

Ways Parish Councils Fail

(Catholic Press Features)

In a column titled, "Preaching About Parish Councils," published in The Western Michigan Catholic of the Grand Rapids, Mich., diocese, Father Francis A. Novak, CSSR, listed "temptations" to be overcome in either establishing or updating a Parish Council.

Describing them as temptations to which parishioners, planning committees, parish council executive committees and pastors are susceptible, the priest listed them as follows.

- To think that a parish council is a super-organization in the

parish and all other groups, clubs, etc., must "knuckle under."

- Not to give parishioners who attend study sessions a firm foundation in the theology of the layman and his apostolate as enunciated by Vatican Council II.

- To fail to understand from the outset the vital distinction between the people of the parish council executive committee who make policy and those who must carry it out.

- For the parish council executive committee, which is pol-

icy-making, to get involved in carrying out its policies and recruiting and training other people to carry them out.

- To share responsibility in the apostolate and not know exactly how Vatican II has defined shared responsibility.

- To feel that one is qualified to run for election to the parish council executive committee and not have read and studied thoroughly Vatican II's document on the Laity and the Constitution of the Church, especially chapter four.

- To run for election to the parish council liturgical commission, for example, without having experience or involvement, for a reasonable period of time, in such areas as: a working knowledge of Vatican II document on the liturgy; attendance at several liturgical workshops; participation with the parish liturgical team in preparing liturgies; assembling the component parts of the liturgy; the benefit from the monthly instructional material provided by the office of the diocesan liturgical commission.

- To think that the purpose of a parish council is organization of all the people rather than renewal of a few at a time.

- To believe that the role of the parish in the modern day is still the same as thirty years ago.

- To expect the parishioners who are invited to study sessions to keep coming if the sessions are uninteresting, poorly presented, badly conducted, leaving people disappointed that they really "wasted an evening of precious time."

- Not to get across to the parishioners who attend study sessions that a parish council is effective only to the degree that it is a spiritual endeavor and directed to Christ.

- To think that if we are not ourselves deeply religious, prayerful, determined to love and serve Christ and our neighbor, above petty personal self-glory-seeking and above the pitfalls of power-seeking, that we can instill in our fellow parishioners the goals of the parish council.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Van Etten — Religious education classes for Grades 1 to 6 will be held Sundays following the 9 and 11 a.m. Masses at St. Pius Church, according to Father Bernard Kuchman.

Teachers will include Helen Berkley, Muriel App, Melba Lakin, Theresa Maki, Ann Norton, Patricia Palomaki.

Our Parish COUNCIL

by Bernard Lyons

"At our last council meeting our pastor did not appear, but sent a note which was read by the chairman and which stated that the pastor would not be at the meeting because he felt unneeded and unwanted," a reader writes from a Midwest diocese.

"We discussed it for an hour, but none of us could come up with the slightest reason for his thinking so. Several days later, at our request, he met with us for the purpose of telling us why he felt that way. At this meeting he told us he was abolishing the council because we did not represent the people!

"Ten of the members were elected by the people, and out of 800 parishioners more than half voted, which is better than the national average!"

I phoned long-distance and talked with the reader. She told me that the pastor had undertaken the redecoration of the church and had appointed three representatives to the newly forming diocesan pastoral council without consulting the council.

Of course, I told her, from this distance, I have no single solution. The problem has many sides and requires solutions. And those actions must come from the people and the diocese itself.

The bishop, too, must concern himself with the problem. The parish is a part of the diocese. Not as a piece of pie is a part of the whole pie, but as a limb of our body is a dynamic part of us.

The pastor is a delegate of the bishop. He represents the bishop to the people of your community. All of you, therefore, are most truly Church as members of the diocese. The problem concerns all of the diocese, "the local Church."

I encourage the council members to continue to meet. They can find plenty to do at this time while at the same time avoiding setting policies for the parish while they do not have the pastor's cooperation.

They have a right as baptized and confirmed Catholics to express their responsibilities to their Christian community, the diocese, and the world. The priest didn't give them this and he can not take it away.

They would find it helpful to continue their committee work, especially those actions that are of service to the poor, the elderly and the ignorant.

They might be helped by reading the New Testament, discussing it, and finding parallels, especially in the Acts of the Apostles, to their own situation.

They will also gain confidence to speak out by reading the Constitution on the Church and the Decree on the Laity from the Vatican II documents.

In addition, council members should explore what diocesan policies have been established in regard to parish councils. How do they relate to your problem?

They might also seek out any priest who has been given any type of assignment relating to councils. This might be the priest who heads the parish council committee for the Priests' Senate to a diocesan moderator of councils. Ask him to meet with you and help to re-open communication with your pastor.

Since the diocesan pastoral council is so new it may not be of any immediate help, but they should be informed of the situation. Council members should write an objective report of the situation and send it to the chairman of the diocesan council.

If there is an interparish council (either on a local basis or on a deanery level) they should be asked for help and advice.

Finally, I would suggest that they recognize that the pastor has a problem of education and Christian commitment. Pray that the Holy Spirit may guide the council to use this setback as a means to deepen their own and the pastor's understanding of the Church and its mission.

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Archbishop to Be CDA Keynoter

Atlantic City (RNS) — Archbishop Duraisamy S. Lourdu-samy, pro-Secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, will deliver the keynote address at the 34th biennial convention of the Catholic Daughters of America here, July 15 to 21.

Besides the prelate, who is from Bangalore, India, participants will include New Jersey Gov. William Cahill; Father Stephen Quinn, superior general of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity; and Bishop, Bernard J. Flanagan of Worcester, Mass., national CDA clergy consultant.

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