

# **Evaluating the Need for a Diocesan/Eparchial Pastoral Council**

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The function of a diocesan or eparchial pastoral council is to offer advice to the diocesan or eparchial bishop concerning the pastoral needs of the people of God entrusted to his care. There are several structures in canon law which provide the diocesan/eparchial bishop the means for obtaining consultation on matters affecting the diocese or eparchy. The presbyteral council and the diocesan/eparchial finance council are just two of the many structures frequently utilized for this purpose. Moreover, the bishop may have an additional group of trusted advisors with whom he consults on a more regular basis.

Should the bishop consider that there may be an advantage to obtaining the counsel of a broader spectrum of individuals within the diocese/eparchy, he may wish to convene a pastoral council for this purpose. The following is a suggested five step process that may be used for establishing a diocesan/eparchial pastoral council as a means for further consultation in the life of the local church.

## **Step 1: Initial Consultation with the Presbyteral Council and with Other Select Groups within the Diocese or Eparchy.**

This suggested first step in the determination of whether to convene a pastoral council involves consultation with the presbyteral council and with other select groups within the diocese/eparchy, as determined by the bishop. Consultation at this stage is limited to an assessment of the advisability of continuing to study the proposal to establish a pastoral council in the diocese/eparchy. Having listened to the presbyteral council and to the other select groups, the bishop may then wish to proceed to the second step.

## **Step 2: Appointment of a Task Force.**

This suggested second step in beginning a diocesan or eparchial pastoral council entails the appointment of a task force whose primary responsibility is to investigate the feasibility of establishing a pastoral council within the diocese/eparchy. The following is a list of tasks which may be assigned to the task force in the fulfillment of its mandate:

- Prepare a background statement outlining the rich tradition of conciliarity within the Catholic Church, including the history of diocesan and eparchial pastoral councils as they have evolved since the Second Vatican Council;
- Enumerate the pastoral circumstances existing within the diocese/eparchy which especially recommend the establishment of a pastoral council at this time (CIC, c. 511; CCEO, c. 272);
- Create a purpose statement for the diocesan or eparchial pastoral council which includes the three-fold tasks proper to it: to investigate pastoral needs, to consider those needs, and to propose practical conclusions about them (CIC, c. 511; CCEO, c. 272);

- Outline the diocesan or eparchial pastoral council's relationship with the other consultative and deliberative bodies within the diocese/eparchy;
- Designate clear criteria concerning pastoral council membership so as to ensure that the diversity of the local church is well reflected;
- Devise a program for the formation of pastoral council members which extends throughout the duration of their appointment;
- Develop a prospectus outlining the financial implications of convoking a pastoral council for the diocese/eparchy;
- Identify the appropriate staff person to oversee the day-to-day operations of the pastoral council; and
- Establish the criteria and the process for an annual evaluation of the pastoral council.

### **Step 3: Preparing Sample Statutes.**

Once the task force has fulfilled its mandate and has presented its recommendations, the bishop may request that his canonical advisor(s) formulate a series of proposed statutes prescribing the purpose "purpose, constitution, government and operation" (c. 94, §1) of the pastoral council to be established in the diocese/eparchy.

### **Step 4: Final Consultation with the Presbyteral Council and other Select Groups within the Diocese or Eparchy.**

With the recommendations of the task force and the proposed statutes in hand, the bishop may then wish to return to the presbyteral council and other select groups so that their unique wisdom may be added to the information already received.

### **Step 5: Decision Rendered by the Diocesan or Eparchial Bishop.**

These four earlier steps are suggested as a means whereby the bishop could advance the establishment of a pastoral council within the diocese/eparchy. Upon completion of these steps, the bishop may then make an informed decision as to whether the circumstances within the diocese/eparchy recommend the establishment of a diocesan or eparchial pastoral council.

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