

Seven essential elements of parish life: Evangelization, worship, word, community, service, leadership and stewardship.

Spirituality: Invites us to deepen our relationship with God. This often involves prayer, study, and activities that nurture our spirit and call us to growth.

Stewardship: One of the seven essentials of parish life, which challenges all parishioners to share their time, talent, and treasure for the fulfillment of the parish mission.

Vatican II: The most recent of 21 Church councils (1962—1965) in which bishops from throughout the universal Church gathered with the Pope to discuss and decide on matters of Church teaching and practice. A council of this nature has supreme and full authority over the Church.

Sources

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Diocese of Shreveport

Information for Church Councilors

A Quick Reference Handbook

Jesus offered a **MESSAGE** of love and healing;
He brought people together in **COMMUNITY**;
He reached out in **SERVICE** to the poor; and
He modeled for us a life of **PRAYER**.

The four key marks of the Church

Revised January 2020

The purpose of this handbook is to promote a clear concise understanding among councils, commissions, parish staffs, and lay parish leadership about the roles each respective group is asked to perform. These policies and/or guidelines primarily concern themselves with the various consultative bodies in the parish. Consultative bodies are established on a diocesan level and then provided to the parish level. On the diocesan level these councils, boards and commissions are consultative to the bishop; while on a parish level they are consultative to the pastor. Here the pastor consults in order to direct the mission of the parish, establish priorities, set goals, and plan strategies and policies for the parish. These structures are not focused on power or authority, but enhance the ability for the governance structures to be more effective.

These guidelines assume a posture of trust in each other and belief in the power of the Holy Spirit working among us. They assume pastoral leaders wish to exercise authority in service, promote appropriate dialogue, share responsibility for the mission of the Church and, whenever possible, build consensus and commitment to be faithful to our faith traditions.

A **consensus** approach to decision making is evidence that each one has an investment in each parish. Therefore, if a process is built on prayer, seeks the will of God rather than “my” will, is based on mutual trust among those making the decisions and honors the teachings of the scriptures and the Church, we should be able to reach substantial, not necessarily unanimous, agreement on matters of overall direction and policy that can be supported by all. This takes time and challenges members to dialogue rather than count votes—in essence there are no winners and no losers. Consensus is

“These guidelines assume a posture of trust in each other and belief in the power of the Holy Spirit working among us.”

Finance Council: A consultative body within the parish that offers expertise in finance and plant management as they relate to the mission of the parish. This does not exist in a church (**quasi-parish**)

Ministry: Active service of the baptized, dependent upon the gifts of the individual, the community’s needs and always directed to building up the community and the kingdom of God.

Parish Councils: Each fully erected parish has two councils. One is the parish finance council; the other is the parish pastoral council often referred to as the parish council.

Pastoral: An approach of caring for the life of the parish as a whole. (*Shepherding a flock.*)

Pastoral Council: A consultative structure in a parish designed to envision, plan and oversee the mission of the parish community as an extension of the mission of Jesus and the Universal Church. This does not exist in a church (quasi-parish.)

Pastoral Planning: The process which turns the parish vision into reality within a particular span of time, through a systematic, and cyclical design. It involves the mission statement, long-range goals, and annual objectives.

Presbyteral Council: A consultative body to the bishop that assists with the governance of the diocese and the concerns of the priests.

Representative: A characteristic of the makeup of parish pastoral council, namely, their concern with the common good of the entire parish as opposed to special interest groups or organizations.

Selection: A method by which leaders are chosen to serve on the parish pastoral council, through a discernment process rather than an election process.

A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Code of Canon Law: Law enacted and promulgated by the Pope for the orderly pastoral administration and government of the Church. The revised Code, effective November 27, 1983, consists of 1,752 canons in seven books.

Collegiality: A characteristic of church leadership based upon mutuality and unity in diversity: in reference to the universal communion of the bishops with the Holy Father, of pastors with their bishops, and of the faithful with their pastor.

Community Council: A council that is peculiar to a church (**quasi-parish**) as an investigative, innovative, and consultative group.

