

PASTORAL COUNCILS HELP FOSTER PASTORAL ACTION

- Before 1983, some pastoral councils called themselves 'parish councils';
 - some thought that they were in charge of the parish, or at least of its temporal affairs;
 - most had a lay president or chairman.
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- In 1983 the new Code of Canon Law said the council is "presided over by the Parish Priest".
 - More recently, Rome has declared that if he is absent the meeting is invalid;
 - there is no place for a lay president or chairman of a pastoral council;
 - moreover such a council is purely advisory and cannot have executive power.

Say 'Pastoral Council', please!

PARISH COUNCILS, as they are commonly called, would be better renamed in the authoritative words of Canon Law, **PASTORAL COUNCILS**.

No one imagines that the Diocesan Pastoral Council is governing the diocese. Nor should anyone imagine that the Parish Pastoral Council is governing the parish. The parish pastoral council is **not the parish's council but the pastor's council**, just as the diocesan pastoral council is not the diocese's council but the bishop's council. Besides, the unfortunate and all too common usage, 'parish' council, tends to convey subtly that it is a *legislative council*, which is not true. However, 'pastoral' council shows it is helping the pastor in the- pastoral work of the parish, i.e. the salvation of souls.

CANON LAW

THE diocesan and parish Pastoral Councils exist to *assist* Bishop and Parish Priest by co-operation and advice. They have only a *consultative* vote; they are not governing bodies. The Church is not a democracy. Thus:

Bishop governs his diocese:

Canon 375 §1: By divine institution, Bishops succeed the Apostles through the Holy Spirit who is given to them. They are constituted Pastors in the Church, to be the teachers of doctrine, the priests of sacred worship and the **ministers of governance**.

A parish priest rules his parish:

Canon 519: The parish priest is the proper pastor of the parish entrusted to him. He exercises the pastoral care of the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, whose ministry of Christ he is called to share, so that for this community he may carry out the offices of teaching, sanctifying and **ruling** with the co-operation of other priests or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of Christ's faithful, in accordance with the law.

Parish Pastoral Councils

Canon 536 §1 If, after consulting the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish. In this council, which is *presided over by the parish priest*, Christ's faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral care in the parish, *give their help in fostering pastoral action*.

§2. The pastoral council has *only a consultative vote*, and it is regulated by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop.

Compare Diocesan Pastoral Councils:

Canon 511: In each diocese, in so far as pastoral circumstances suggest, a pastoral council is to be established. Its function, under the authority of the Bishop, is to study and weigh those matters which concern the pastoral works in the diocese, and to propose practical conclusions concerning them.

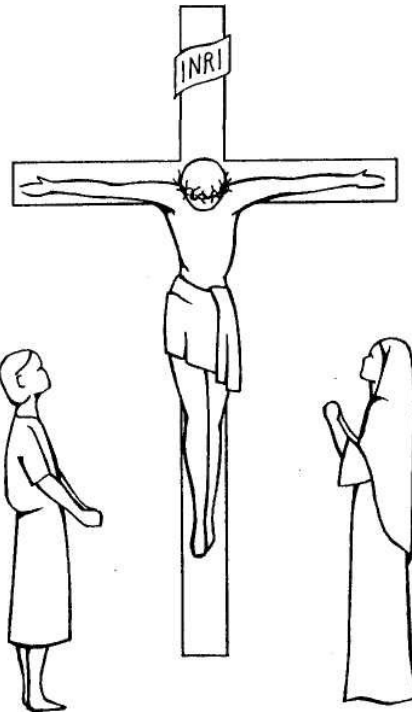
Canon 512 §1: A pastoral council is composed of members of Christ's faithful who are in full communion with the Catholic Church: clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life and especially lay people. They are *designated* in the manner determined by the diocesan Bishop

§2: The members of Christ's faithful *assigned* to the pastoral council are to be *selected* in such a way that the council

truly reflects the entire portion of the people of God which constitutes the diocese, taking account of the different regions of the diocese, of social conditions and professions, and of the part played in the apostolate by the members, whether individually or in association with others.

§3: Only those members of Christ's faithful who are *outstanding in firm faith*, high moral standards and prudence are to be *assigned* to the pastoral council.

Canon 513 §1: The pastoral council is appointed for a determinate period, in accordance with the provisions of the statutes drawn up by the Bishop.



