

Diocesan/Eparchial Pastoral Councils: Historical Development, Canon Law, and Practical Considerations

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2002

Introduction

In his apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte*¹, Pope John Paul II invites the Church at the beginning of the third Christian millennium to "put out into the deep" (Luke 5:4): "Duc in altum!" He recalls that the program guiding the Church already exists: "It is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever." Yet, he adds, this program "must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community." (NMI, 29) He explains further:

With its universal and indispensable provisions, the program of the Gospel must continue to take root, as it has always done, in the life of the Church everywhere. It is in the local churches that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified--goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary resources--which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mold communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.

I therefore earnestly exhort the pastors of the particular churches, with the help of all sectors of God's people, confidently to plan the stages of the journey ahead, harmonizing the choices of each diocesan community with those of neighboring churches and of the universal Church. (NMI, 29)

Pope John Paul II is calling every diocese/eparchy to develop a detailed pastoral plan. Without doubt, this invites us to consider afresh the role of pastoral councils in our particular churches. These councils exist to do pastoral planning.

Church sources identify the purpose of a pastoral council as "to investigate, consider, and propose practical conclusions about pastoral issues in the Church." Vatican Council II laid the foundation for the establishment of pastoral councils in each diocese/eparchy. A number of post-conciliar documents provided more details about them. Now, universal legislation for both the Latin Church and the Eastern Churches provides norms for pastoral councils, which necessarily must be complemented by particular statutes in each diocese/eparchy.

This brief article on the diocesan/eparchial pastoral council has three parts. The first part outlines the historical development of the pastoral council. The second part addresses the four canons on pastoral councils which are found both in the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the 1990 Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. The third part offers some practical insights about pastoral councils.

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte* (January 6, 2001)

Part I: The Diocesan/Eparchial Pastoral Council

Historical Development

A. Vatican Council II

The conciliar basis for pastoral councils is the *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, Christus Dominus* (October 25, 1965):

It is highly desirable that in every diocese a special pastoral council be established, over which the diocesan bishop himself presides and in which clergy, religious and laity specially chosen for the purpose will have a part. It will belong to this council to investigate, to consider, and to formulate practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works [*ea quae ad pastoralia opera spectant investigare, perpendere atque de eis practicas expromere conclusiones*]. (CD 27)

The role of the pastoral council is identified directly and simply: to investigate, to consider, and to formulate practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works. Its president is the diocesan bishop. It is to be composed of clergy, religious, and laity. Its establishment is highly desirable.

The pastoral council is mentioned in two subsequent conciliar documents. The *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, Ad gentes* (December 7, 1965) recommends that, as far as possible, for the better coordination of missionary activity the bishop should establish a pastoral council in which clergy, religious, and laity would have a part through elected delegates. (AG 30) A note in *the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Presbyterorum ordinis* (December 7, 1965) explains that the presbyteral council differs from the pastoral council mentioned in *Christus Dominus* 27; lay persons also belong to the pastoral council, whose role is only to investigate those things which pertain to pastoral works. (PO 7, n. 41) The council of priests represents the presbyterate and by its advice is able to help the bishop effectively in the government of the diocese. (PO 7)

B. Post-Conciliar Documents

The conciliar doctrine about pastoral councils is further elaborated in a number of post-conciliar documents which precede the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the 1990 Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. The following merit special mention.

1. Pope Paul VI, Ecclesiae sanctae, August 6, 1966

In his *motu proprio, Ecclesiae sanctae*, Pope Paul VI gives further details about the structure of the pastoral council. He explains that the council enjoys only a consultative vote and may be established in different ways. The pastoral council is ordinarily a permanent institution, but may be temporary as regards membership and activity, and may exercise its function as the occasion arises. The bishop may convene it whenever he considers it advisable. To achieve the real objective of the council, study must prepare the way for common work, and the services of institutes and offices working in the field should be sought. If hierarchies of different Churches *sui iuris* exist in the same territory, it is highly recommended that the pastoral council be inter-ecclesial. (ES I, 16)

In matters affecting the presbyteral council and the pastoral council and the relations of these councils with each other and with other councils, bishops should take counsel together and issue common regulations for the dioceses of the territory. Each bishop is also to see to the coordination of all the diocesan councils by defining precisely their competence, by mutual participation of their members, by common or continuing sessions, or by other means. (ES I, 17)

Pope Paul VI recalls the recommendation of *Ad gentes* 30 that the pastoral council be duly established in mission lands. The council's duty is identified in *Christus Dominus* 27. It will also assist in preparing for the diocesan synod and carrying out its statutes. (ES III, 20)