Community Coordinator: A priest, deacon, religious or lay person recommended by the pastor and appointed by the bishop to act in certain matters pertaining to the administrative operation of a church (**quasi-parish**).

Consensus: A method of decision-making. A group strives to reach substantial, not necessarily unanimous, agreement on matters of overall direction and policy that can be supported by all.

Diocese: The local or “particular” church, referring to a geographically designated area in which Catholics are gathered in parishes, united in faith and in the sacraments with the bishop who has been ordained in apostolic succession.

Discernment: Formal, prayerful process where a group discovers God’s will in a particularly significant situation or decision.

Evangelization: One of the seven essentials of parish life which encompasses any way in which the parish continues to spread the Good News of Jesus, especially, through personal and corporate sharing of faith.

achieved when all the participants in the process, including the pastor, agree that they have been heard, are valued for their convictions and are able to affirm and support the prevailing position.

“...it takes all members of the parish body to make the mission a reality.”

The parish is where the Church lives. Parishes are communities of faith, love, acceptance, diversity, hope and action. Here the Word is proclaimed and the Eucharist is celebrated. “Without the Eucharist at the center of parish life, the mission is devoid of meaning.”

All who share in the ministry of leadership within the parish have specific roles, tasks and functions. St. Paul’s analogy of the body in *1 Corinthians 12:17ff* reads “If the body were all eye, what would happen to our hearing? If it were all ear, what would happen to our smelling? As it is, God has set each member of the body in the place he wanted it to be. Even those members of the body which seem less important are in fact indispensable. You, then, are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it.”

In this way, it takes all members of the parish body to make the mission a reality. The clergy, councils, boards, parish staff, parish organizations and all parishioners are vital parts of the whole. Together, they form the Body of Christ. The successor of Peter, St. Pope John Paul II urged upon each one of us the courage to bear witness to the Gospel of our redemption.

By proclaiming the **WORD**, offering prayerful **WORSHIP**, forming a **COMMUNITY** of faith, placing ourselves at the **SERVICE** of others, exercising **STEWARDSHIP** over all God’s gifts and a shared **LEADERSHIP** modeled on that of Christ himself, we fulfill the Church’s essential mission of **EVANGELIZATION**.

I. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Every Catholic Parish is a part of a diocese and thus a part of the Universal Church.

A. Universal Church

The Universal Catholic Church is in principle a college of local churches whose unity is rooted in the presence of the Holy Spirit, a common faith in Jesus Christ, the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and the visible unifying ministry of the Bishop of Rome.

B. Particular Church (Local)

The particular church is usually a diocese. A diocese is a portion of the people of God which is entrusted to a bishop for him to shepherd with the cooperation of the presbyterate, so that, adhering to its pastor and gathered by him in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative. (Canon 369)

C. Parish (Parent Church)

1. A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church (diocese), whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor as its proper pastor (shepherd) under the authority of the diocesan bishop. (Canon 515:1)
2. It is only for the diocesan bishop to erect, suppress, or alter parishes. He is neither to erect, suppress, nor notably alter parishes, unless he has heard the council of priests. (Canon 515:2)
3. A lawfully erected parish possesses its own juridical personality by virtue of the law itself. (Canon 515:3)

Church (quasi-parish) is not micro managed by the parish councils but reports no less than quarterly to the parish councils.

It is recommended that at least a semi-annual assembly of councils – parish pastoral and finance and community council, with community coordinator and pastor be held. Common prayer is also recommended.

Operational expenses for shared services, such as the pastor, community coordinator, director of religious education, and the business manager can be divided using an equitable and fair formula recommended by the finance council and accepted by the pastor and community coordinator.

All council members should feel welcome to participate in workshops and/or conferences hosted by the parish and/or church (**quasi-parish.**) All members are also welcomed and encouraged to participate in diocesan and deanery level events regarding parish leadership and formation; as well as parish life , ministry and catechesis.

Churches (**quasi-parishes**) maintain separate property including movable and immovable property as well as all financial assets. They continue to maintain their sacramental records and continue to archive their particular records.

