

Minutes of the September 10, 2011 Meeting of the Diocesan Pastoral Council

The meeting was opened by facilitator Quentin Wadle. Bishop Melczek led the Council in prayer. Following prayer, Quentin asked the new and old members to introduce themselves and state their parish, the ministries they are involved in.

In his opening remarks, the Bishop spoke about his experience at World Youth Day, and the importance of relationships. He recapped the March meeting, stating that the training for the implementation of the Revised Roman Missal was going well, and their input was helpful. He continued by bringing to the attention of the Council the article in their mailing that related to the growing Catholic population over the past decade, while at the same time the numbers of Catholic priests and Catholic parishes have declined. He hoped they would find the article helpful in their discussion. The Council broke into small groups for the first round of discussion.

Round I: Brainstorming Session

#1: Do the members of your Parish Pastoral Council understand their role?

- Generally, the members understand their role but the selection process is unclear in some parishes, and consequently the work of the Council is affected. Another group stated just the opposite – the selection process is clear, but the member's role may not be clear.
- Those who are assisted by Anne Verbeke understand their roles, but in some cases the member is not acceptant of his/her role.
- Membership is not taken seriously. There is a high rate of absenteeism.

#2: How often does your Parish Pastoral Council meet? Does the council have 12 lay members?

- The frequency of meetings ranges from monthly, to 10 times a year, to 6 – 8 times per year.
- Council membership in general is 12, but the size of the parish affects the number. Smaller parishes have fewer possible members, so their councils are smaller.

#3: What is the focus of discussion at your meetings?

- a. Is it on the programs and spiritual life of the parish?
 - b. Is it on issues of viability?
 - c. Is it on money, buildings, and parking lots?
 - d. Is it about evangelization and retaining our young people?
 - e. All of the above or none of the above?
- Most of the discussion centers on the school, facilities, and money. Some parishes do discuss the spiritual life of the parish.
 - Evangelization is discussed at some Councils, particularly in relation to retaining young people. This also relates to the selection process – lack of young people participating in the discernment process.
 - Others commented that there is no over-emphasis on any one area of discussion.
 - There needs to be a better vehicle for parishioners to be able to share their ideas, as well as, a way for the Council to communicate what is discussed at the meetings.

The bishop then commented, stating that communication is a key element. Our changing culture affects everything; we are moving from a culture of extreme dependence on the priest for everything, to one of increased lay involvement. We need to find vehicles for the People of God

to work to build the Kingdom. He also noted that it is much easier to talk about finances, etc., than about our spiritual life and evangelization. When the parish budget is discussed, the entire Council should be brought in after the Finance Council has developed the budget, because the budget sets the priorities for the parish .

Round II: Recommendation to the Bishop

#1: What did you hear this morning from the first discussion and what do you see at your own Pastoral Council meetings that prevent the Councils from functioning as they should?

- A lot has to do with the mindset. Things in the Church are changing more quickly than they have in the past, and some priests who are older do not change quickly.
- Communicate, communicate: this problem exists between the Council and the Commissions. They don't communicate with each other, so the parish community isn't kept involved.
- Change the method of communication from the Pastoral Council Office to e-mail.
- Absenteeism is a frequent problem. Is it possible to have a substitute.

#2: What steps do you recommend that a parish can take to help their Pastoral Council function as it should? What type of assistance do you think the Office for Pastoral Councils should be providing to help the Pastoral Councils function better?

- Formation has been done in many parishes, but the conversation leads to the fact that the pastor is key to the success of the Council.
- More organization, with agendas in place for meetings, is needed.
- Formation: most people don't recognize this as an opportunity to serve in Jesus' name.
- Have a short retreat for potential members; encourage members to bring someone with them to a meeting to get an idea of how the Council functions.
- Having Anne come out to get the Council going is effective, but how do we keep it going? Have the Office for Council have a sub-committee or volunteers willing to make parish visits to help the Councils.
- Have joint meetings of the Pastoral Councils from all parishes.
- Encourage greater unlimited membership on committees to discourage private ownership of committee.
- More information should be provided to all parishioners as to the opportunities available.
- Revise training manual that will expand more on the selection process, role of the Council member, etc.

#3: What topics or issues would your group like to discuss at future diocesan council meetings?

- What is the priests' involvement in clusters?
- How to get young people involved at their parish.
- How do we compete with the other "gods" in our world?
- Meaningful ways to promote and renew a personal relationship with Jesus beyond traditional faith formation.

The bishop commented that for communication to be increased, the laity, especially the leaders, need to take responsibility to move the Council forward, and not wait for the Pastor to have to do it. The Bishop thanked the Council for their input and for their open discussion. Anne Verbeke thanked the Council also for the insights and suggestions. She will keep them updated.

The meeting was ended with prayer followed by lunch. **The next meeting will be on Saturday, March 10th at the Pastoral Center. The meeting will begin at 9:00 a.m.**

