

Official Communiqué 19

The Pastoral Orientation Council in the Parishes

Reference Points

This reflection statement is not aimed at going back over the definition of the Orientation Council in the parishes but at recalling their source and some modes of application with a view to easing their implementation. The perspective of a catechesis of the whole community, which forms part of the Evangelization and Pastoral Animation Project, provides a new chance to relaunch the Pastoral Orientation Councils. Here are some points of reference to assist parish leaders.

Ecclesiological Reference Points

It is the very nature of the Church that summons a pastoral council whether it be a diocesan or parish (or inter-parish) council. In the entire period preceding the Second Vatican Council and in the course of this same Council¹, we came to understand that the Church is made up of all the faithful who belong to it; and that this Church is the initiator of evangelizing action in each of its members and not simply an object of evangelization or of pastoral attention. Consequently, with the Church initiating evangelization, it is natural, indeed imperative, that its members, and not only those entrusted with a pastoral responsibility or those participating closely in a parish, may express themselves on the pastoral orientations of the Church. Now, one of the ways of doing this is to set up a Pastoral Orientation Council where the people of a parish or a parish cluster can express their expectations, their vision and their desires as to the evangelizing action of the Church in a given place.

The true nature of the Church is not manifested fully when all the evangelizing activity and pastoral thinking are monopolized by the priest or priests, or even by the pastoral team. This is reverting to clericalism in a new guise, which leaves every initiative, every pastoral orientation in the hands of a few. The true nature of the Church is also distorted when this participation in pastoral plans is entrusted to other authorities who do not have this as their prime responsibility, for instance, the churchwardens or support committees. The Pastoral Orientation Council has a specific responsibility that stands in the direct line of discernment, advice and leadership in thinking, communication and vision.

In our diocese we have entrusted to the Pastoral Orientation Council the development, bringing up to date and supervision of the Evangelization and Pastoral Animation Project that is being requested of each parish (or each parish cluster). It is certain that the pastoral team members, and, above all, the pastor have a deciding role in developing this Evangelization Project, but the pastoral team's role will primarily be centred on launching the project and determining the

¹ The Council explicitly mentions a pastoral council at the parish level only in the Decree on *The Apostolate of the Laity*. The apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no.27, expressly deals with it.

priorities to be put forward each year or for given periods. I note finally that this project is one belonging to the parish and not just to the pastoral team. It is a project in which the Church in a specific place will appear as a synodal Church, a collection of people who walk together in response to the Lord's call.

Reference Points for Implementation and Renewal of the POC

Nature and Role

There is no unique or uniform model for a POC. The essential point about this council is the fact that members of the community can deliberate, take part in development of the Evangelization Project and in its bringing up to date, proceed with evaluations of the way in which the community is living and proclaiming the Gospel, and encourage everybody's participating in the vitality of the parish. There are thus several possible models for a POC: one for a large parish, a single POC for a parish cluster comprising several parishes, a single POC for a region as is the case with the Anglophone Region of the diocese.

Composition

It is obvious that the pastor (or the moderator) and the co-ordinator of parish activities are part of the POC, but, since the POC is needed precisely to enable the lay faithful to participate in establishing parish orientations, it is normal for the majority of POC members to be lay people not already engaged in parish service as pastoral agents or churchwardens. On the other hand, to allow, at the same time, a certain stability and a renewal of members, it would be important to set the duration of the mandate for POC members at three years, for instance, renewable for one term. As to the number of POC members, this will vary with the size of the parish or parishes concerned. Based on experience, one may think of a minimum of 6 to 8 persons and a maximum of 12.

It is up to the regional leaders to assist the parishes or parish clusters in the establishment and fulfilment of the POC mandate. This responsibility goes hand in hand with the one related to guiding parishes in the development and initiation of the parishes' evangelization and pastoral animation projects.

May these few reflections help each of the parishes of our diocese to deepen the vision of Church desired by the Second Vatican Council and thus contribute to a new vitality in our whole Church.

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