All pastoral and financial decisions however belong to the parish. However, the Community Coordinator in cooperation with the Community Council meet, discuss and make recommendations to the pastor and parish councils.

This publication supersedes all previous documents regarding Councils in the parishes and their relationship.

VI. RELATIONSHIP OF PARISH AND QUASI-PARISH

A church (**quasi-parish**) is a definite community of the Catholic faithful in a particular diocese, entrusted to a priest as its pastor, but not erected as a parish because of particular circumstances.

The pastor of the “church” usually will not reside in the rectory of a church (**quasi-parish**), but remains the proper pastor of both the “parish” and church (**quasi-parish**)

Church (**quasi-parish**) geographic boundaries remain in tact unless changed through the normal processes and decreed by the Office of the Bishop.

Church (**quasi-parish**) may remain a civil corporation if it was a civil corporation as a fully erected parish. The pastor of the parish remains the Secretary-Treasurer of the civil corporation .

A **Community Council** representative to the parish finance council should be recommended by the pastor to the bishop to be duly appointed. The pastor can appoint a church (**quasi-parish**) representative to the parish pastoral council or call for an election after hearing a recommendation from the community coordinator.

The community council representatives to the parish pastoral council and the parish finance council have voting rights and privileges as parish council members. They can also serve as officers of these councils and trustees if qualified.

D. Church (Quasi-parish)

1. Universal Church law defines a **quasi-parish** as a definite community of the Catholic faithful in a particular church (diocese), entrusted to a priest as its proper pastor but not yet erected as a parish because of particular circumstances. (Canon 516)
2. **Quasi-parishes** have existed in this diocese for years. They have been called by the more familiar title of “mission” or “chapel.”
3. The more familiar identity “church” will be preferred when referring to these communities; while the technical title: “**quasi-parish**” will be maintained in respect to the law.
4. The term “**parish**” no longer applies to “**quasi-parish.**” It will be used to designate the parent parish to which the “**quasi-parish**” is attached.

E. Chapel

The term “**chapel**” will be used to designate pastoral centers that receive sacramental assistance and exist primarily for the convenience of the people being served, e.g., the chapel at the Catholic Center.

II. LEGAL PERSPECTIVES

The Catholic Church is a not-for-profit corporation and functions under both canon law and civil law. 501(c)3 is a status code awarded by the Internal Revenue Service once certain criteria is met, documented and maintained through annual reporting in the Official Catholic Directory and proper tax filings.

A not-for-profit (non-profit) corporation is a legal entity chartered by the state or the federal government in which no stockholder or trustee shares in the profits or losses and usually exists to accomplish some charitable, humanitarian or

educational purpose. Such groups may be tax deductible for the donor. This is not to be confused with tax exempt. **The Diocese of Shreveport is not exempt from paying state and local sales taxes in the State of Louisiana.**

- A. Canon Law** deals with matters concerning the mission of the Church and the relationships within the Catholic community. These matters include norms for the celebration of the sacraments and public worship, the preaching of the Gospel, the organization of clerical and religious life, Catholic education, the use and administration of church property, procedures in the adjudication of conflicts, the allocation of penalties and the rights and obligations of the Christian faithful.
- B. Particular Laws** are those enacted for a certain territory or given group of the faithful, e.g., a given diocese or religious institute.
- C. Civil Laws** which govern not-for-profit corporations are respected by the Catholic Church in so far as they do not contradict the laws of the Catholic Church, e.g., laws dealing with labor, banking and finance, property, etc.

III. RELATIONSHIP OF THE DIOCESE AND THE PARISHES

A. Operational Relationship

After consultation, the Holy Father appoints a bishop to serve a diocese. After consultation, the bishop appoints the pastor under the jurisdiction of the bishop.

Each **parish** is incorporated; as are many of the churches that were once fully erected parishes now quasi-parishes.

The corporate officers in civil law are:

Bishop—is the **President** of all parish corporations in the diocese, the Diocesan Corporation and other Catholic entities under the direction of the diocese.

