

St. John the Baptist Pastoral Council Operating Norms

The Pastoral Council is a consultative body rather than a governing body. Issues discussed are determined through consensus.

Membership

Membership on the parish pastoral council is not normally a matter either of appointment by the pastor or election by popular vote. However, because leadership ministry requires particular gifts, a process of discernment with the guidance of the Holy Spirit should choose council members.

Council Size

The size of the council may be ten members. But in the case of partnered parishes or of a very small parish, this number may vary to maximize effectiveness. There is no need for alternate members since 100% commitment is expected from each member, with the hope that continued presence and participation promotes a sense of community among the members so necessary for effective leadership.

Council terms

The terms of council may be on a rotating basis using the discernment process every two years. The initial members determine rotation of the first council and then new members may be added to fill seats as they are vacated. Some initial members may choose to continue to serve. The discernment process should occur each time in November so that new members may begin in December.

Attendance

Members are expected to attend all meetings. Those who miss 20% of the meetings during a year may be asked to resign.

Resignation

A Council member has the right to resign for reasonable cause. A letter of resignation should be sent to the pastor in such situations.

Discerning Members

Council members are selected through a process of prayerful discernment. This approach identifies those with gifts for the ministry of leadership and comes to consensus about which parishioners are needed to carry on the leadership role. A parishioner may write a letter of intent to the pastor or meet with him in person before the initial discernment.

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Information

The parish at large is given information about requirements needed for the role of a pastoral council member. They are asked to identify parishioners who, in their experience, possess these gifts. In general, council members need to be:

- Women and men of prayerful faith, motivated by the desire to grow in faith themselves and to see similar spiritual growth in the parish
- Optimistic and enthusiastic about the future of the parish
- Desirous of working within model of shared leadership, i.e., one based not on power or authority, but on collaboration and consensus
- Eager about facilitating parish efforts to identify its mission and goals
- Capable of the careful listening to others' ideas, of articulating their own ideas, and of practicing the art of building consensus
- Willing to invite, delegate and encourage parishioners to bring the parish pastoral plan to fruition

Discernment, Part 1

After names surface from the parish (including input from the pastor and current council members), all potential members come together to learn more about the ministry of leadership. Such sessions might include:

- A time of prayer focused on call, giftedness, service, discipleship or other Scriptural themes related to the ministry of leadership
- Foundational theology of Church and ministry, basic history and background on the role of councils in the diocese and parish
- Clarifications about the constitutive elements of pastoral life
- Basic information on parish statistics and liaisons with other parts of the local Church for shared activities
- Information from the present council on the status of the pastoral plan and its anticipated direction
- Expectations about practical matters, such as time commitment, frequency of meetings, role of prayer and faith sharing in meetings, specific tasks assumed by members in regard to the inner functioning of the council
- Time for questions from potential members
- Opportunity for potential members to consider and declare whether they feel attracted and called to this ministry

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Discernment, Part 2

Those who have determined that they wish to be considered for membership on the pastoral council gather with the pastor and current council. This process takes place within a context of prayer and involves the actual selection of new council members. It may include the following:

- Self-introduction by potential members, focused primarily on their relationship with and history of involvement in the parish
- Open-ended questions addressed by potential members around their perceptions of the mission of the parish, their hopes and dreams for the future of the parish, their own self-awareness of their gifts for this ministry
- Decision by the potential council member to withdraw from consideration after discussion of the open ended questions
- Additional rounds of questions, responses, and choices when discernment is not completely clear
- Affirmation and blessings of those selected for the council
- Announcement to the parish community of who has been discerned for this ministry
- Update names and photographs on the parish website

Meetings

- There should be at least nine (9) regularly scheduled monthly meetings in a calendar year.
- Should a regularly scheduled meeting fall on a holiday or become cancelled; the meeting will be rescheduled on the comparable weekday of the same month.
- The Pastor or Facilitator (in cooperation with the pastor) may call special Pastoral Council meetings. No other business shall be conducted at a special meeting except such business as stated in the notice for a special meeting.
- All regular meetings of the Council shall be open to all members of the Parish. The Pastoral Council may meet in special session, but all decisions must be made public at the next regular meeting.
- A parishioner who wishes to have an item placed on the agenda of a Pastoral Council meeting may do so by requesting, in writing, that the Pastor place his/her item on the following month's agenda.
- Reasonable notice of desire to attend should be made to the pastor prior to the meeting.

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- Visitors may not be permitted to speak unless they have been added to the agenda.
- Pastoral Council meeting times should be published in the bulletin prior to the meetings.
- Full meeting minutes will be published on the parish website and made available upon request at the parish office.

Responsibilities and Roles

For good organization specific responsibilities and roles within the council should be inaugurated. Three persons compromise the AGENDA TEAM, which collaborates on preparing agendas for important pastoral council meetings and events:

- **PASTOR** The Pastor presides by assuring that the council performs its tasks. He sees to the ongoing development, training and replacement of council members and is ultimately accountable for the quality of the planning decisions of the council. He assists the council in developing consensus around particular pastoral issues by sharing information, teaching ecclesial principles or providing his own perspectives from experience. In the end he authorizes any final course of action in relation to the pastoral plan and is the chief spokesperson for that vision to the parish.
- **FACILITATOR** The facilitator organizes the council's work toward the completion of an agenda and ultimately the process parts of pastoral planning. In particular the facilitator should have a knack for group dynamics and be able to listen, respond appropriately to what is going on in the group, and move the agenda towards its end.
- **RECORDER/SCRIBE** The recorder or scribe documents necessary information, disseminating it appropriately.

Committees

The Council relies upon the following standing committees, as needed, to carry out the work of the Parish.

- Festival Committee
- School Advisory Board
- Worship Committee