2. *Second Synod of Bishops, Ultimis temporibus, November 30, 1971*

The statement of the second synod of bishops, *On the Ministerial Priesthood, Ultimis temporibus*, says that the pastoral council should help the diocesan community to arrange its pastoral program systematically and carry it out effectively [*munus pastorale organice praeordinare, tum efficaciter persolvere possit*]. It adds that the more the corresponsibility of bishops and presbyters increases, especially through presbyteral councils, the more desirable it will be that a pastoral council be established in the individual dioceses. (UT II, II, 3)

3. *Sacred Congregation for Clergy, Omnes Christifideles, January 25, 1973*

Omnes Christifideles is a circular letter from the Sacred Congregation for Clergy, the dicastery competent to deal with diocesan pastoral councils.² The entire letter is devoted to pastoral councils. The congregation had contacted the episcopal conferences to learn of the workings of pastoral councils, and had also been in dialogue with other curial dicasteries. A plenary congregation was held (involving also the Sacred Congregation for Bishops, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, and the Council for the Laity) and this circular letter, containing its conclusions, was approved by Pope Paul VI.

Omnes Christifideles identifies *Christus Dominus* 27 as the basis for the pastoral council, and repeats and expands much of the subsequent legislation.

Members of the pastoral council should reflect the entire diocese, and the majority of members should be lay since the greatest part of the diocesan community is composed of laity. (OC 7) Certainly, the council is consultative; still, its recommendations are of great help to the bishop in coming to a decision. The actual obedience and reverence which the faithful should show their sacred pastors fosters an open and sincere manifestation of what is needed for the good of the Church. The bishop should greatly esteem the council's propositions and seriously consider the judgments on which the councilors agree, preserving the freedom and authority which are his by divine law for his pastoral service to that portion of the People of God committed to his care. (OC 8)

The matters studied by the pastoral council may be proposed by the bishop or by the council members and accepted by him. It is beyond the competence of the pastoral council to decide on general questions bearing on faith, orthodoxy, moral principles, or universal Church laws. In the diocese only the bishop is the teacher. Although the presbyteral council is charged with advising on matters of governance, the pastoral council may nonetheless consider matters requiring acts of jurisdiction, "for in such a case the bishop will consider the matter and make his decision after hearing the presbyteral

² Eparchial pastoral councils are governed by the Congregation for the Oriental Churches: *Pastor Bonus*, art. 58

council, if the case requires." (OC 9) The letter identifies areas in which the pastoral council may offer counsel:

The pastoral council, therefore, can give the bishop great help by presenting him with proposals and suggestions: regarding missionary, catechetical, and apostolic undertakings within the diocese; concerning the promotion of doctrinal formation and the sacramental life of the faithful; concerning pastoral activities to help the priests in the various social and territorial areas of the diocese; concerning public opinion on matters pertaining to the Church as it is more likely to be fostered in the present time, etc. The pastoral council can also be extremely useful for mutual communication of experiences and for proposed undertakings of various types by which the concrete needs of the people of the diocese may become clearer to the bishop and a more opportune means of pastoral action may be suggested to him. (OC 9)

It is for the bishop to convene the pastoral council according to the needs of the apostolate. He may send a list of questions to be considered in advance, together with helpful related materials. (OC 10)

When a see is vacant, the pastoral council ceases; still, during the vacancy of the see, the ordinary, if the case warrants it, may call upon those who had been councilors for their advice. (OC 11)

This is the first document envisioning the establishment of parish (and regional) pastoral councils. It is also the first document saying that interdiocesan, provincial, regional, national, or international pastoral councils are inopportune at the present time. (OC 12)

4. *Sacred Congregation for Bishops, The Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, Ecclesiae imago, May 31, 1973 (n. 204)*

Ecclesiae imago repeats much of the earlier discipline, and again identifies *Christus Dominus 27* as the source for the pastoral council. It suggests that parish pastoral councils be aligned with the diocesan pastoral council: members from parish pastoral councils of a region may choose representatives to serve on the diocesan pastoral council. This would enable the entire diocesan community to sense its cooperation with its bishop.

The directory states the pastoral council investigates, considers, and formulates practical conclusions about all those things which pertain to diocesan pastoral activities in order to help the people of God pattern their lives and actions more closely on the Gospel. The pastoral council furnishes the judgments necessary to enable the diocesan community to plan its pastoral program [*munus pastorale ... praemoliri*] systematically and to fulfill it effectively.