Selection of Membership—The pastor recommends the community coordinator to the bishop, who makes the pastoral assignment after consultation with the pastor and the Vicar Forane. The community coordinator is responsible to the pastor of the parish. Guidelines for size of the community council are not specified as it should depend on the need and expertise in the areas that would be of help and service to the church (**quasi-parish.**)

Basic Criteria include:

- Be a Catholic in "good standing."
(**Good standing** is defined as: a practicing Catholic, baptized and confirmed; if married, married in the Church.)
- Be a registered member of the church (**quasi-parish.**)
- Be an active participant in the ongoing life of the church (**quasi-parish.**)
- Be knowledgeable of the Mission of the parish and the diocese.
- Be a person of vision and integrity, interested in the "whole parish," be prayerful and open to change and inclusive.
- Be available and willing if asked to serve on either pastoral or finance council of the "parish."

Terms – Three to five years renewable one time

D. **School Council**- The Catholic School is an expression of the education mission of the parish as well as the largest ministry of the parish. Since the pastor is responsible to the bishop for the administration of the total parish, he is responsible for the school. According to Diocesan Policies (August 2001), each school is to have a School Council, which is a "consultative, policy recommending body" to assist the pastor.

(If your parish has a school please request "School Council Handbook" through the Office of Superintendent of Schools).

*The duties and responsibilities of the **pastoral and finance councils** are conducted at the “parish” level rather than at the church (**quasi-parish**) level.*

A **community council** is called to have **bylaws** to assist in conducting their ministry as a council in good order. The size of the **community council** depends on the need and expertise in certain areas of help to the **quasi-parish** such as planning, and budgeting.

MINUTES of ALL COUNCIL MEETINGS should be compiled and once approved by the community coordinator, shared with the pastor and then forwarded to the Chancellor.

All sacramental, liturgical and finance policies published by the diocese are to be observed in a church (**quasi-parish**). Sacramental records, census and financial records are maintained and reported separately from the parent parish. These are maintained in the church not consolidated with the parish.

Catechesis and sacramental preparation may be combined or presented separately depending on individual situations and circumstances as determined by the parish.

Functions of the COMMUNITY COUNCIL:

- Attend to and oversee the daily operation, ministries and all communication for the church (**quasi-parish**).
- Establishes the direction of the church (**quasi-parish**) in collaboration with the pastor and the parish pastoral and parish finance councils.
- May establish pastoral and finance committees for investigative and discussion purposes.
- Maintain all documents/artifacts that comprise the archives of the church (**quasi-parish**).
- No less than quarterly reports on the pastoral activities and finances should be sent to pastor and the parish councils.

Vicar General - is the **Vice-President** of all parish organizations in the diocese as well as the Vice-President of the Diocesan Corporation.

Pastor - In civil law is the **Secretary-Treasurer** of the parish organization he is assigned to as the Canonical pastor. *(Currently the Corporate Articles of Incorporation call for the Secretary-Treasurer in the diocese to be a priest, therefore a non-priest community coordinator or pastoral administrator cannot be the Secretary-Treasurer.)*

Trustees -two parishioners appointed by the bishop serve as legal trustees of the Parish according to civil law.

The **pastor** establishes the **parish pastoral council** according to diocesan guidelines and recommends the **parish finance council** members to the bishop who appoints them to serve on the **parish finance council**.

A church (**quasi-parish**) may have a **community coordinator** appointed by the bishop and a **community council** that will relate to the people, the pastor and the bishop. The community coordinator may be a priest, deacon, religious or lay person.

B. Pastoral/Ministerial Relationship

The bishop with the clergy and lay leaders exercise the three-fold pastoral office of teaching, sanctifying, and governing. Together with the faith community, all strive to bring alive the mission of the Catholic Church mandated by Christ to:

- Preach/teach the Gospel
- Witness love in communion and unity by serving others
- Celebrate in public and private worship

The bishop works to implement the principles of **collegiality**, **subsidiarity** and **legitimate diversity** to build unity, shared leadership and co-responsibility as we serve the Lord.

