

Questions to Consider When Drafting Diocesan/Eparchial Pastoral Council Statutes or By-Laws

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1. Nature of the Council

- What will be the official title for the pastoral council in the diocese/eparchy?
- Will the diocese/eparchy develop a statement of mission for the pastoral council?
- How will the pastoral council's consultative nature be incorporated into the statutes?
- How will the pastoral council relate to the other structures within the diocese/eparchy, such as the presbyteral council, the finance council, the college of consultors, and other central offices, agencies, and advisory groups (e.g., through mutual consultation on matters of common interest, ongoing communication, participation on committees, ex officio membership, etc.)?

2. Purpose of the Council

- What structural means will the members utilize to explore the pastoral needs of the diocese/eparchy?
- How can the pastoral council best achieve its ends of study, reflection, and dialogue for presenting practical conclusions to the bishop?
- Are there any general but clear objectives for the pastoral council that should be incorporated into the founding documents (e.g., to seek collective wisdom, to provide an open and honest forum for dialogue and communication concerning pastoral affairs, to foster collaboration between the pastoral units of the diocese/eparchy, to implement Church teaching on shared responsibility, to identify diocesan/eparchial pastoral needs, to coordinate diocesan/eparchial planning, etc.)?

3. Council Membership

- What will be the optimal number of members for the overall effectiveness of the pastoral council so that it may reflect the various diocesan/eparchial constituencies while being a good steward of time, personnel, and resources?
- Will there be a stated maximum or minimum number of council members, both collectively and/or within each category of persons who are invited to serve?
- Are there persons who will be designated as ex officio members of the pastoral council (e.g., particular diocesan/eparchial staff, presidents of parish pastoral councils, etc.)?
- Will some members be given voting privileges while others are given voice-only privileges?
- By what process(es) will members be chosen to serve on the pastoral council (e.g., election, appointment, consensus, etc.)?

- Will the diocesan/eparchial bishop appoint additional representatives by means of free conferral?
- What qualifications are to be expected of pastoral council members?
- Will there be a system for utilizing alternates, substitutes, or proxies when a member must be absent?
- How will vacancies on the pastoral council be resolved when they occur prior to the expiration of a member's term?
- Is there a procedure for the dismissal of members, including the circumstances for which dismissal is warranted, and a process for appealing dismissal?
- Will there be any provision for the formation of pastoral council members (e.g., orientation for new members, continuing education for all members, an annual retreat, etc.)?
- Will members be formally commissioned prior to serving on the pastoral council?

4. Meetings

- How many times per year will the pastoral council customarily schedule meetings?
- Who may recommend or request the convening of additional meetings of the pastoral council?
- How will the location for pastoral council meetings be determined (e.g., one central location, a process for rotation among different venues within the diocese/eparchy, etc.)?
- Are there particular local circumstances that should be considered when determining the time of year or the location for pastoral council meetings (e.g., travel distances, agricultural cycle, etc.)?
- Is a quorum of members necessary for the pastoral council to conduct a valid meeting?
- Will observers be permitted to attend pastoral council meetings?
- How will prayer be integrated into the pastoral council's activities?
- If pastoral council meetings are publicized, how will this be done (e.g., diocesan/eparchial newspaper, parish bulletins, letter to pastors, diocesan/eparchial mailings to all households, etc.)?
- How are pastoral council meetings to be conducted in order to assure the most respectful, expeditious, and engaging reflection upon the issues (e.g., parliamentary procedure, discernment through consensus, etc.)?
- How is the confidentiality of the members to be protected?
- Who may place items for consideration on the pastoral council's agenda (e.g., the bishop, council members, council committees, parish pastoral councils, non-members)?
- Are there any issues which by their very nature are not to be addressed by the pastoral council?
- When will the agenda be communicated to the members?
- Who will be responsible for preparing the minutes of pastoral council meetings?
- How will pastoral council minutes be adopted?

- When and how will the minutes be disseminated to pastoral council members?

5. Organization

- How is the bishop's authority vis-à-vis the pastoral council provided for at every necessary juncture of the council's functioning (e.g., the approval of the constitution and statutes, the convocation of the council, the designation of council members, the approval of the agenda, as presider over the assembly, the publication of the proceedings, the dissolution of the council, etc.)?
- Will the pastoral council have officers (e.g., chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary)? If so, what will be their titles, responsibilities, terms of office, method of selection, provision for filling vacancies, etc.?
- Will the pastoral council have standing and/or ad hoc committees (e.g., Executive Committee)? If so, who will constitute the committees? To whom will the committees be accountable?
- Will the pastoral council have a staff person? If so, what are the staff person's primary responsibilities with regard to the functioning of the council?

6. Miscellaneous Issues

- Will there be a periodic self-evaluation or assessment by the members concerning the workings of the pastoral council?
- What is the procedure for the submission and adoption of amendments to the pastoral council's constitution and statutes?
- How will the canonical provisions for the dissolution of the pastoral council be incorporated into the statutes?
- How will reasonable costs incurred by the pastoral council and its committees be administered?

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