

## Pastoral Council

The Diocese has made it imperative that every parish engage in some way with pastoral planning. “Maintenance” or “continuing what we have always done” is not an appropriate posture for a church that is fundamentally missionary in its nature.” The pastor – with the help of his parochial vicars, adjunct priests, the parish staff and the parish Pastoral Council- is to select from the Diocesan plan the goals and objectives for which the parish will develop action plans in any given year...”, Saint Jerome parish, along with other parishes in the Diocese, has been asked to undertake its own process of planning in reference to these goals and objectives. In a succinct manner, they are best expressed as encompassing: Sunday Mass, Living as Disciples, Growing in Faith, Leadership, Charity and Justice, Youth and Young Adults and Ethnic Diversity. The Council, a deliberative body, meets monthly and serves as an advisory resource to assist the Pastor with the formulation and execution of plans that promote parish goals.

Bishop O’Connell during October 2012 presented an explanation of Pastoral Council activities in the Diocese that provides a broad foundation for understanding and better appreciating the rationale for Councils throughout parishes in the Diocese. What follows has been edited for brevity. The entire article can be read in November 3, 2010 issue of the Monitor.

“The Pastoral Council is the fruit of Vatican II. That is very important to remember. Why? Because the Second Vatican Council introduced many significant changes into the life of the Church, different from previous experience. Most of us here today are so fortunate to have lived at a time in the Church’s history when an Ecumenical Council had occurred. We have the living memory to be able to recognize and compare the differences that existed between the time before the Council and the years the followed. Vatican II witnessed a new theology, a new ecclesiology or philosophy of being Church that saw the Church as the “people of God.” This new concept replaced a prior ecclesiology that viewed the Church as a “perfect society” – that is, a hierarchically ordered organization where the various levels of the organization did not necessarily interact or relate to/with each other to advance the Church’s mission. The notion of Church as “people of God” was rooted in the theological concept of “communio,” a communion of persons in relationship with one another in pursuit of a common goal or mission. It was and is based upon the Church’s understanding of the life of the Holy Trinity, the “divine communio” of three Persons in One God. The Pastoral Council is the fruit of this kind of thinking and did not exist before the Second Vatican Council.

By baptism and confirmation, all Catholics ... are now called ... to share in the Church's mission which is the very mission of the Lord Jesus Christ as priest, prophet and king in accord with their respective roles. These are not responsibilities limited to the clergy or hierarchy. As priest, by baptism and confirmation, all the faithful are called to personal holiness and to lead others to holiness. As prophet, by baptism and confirmation, all the faithful are called to teach and instruct but only after they have first learned and understood. As king, by baptism and confirmation, all the faithful share in leading and guiding the Church in their respective roles under the leadership of the diocesan bishop. The Pastoral Council is the fruit of this kind of thinking and is a new institute within the post-conciliar Church.

Vatican II placed a special emphasis on the local Church united around the diocesan bishop as its chief shepherd. The Pastoral Council was created to involve all the faithful – clergy, religious and lay – in participating in the Church's pastoral life and ministry. It is its responsibility to investigate and weigh matters that impact diocesan pastoral activities. It is its responsibility to formulate conclusions about the same. It is composed, not of representatives but, rather, the broadest cross-section of the diocese. It is not a “study club” or a decision-making body but, rather, a group of committed Catholics asked to examine diocesan pastoral life and to recommend concrete steps to promote and improve it.

Its purpose can be understood in terms of several “c’s”: to foster conformity with Jesus Christ, with his Gospel, with his Church; to be consultative to the bishop as chief shepherd; to be a medium of communication with the diocesan faithful; to serve as a model of cooperation and collaboration within and among the people of God in the local Church. I wish I could claim these as original ideas but they have been spoken of time and again throughout the Church in our country by those far more experienced in such matters than I....”

Using the Bishop's Diocesan Council model, the parish has adapted many of the diocesan features to define its own Council. Most importantly, the Parish Council, like the Diocese entity, has responsibility to study and weigh matters that impact parish pastoral activities. It is its responsibility to formulate conclusions relative to such activities. It is composed of a broad, practical cross-section of the congregation. It is not a “study club” or a decision-making body but, rather, a group of committed parishioners invited to examine parish pastoral life and to recommend concrete steps to the Pastor for promoting and improving it. Akin to the purposes framing the Diocesan model, the Parish Council can also be understood in terms of the “c’s” as put forth by Bishop O’Connell: to foster conformity with Jesus Christ, with his Gospel, with his Church; to be consultative to the pastor; to be a medium of communication with the parish congregation and to serve as a model of cooperation and collaboration within and among the people of the Saint Jerome parish.