IV. THE REALITIES AND CHALLENGES IN TODAY'S WORLD

We are faced with some **realities** that must be a part of any future planning in our parishes. As councilors we must have a sense of the “**reality of our resources**” before beginning to plan. Being aware of these **realities** is critical to effective leadership. Depending on the role you serve in your parish, you may look at the “**reality of resources**” as opportunities rather than challenges. Here is a partial list of **realities** a leader faces today. This listing is not offered in any ranking of importance.

- A decline in church attendance.
- Aging of the church population.
- Loss of the millennium generation to other worship cultures. *(This can result in a decrease in financial support of the parishes.)*
- A decline in vocations to the priesthood and vocations to the vowed religious.
- A higher incidence of divorce and remarriage.
- The rejection of papal authority, e.g., birth control, stem cell research.
- Immigration and diverse cultures.
- The widening of theological dissent and the resistance to discuss Universal Church issues.

Additionally, church leaders must be aware of **challenges** in the Diocese of Shreveport, and the territorial neighborhoods in which the parish is asked to evangelize. Every challenge is not found in every parish but is evident within the 16 civil parishes served by the Diocese of Shreveport. Here is a partial list of challenges and real world constraints identified to help leaders cope with concerns they may present.

- There are a number of un-churched people in the area. (These people indicate no religious preference on census and other demographic records).

Basic criteria include:

- Be a Catholic in “good standing.”
(Good standing is defined as: a practicing Catholic, baptized and confirmed; if married, married in the Church.)
- Be a registered member of the parish for a minimum of three years (five years is preferred) and five years if appointed as a trustee.
- Be skilled in one of the following: financial affairs; civil law, management, understand not-for-profit finance.
- Be an active participant in the ongoing life of the parish.
- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Be a person of outstanding integrity.
- Be knowledgeable of the mission of the parish and the diocese.
- Members of the same family may not serve on either the **parish pastoral or parish finance council**.
- Staff members may not serve on the councils or fill council positions such as secretary.

Terms

- Members are appointed for a five-year term.
- Trustees have a three-year term.
- Both may be renewed for one additional term.

MINUTES OF ALL COUNCIL MEETINGS should be compiled and once approved forwarded to the Chancellor. ONLY ONE COPY IS NECESSARY. THE CHANCERY DOES NOT MAINTAIN AN ARCHIVAL COPY OF PARISH MINUTES.

C. **COMMUNITY COUNCIL**— *the role is to assist the community coordinator in the conduct of both the pastoral and financial care of the church (quasi-parish).*

In each church (**quasi-parish**) the **community council** serves in place of the **parish pastoral** and **parish finance council**.

B. PARISH FINANCE COUNCIL- *the role is to assist in the conduct of the business administration of the parish church. (See Handbook on Parish Finance Councils for more in-depth information.)*

In each parish there is to be a **parish finance council** which is governed, in addition to universal law, by norms issued by the diocesan bishop and in which the Christian faithful, selected according to these same norms, are to assist the pastor in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to the prescript of Canon 532 (Canon 537).

The **parish finance council** advises the pastor in the administration of parish goods, also called temporal goods. The pastor is by canon law the administrator of the parish goods and he represents the parish in all juridical (legal) affairs.

Functions of the parish finance council:

- Collaborate with the pastor/administrator/community coordinator/business management in preparing the annual parish budget and ensure it is sent to the bishop.
- Submits a complete financial report to the pastor and the **Pastoral Council**; the pastor will forward to the bishop.
- Assists in the acquisition of revenues.
- Provides oversight in administration of assets, e.g., internal controls – finances, safety, harassment issues, investments, copyrights, and environment.
- Develops a 3-5 year maintenance program for church property.

Selection of Membership— The bishop appoints members and trustees to the **parish finance council** upon written recommendation of the pastor. Guidelines specify five members- two of whom are trustees.

Additional members representing churches (**quasi-parishes**) under the direction of the parent parish are afforded voting rights also and should be a registered member of the church (**quasi-parish**).

