

USCCB Committee on the Laity

Report on Diocesan and Parish Pastoral Councils

March 12, 2004

Executive Summary

A survey of diocesan and eparchial bishops was conducted in December 2003. 195 surveys were distributed and 112 were returned, for a response rate of 57%. 107 responses were from Latin rite dioceses and 5 from eparchies of Eastern rites.

More than half of the dioceses and eparchies have established diocesan pastoral councils (DPCs); several others are actively considering doing so. In locations where DPCs are not currently active, some respondents reported that prior attempts at such bodies had proven ineffective, were difficult to conduct given large or rural geographic areas non-conducive to travel, or had temporarily lapsed due to a change in episcopal leadership. In locations where DPCs have been established, the bishops are directly involved in the work of the councils and believe DPCs provide fairly effective consultation and representative feedback that is of benefit in their episcopal leadership role.

Close to two-thirds of bishops mandate the establishment of parish pastoral councils (PPCs) in their diocese or eparchy. Bishops who mandate PPCs estimate a much higher percentage of parishes have established them, as opposed to bishops who only encourage PPCs or take no particular action. Some dioceses and eparchies are able to make a dedicated staff person available to support PPCs in their work, but such support does not appear to have a direct relationship in determining whether parishes ultimately establish a PPC. Most bishops recommend that PPCs take leadership roles in pastoral planning, consultation with parishioners, and faith sharing rather than in implementation of parish events, suggesting the desire that PPCs be more of a visioning body and less of a social activities committee.

A sizable majority of dioceses and eparchies have established myriad other structures for providing the episcopal leadership with consultation. In addition to mandated Presbyteral and Finance Councils, numerous boards, commissions, committees, and teams currently assist bishops by offering their experiences and visions for the good of the Church.

Analysis of Survey Responses

The following provides detailed statistical analysis of and commentary on the three sections of the survey.

I. DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCILS

60% of respondents (67 of 112) have an established diocesan pastoral council (DPC) at the present time. This figure includes some Latin rite dioceses and some eparchies of Eastern rites.

These DPCs meet anywhere from 1 to 10 times per year. The mean number of annual meetings is 4, as indicated by 40% of respondents.

Virtually all bishops (99%, or 66 of 67) report that they regularly attend DPC meetings, suggesting that they consider their participation in the process to be vital.

76% of dioceses/eparchies (51 of 67) provide training to help DPC members in their role. DPCs are rated only slightly more effective when training is provided than when training is not, raising the question of whether the particular training offered may be less comprehensive than council members require or if council members come to their role with a better initial understanding of it than previously thought.

The aspects of the DPC that bishops find most helpful in their episcopal leadership role include:

- 100% turn to DPCs as consultative bodies providing representative feedback.
- 69% turn to DPCs for long-range planning and visioning for the diocese/eparchy.
- 39% turn to DPCs for short-term, task-oriented project implementation.

Additional responses include turning to DPCs and their individual members for:

- considering parish clusterings or closings
- considering diocesan policy changes
- implementing diocesan/eparchial synod and synod goals
- reporting on and suggesting responses to pastoral concerns from specific areas of the diocese/eparchy
- leading local Deanery meetings
- meeting with parish pastoral councils
- planning an annual conference for parishes
- serving as an integral voice with clergy and religious
- general sounding board for various issues

On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 5 is most effective), bishops report that the effectiveness of their DPCs in providing them consultation falls throughout the range but very few believe the DPCs are only minimally effective (only three used ratings of 1 or 2). The mean effectiveness rating is 4, as indicated by 50% of respondents. Fourteen bishops, or 22% of respondents, rated their DPCs with an effectiveness of 5. Overall, bishops are suggesting that DPCs can be and are a helpful resource.

II. PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

65% of respondents (73 of 112) mandate the establishment of parish pastoral councils (PPCs) in their diocese/eparchy. 32% encourage parishes to establish PPCs. 2% take no particular action. One survey did not indicate a response. Most bishops are conveying the message that PPCs are important and should be established.