"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20-28

§2 When the see is vacant, the pastoral council lapses. **Canon 514 §1:** The pastoral council has only a consultative vote. It is for **the diocesan Bishop alone** to convene it, according to the needs of the apostolate, and to **preside over it**. He alone has the right to make public the matters dealt with in the council.

§2: It is to be convened at least once a year.

Parish Finance Committee

Canon 537: In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the **administration of the goods of the parish**, without prejudice to canon 532. It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, and it is comprised of members of the faithful selected according to these norms.

The cross-reference to canon 532:

Canon 532: In all juridical matters, the parish priest acts in the person of the parish, in accordance with the law. He is to ensure that the parish goods are administered in accordance with canons 1281-1288.

Rome says... "consultative only, not deliberative"

THE POPE and his helpers in the Roman Curia have issued the *Instruction on Certain Questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*.

This *Instruction* is totally without precedent — see below for the signatures of 16 Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops of eight Congregations and Pontifical Councils of the Roman Curia, and the Pope.

It excludes any contrary diocesan directives: "All particular laws, customs and faculties conceded by the Holy See *ad experimentum* or other ecclesiastical authorities which are contrary to the foregoing norms are hereby revoked."

TWO SORTS of parochial Councils are mentioned in the *Instruction*, Article 5 §2, (italics in original): "Diocesan and parochial *Pastoral Councils* and *Parochial Finance Councils*, in which the non-

ordained faithful are members, enjoy **a consultative vote only and cannot in any way become deliberative structures**. Only those faithful who possess the qualities [there is a footnote referring to canon 512 §§ 1 and 3; see citation above] prescribed by the canonical norms may be elected to [i.e. 'chosen for', not necessarily by ballot] such responsibilities."

PARISH PRIEST THE ONLY PRESIDENT

Article 5 §3 adds that: "**It is for the Parish Priest to preside at parochial councils. They are to be considered invalid, and hence null and void, any deliberations entered into, (or decisions taken), by a parochial council which has not been presided over by the Parish Priest or which has assembled contrary to his wishes.**" A footnote cites canon 536. Note 'presided over': the dictionary defines both 'chairman' and 'president' as one who 'presides over'.

WHAT DO PASTORAL COUNCILS DO?

PARISH pastoral councils help the priest in pastoral activity, and provide co-ordination and mutual co-operation and encouragement for all the lay apostolates in the parish, with the families ('domestic churches') in the first place of all, and then:

- adoration & prayer groups,
- acolytes & servers,
- lectors & readers,
- organists & choirs,
- church wardens,
- catechists in government schools,
- lay teachers in Catholic schools,
- RCIA & convert classes,
- Adult Education Groups,
- Legion of Mary & St Vincent de Paul,
- Family Apostolate & Marriage Preparation,
- Preparation for Infant Baptism,
- Preparation for First Confession & Communion,
- Preparation for Confirmation,
- Mothers' Club & Mothers of pre-school children,
- Children of Mary,
- Youth Apostolate,
- Social Groups & activities, etc

Instruction on Certain Questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests

The SUPREME PONTIFF, in Audience of the 13th August, 1997, approved *in forma specifica* (ie. binding in every single detail) this present Instruction and ordered its promulgation.

Vatican City 15th August 1997, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

- **Congregation for the Clergy**
+ Dario Castrillon Hoyos, Pro-Prefect [now Cardinal Prefect]; + Crescenzio Sepe, Secretary
- **Pontifical Council for the Laity**
+ James Francis Cardinal Stafford, President; + Stanislaw Rylko, Secretary
- **Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**
+ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect; + Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B; Secretary
- **Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments**
+ Jorge Arturo Medina Estevez, Pro-Prefect [now Cardinal Prefect]; + Geraldo Majella Agnelo, Secretary
- **Congregation for Bishops**
+ Bernardin Cardinal Gantin, Prefect; + Jorge Maria Mejia, Secretary
- **Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples**
+ Jozef Cardinal Tomko, Prefect; + Giuseppe Uhac, Secretary
- **Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life**
+ Eduardo Cardinal Martinez Somalo, Prefect; + Piergiorgio Silvano Nesti C.P; Secretary
- **Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts**
+ Julian Herranz, President; Bruno Bertagna, Secretary