- There is a very low percentage (4%) Catholic population in a predominately Protestant culture.
- The growth in population of other cultures prompts the need to provide more diversity in the language of Mass, other liturgical services and education services.
- More than one third of the total population of the diocese lives in rural areas.
- Large numbers of people live in poverty.
- Large number of university and college students are located in the area. (*Nine university/college campuses in the Diocese of Shreveport.*)
- Large number of prisons, hospitals, nursing and assisted living homes require ministry resources.

V. LEADERSHIP IN PARISH COMMUNITIES

Parish leadership consists of those representative members of the parish who have received a call to the ministry of leadership. Parish leadership is all about what each of us can give, not what we can get. It is about coming together to build up the Body of Christ and advance the work of the Gospel. This leadership is envisioned as a shared leadership with the pastor.

Parish leaders are individuals who are capable of **reflection, discernment, visioning, reaching consensus** and **planning** both financially and pastorally. Following is a list of the gifts necessary for parish leadership.

- A desire for spiritual growth in oneself and the parish.
- Enthusiasm about the future of the parish.
- Eagerness to facilitate parish decisions
- Courage to work toward consensus.
- Capacity to listen outweighing the need to speak.
- Integrity in articulating what one believes.
- Ability to inspire and empower.
- A willingness to delegate.
- Flexibility and openness with people and ideas

A. PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL – *the role is to guide the community in the discernment, expression, and fulfillment of its pastoral mission.*

If the diocesan bishop, after consulting the council of priests, considers it opportune, a **parish pastoral council** is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which Christ's faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office, assist in fostering pastoral activity. (Canon 536:1) (*By decree, parish pastoral councils are to be established in each parish in the Diocese of Shreveport.*)

A **parish pastoral council** possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by the norms established by the diocesan bishop. (Canon 536:2)

Bylaws—Each **parish pastoral council** may create their own document concerning the governing principles and procedures for their council since each parish is different. The council should be prepared to take the time and effort to produce a document suited to its own unique situation. There are, however, certain basic elements which ought to appear in bylaws if it is to be a living and effective document. These include: purpose and objective of the organization, powers, membership, nominations and elections, officers, meetings, committees, amendments and ratification.

Once approved by the **parish pastoral council** and accepted by the pastor, the document should be forwarded to the bishop, by virtue of his being the President of the Parish Corporation for his acceptance and approval.

Functions of the **parish pastoral council**:

- Provide leadership
- Develop a Parish Pastoral Plan that helps the parish to fulfill the Mission of the Parish, diocese and the Church.
- Identifies and encourages the use of parishioners' gifts and talents.

- Acts as a line of communication to and from people for pastoral programs.
- Works to help all parishioners feel welcome and included.

MINUTES OF ALL COUNCIL MEETINGS should be compiled, approved and forwarded to the Office of the Chancellor.

Selection of Membership – Members include parishioners of either sex without prejudice to racial or ethnic origin. As well as representatives of a church (**quasi-parish**) should be included as voting members of the council. Members may be appointed by the pastor or elected by the parish at large. (*Most parish bylaws call for a combination of both.*)

Basic criteria include:

- Be a Catholic in “good standing.”
(*Good standing is defined as: a practicing Catholic, baptized and confirmed; if married, married in the Church*)
- Be a **registered member** of the parish for three to five years. (*Five years is desired; three is allowed due to certain circumstances*)
- Be an active participant in the ongoing life of the parish.
- Be at least 18 years of age unless a youth or student rep.
- Be knowledgeable of the Parish's Mission and the Mission of the Diocese.
- Be a person of vision and integrity, interested in the whole parish, prayerful, open to change, and inclusive.
- Family members cannot serve on other councils.
- Staff members may not serve on the councils or fill council positions such as secretary.

Terms—Three (3) years; renewable one time. Once someone has served several terms, they are not eligible to serve on that council unless appointed by the pastor. Once an individual has served several terms and been an officer of the council they are not eligible for service unless appointed by the pastor.