

AUTHORITY OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

"In dioceses, as far as possible, there should be councils which assist the apostolic work of the Church either in the field of making the gospel known and men holy, or in charitable, social, or other spheres. To this end clergy and religious should appropriately cooperate with the laity. While preserving the proper character and autonomy of each organization, these councils will be able to promote the mutual coordination of various lay associations and enterprises.

"Councils of this type should be established as far as possible also on the parochial, interparochial and interdiocesan level as well as in the national and international sphere." (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, n-26.)

With an increasing awareness of the call to discipleship, there has come from the very heart of the Church a compelling impetus to establish effective channels for fraternal consultation and cooperation among all who share, according to their calling, in the priesthood of Christ.

Recognizing that pastors "cooperate with the bishop in a very special way, for as shepherds in their own right they are entrusted

with the care of souls in a certain part of the diocese under the bishops' authority" (Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church, n-30), the pastor is in very fact the bishop's personal representative in the parish. Through the Parish Council the Pastor may be expected to gain valuable information and indispensable assistance for the enlightened decision-making which is demanded of spiritual leadership today.

Since it is in relation to Pastoral Councils that reference is made to Parish Councils by the ecumenical, Second Vatican Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (loc. cit.) and in the clarifying instruction of Pope Paul VI (Apostolic Letter, *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, October 6, 1966—Nos. 16, 17), it must be recognized that Parish Councils are by their nature consultative bodies. A Parish Council may be said to be a decision-making body in the sense that it facilitates the process of consultation through the thorough discussion of matters calling for practical resolution—discussion embracing every factor which might reasonably be expected to influence a decision. In this context it is essential that all discussants have prompt access to pertinent factors involved in the matter under discussion. The concept of consultation in this sense envisions that, when reasonable and prayerful men explore together a matter in depth, a consensus must normally evolve that is acceptable to the one who consults and to

those who are consulted.

In the Parish Council each member shall have one vote. All policies developed and defined by the Council shall reflect strict regard for the rights and duties of each member as delineated in Church law and civil law, and they shall be consistent with all policies and directives given by the Diocese of Rochester. Should the pastor, as the authentic leader of the parish community, take exception to a position sustained by more than one-half of the membership of the Parish Council (the rules for quorum having been established and stated in the Parish Council constitution for both regular and special meetings), he shall present a statement of rejection, giving the reasons which have prompted him to adhere to his position. Further moderate discussion is then to be initiated, the Parish Council having been recalled to "special session". At this point, the contested question shall automatically become a "reserved issue", i.e., the pastor's position will be then sustained unless two-thirds or more of the voting membership present at the "special session" shall register disagreement. If necessary, the matter could then be referred to the Pastoral Office for definitive resolution. Pending the final solution of the question, implementation of any course of action relating to the question at issue shall be considered provisional and, if possible, held in abeyance.

FORMATION OF A PARISH COUNCIL

In the formation of a Parish Council the appointment of a Steering Committee must be envisioned. Before such a committee is formed, however, it is essential to explicitly promulgate the intended establishment of a Parish Council. The first steps are crucial in laying a firm foundation for full participation and the support of parishioners for the Council. Meetings and discussions in which there is free and responsible participation by all interested parishioners, including to the fullest extent possible representatives of existing parish organizations, are vital steps in building firm support. Several preliminary sessions, sponsored by the Steering Committee, at which discussion and instruction in the nature, purposes, and goals of the Parish Council are studied, will bring the unique needs and potential of the parish into focus.

It must be borne in mind that the Parish Council members are collaborators in the formulation of parish policies within the ambit of their authority. They are called upon to be mindful of the pastoral aspects of their endeavors. The Parish Council is not an end in itself, but a means for reviewing and revitalizing the Church in all facets of its authority; it is to serve as a vehicle for Christians to articulate and implement their uniquely personal contributions to the life of the Christian community. From another point of view it is a structure for laity, religious, and priests to effectively participate in the total life of the parish.

When the parish has expressed after full discussion at appropriately scheduled meetings, a determination to form a Parish Council, a Steering Committee drawn from and representative of the entire parish (clergy, religious and laity) is to be established and charged with responsibility for studying the Diocesan Guidelines. Upon completion of its study, the Steering Committee in consultation with the pastor, shall be responsible for:

- 1) Preparing the Parish Council constitution, incorporating concepts presented in these Diocesan Guidelines and additional specifications recommended by the Steering Committee.
- 2) Developing a plan for the selection of the initial nominating committee.



... the anguishing burden of modern man — his loneliness.

- 3) Establishing the procedures for parish elections. The Steering Committee shall be dissolved when the constitution is ratified by the elected Parish Council. It is strongly suggested that the initial ratification of a constitution be provisional (for one or two years) with a view to reformation in the light of experience. A copy of the ratified constitution, both provisional and final, shall be forwarded to the Diocesan Council Office.

RESTRUCTURING AN EXISTING PARISH COUNCIL

Some Parish Councils have already been established and are functioning with varying degrees of success. The Diocesan Guidelines may add a new dimension for their consideration. To aid in self-analysis, it is recommended that a special Review Committee be established in such parishes with the mandate to:

- 1) Review the Parish Council constitution (or prepare the the council constitution if none exists) in accordance with the

Diocesan Guidelines, and the specific requirements established by the Parish Council.

- 2) Establish procedures for parish elections in collaboration with the existing Council.

MEMBERSHIP ON THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Council shall consist of elected and non-elected members. It is expected that the size of the Council will be determined by the size of the parish. Council membership must incorporate:

- 1) An elected majority. The number of elected members is to be determined by the size of each parish. This majority shall be representative of the entire parish and elected by the vote of registered adult parishioners. Terms of office should be staggered to provide continuity of Council membership.
- 2) A non-elected membership. The non-elected membership shall always include the Pastor, Associate Pastor(s) and Deacon(s), representatives of Religious Communities serving the parish, and representatives of parish-wide organizations or societies (men's, women's, youth groups, etc.).

Other non-elected members may be appointed by the Council itself to meet special circumstances: such members should be appointed for specific terms and purposes. These members will be selected by the Chairman in collaboration with the pastor and approved by the Council. Non-elected members shall always constitute a minority of the Council membership. Any elected member or representative of the Council absent from a specified number of meetings within a year without reasonable cause will be asked to submit his resignation from the Council. Three such consecutive absences are recommended as cause for justifiable automatic termination of Council membership.

PARISH TRUSTEES

It is recommended that Parish Trustees be drawn from the elected membership of the Parish Council. Trustee candidates will be presented by the Pastor for the approval of the Bishop and Vicar General in fulfillment of the Religious Corporation laws of New York State.