

Parish Councils In the Diocese ... A History

The parish council in the Diocese of Rochester goes back nearly eight years. This "basic building block" for the Diocesan Pastoral Council was produced by a few parishes in late 1967 and early 1968. A survey completed in August 1970 showed that 65 of the 192 parishes had organized councils. Today, there are 140.

"Because the Second Vatican Council provided no more than a few scattered paragraphs and sentences on parish councils, the process of developing a council depended very much on what a parish could learn about it from other parishes — their successes and failures," according to a report prepared by the Office of Pastoral Ministry.

This office was set up two years ago particularly to spur the development of councils. It is prepared to help in formation and training, and to advise on particular problems. Father Douglas Hoffman is director.

The following outline of parish council development was extracted from a "history" he wrote in advance of the first DPC convocation last month.

The original 1970 count of parish councils was taken by the Rochester Association of Catholic Laymen and the Southern Tier Association of Catholics, at the request of Bishop Joseph L. Hogan. These two organizations recommended that diocesan-wide guidelines be adopted and that a lay commission be established to assist in the formation of councils.

In November of 1970, Fathers Booth, Hempel and Davis were appointed by the Priests' Council to establish a philosophy by which an actual working steering committee for the formation of a Diocesan Pastoral Council could be chosen and guided.

In December 1970 this planning group recommended that the Priests' Council set up a committee of 15 to 20 persons with more lay people than the combined total of priests and sisters. It would be the responsibility of this committee to draw up a proposal for the DPC. This group would assume responsibility also for parish council development.

In March of 1971, the Priests' Council accepted Father Charles Mulligan's plan, "The Pastoral Council." This plan indicated that parish councils, which are the basic roots of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, must be given real decision-making power in the parish.

Bishop McCafferty and Msgr. Mulcahy were appointed in March of 1971 by Bishop Hogan to form the Pastoral Council Formation Committee (PCFC). By

May, Bishop Hogan had approved the appointment of a number of lay, priests and sisters to be members of the PCFC.

At the first meeting of the PCFC on May 25, 1971, it was stated that the parish council in every parish would serve as a foundation for the Pastoral Council and that parish councils should be generated regionally to prevent any isolationism. Subcommittees were established and chairmen appointed.

During May 1971, the Guidelines subcommittee drew up a preliminary draft of guidelines for parish councils. The Education subcommittee proposed a program for establishment of parish councils which called for expansion of the committee to include regional teams and experts in ecclesiology, journalism and education; an impact session for this committee; regional meetings for priests, sisters and laity; a laity education program.

