Pastoral Council. Thus, choosing not to have a Pastoral Council is not an option for either a parish or for a Pastor/Administrator.
- 1.2 **Purpose:** Except as otherwise provided for in these Policies, each parish/mission in the Diocese of Little Rock is to have a Pastoral Council, the purpose of which is to assist the Pastor/Administrator in his leadership role of planning, organizing, initiating, promoting, coordinating, and reviewing the broader pastoral objectives of the parish/mission.
- 1.3 **Responsibilities and Objectives:**
  - 1.3.a To assess the needs of the entire parish and its members, and to advise the Pastor/Administrator regarding those needs. Although the parish’s needs may include decisions related to personnel matters, in general the Council is not to be consulted on matters directly pertaining to specific personnel decisions, which are the proper purview solely of the Pastor/Administrator.
  - 1.3.b To foster unity and a sense of community in the parish.
  - 1.3.c To coordinate all parish activities in a manner that will best serve the interests of the parish, especially in fulfilling the purpose of the Pastoral Council.
  - 1.3.d To advise the Pastor/Administrator and help him direct the parish/mission in various aspects of parish life, including: liturgy; adult and youth faith formation; charitable activities and outreach; stewardship; fellowship; and overall parish life.
  - 1.3.e To promote programs and activities recommended by the Bishop, diocesan offices, and affiliated agencies and organizations, as well as the Pastoral Council itself.

## **2. MEMBERSHIP**

- 2.1 There shall be at least three (3) and no more than twelve (12) members in a Pastoral Council. The Pastor/Administrator is not a member of the Council but presides over it, and thus he does not count towards the number of members in a Council.
- 2.2 The Pastoral Council By-Laws can provide for the selection of members of the Council in the following ways: (1) by appointment of the Pastor/Administrator; (2) by election from amongst the members of the parish/mission; or (3) some combination of #1 and #2.
- 2.3 If the Pastoral Council By-Laws provide that some members be selected by election, it is for the Pastor/Administrator to nominate individuals to stand for election and/or to approve any parishioners who nominate themselves for election, with the input of the Council and others in the parish community. A Pastor/Administrator must always see to it that more than one person is nominated for a seat to be filled by election.

- 2.4 Any registered, active member of the parish/mission who is at least eighteen (18) years of age and is in full communion with the Catholic Church is eligible to be a member of the Council. Council members must have the ability to: consider the needs of the entire parish; listen to and consider the ideas of others; be committed to attending meetings; and maintain a respectful attitude towards the teachings and beliefs of the Catholic Church.
- 2.5 The Pastoral Council By-Laws should include provision for the appointment by the Pastor/Administrator of *ex officio* members of the Council.
- 2.6 Paid staff members, including employees of the parish's school if the parish has a school, are not to be appointed or elected as members of the Council, but they may be present for Council meetings as needed or as directed by the Pastor/Administrator.
- 2.7 Associate pastors, deacons, and volunteers of the parish/mission are not automatically members of the Council, but they may be present at Council meetings when needed or as directed by the Pastor/Administrator. These persons do not count toward the total number of members of the Council, and they do not have a consultative vote as part of the Council.
- 2.8 The Pastor/Administrator shall devise the method for removing any delinquent members from the Council.
- 2.9 If it seems practical and productive, the Pastor/Administrator of more than one parish/mission may establish a single Pastoral Council for his parishes and missions, so long as all parishes/missions are equitably represented.
- 2.10 If a parish has more than one predominant language group, there may be "councils" that represent each distinctive language group for communication purposes—but the parish as a whole must establish one unified Pastoral Council, which would be equitably comprised from members of the various language groups.
- 2.11 Smaller parishes may find it difficult or ineffective to have a Council with formal membership (section 2), formal terms of office (section 3), and formal officers (section 4). In such cases, at the discretion of the Pastor/Administrator, the Council membership and meetings may follow a more informal "town hall" style format, in which the membership of the Parish at large is welcome to attend and participate.

### **3. TERMS**

- 3.1 Members shall be selected for staggered terms of three (3) years.
- 3.2 No member shall serve more than two (2) consecutive terms, whether that member is elected or appointed. A term-limited member can be eligible for selection again after an interim period of one full term (i.e., three years).

- 3.3 Any vacancies shall be filled by the Pastor/Administrator with consultation of the Council. An appointment to a vacant seat shall be for the remainder of the vacant seat's term period, and such appointments are not considered one of the two permitted consecutive terms.
- 3.4 For a just cause, a Pastor/Administrator may remove a member of the Council prior to the expiration of his/her term.

