



## GENERAL DECREE

### PARTICULAR LAW FOR PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

Attentive to the need for updated norms regarding parochial pastoral councils and in accordance with canon 536, §2, I hereby revoke all prior norms and legislation relating to parish pastoral councils and decree the following as particular law for the Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee.

#### Introduction

In light of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council,<sup>1</sup> the law of the Church recommends the establishment of parish pastoral councils as a means of promoting fruitful cooperation between the lay faithful and their pastors. The *Code of Canon Law* states: “If the diocesan bishop judges it opportune after he has heard the presbyteral council, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity” (canon 536, §1). Subsequent documents of the Holy See have spoken of the importance of the pastoral council as a means for the pastor to utilize the gifts and talents of the lay faithful in the life of a parish.<sup>2</sup>

An Instruction of the then-Congregation for the Clergy helpfully articulates the role of the parish pastoral council: “The basic task of such a council is to serve, at the institutional level, the orderly collaboration of the faithful in the development of pastoral activity which is proper to priests. The

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<sup>1</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964), 33. See also ID., Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum ordinis* (7 December 1965), 9.

<sup>2</sup> “[T]he pastoral council can be a most useful aid [...] providing proposals and suggestions on missionary, catechetical, and apostolic initiatives [...] as well as on the promotion of doctrinal formation and the sacramental life of the faithful; on the assistance to be given to the pastoral work of priests in various social and territorial situations; on how better to influence public opinion, etc.” (SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, Circular letter *Omnes christifideles* [25 January 1973], 9).

“This Council’s mention of examining and solving pastoral problems ‘by general discussion’ ought to find its adequate and structured development through a more convinced, extensive and decided appreciation for “Parish Pastoral Councils,” on which the Synod Fathers have rightly insisted” (JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifideles laici* [30 December 1988], 27).

“The pastor should never fail to seek the opinion of his collaborators regarding the varied questions arising in parish life, particularly the *parish pastoral council*” (CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum successores* [22 February 2004], 211).

pastoral council is thus a *consultative* organ in which the faithful, expressing their baptismal responsibility, can assist the pastor, who presides at the council, by offering their advice on pastoral matters.”<sup>3</sup>

The parish pastoral council is governed by the universal law of the Latin Church and the following norms.

**Article 1. Establishment**

- §1. Every parish<sup>4</sup> in the Diocese shall have a parish pastoral council.
- §2. When a new pastor or parochial administrator is appointed, he shall establish a new pastoral council within one year.
- §3. The parish pastoral council ceases when a pastor resigns or when a pastor is transferred or removed.
- §4. A mission church is part of a parish and, therefore, one or more of the faithful who regularly worship at the mission church should be included among the members of the parish pastoral council.

**Article 2. Membership**

- §1. The pastor presides over the parish pastoral council (canon 536, §1) but is not a member of the council.<sup>5</sup>
- §2. All members of the parish pastoral council must be in full communion with the Catholic Church and considered to be outstanding in firm faith, good morals, and prudence.<sup>6</sup>
- §3. The parish pastoral council shall be composed of *ex-officio* members and at least four appointed members.

**Article 3. Appointed Members**

- §1. The appointed members of the parish pastoral council will ordinarily be laypersons; however, religious who are assigned to the parish or work in the parish may be appointed.

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<sup>3</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, Instruction *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community* [2 August 2002], 26 (emphasis original).

<sup>4</sup> In this document, everything said of parishes also applies to quasi-parishes (see c. 516, §1).

<sup>5</sup> J. RENKEN, *Particular Churches: Their Internal Ordering: Commentary on Canons 460-572*, Ottawa, St. Paul University, 2011, 283.

<sup>6</sup> Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests *Ecclesia de mysterio* (15 August 1997), art. 5, §2; see c. 521, §§1, 3.

§2. The appointed members of the parish pastoral council are ordinarily limited to those who have domicile or quasi-domicile in the territory of the parish or those who are registered as members of the parish.

§3. Members are appointed for a term of not less than three years.

#### **Article 4. *Ex-officio* Members**

§1. Those who “share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish” (canon 536, §1) are *ex-officio* members of the council, including:

- 1° the parochial vicar(s),
- 2° the deacon(s) assigned to the parish,<sup>7</sup>
- 3° the principal of the parochial school, and
- 4° the director of religious education.

§2. Since pastoral initiatives should always be considered in light of the financial state of the parish, the parish finance council chair also serves as an *ex-officio* member.

#### **Article 5. Cessation of Membership**

§1. Appointed members cease to be members of the council through cessation of the council, resignation, removal, or completion of their term.

§2. The pastor is not to remove a member from the pastoral council except for a just cause.

#### **Article 6. Officers**

§1. The pastor may select one of the appointed members to serve as the chairperson of the parochial pastoral council.

§2. The chairperson assists the pastor in scheduling meetings, preparing agendas, distributing the minutes of meetings, and performing other duties assigned by the pastor.

§3. The pastor shall designate a secretary from among the appointed or *ex-officio* members to record the minutes of the meetings, which are to be kept permanently in the archive of the parish.

#### **Article 7. Meetings**

§1. The parish pastoral council shall meet at least four times per year.

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<sup>7</sup> UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States of America, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2021, 53.

- §2. The pastor presides at the meetings of the pastoral council.<sup>8</sup> For a just cause, he may ask the chairperson to conduct a council meeting.
- §3. The council shall not meet without the presence of the pastor.
- §4. Meetings should ordinarily be conducted in person.

**Article 8. Voting**

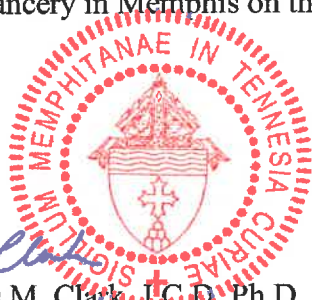
The parish pastoral council need not vote on matters to fulfill its consultative role; however, the pastor may request that a vote be conducted. Such votes are only consultative in nature (canon 536, §2).<sup>9</sup>

**Article 9. Statutes**

- §1. The pastor may compose statutes for the parish pastoral council, which must be approved by the local ordinary.
- §2. If the current pastor has not provided statutes for the pastoral council, these norms function in the place of statutes.

These norms are to be posted on the diocesan website and take effect one month from publication.

Given at the Chancery in Memphis on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2026



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*+ David P. Talley*

Most Rev. David P. Talley, M.S.W., J.C.D.  
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<sup>8</sup> *Ecclesia de mysterio*, art. 5, §3.

<sup>9</sup> See also *Ecclesia de mysterio*, art. 5, §2.

“The pastoral council is to be seen in relation to the context of the relationship of mutual service that exists between a pastor and his faithful. It would therefore be senseless to consider the pastoral council as an organ replacing the pastor in his government of the parish, or as one which, on the basis of a majority vote, materially constrains the pastor in his direction of the parish” (*The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*, 26).