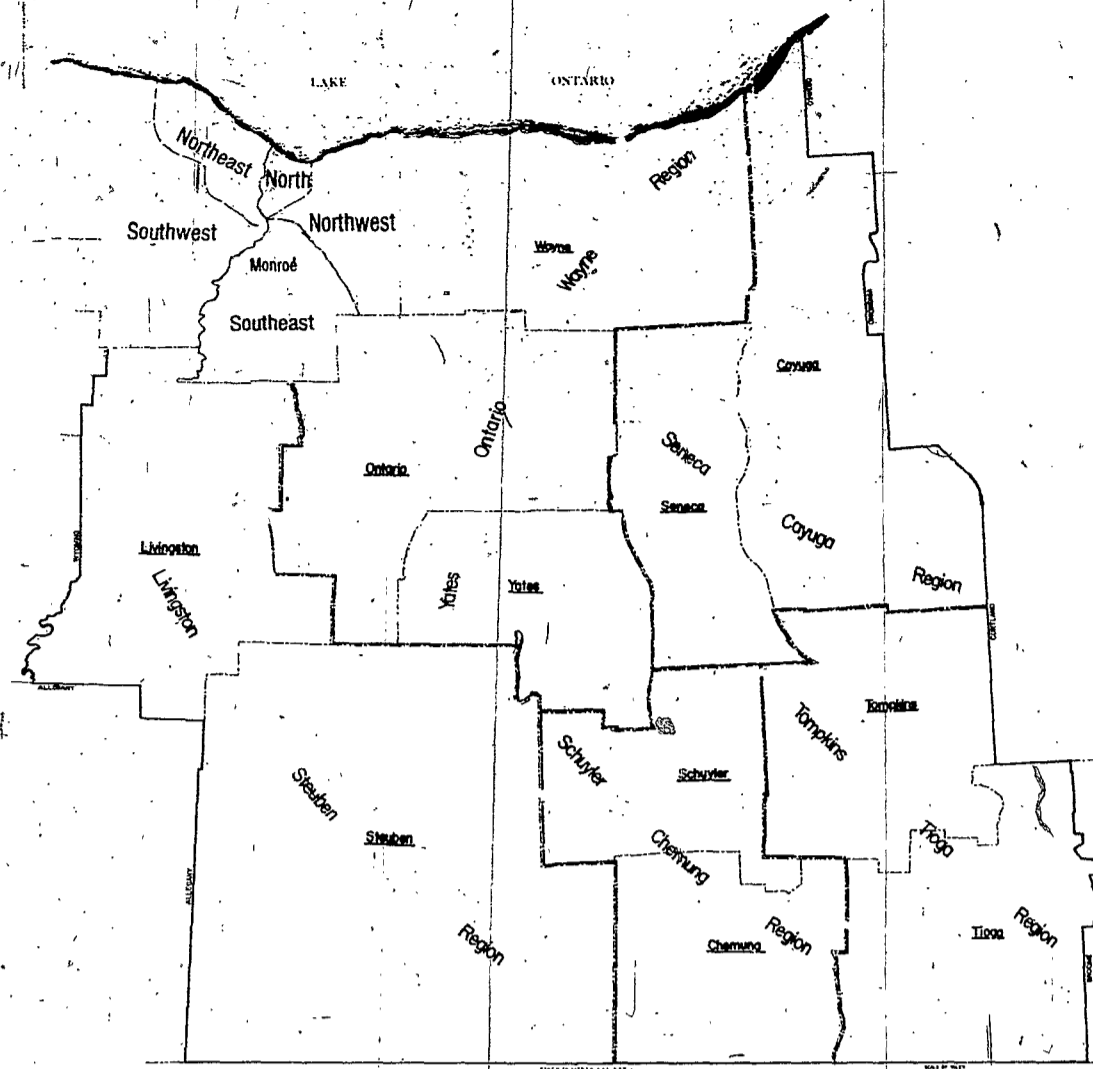
In June of 1971, the Regionalization subcommittee presented a report of data regarding percentages of parishes, priests, families and parish income. Division of diocese into regions was recommended. The Education subcommittee called for a year of renewal for the diocese. The Service subcommittee felt that it was necessary for councils to request assistance rather than have it forced upon them. They felt their committee should await further action until parish council guidelines were established.

In July of 1971 the Education subcommittee further explained its role to include the following: development of a diocesan-wide educational program on parish councils via news media, pulpits, schools, etc. The basic themes of this program were to be The Church, The Parish, The Laity, The Parish Council, and organization of Parish Council Steering Committees.

In August 1971, the PCFC voted in favor of a year of renewal.

In September 1971, emphasis was placed on the establishment of regional committees for parish councils as a means of providing a regional "spark plug" for each parish council committee.

On Oct. 15-16, 1971, the PCFC sponsored a Seminar on Renewal at Becket Hall in Rochester. In addition to PCFC members, department heads, and representatives from all regions of the diocese attended this seminar which was conducted by Richard Dement, program director of the National Council of Catholic Men. The purpose was to formulate plans as to what should be done to vitalize the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Rochester.



Diocese with regions delineated.

On November 7, 1971 a "Dialogue with the Bishop" was held. As part of the PCFC goal, "To lay the groundwork of renewal from which the Pastoral Council will result, and to deal in the issues of the times", the following proposals were presented to the Bishop:

- 1) That councils be encouraged in every parish and guidelines be provided before the end of the year.
- 2) That an intensive orientation be conducted for the pastoral coordinators as to their role and function, so they might guide those parishes wanting to start a council and to update existing councils.
- 3) That the PCFC be ready to service these parishes before the end of the year.
- 4) That each parish prayerfully embark on an intensive analysis of its spiritual condition and priorities.
- 5) That proposed action be forwarded to the Pastoral Coordinator.