Throughout the dioceses/eparchies responding (109), an average of 85% of parishes are reported to have established PPCs. Respondents indicated that the establishment of PPCs in their region ranges from 32% to 100% of parishes.

In dioceses/eparchies where the vast majority of parishes (90% or more) are reported to have established a PPC, 80% of their episcopal leaders mandate such establishment, 18% encourage it, and one bishop takes no particular action. In virtually all dioceses/eparchies where PPC establishment is more limited (60% or fewer parishes with a PPC), the episcopal leaders encourage PPCs but do not

mandate their establishment. Generally, the stronger a view a bishop takes on the establishment of PPCs, the greater the response of parishes.

43% of respondents (48 of 111) have a diocesan/eparchial office or staff person whose sole responsibility is to support PPCs within the region. The reported participation level of parishes in establishing PPCs does not differ significantly based on whether a dedicated office/staff person is available to support them. This survey did not attempt to measure the effectiveness of PPCs, nor the relationship between the availability of a dedicated supporting office/staff person and PPC effectiveness.

The activities that bishops recommend PPCs undertake include:

- 95% suggest pastoral planning.
- 88% suggest broad consultation with parishioners to elicit hopes and concerns of the community.
- 73% suggest empowering parishioners to carry out plan objectives.
- 71% suggest regular prayer and faith sharing.
- 64% suggest coordinating or overseeing parish activities/events.
- 53% suggest reporting on parish activities/events.
- 44% suggest carrying out or implementing parish activities/events.

Additional responses include recommending to PPCs that they undertake:

- communication
- community building
- fellowship
- study of Church and diocesan/eparchial teaching and other documents
- attend formation activities sponsored by diocese/eparchy
- develop understanding of parish budgets and finance councils
- discernment for parish planning
- consider and address spiritual needs of the parish
- evangelization
- vocations awareness
- collaborate with cluster parishes and neighboring PPCs
- conduct liaison meetings with the diocesan pastoral council
- attend vicariate council meetings

III. OTHER CONSULTATIVE BODIES

70% of respondents (78 of 111) indicate that other forms of councils and consultative bodies (excluding Presbyteral and Finance Councils) are active in the diocese/eparchy. The other active councils and consultative bodies reflect a wide diversity in naming conventions and in topical issues being considered. The responses include:

- Administration – Administrators Staff, Bishop’s Administrative Council, Council of Administration
- Bishop’s Advisory Committee (Cabinet)
- Bishop’s Executive Committee
- Bishop’s Leadership Team

- Building – Building (3), Building Commission (5), Building Committee, Diocesan Building Board
- Campus Ministry Board
- Capital Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) Committee
- Catechesis – Bishop’s Committee on Catechesis, Board of Catechesis, Diocesan Council for Catechesis (2)
- Catechetics and Initiation Board
- Cathedral Restoration, Ad-Hoc Committee on
- Catholic Charities – Catholic Charities Board (5), Catholic Family Service Inc.
- Catholic Foundation – Catholic Foundation Board, Community Foundation, Foundation of [Geographic Location]
- College of Consultors (2), Diocesan Consultors (2)
- Communications Board
- Community (church and civic) Council
- Construction Board
- Deans/Deanery Council (8)
- Deacons/Diaconate – Deacons/Diaconate Assembly, Deacons/Diaconate Council (8)
- Deposit and Loan Fund Board
- Development – Development Committee, Development Council
- Diocesan Directors
- Diocesan Newspaper, Advisory Board
- Diocesan Synod
- Diocesan-wide meeting of all involved in full-time ministry
- Ecumenical – Ecumenical Commission, Ecumenical Committee, Ecumenical Council
- Education – Diocesan Commission on Education, Diocesan Education Council
- Education, Catholic Education/Schools – Catholic Schools Advisory Council (2), Catholic Schools Council (2), Diocesan Board of Catholic Education (9), Diocesan Catholic Education Board of Advisors, Endowment Trust Board, Funding Board Inc., Parish Boards of Total Catholic Education
- Education, Continuing – Continuing Education of Clergy Board, Continuing Education for Priests Committee (3)
- Education, Religious – Religious Education Committee (3)
- Education, Seminary – Seminary Education Board
- Ethics and Integrity in Ministry
- Ethnic Minorities
- Evangelization – Evangelization, Diocesan Evangelization Council
- Finance Council
- Formation – Deacon Formation Council, Seminary Formation Council (2)
- Formation, Faith – Diocesan Board of Faith Formation and Education, Lifelong Faith Formation Advisory Board
- Formation, Ministry – Diocesan Office of Ministry Formation and its consultors
- Fundraising, Ad-Hoc Committee on
- Guatemala Commission
- Health Services, Board of Catholic
- Hispanic Ministry, Diocesan Council of
- Housing – Bishop’s Housing Corp., Housing Board