The council is only consultative, but the bishop has great respect for its recommendations since they offer his apostolic office the serious cooperation of the ecclesiastical community.

It is helpful if study precedes the deliberation of the pastoral council. Assistance may be given from the appropriate curial agencies.

5. *Pope John Paul II, Christifideles laici, December 30, 1988 (n. 25)*

Nearly six years after the promulgation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, Pope John Paul II issued his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles laici, On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*. The Holy Father explains that the 1987 synod, focusing upon

the role of the laity twenty years after Vatican Council II, favored the creation of diocesan pastoral councils.

The pope suggests that, on the diocesan level, the pastoral council is "the principal form of collaboration, dialogue, and discernment." He adds that "the participation of the lay faithful in these councils can broaden resources in consultation and the principle of collaboration--and in certain instances also in decision-making--if applied in a broad and determined manner."

6. U.S. Catholic Bishops, Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium, November, 1995

In *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, the bishops of the United States offer reflections on occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the conciliar *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* and the fifteenth anniversary of their own document, *Called and Gifted*. The bishops explain that the competence of the laity is evident in their participation in the various councils of church governance:

The Code of Canon Law requires finance councils in parishes and dioceses. Furthermore, it encourages the establishment of pastoral councils both for dioceses and parishes (canons 511-514, 536-537). Because we believe that they can enrich the life of the Church, we strongly encourage efforts to establish them where they do not exist.

The document adds that the various councils "are opportunities for the Church to listen to the wisdom of the laity. ... The challenge is to nurture the growth and development of these various consultative bodies."

Part II: The Diocesan/Eparchial Pastoral Council

Canon Law

A. The Diocesan Pastoral Council

The 1983 Code of Canon Law contains four canons on the diocesan pastoral council. These universal norms must be complemented by particular statutes in each diocese. The canons state:

Can. 511 – In every diocese and to the extent that pastoral circumstances suggest it, a pastoral council is to be constituted which under the authority of the bishop investigates, considers, and proposes practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works in the diocese [*ea quae opera pastoralia in dioecesi spectant investigare, perpendere atque de eis conclusiones practicas proponere*].

Can. 512 – 1. A pastoral council consists of members of the Christian faithful who are in full communion with the Catholic Church--clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life, and especially laity--who are designated in a matter determined by the diocesan bishop.

“ 2. The Christian faithful who are designated to a pastoral council are to be selected in such a way that they truly reflect the entire portion of the people of God which constitutes the diocese, with consideration given to the different areas of the diocese, social conditions and professions, and the role which they have in the apostolate whether individually or joined with others.

“ 3. No one except members of the Christian faithful outstanding in firm faith, good morals, and prudence are to be designated to a pastoral council.

Can. 513 – 1. A pastoral council is constituted for a period of time according to the precepts of the statutes which are issued by the bishop.

“ 2. When the see is vacant, a pastoral council ceases.

Can. 514 – 1. A pastoral council possesses only a consultative vote. It belongs to the diocesan bishop alone to convoke it according to the needs of the apostolate and to preside over it; it also belongs to him alone to make public what has been done in the council.

The identified sources for these canons are *Christus Dominus* 27, *Ad gentes* 30, *Presbyterorum ordinis* 7, *Ecclesiae sanctae* I, 16, *Omnes Christifideles*, and *Ecclesiae imago*.³

B. The Eparchial Pastoral Council

The 1990 Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches contains four canons on the eparchial pastoral council (CCEO 272-275). The legislation is similar to CIC 511-514 with two differences. The CCEO envisions the possibility of the eparchial bishop inviting others to the pastoral council meetings, even persons of another Church *sui iuris*; and it does not specify that the council must be convoked at least once annually.⁴

Can. 272 – In the eparchy, if pastoral circumstances recommend it, a pastoral council is to be established which, under the authority of the eparchial bishop, is to investigate, assess and propose practical conclusions about those things which regard pastoral activity in the eparchy [*ea, quae ad opera pastoralia in eparchia spectant, investigare, perpendere atque de eis conclusiones practicas proponere*].

Can. 273 – 1. The pastoral council, which is only a consultative body, consists of clerics, religious or members of societies of common life in the manner of religious, and especially, of lay persons designated in a manner determined by the eparchial bishop.

