

## SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Whenever we are involved in the life and ways of the Church, it is necessary for us to take a solid, loving look at what Jesus teaches us.

For it is the Mission of Jesus that both directs and motivates the way we make decisions as spiritual leaders.

Because of our pragmatism, there is often a temptation to simply take a look at proximate problems or emergencies and respond with short-term solutions weighted heavily with personal taste and expediency.

Using this method of operating easily overlooks the necessity of reflecting on the person of Jesus. A deliberate effort needs to be made in order that we see ourselves as the extension of Jesus healing, Jesus teaching, Jesus feeding, Jesus praying, Jesus socializing, Jesus making events sacred by an attitude that extends itself especially to the unwanted, the “great unwashed,” the fringe.

His Mission is a demanding one. The support to accomplish this is rooted in an openness to the Spirit and in a community of believers sharing prayer and growing in trust.

It is much easier to tackle a few surface needs devoting ourselves to “saving the saved,” rather than really facing the living Word.

It may sound a bit contrived, but is not the Church that has a Mission, but the Mission of Jesus which has a Church.”

The call to faith, hope and love: the call to justice; the call for peace came out of the life of Jesus. In order that these commandments and beatitudes could become a part of people’s lives, Jesus called together a group of followers – a Church.

Also in order that Catholic leaders of today remain faithful to the way of Jesus and tradition of the Church, it is important that they continue to pray and to study.

Council leaders indeed have a special responsibility to be involved in understanding the will of God and serving the needs of God’s people. To do this, it is wise to set a program for prayer development and spiritual formation.

In order to be responsive spiritual leaders, we wrestle with how we are prepared. There are many ways, but somehow certain ingredients are necessary if there will be a wholeness. People being prepared for council work (or people already on councils where preparation was not given) should be involved in a program that acquaints them with (1) the value of shared prayer, specifically scripture-based; (2) the important emphasis on the teachings of Vatican II, (3) the theologically sound teaching and customs that have a rich place in our Catholic traditions of Christianity; (4) ongoing education; and (5) effective methods of meeting.

If a council is not able to share prayer in a deep and enriching way, there is something missing. If a council is not about the task of ministering to its members by affirming or challenging, there is something missing. If a council does not have a real appreciation for the teachings of Vatican II (that does not mean equal enthusiasm for all parts), there is something missing.

In our initial information, then, and in our ongoing renewal, we build into the structure of our coming together (our meetings) time to pray and to study.

Some may object. Some may say there is work to do. What they say is true. But the work to do is God’s work and there is no better preparation to best carry out His will than time taken to know what His will is. This is not only just time taken alone – but also time together as spiritual leaders responsible for the pasturing of a parish.

Councils, therefore, need to give careful thought to prayer and formation for each meeting. A good rule of thumb is to plan agendas in such a way that one-third of the meeting is prayer, one third is discussion/decision, and one-third is visioning and planning.

Formation does not take place only in meetings. Some councils set up days/evenings of reflection or overnight retreats (often Friday evening to late Saturday afternoon). In fact, there is an increasing number who name these dates to prospective council members, and they are required to commit themselves to them in order to accept the nomination to run for council office. This, of course, avoids the problem of a portion of the council gathering and growing in prayer and trust and others only hearing about it.

Some councils require an overnight plus three additional evenings a year for purposes of reflection, prayer and faith sharing. These evenings are separate from the usual monthly meetings. The request may seem like a lot but is extraordinarily rewarding. The sessions are tailored to the needs of a particular council. In this way people feel touched and strengthened in their mission.

It is amazing to see the wonderful results that come from this kind of preparation and continued sharing. With this Spirit-filled approach, the people of this age will also say “a reverent awe overtook us for the many wonders and signs performed among us.”

**AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY PRAY IN THE SPIRIT, USING PRAYERS AND PETITIONS OF EVERY SORT. PRAY CONSTANTLY AND ATTENTIVELY FOR ALL IN THE HOLY COMPANY.**

Ephesians

**PARISH COUNCIL**

Elected by parishioners

Members to be representative of total parish needs

Policy formulating in total parish concerns

Monitors all policies

Does not perform most administrative tasks

Works cooperatively with professional staff

Minutes provided to members and committee chairperson

One goal is formation of members

Ordinarily meetings are open.

Trust in Committee and its members

**COMMITTEE/BOARD/COMMISSION**

Elected/appointed with council approval

Members to be representative of specific needs, and with special gifts

Shaping policy for council approval

Monitors policies in area of ministry

May perform administrative tasks with appropriate delegation

Works cooperatively with professional staff

Minutes provided to members and council members

One goal is formation of members

Ordinarily meetings are open to parishioners

Trust in council and its members

**Parish Council Committee Chairperson**

- 1) Each chairperson of any committee should submit the minutes of the committee to the parish council.

- 2) If any action is required, the chairperson should attend the parish council meeting and present the item to parish council providing the rationale and explanation.
- 3) If additional committee members are needed for a parish council presentation, they should be in attendance.
- 4) Monthly, parish council committee chairpersons should meet together in dialogue and discussion.
- 5) Anytime a question regarding the work and/or direction of a committee arises, the chairperson of the committee should speak for the committee.

## AGENDAS

### Example 1

Corporate meeting			
Time Allotment	Item	By Whom	Material
15 minutes	Report-Finance Committee	J. Smith	Written material; Blackboard & chalk

### Example 2

Corporate Meeting				
Time Allotment	Item	Action	By Whom	Material
15 minutes	Report-Finance Committee	Information  Discussion	J. Smith  all	Written report Blackboard/chalk

### Notes About Agendas for Agenda-makers

The agenda is your tool for planning and controlling your meeting. Well done, it helps you make your time together focused and productive. Poorly done, it invites confusion, wasted time, indecision and frustration. Some guidelines for preparing an agenda:

- 1) Limit carefully the number of items that get on it
- 2) Group interest should be reflected in the agenda – not just the leader’s concerns
- 3) Prioritize among the things you might include so that your agendas reflect a balance of urgent items of long-range importance
- 4) Clarify, at least in your own mind, how each item is to be handled and what’s to be done or decided. List agenda items as questions where possible.
- 5) Background information should be provided as necessary – ahead of time if possible.
- 6) Options should be identified with their advantages and disadvantages
- 7) Committee or individuals with reports should be provided as necessary – ahead of time if possible.
- 8) Order the agenda so that

- a. Priorities come first
  - b. There is a variety
  - c. The group can sense achievement
- 9) Budget time for each item so you know that all business will fit into the time available. You can make adjustments if you get off schedule.

### Minutes of Parish Council Meetings

The following should receive copies of parish council minutes

Pastors, parish staff (DRE, deacons), Parish Council members, Committee chairpersons

A summary of parish council minutes should appear in the newsletter

### **DECISION MAKING**

Because the parish council is attempting to model a faith community, we recommend that rather than vote on every issue, the group work toward consensus. This process requires prayer, openness, listening, reflection, discussion and energetic effort.

After the topic for discussion has been presented, the council chairperson should ask if anyone needs any clarification before the process continues.

A few minutes of quiet reflection should follow (3-5 minutes) during which every council member jots down three things: 1) the cons 2) the pros 3) Questions

After everyone has completed this task, the chairperson should ask that all cons be listed on the blackboard. Once listed, a brief (3-5 minutes) discussion should follow. The same process should be followed for pros. The questions should all be listed and discussed.

Once the above steps are taken, the chairperson should ask again for quiet reflection during which the council members would: 1) Ask for guidance of the Holy Spirit in knowing what the Father wills for the Parish. 2) Try to clarify personally what they believe is the best.

The chairperson should then go around the group and ask for a one or two sentence statement from every member.

Once all have spoken, the chairperson should try to state the "sense of the group". If all or almost all tend to favor it, he/she should ask those not supporting an issue what would help them in moving toward support.