- Intergenerational Ministries Committee
- Investments – Investments Advisory Committee, Diocesan Investments Council
- Justice and Peace – Justice and Peace Board (2), Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Collaborating Council
- Land Board
- Lay (Ecclesial) Ministers Council
- Lay (Ecclesial) Ministry Advisory Council
- Legal, Diocesan Team
- Liturgy/Liturgical – Liturgy/Liturgical (5), Liturgy/Liturgical Commission (8), Liturgy/Liturgical Council, Diocesan Worship Commission, Pastoral Liturgical Commission
- Marriage and Family Life, Bishop’s Committee on
- Orders and Ministries, Commission for
- Parish Life Ministers Group
- Pastoral Life and Ministry Board
- Pastoral Services, Diocesan Board of
- Pension – Lay Pension Board, Priests’ Pension Board (3), Priests’ Retirement Committee
- Personnel – Personnel Board (3), Personnel Committee, Personnel Council, Clergy Personnel Board, Deacons Personnel Board, Priest Assignment Commission, Priest Personnel Board (3), Priest Placement Board
- Planned Giving Advisory Council
- Planning – Board for Diocesan Planning (2), Planning Commission, Planning Committee, Pastoral Planning, Pastoral Planning Core Group
- Planning, Strategic/Long-Range – Strategic/Long-Range Planning (3), Strategic/Long-Range Planning Committee
- Priest Council (2)
- Priest Clergy Health and Retirement Board
- Presbyteral Council
- Program and Budget Review Committee
- RCIA, Diocesan Advisory Council
- Regional/Area Pastoral Councils (2)
- Regional-wide meeting of all priests, religious, deacons, and lay leaders
- Religious – Religious Advisory Board, Assembly of Religious, Commission for Religious, Council of Religious, Sisters Council (3)
- Religious Leadership – Conference of Religious Leadership, Religious Leadership Executive Committee
- Religious Women, Annual Gathering of
- RENEW, Ad-Hoc Committee on
- Renewal and Revitalization Commission
- Retreat Center Board (2)
- Rural Life, Catholic Rural Life Conference
- Sexual Misconduct Review Board (5), Sexual Abuse Review Board
- Social Justice, Secretariat for Social Justice Board
- Social Services – Social Services, Catholic Social Services Board, Catholic Social Services Board of Directors, Catholic Community Services
- Stewardship – Stewardship Committee, Stewardship and Mission Board
- Vicar – Board of Vicars, Regional Vicar

- Vocations – Vocations, Vocations Committee, Vocations Promotion Council
- Women – Commission for Women, Diocesan Council of Catholic Women (2), National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW), Women’s Commission (3)
- Youth – Youth, Youth Advisory Council, Youth Council (3), Diocesan Youth Board (2)
- Youth Ministry – Youth Ministry Board, Bishop’s Committee on Youth and Young Adult Ministry