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ST. MICHAEL PARISH CHURCH PASTORAL AND FINANCE COUNCIL POLICY AND PROCEDURES (CHANGE #2)

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The following Change #2 to the parish's existing Policy and Procedures regarding the conduct of the parish's Pastoral and Finance Councils is hereby published to better clarify the procedures regarding when should a Pastor consult his Councils. When is it required?

The parish priest (*parochus*), as pastor, stands within the Church, yet unmistakably as shepherd. (cf: Canons 515 §1 and 519). After the Second Vatican Council, a renewed understanding began of the roles of the Bishop/Pastor and the diocesan/parish councils as essential for diocesan/parish life. Only when each individual's "office*" respects its proper limits, does the diocese/parish truly reflect the mystery of the Church: One Body, many members, united under Christ the Head.

(* The office of the laity focus on secular world sanctification and parish service, while the office of clergy (bishops, priests, and deacons) focus on governing, teaching, and sanctifying.)

When should a Pastor seek the councils' consultation?

First, the parish and finance councils have a consultative vote, not a deliberative one, meaning they provide advice, to the pastor, who makes the final decisions (cf: Canons 536 §2 and 537).

The pastor *should* consult with the parish's two councils for a variety of reasons. The "when" and "to what degree" he chooses to consult with the councils, however, is mostly discretionary – excluding instances when he must consult the Finance Council regarding fiscal finances.

In the Catholic Church's centuries-long enduring wisdom and its Code of Canon Law, there is no single resource that defines "*consultation*." To be sure, however, it treats it under a variety of subject headings. We read about bishops consulting with their priests; when consulting religious superiors and/or the Holy See is necessary. However, neither Church's documents nor the Code define what constitutes consultation and when it should be sought. What it does say, however, is that when the Bishop and Pastor consult pastoral and financial councils, its members possess a consultative vote only. The final decision on matters of the parish church remains with the Pastor.

Conversely, council members cannot mandate or dictate to the Pastor how and when he should consult them. Indeed, the notion that councils should dictate to Pastors is repugnant to Christian freedom and to the communion that ought to exist in parishes and, is disordered to each's office.

By widening its consultative repertoire, councils can positively deepen its relations with the Pastor and between members, break unproductive habits, and render the parish faithful service.

When should a Pastor not seek the councils' consultation?

There are two basic instances when pastors should not consult their councils:

1. One reason is that a particular subject matter does not require consultation. Even when consultation would be nice, consultation need not always be practically sought.

Questions such as whether the parish's hospitality committee or Knights of Columbus must heed the Fire Department's limit of persons occupancy in the Church social hall, are not questions for deliberation. The answers do not depend on what the community thinks.

2. The other reason for not consulting is when the council is unready to consider a matter on which the pastor seeks advice. This occurs often when a new council is formed and the members look to the Pastor himself for answers, recommendation, etc., regarding subject matters of which they are not knowledgeable or possession sufficient competency yet to act.

Additionally, there are many types and degrees of consultation, and some of them do not involve the parish's councils at all.

For example:

1. A Pastor may invite parishioners to partake in an anonymous survey to provide feedback regarding the parish's environment, liturgy, and/or child/youth faith formation programs.

Or the Pastor may announce that he is seeking a new Church heating system and individually ask trusted parishioners and/or non-parishioners their opinion. In these cases, the Pastor seeks consultation and expertise with those of a specific competency.

2. A Pastor may consult the council(s) before implementing a new diocesan policy on Confirmation or marriage preparation. While such changes in policies need to be understood by parishioners, the council can assist the pastor see how best to manage the transition within the faith community from the old policies to the new ones.

However, the Pastor is not required to consult or reach any council(s) consensus about the transition and implementation of the new policies. Published decisions by the diocesan bishop are automatically *Particular Law*; requiring use in all diocesan parishes churches.

What do the Second Vatican Council and post-Conciliar documents have to offer us regarding a Pastor and his consultation with the parish's council?

1. *"... participation of the faithful in the mission of the Church is not the same as the participation of some who exercise ecclesiastical power [i.e., or authority - bishops, priests, and deacons]. For in the Church, according to the will of its divine Founder, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood or hierarchy differ in essence and not only in degree. Accordingly, the pastoral work, namely of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling [i.e., management, governance], and the power necessary for it are*

not bestowed by the Lord on the entire community of the faithful, but are conferred on sacred pastors by a special consecration and canonical mission.

Diocesan Bishops 'govern the particular churches entrusted to them as the vicars and ambassadors of Christ. This they do by their counsel, exhortations, and example as well as in deed by their authority and sacred power.' (paragraph 3, Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *Omnes Christifideles*, 1973). [Pastors the parish church(es) entrusted to them.]

2. *"The faithful who are not sealed with the ministerial priesthood, beyond the aforesaid actual participation in the apostolic mission of the Church] are also able to assist in the very pastoral office itself though not in the hierarchy."* (paragraph 4, Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *Omnes Christifideles*, 1973).
3. *"It is, however, beyond the competence [role, responsibility, and mission] of [diocesan and parish councils] to decide on general questions bearing on faith, orthodoxy, moral principles or laws of the universal Church; for the teacher of the faith in the diocese is always and obviously the bishop alone, with his bond of communion with the head of the episcopal college and its members. (paragraph 9, Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *Omnes Christifideles*, 1973). [Pastors the parish church(es) entrusted to him.]*

Concluding Comments:

The Pastor exercises real authority to lead, decide, and direct pastoral life; to oversee the parish ministries and staff; and to oversee the administration of parish goods. It is the Pastor who represents the parish in all (canonical, legal) juridic affairs and is to ensure that the goods of the parish are administered according to the norm of law (Canon 532).

The *Code of Canon Law* suggests the establishment of a Pastoral Council and requires the establishment of a Finance Council in every Catholic parish, governed by universal law and by norms established by the diocesan bishop. Canon 537 states that in the finance council *"the Christian faithful, selected according to these same norms, are to assist the pastor in the administration of the goods of the parish,"* keeping in mind that in all juridic affairs, the Pastor represents the parish according to the norm of law (cf: Canon 532).

NB: Neither council exercises control over parish finances independent of the Pastor, nor do they possess any actual or perceived authority over pastoral priorities, parish mission evangelization plans, staffing decisions, or liturgical life.

In closing, authentic collaboration within the Church flourishes only when roles are rightly ordered. Canonically, the pastor is encouraged to listen, consult, and value the wisdom of the laity. Councils may speak honestly, advise properly, and respect the Pastor's roles, responsibilities, and authority. When each serves according to his or her proper role (or office), the parish church as a whole genuinely reflects the Body of Christ — ordered, living, and directed toward holiness.

Thank you in advance for your time and kind assistance in this important matter.

Respectfully,



Rev. Robert G. Newbury Jr., KC*HS
Pastor

cc: File