³ CIC 536 is about the parish pastoral council. Its identified sources are: *Christus Dominus* 257 *Ecclesiae sanctae* I, 16, *Omnes Christifideles* and *Ecclesiae imago*. Note that while *Christus Dominus* 27 recommends the establishment of pastoral councils ("it is highly desirable"), CIC 511 and CCEO 272 take a more cautious approach ("to the extent that pastoral circumstances suggest" and "if pastoral circumstances recommend it", respectively). ⁴ CCEO 295 says that appropriate parish councils on pastoral matters and on economic matters are to be established, according to the norms of the particular law of each Church *sui iuris*. The identified sources of this canon are *Apostolicam actuositatem* 26 and *Presbyterorum ordinis* 17. The sources identified in the CIC for parish pastoral councils are not mentioned in the CCEO.

⁴ CCEO 140-145 provides for the establishment of the patriarchal assembly, "a consultative group of the entire Church over which the patriarch presides and which assists the patriarch and the synod of bishops of the patriarchal Church in dealing with matters of major importance especially in order to harmonize appropriately the forms and programs of the apostolate and ecclesiastical discipline with the current circumstances of the time, taking into account the common good of its own Church as well as the common good of the entire territory where several Churches *sui iuris* coexist." (CCEO 140). A parallel structure does not exist in the CIC.

“ 2. The pastoral council is to be so established that, insofar as possible, it represents the Christian faithful of the eparchy with regard to the types of persons, associations and other endeavors.

“ 3. Along with these Christian faithful, if it is opportune, the eparchial bishop can also invite others to the pastoral council, even if they are of another Church sui iuris.⁵

“ 4. No one is to be designated to the pastoral council except those Christian faithful who are outstanding in firm faith, good morals and prudence.

Can. 274 – 1. The pastoral council is constituted for a term according to the prescriptions of the statutes which are issued by the eparchial bishop.

“ 2. During the vacancy of the eparchial see, the pastoral council ceases.

Can. 275 – It is for the eparchial bishop alone to convoke the pastoral council according to the needs of the apostolate, to preside over it and to publish the matters dealt with in it.

The identified sources for these canons are *Christus Dominus* 27, *Ad gentes* 30, and *Ecclesiae sanctae* I, 16.

C. Addendum: Post-Codal Instruction

Congregation for the Clergy (et al). On Certain Questions Regarding Collaboration of Nonordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests, August 15, 1997 (instruction)

The 1997 inter-dicasterial instruction *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*⁶ was approved in forma specifica by Pope John Paul II. Its purpose "is simply to provide a clear, authoritative response to the many pressing requests which have come to our dicasteries from bishops, priests and laity seeking clarification in the light of specific cases of new forms of "pastoral activity" of the nonordained on both parochial and diocesan levels" (Forward). Following theological principles, the instruction provides several practical provisions which intend to offer "remedies ... to correct abuses which have been brought to the attention of our dicasteries" (Theological Principles, 4). Article 5 of the instruction's Practical Provisions is about collaborative structures in a particular church.

Article 5. The Structures of Collaboration in the Particular Church

These structures, so necessary to that ecclesial renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council, have produced many positive results and have been codified in canonical legislation. They represent a form of active participation in the life and mission of the church as communion. . . .

⁵ Note that CCEO 916, 5 provides that the Christian faithful of one Church sui iuris can be committed to the pastoral care of a bishop of another Church.

⁶ The dicasteries are: Congregation for the Clergy, Pontifical Council for the Laity, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Congregation for Bishops, Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts. The Congregation for Clergy deals with all aspects of pastoral councils: *Pastor Bonus*, art. 97, 1.

2) Diocesan and parochial pastoral councils and parochial finance councils, of which nonordained are members, enjoy a consultative vote only and cannot in any way become deliberative structures. Only those faithful who possess the qualities prescribed by the canonical norms may be elected to such responsibilities.

4) Diocesan councils may properly and validly express their consent to an act of the bishop only in those cases in which the law expressly requires such consent.

5) Given the local situation, ordinaries may avail themselves of special study groups or of groups of experts to examine particular questions. Such groups, however, cannot be constituted as parallel to diocesan presbyteral or pastoral councils nor indeed to those diocesan structures regulated by the universal law of the Church in canons 536.1 and 537. Neither may such a group deprive these structures of their lawful authority. Where structures of this kind have arisen in the past because of local custom or through special circumstances, those measures deemed necessary to conform such structures to the current universal law of the Church must be taken.

The instruction stresses the consultative nature of the diocesan pastoral council; they may not become deliberative. While it recognizes that ordinaries may use various groups to examine particular questions, it forbids that these become parallel to the pastoral council.

