



ONE BODY, ONE MISSION

Parish Pastoral Councils and *The Church Alive!*

What are Parish Pastoral Councils?

Parish pastoral councils are central to Bishop Zubik's vision of *The Church Alive!* Based on years of research, consultation and pastoral practice, the Diocese of Pittsburgh has established guidelines for parish pastoral councils. Our parish is committed to implementing those guidelines to advance the mission of Christ and His Church.

Pastoral planning is the core responsibility of parish pastoral councils. This activity moves the parish forward into God's design for our future as we become *The Church Alive!*

This week, we will offer some background on parish pastoral councils.

Parish Pastoral Councils ...

Affirm the call received in Baptism

The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the baptismal call of the laity to participate in the Church. Documents such as *The Church in the Modern World* and *On the Apostolate of the Laity* point to the essential role of lay persons. In this spirit, the Nineteenth Diocesan Synod of Pittsburgh in 2000 called for the establishment of a parish pastoral council in every parish in the diocese.

Are prayerful

The members of parish pastoral councils are persons of prayer. They see the value of private prayer for their own personal growth in holiness as well as the value of communal prayer for growth in Christ's community.

Are pastoral

Parish pastoral councils strive to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit among God's people in the parish by investigating pastoral activities affecting the lives of parishioners and by formulating, on behalf of the parish, practical conclusions regarding those activities.

Are representative

Parish pastoral council members represent not one particular group or issue, but all areas of parish life: old and young; men and women; laity, clergy and religious; and people with divergent viewpoints, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds.

Are discerning

Under the authority of the pastor, parish pastoral councils serve at the heart of the parish in coming to know God's will for the parish. Through prayer, reflection on Scripture and study of the teaching of the Church, council members reflect on the parish's mission and plan ways to initiate or strengthen whatever is needed to fulfill that mission.

Are a vital part of *The Church Alive!*

Collaborating with the parish finance council, parish staff, parish organizations and parishioners, the pastor and parish pastoral council lead the parish to envision a fuller manifestation of the Kingdom and invite parishioners into both the vision and its accomplishment.

More information on parish pastoral councils can be found on the diocesan website at www.diopitt.org.



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How do Parish Pastoral Councils serve the Church?

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This week, we will discuss how parish pastoral councils not only serve the parish but also the Church as a whole.

Parish Pastoral Councils ...

Focus on the mission of Christ

It is the task of the parish pastoral council to keep before the faithful of the parish our common baptismal commitment to make Jesus' mission the very mission of the parish. With confidence in the gifts of the Spirit residing in all the baptized, parish pastoral councils craft a pastoral vision in response to the needs of the parishioners and the signs of the times. Then, parishioners are invited to work as one to bring that vision to fulfillment.

See the "big picture" of *The Church Alive!*

Parish pastoral councils educate themselves not only about the demographic trends of the parish, but also about changes in the larger community. When change occurs in the parish and population trends shift, the pastoral council may determine new priorities and needs as it moves through the planning cycle. By seeing the "big picture," the parish can do more together than any one group or person can do alone.

Promote healing and reconciliation

As parish pastoral councils plan for the future of the parish, they seek to foster healing and reconciliation amidst the challenges and changes in parish life. These tasks require pastoral sensitivity, an openness to hear people's stories and a willingness to acknowledge the past. Pastoral councils depend on maintaining right relationships among everyone in the parish and on seeking healing where there has been tension or division in the community.

Affirm the unity of the Church

Parish pastoral councils can connect parishes to achieve important tasks and enhance the pastoral life in a broader area. With sister parishes in a district or the vicariate, or even with parishes across town, parish pastoral councils study their respective geographic areas, learn each other's strengths, assess the pastoral needs of their communities and plan how to become a stronger presence of Christ to the world.

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How do Parish Pastoral Councils work with their pastors?

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This week, we will discuss the relationship between the pastor and the parish pastoral council.

Parish Pastoral Councils ...

Affirm the importance of Holy Orders in the life of the Church

Those who share in the ministerial priesthood through the gift of the sacrament of Holy Orders are specifically directed toward leading the Body of Christ. The pastor is ordained and appointed by the bishop to preside over the Church community. Teachers and guardians of the faith, they unite everyone toward continuing the mission of Christ in our day and age.

Work with the Pastor

As a priest presides at Eucharist, he is surrounded by competent liturgical ministers who express the diversity of gifts God has given for building up the Body of Christ. As he attends to the pastoral needs of his flock, he is assisted by qualified laity as visitors to the homebound or organizers of social outreach efforts. His teaching and preaching are enhanced by the efforts of catechists, evangelization and RCIA teams, and lay-led Scripture study groups. Complex administrative responsibilities are handled by professional lay business managers. Likewise, the pastor works with a lay parish pastoral council to assist him in moving the parish into the future.

Help pastors understand the parish better

While the pastor is responsible for the life of the parish, he shares this blessed burden with all the baptized. Familiar with the particular circumstances of their community, parish pastoral councils can advise the pastor about a parish's history and values, achievements and failures, and dilemmas and demographics.

Keep the mission of Jesus before the parish, *The Church Alive!*

In their vocation as married or single persons, the laity bring gifts and talents to build up the Church. The Church has provided pastors with parish pastoral councils to work with them in discerning the pastoral needs of the parish and keeping before the faithful their baptismal commitment to make the mission of Christ the mission of the parish.

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Parish Pastoral Councils and *The Church Alive!*

What do Parish Pastoral Councils do?

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Parish Pastoral Councils ...

Affirm the importance of parish life

A parish is the primary means for providing pastoral resources for individuals and families, to experience Christian Community and to live out the mission of the Church. The particularities of each parish constitute both its identity and its relationships with others. For this reason, parish pastoral councils pursue their work with a deep sense of responsibility.

Cultivate positive relationships for mission

Parish pastoral councils cultivate relationships and commit to healthy communication with the parish finance council, parish staff, administrative personnel, lay ecclesial ministers and parishioners as a whole. They also commit to form positive relationships with other parishes, their regional vicar and the diocese for the sake of the mission of Christ.

Examine every dimension of parish life

Under the direction of the pastor, the parish pastoral council examines every aspect of the parish's pastoral ministry: worship and spirituality, most especially Sunday Eucharist; catechesis and formation of adults, teens and children; evangelization and outreach; and stewardship and service in charity and justice.

Listen to the parish in a variety of ways

Parish pastoral councils depend on parish assemblies, focus groups, appreciative interviews and surveys to gather information about parishioners' needs and aspirations. Participating in these forums is essential for helping the council to draw the right conclusions and recommend the right course of action to the pastor.

Continuously plan for the future of *The Church Alive!*

Parish pastoral councils use an annual, continuous process to ensure the quality of pastoral life in a parish. This process includes crafting the parish's mission, assessing the parish's needs, developing goals, identifying objectives, implementing those objectives, evaluating programs and celebrating successes. At the end of every year, the planning begins anew.

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