On November 19, 1971, Bishop Hogan sent a letter to all priests in which he requested that all parishes begin to establish councils or update existing ones by Pentecost of 1972.

In December, 1971, Bishop McCafferty sent the approved "Guidelines for Parish Councils" to all Diocesan priests. The letter indicated that the Guidelines had the expressed approval of Bishop Hogan and that "regional coordinators" would be chosen to promote parish council formation and evaluation. At this same time, the PCFC was restructured to reflect regional interests, ethnic and cultural groupings, Sisters' Council, and various categories of the clergy. Committees under the regional coordinators were to be the action and service groups under this new plan.

By January of 1972, the PCFC had held regional meetings with priests and with the laity to explain the PCFC aims and purposes. A committee had been appointed to write a position paper on the Mission of the Church in Rochester, which would become the basis for the Year of Renewal.

In February, 1972 it was an-

nounced that the diocese would be divided into ten regions (5 metro, 5 non-metro) based on a geographical division by counties in the non-metro areas and a pie-shaped division of Monroe County. At the same time the Office of Regional Coordinator was established and ten priest-coordinators were appointed for a period of one year. The Regional Coordinators, as the personal representatives of the Bishop in their regions, were called upon, "... to promote shared responsibility between parishes and to coordinate the various ministries of each region of the diocese ... (and) to provide the leadership and guidance that is demanded by the diocesan revitalization program

During 1972, the Service subcommittee of the PCFC continued working with parishes to explain the work of parish councils.

In May 1972, Bishop Hogan wrote, "Pastoral Council: My fondest hope" in the *Courier-Journal*.

In June 1972, Father Daniel Holland was appointed director of the Year of Renewal.

During the month of June, the three bishops met with the clergy in small groups to discuss the study paper on the Mission of the Church in the Diocese of Rochester.

On July 27, 1972, Fr. Daniel Holland wrote all priests announcing the formal beginning of the Year of Renewal to be September 9-10, 1972.

At a PCFC meeting in November, 1972 the Regional Coordinators presented a status report on parish council and regional development.

In April 1973, Msgr. Mulcahy resigned from his duties as executive secretary of the PCFC. Shortly thereafter, a search committee was appointed for the purpose of drafting a job description for a full-time person to replace him. In August of 1973, the Pastoral Ministry Office was created to meet the new and ongoing needs of ministry arising in parish councils and regional leadership, and their interaction with the Bishop and the departments.

In addition to having responsibilities related to Regional Coordinators and to the

Bishop, the director of the Office of Pastoral Ministry was to be responsible to the parish councils in the following ways: assessing and developing training needs at parish and regional levels, coordinating a central delivery of services from the Pastoral Offices to parish councils, design and coordination of a systematic communication network to all parish councils, coordinating the development and upkeep of more meaningful parish profiles, reviewing and revising parish council guidelines and constitutions. Providing consulting services for specific problem areas in parish council development.

At a PCFC meeting in September 1973, Father Hoffman outlined his goals which included visiting every parish council in the diocese to learn, offer services, identify needs, respond to practical questions and relate the urgency of forming a parish council.

In October of 1973, Father Hoffman reported that parish councils in the Diocese were at all stages of development. Much good will, talent and love coming to the surface. Principal difficulties were directional, organizational and spiritual.

In January 1974, Father Hoffman formed an Advisory Board on Parish Councils for the purpose of designing a self-evaluation tool for parish councils, development of a training program for chairmen and for councils, and rewriting the Diocesan Guidelines for Parish Councils.

From September 1973 through February 1975, at the invitation of the pastor or council chairperson, the Office of Pastoral Ministry had gone to parish council meetings in 89 parishes. The purpose of the visit is usually to listen to the concerns expressed at the regular meeting, make a brief presentation on the purposes of parish councils, Diocesan assistance available to councils, and provide an opportunity for questions and discussion.

The Office of Pastoral Ministry is issuing a new set of guidelines for parish councils, which will include a broader view of total parish ministry. A statement of purpose and areas of mission of the parish council and the Diocese, and the role of the council as direction-setter for the parish is being prepared.