#### **4. OFFICERS**

- 4.1 The Council is to select from among its members a Chair, a Vice-Chair, and a Secretary, whose terms are for one (1) year, renewable.
- 4.2 In addition to other duties assigned by the Pastor/Administrator: the Chair normally conducts the meetings of the Council (with the Pastor/Administrator presiding); the Vice-Chair assists the Chair to the extent necessary; and the Secretary records detailed minutes and composes a summary of those minutes. If the taking of minutes inhibits a member from full participation in the consultation process, the Pastor/Administrator may appoint a non-member to record minutes.
- 4.3 If there is a vacancy in one of the officer positions, the Council is to fill that position for the remainder of the term at the first meeting following such vacancy.

#### **5. MEETINGS**

- 5.1 The Council should strive to meet regularly, at an interval to be determined by the Pastor/Administrator and the Council (e.g., monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, etc.). A Council must hold at least two (2) meetings during any given fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).
- 5.2 Regular meetings of the Council may not occur without the presence of the Pastor/Administrator or his delegate. Only the Pastor/Administrator may call a special meeting.
- 5.3 A well-planned agenda for each meeting is advisable. The method of preparing the agenda is up to the discretion of the Pastor/Administrator.
- 5.4 The Council is to adopt separate By-Laws, which are subject to approval by the Pastor/Administrator and which must be consistent with the Code of Canon Law and these diocesan policies on Pastoral Councils. The areas that the By-Laws may address include but are not limited to the following: ways to help the Council fulfill its purpose, responsibilities, and objectives as defined in sections 1.2-1.3; the selection and nomination of members and *ex officio* members as outlined in sections 2.3-2.5; ways to

better facilitate Council meetings; and possible committees or sub-committees of the Council.

- 5.5 The Pastoral Council may form sub-committees to work on more specific areas of the pastoral life of the parish/mission, such as: liturgy; adult and youth faith formation; charitable activities and outreach; stewardship; fellowship; and overall parish life
- 5.6 As a general rule Council meetings are open to parishioners, unless due to the nature of the matters under consideration the Council decides to meet in executive session. At his discretion, the Pastor/Administrator may permit non-members to speak at an open meeting on specific agenda items, and it is for the Pastor/Administrator to determine the manner in which non-members may speak.
- 5.7 As a consultative body, the Council does not necessarily need to vote on all matters in order to fulfill its function, and indeed the Council should strive to reach consensus on all matters that it considers. However, for any acts of extraordinary administration which require the Bishop's permission or approval, the Pastor/Administrator must hear and obtain a consultative vote from the Pastoral Council prior to seeking the Bishop's permission or approval (see Appendix II). The Pastor/Administrator may also ask the Council to vote on other matters. The Council's vote is always non-binding and merely consultative (c. 536 §2).
- 5.8 The detailed minutes of the meetings are to be retained permanently in a file at the parish office.
- 5.9 Each meeting should open and close with a prayer.

## **6. PASTOR/ADMINISTRATOR**

- 6.1 As chief governing officer of the juridic person of the parish/mission, the Pastor/Administrator is to convene and preside at all Council meetings and participate in its activities.
- 6.2 When a Pastor/Administrator leaves a parish through transfer, retirement, or death, all formal activity of the Council ceases until the new Pastor/Administrator reconvenes the Council.
- 6.3 The new Pastor/Administrator may establish or amend any procedures in these policies that are "at the discretion of the Pastor/Administrator," including any amendments or modifications to the Council By-Laws. Any such established or amended procedures are to be put in writing and communicated to the Council.
- 6.4 In exceptional circumstances, after consultation with and consent from the Bishop or Diocesan Administrator, a newly-appointed Pastor/Administrator may dissolve the Pastoral Council. In the event of a Council dissolution, the newly-appointed

Pastor/Administrator is to reconstitute a new Council within four (4) months of his appointment.

- 6.5 The Pastor/Administrator may publish a summary of the Council minutes in the parish bulletin or in another publicly-available electronic or physical location shortly after each meeting.

## **7. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FINANCE COUNCIL AND OTHER BOARDS**

- 7.1 The Pastoral Council is distinct from the Finance Council. Under Church law, there is no such entity as a “Parish Council.” Rather, there is a “Pastoral Council” (c. 536) and a “Finance Council” (c. 537), both of which are councils of the Parish, and both of which have their own distinct roles and responsibilities.
- 7.2 The Pastoral Council should endeavor to maintain a quality of communication with the Finance Council which would enable each to share a common awareness of the overall mission and pastoral vision of the parish in all consultation.
- 7.3 Where there is a School Board or other special board, care should be taken to allow these boards to operate according to diocesan norms and in harmony with the Pastoral Council. The Pastoral Council has no oversight or authority over a School Board or a school. However, the Pastor must consult with the Pastoral Council prior to any of the following school-related actions: (a) recommending to the Bishop that a school be opened or closed; (b) requesting permission from the Bishop to initiate construction projects pertaining to the school; or (c) determining the amount of parish subsidy to be allocated to the school.
- 7.4 The Pastor/Administrator may appoint a representative of the Finance Council and School Board as *ex officio* members of the Pastoral Council should he deem it productive; such representatives do not count towards the total number of members of the Pastoral Council. The Pastor/Administrator may also, on occasion, invite a member of these bodies to a Pastoral Council meeting to discuss a specific agenda item.