Part III: The Diocesan/Eparchial Pastoral Council

Practical Considerations

A. Purpose of Pastoral Councils

The pastoral council exists to investigate, consider, and propose practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works in the diocese/ eparchy.

The purpose of the pastoral council is envisioned by *Christus Dominus* 27 as "to investigate, to consider, and to formulate practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works" This terminology (with minor modifications) has been used consistently since Vatican II and is reflected in CIC 511 and CCEO 272.⁷

This activity may be called pastoral planning. That the work of the pastoral council may be described as pastoral planning may also be concluded from other statements in post-conciliar documents--for example:

The pastoral council provides the necessary conclusions for the diocese to arrange its pastoral program systematically and to carry it out effectively [*munus pastorale organice praeordinare, tum efficaciter persolvere possit*]. (*Ultimis temporibus* II, II, 3)

⁷ Neither the CIC nor the CCEO identify the origin of the pastoral issues being investigated and considered by the pastoral council. The canons on the presbyteral council (CIC 500, 1 and CCEO 269, 1), however, say that the diocesan/eparchial bishop determines the questions to be treated by the presbyteral council and receives proposals from its members. A parallel process for the working of diocesan/eparchial pastoral councils is reasonable.

The pastoral council furnishes the judgments necessary to enable the diocese to plan its pastoral program [*munus pastorale ... praemoliri*]. (Ecclesiae imago 204)

Thus, it is accurate to identify the work of the pastoral council as pastoral planning.

The pastoral issues to be investigated and considered by the pastoral council may come from a variety of sources--certainly including the bishop and the council itself. It is appropriate for the bishop to give approval of them before any pastoral issues are investigated and considered.

Often a curial agency is charged with pastoral planning. If such is the case in a given diocese/eparchy, the roles of the pastoral council and the curial agency will need to be clarified, coordinated, distinguished, etc. Confusion may arise if the council and the agency are perceived to have the identical purpose.

B. Coordination of Pastoral Activities

The pastoral council does not serve the diocese/eparchy by directly coordinating pastoral activities. The curia assists the bishop in governing the entire diocese/eparchy, especially in directing pastoral action, in providing for the administration of the diocese/eparchy, and in exercising judicial power (CIC 469; see CCEO 243). The work of the curia is coordinated by the diocesan bishop or, at his discretion, by the moderator of the curia whom he appoints (CIC 473).⁸ The pastoral council does not coordinate pastoral activities. The pastoral council investigates, considers, and proposes practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works.⁹

C. Composition

The pastoral council is composed of clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life (or, religious or members of societies of common life in the manner of religious), and especially laity.

The pastoral council is not a lay council: its membership includes clergy, members of institutes of consecrated life (or, religious or members of societies of common life in the manner of religious), and especially lay persons. Since the majority of the faithful of the diocese/eparchy are lay persons, it is reasonable that the majority of the members of the pastoral council are lay.

To consider the pastoral council as the lay council (perhaps over against the presbyteral council) is to misunderstand seriously the composition of the council, and perhaps also its purpose (which is not simply to be a vehicle for lay consultation, communication, or even planning).

⁸ The CCEO does not mention the moderator of the curia, though nothing prevents the eparchial bishop from creating such an officer in the curia.

⁹ Some look to the Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Apostolicam actuositatem* (November 18, 1965) as the basis for pastoral councils. This decree discusses coordinating councils in a diocese: "In dioceses, as far as possible, councils should be set up to assist the Church's apostolic works, whether in the field of evangelization or sanctification or in the fields of charity, social relations and the rest; the clergy and religious working with the laity in whatever way proves satisfactory. These councils can take care of the mutual coordinating of the various lay associations and undertakings, the autonomy and particular nature of each remaining untouched. Such councils should be found too, if possible, at parochial, inter-parochial, inter-diocesan level, and also on the national and international plane." (AA 26) This decree is not listed among the identified sources for the canons on diocesan/eparchial pastoral councils.

The bishop determines how the members are designated. They should represent the diversity of the diocese/eparchy. The specific manner of designating members needs to be addressed in the statutes of the pastoral council.

Members of the council are to be members of the Christian faithful who are in full communion with the Catholic Church. If there are Eastern Catholics without an eparchial bishop or exarch, they may also be represented on the diocesan pastoral council (see CIC 479, " 2). Further, nothing prevents the diocesan/eparchial bishop from inviting Christians not in the full communion of the Church to attend meetings of the pastoral council as observers.¹⁰

D. Manner of Operation

The pastoral council operates in a consultative manner.

