

What does a Parish Council Do?

Here is a brief outline, as laid out by the Diocese of Saint John, of some of the responsibilities of a Parish Council.

1. The Parish Council unites clergy, religious and laity in a community of leadership and service. Service on a Parish Council is a ministry. Councilors are called to use their gifts in planning and coordinating the life of the parish. They are not on the Council to represent some group of parishioners, to lobby for their particular group or faction. Rather they represent the whole parish.

2. The Parish Council must be concerned with the fullness of the parish's mission, particularly with the evangelization and spiritual renewal of the communities of which they are a part. It is not a parish management committee, nor is it concerned with finance or parish buildings.

3. In union with the pastor, the Council is the primary policy-setting and decision-making body, sharing responsibility for the life and welfare of the parish - although the pastor bears the final responsibility for the local parish ministry.

4. Because of its pre-eminent responsibility for the parish's mission, the Council is the predominant parish organization. All other organizations and committees must communicate and co-operate with the Parish Council. As the primary leadership community, the Council supersedes every other parish unit. The Council must support and encourage parish organizations and committees, and seek their input to the overall pastoral plan. Parish organizational heads should not serve on the council, rather the Parish Council members should serve as liaisons with the various parish organizations.

5. The Parish Council reaches its conclusions by prayerful discernment and consensus decision making. A parish Council is not a democratic institution, where majority rules. It is a Christian community where members discern through prayer, study and the insights of all, the best course of action to be taken.

6. The Parish Council does not have any responsibility for the day to day operation of the parish such as staffing, music or religious education.

7. The Parish Council must discern the needs of the parish and community, and set parish direction by prayerful reflection and by continuous pastoral planning. This is done by considering the needs of the entire parish and the community of which it is a part.

8. The Parish Council must seek constantly to draw forth the talents, energies and insights of the parishioners and channel this "variety of gifts" for the building up of the whole Body of Christ. The Parish Council should try to make it possible for all parishioners to share in the mission of Jesus.

9. The Parish Council has a formal structure with established by-laws, regular meetings with an established agenda, and at least 50% of its membership is elected by the parish at large. Monthly meetings are recommended, with no less than 6 per year.

10. The Parish Council must understand and support the relationship of the parish to the Diocesan Church. All Parishioners belong to the Diocesan Church, as well as their parish. The Council serves as the connecting link between the diocese and the parish.

11. Parish Councils provide initial formation and continuous training to council members. Parish Council members have an obligation to acquire the background and skills necessary for their task. Fields of training for all Council members include spiritual formation and scripture, the theology of the Church and the role of the laity, the areas of mission, effective leadership and communication.

12. The Parish Council should communicate regularly with the parish and with the civic community of which it is a part. The Council exists for the parish, so it must tell the parish what it is doing and why.