**APPENDIX I**

	<b>Parish Administration</b> (includes Assoc. Pastor & parish staff)	<b>Pastoral Council</b>	<b>Finance Council</b>
<b>Pastor's Role</b>	Oversees daily parish operations and staff	Convenes and presides over	Convenes and presides over
<b>Membership</b>	Hired or appointed by Pastor	Selected by election, appointment or some combination thereof; excludes parish staff	Appointed by Pastor; excludes parish staff, except as consultants; excludes close relatives of Pastor and those with conflicts of interest
<b>Terms</b>	N/A	3 years; eligible to serve a second consecutive 3-year term, then must go off the Council for one full term	3 years, renewable until change in Pastor
<b>Focus</b>	Day-to-day ministry and administration of the parish	Long-range pastoral planning for the common good of the parish; foster unity and a sense of community	Annual budget; long-range financial planning; assist with effective management of parish assets
<b>Areas of Responsibility</b>	Matters pertaining to a job description or specific area of parish life	Assists the Pastor in his leadership role of planning, organizing, promoting, coordinating, and reviewing the evangelization, worship, religious education, and service objectives	Matters pertaining to budget, facilities, or development; financial reports to the parish; studies revenues/expenses of the parish and makes recommendations
<b>Relationship to Pastoral Plan</b>	Assists as a resource	Develops, monitors, and evaluates plan	Assists as a resource
<b>Relationship to Pastor</b>	Accountable to Pastor	Consultative to Pastor	Consultative to Pastor
<b>Method of Decision-Making</b>	By consensus when appropriate	By consensus	By consensus when appropriate
<b>Meetings</b>	As deemed necessary	Regularly, with at least 2 meetings each fiscal year	At least quarterly



## APPENDIX II

The following are defined as acts of ordinary and extraordinary administration within the Diocese of Little Rock.

### Acts of Ordinary Administration

Acts of ordinary administration are the normal business dealings that are done routinely or regularly in order to maintain ecclesiastical goods (e.g., parish accounts, tangible property, real property, and buildings). Ordinary acts include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Reviewing, planning, tracking, and preparing the budget
2. Preparing routine financial reports
3. Overseeing proper maintenance and upkeep of parish buildings and property
4. Evaluating insurance coverage needs
5. Evaluating overall financial needs
6. Collecting and accounting for regular income, debt, rent, and interest
7. Paying routine invoices and bills
8. Maintaining and overseeing the financial accounts of the parish/mission
9. Making routine purchases
10. Accepting gifts and bequests
11. Carrying out other routine acts of finance and administration that a Pastor/Administrator performs in the regular course and scope of his day-to-day responsibilities.

### Acts of Extraordinary Administration

Acts of extraordinary administration are those that do not routinely occur in the normal course and scope of the business dealings of the parish/mission. Within the Diocese of Little Rock, acts of extraordinary administration include only the following:

1. Leasing or renting parish/mission property in such a way as to subject the parish/mission to a permanent or long-term financial or regulatory burden.
2. Purchasing or selling real property or real estate.
3. Capital expenditures that exceed \$5,000 or 1% of the annual parish revenue, whichever is greater.
4. All renovation, repair, and construction of any church property exceeding the dollar amount established by the Diocesan Building Commission.
5. Accepting gifts, bequests, or donations to the parish/mission that entail a restriction, such as the imposition on the parish/mission of any legal, financial, or modal obligation (c. 1267 §2).
6. Entering into a financial transaction (including donating money to a third party) which could worsen the patrimonial condition of the parish/mission (see c. 1295).
7. Initiating or contesting a civil lawsuit (see c. 1288).
8. Instituting financial campaigns, drives, special collections, or major fund raising events other than those already approved and required by the Diocese.
9. Alienating (i.e., transferring ownership of) parish/mission property which: (i) exceeds \$5,000 in value (c. 1291); (ii) was given to the parish/mission by vow (c. 1292 §2); or (iii) is precious for artistic or historical reasons (c. 1292 §2).
10. Applying for a loan from the Diocese or any other lending institution.
11. Establishing a school or a cemetery.

### **APPENDIX III**

#### **Relevant Canons from the Code of Canon Law**

**Canon 532.** In all juridic affairs the pastor represents the parish according to the norm of law. He is to take care that the goods of the parish are administered according to the norm of cann. 1281-1288.

**Canon 536 §1.** If the diocesan bishop judges it opportune after he has heard the presbyteral council, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.

§2. A pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by the norms established by the diocesan bishop.

**Canon 537.** In each parish there is to be a finance council which is governed, in addition to universal law, by norms issued by the diocesan bishop and in which the Christian faithful, selected according to these same norms, are to assist the pastor in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to the prescript of can. 532.