

# NORMS FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS



DIOCESE OF  
LONDON

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The Pastor or Administrator of each parish and Catholic community in the Diocese of London is to establish a Parish Pastoral Council based on the Norms articulated in this document.

The Norms listed below express the common standards, values and aspirations of the Bishop of London concerning the mandate of Parish Pastoral Councils and the formation of their members.

**Basis in Canon Law: *Canon 536 states:***

§1. If, after consulting the Council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a pastoral Council is to be established in each parish. In this Council, which is presided over by the parish priest, Christ's faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral care in the parish, give their help in fostering pastoral action.

§2. This pastoral Council has only a consultative vote, and it is regulated by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop.

**Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils (Councils) in the Diocese of London:**

**A Structure**

1. The Council is a representative body rather than a body of representatives. It is constituted for the good of the whole parish.
  - Council members do not represent committees, groups or constituencies within the parish.
  - Councils are not management boards and do not supervise parish staff or mediate between pastoral leadership, staff and/or parishioners.
2. As required by Canon Law (536 §2), the Council is a consultative body to the pastor. However, the pastor can delegate decision-making to the Council on an ad hoc basis.
3. The nature of the Council is pastoral in that it is concerned with mission and ministry in the parish.
4. The Council is required to create and develop a foundation document.
5. The Council may only meet with the pastor present.
6. The Council lapses upon the death, transfer, or removal of the pastor or administrator. It is the responsibility of the new pastor or administrator either to reconvene the lapsed Council or to call forth a new Council. This is to take place as expeditiously as possible. This norm is congruent with Canons 501 § 2 and 513 §2 concerning the lapse of the Council of Priests and the Diocesan Pastoral Council.
7. The Executive of the Council is chosen from the membership of the Council. It will consist of the pastor who presides over the Council, a chair and a vice-chair. A reporting secretary will be appointed who is neither a member of the Council nor an employee of the parish. .
8. It is preferable that Councils meet monthly. They may however meet more often at the discretion or need of the pastor.
9. Prayer is central to the organization and work of the Council. Councils are to set aside significant time for prayer each time they meet. It is recommended that Council members participate in a

retreat day at least once a year and any discernment carried out by the Council is to be done in the context of prayer.

## **B Membership**

10. Priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers who serve as part of the parish's pastoral team are ex officio members of the Council.
11. Council membership, including the pastor and pastoral team members, should not exceed 12 members. Depending on the size of the pastoral team, it may be necessary to reserve two or three seats on the council for team members. Team members would then only participate as required. The full team, however, would participate in full planning sessions.
12. The term of office for Council members is generally 3 years and to a maximum of 2 terms.
13. Potential Council members should be baptized members of the community.
14. Following are the processes, in order of preference, through which Council members are identified and enlisted for this ministry: (examples of discernment processes are available)
  - Discernment of gifts: all eligible parishioners are invited into a discernment process in which issues facing the parish are identified as well as the gifts and skills needed to address these issues. Parishioners can then come forward or be suggested by others for membership on the Council. Should more applicants present themselves than are required, the present Council along with the Pastor will discern who from this group will join the Council;
  - Discernment of gifts with an election option: the discernment process noted above is carried out but the parishioners identified stand for election by parishioners;

## **C Role Description**

15. The principal role of the Council is pastoral planning. Pastoral planning is meant to ensure that the mission and vision of the diocese and parish guide the community into the future. Pastoral planning involves:
  - developing a working vision for the parish for the following 3 to 5 years;
  - discerning the will of God for this parish community by identifying, assessing and prioritizing pastoral needs;
  - setting goals and developing objectives in order to meet those needs; and,
  - recommending courses of action to the pastor or pastoral team members.

Council members may also be asked to evaluate ministry and programming in the parish.
16. The implementation of programming and ministry objectives is inconsistent with the Council's role. Should Council members participate in the implementation of recommended courses of action, they do so as regular parish volunteers and not as members of the Council.
17. The Executive of the Council is to prepare and forward a detailed agenda to the members of the Council at least one week in advance of the Council meeting date. The agenda is to detail the issues to be addressed and indicate the type of consultation desired (i.e. information only, input and consultation, rendering a decision, or evaluation).

18. In providing recommendations or rendering decisions, Councils are to function through consensus.
19. The Council is not to create standing committees. Ad hoc committees may be formed to respond to specific needs such as researching issues, preparing surveys, polling parishioners and consulting with experts on behalf of the Council.

#### **D Formation**

20. It is recommended that formation in how Councils function be provided for new Council members. The Director of Pastoral Planning is the source for initial and ongoing formation of Parish Pastoral Councils. Other individuals or agencies should be chosen in consultation with the Director of Pastoral Planning of the Diocese of London.

#### **E Multi-parish Councils**

21. Clustered Parishes: Although clustered parishes retain their distinct parish status in Canon Law, they are to act as one faith community, form a single Council and develop a shared response to the diocesan pastoral plan.
22. Transitional Parish Pastoral Councils: When two or more parishes come together either through the clustering, merging or closing of parishes, a transitional Parish Pastoral Council is formed. Transitional Parish Pastoral Councils shall:
  - have as their principal task the establishment of the permanent parish pastoral Council of the new parish.
  - consist of representatives of the Councils of the parishes involved who, ideally, are coming to the end of their first term. This will allow for continuity should some members of the transitional Council wish to serve on the permanent Council;
  - be formed for a predetermined period of time, usually one year;
  - have as a secondary task, the merger of ministries, committees and outreach and other tasks determined by the pastor and/or pastoral team.

#### **F Ancillary Relationships**

23. All ancillary bodies, such as Parish Liturgy Commissions, Parish Youth Commissions and other parish committees or groups are accountable to the pastor and/or a pastoral team member of the parish. No commission, committee or group is to report to the Parish Pastoral Council. However, the pastor, having accepted the recommendations of the Council can mandate commissions, committees or groups to carry out programs or activities discerned to be integral to the ministry or mission of the parish.