

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH'S CODE OF CANON LAW AND DIOCESAN STATUTES STATE REGARDING THE PURPOSE, ROLES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARISH CHURCH'S TWO COUNCILS (THE PASTORAL AND FINANCE COUNCILS)?



PASTORAL COUNCIL

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

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

The installed and incumbent Pastor ***must*** preside at and over all councils' meetings.

- St. Michael Parish Council Statutes: Promulgated previously by Bishop Sheridan (12/5/2011):

Article 1, para c: "*The Council shall address matters presented in the agenda, previously approved by the Pastor. These matters can be proposed by any of its members or parishioners, but must be accepted by the Pastor.*"

Article 3, para d: "*Any member of the Council may propose in writing matters to be addressed by the Council. These matters shall be addressed only with the approval of the Pastor and included in the agenda.*"

Article 7, para d: "*The regular meetings of the Council are open to any parishioner.*"
[However, subject to the above stated norms of the Pastor's approval and restrictions.]

- St. Michael Finance Council Statutes: Promulgated previously by Bishop Sheridan (12/5/2011):

Article 1, para c: *“The Council shall address matters presented in the agenda, previously approved by the Pastor. These matters can be proposed by any of its members or parishioners, but must be accepted by the Pastor.”*

Article 3, para d: *“Any member of the Council may propose in writing matters to be addressed by the Council. These matters shall be addressed only with the approval of the Pastor and included in the agenda.”*

Article 7, para d: *“The regular meetings of the Council are open to any parishioner.” [However, subject to the above stated norms of the Pastor’s approval and restrictions.]*

2. After the guest has given their specific subject/topic presentation or activity report and any post-presentation council members’ questions and answers (Q&A) segment has concluded, the guest will be excused from the councils’ meeting, which will then continue as normal per the agenda. Generally, 10 minutes will be permitted to each speaker or guest. Guest presentations will be made at the very beginning of the combined councils’ meeting.
3. There are no **“observer”** non-council members permitted to attend a partial or entire councils’ meetings; a practice commonly found at a local community or town hall meeting.
4. Council members are selected to serve 3-year terms, allowing members to serve a maximum of two consecutive terms before stepping down. Council members may be replaced mid-term by the Pastor for just cause also.

When should the Pastor seek the Councils’ consultation?

First, the parish and finance councils have a consultative voice and vote, not a deliberative one, meaning they provide advice to the Pastor who makes the final decisions (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 discretionary – excluding instances, when he must consult the Finance Council regarding fiscal year (FY) budget finances.

In the Catholic Church’s centuries-long enduring wisdom and its Code of Canon Law, there is no single resource that defines the word or process of “*consultation*.” To be sure, however, it treats it under a variety of subject headings. Today, we read about bishops consulting with their priests; consulting religious superiors and/or the Holy See, if/when necessary. However, neither the 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 voice and vote only. The final decision on matters related to the diocese remains with the Bishop and in the parish church remains with the Pastor.

By widening its consultative repertoire of skills and talents, councils can positively deepen their relations with the Pastor and between members; break dysfunctional and/or old, unproductive practices; and render the parish faithful dutiful and worthy service.

Additionally, there are many types and degrees of consultation. Some of them do not involve consultation with 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 possessing a specific competency.

2. A Pastor *may* consult the council(s) before implementing a new diocesan policy on confirmation, marriage preparation, etc. 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/practices to the new ones.

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

What does 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 [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 to 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 to the parish church(es) entrusted to him.]

Concluding Comments:

The Pastor exercises full authority to lead, decide, and direct pastoral life and activities [within his assigned parish church]; to oversee parish ministries and staff; and to oversee the administration and stewardship of the parish's goods.

Additionally, 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 Roman Catholic Church's *Code of Canon Law* (1983) [promulgated in its current form by Pope St. John Paul II in 1983 to reflect the changes of the Second Vatican Council] *suggests* the establishment of a Pastoral Council and *requires* the establishment of a Finance Council in every Catholic parish church, governed by universal law and by norms established by the diocesan bishop [i.e., Particular Law]. 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 (also refer to Canon 532).

NB: A parish's councils do not exercise control over parish activities and/or finances, independent of the Pastor, nor do they possess any actual or perceived authority or responsibility over pastoral priorities, the parish's mission, and evangelization plans, staffing decisions, or its liturgical life.

In closing, authentic collaboration within the Church flourishes only when roles are rightly ordered.

In closing, canonically the pastor is *encouraged* to listen, consult, and value the wisdom and suggestions of the laity. Councils may speak honestly and advise properly, however, they must respect the Pastor's roles, responsibilities, and authority also.

When each serves according to their proper role (or office), the parish church as a whole genuinely reflects the Body of Christ — ordered, living, and directed toward holiness.



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