The pastoral council performs its function in a consultative (decision-recommending) manner, not in a deliberative (decision-implementing) manner. It offers recommendations, but does not have the power or the role to execute them. This is obvious from *Ecclesiae sanctae* through the 1997 inter-dicasterial instruction.

Certainly, the pastoral council does not find its purpose (namely, to investigate, to consider, and to propose practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works) in its manner of operation (namely, being consultative). To refer to the pastoral council only in terms of its manner of operation, without acknowledging its purpose for existence, does not present a complete vision of the council. The opposite is equally true: to consider the purpose of the council without acknowledging its consultative manner of operation also does not give a complete picture.

The pastoral council is a consultative body which plans.

It is a planning council which operates in a consultative manner. It is a council which plans in a consultative way.

The consultative manner of operation of the pastoral council indicates that the diocesan/eparchial bishop remains free to accept or not to accept the recommendations made to him by the councilors.¹¹

¹⁰ In a similar fashion, CIC 463, 3 says the diocesan bishop can invite ministers or members of churches or ecclesial communities which are not in full communion with the Catholic Church as observers to a diocesan synod. CCEO 238, 3 says that the eparchial bishop can invite to the eparchial assembly as observers some persons from non-Catholic Churches or ecclesial communities.

¹¹ The *Instruction on Diocesan Synods*, issued on March 19, 1997 by the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, discusses the consultative manner of operation of diocesan synods. This instruction's reflections on synod's consultative nature can be applied in a similar fashion to the work of pastoral councils. The instruction says that a consultative quality of a votum by synodal participants is not to "imply that such a votum is of little importance or merely an "external" consultation involving someone with no responsibility for the final outcome of the synod." (I, 2) And, "Since the synod is not a college with decisional capacity, such votes are not intended as a binding majority decision. It should be explained, rather, that their purpose is to indicate the degree of concurrence among the synodal members with regard to a given proposal." (IV, 5) As regards the bishop's response to the participants' votes, the instruction says: "Concerning the outcome of the synodal votes, the bishop always remains free to determine what weight is to be attributed to their results. Consequently, he may wish to accept the common view expressed by the members of the synod, unless there should exist some grave obstacle to be evaluated by him coram Domino." (IV, 5)

It is only reasonable to expect that the bishop will sometimes approach the pastoral council for advice on matters of pastoral concern--as it were, to get a sense of the diocese/eparchy. This is a perfectly legitimate activity, and can result in much pastoral good within the Church.

E. Role of the Bishop

The pastoral council will need the support of the bishop if it is to be effective in its role. The support of the bishop is essential for the success of the pastoral council, whether he proposes questions for the council to study or receives questions from it. Indeed, the council exists to give practical conclusions on pastoral matters to the bishop. He designates its members, issues its statutes, convokes it, makes public its activities, and receives its conclusions.

If the pastoral council is to perform its function effectively, it may rely on the support of some curial agency or person to assist its work (e.g., doing advance study, conducting necessary research, surfacing specific pastoral needs, gathering responses to those needs, etc.)

F. Statutes

The universal law envisions particular statutes to apply the universal norms in each diocese/eparchy. The universal legislation envisions that the bishop will issue statutes to apply the universal norms to the diocese/eparchy. The universal law foresees that statutes will address the composition of the council (CIC 512; CCEO 273) and the period of time for which it is established (CIC 513, " 1; CCEO 274, " 1). Certainly the bishop may include other reasonable matters in the statutes (e.g., officers, support staff, time and place of meetings, committees, the origin of its agenda, relation to a curial agency and other councils/groups, etc.)

Conclusion

The diocesan/eparchial pastoral council finds its origin in Vatican Council II, and its role is further explained in various post-conciliar documents. Universal legislation, to be complemented by necessary particular legislation, invites its creation in each diocese/eparchy.

This brief study has shown that the pastoral council exists to investigate, consider, and propose practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works in the diocese. This may be called pastoral planning. While planning is common to so many groups and individuals in the Church, the pastoral council is the only body which exists solely to do pastoral planning. It performs its important function in a consultative manner, but its role is not to be identified exclusively with its manner of operating. It exists to plan in a consultative way.

The pastoral council is composed in such a way as to represent the diversity of the diocese/eparchy--so its members are clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life (or, religious or members of societies of common life in the manner of religious), and especially laity. When the pastoral council performs its role effectively and appropriately, much will be done to further ecclesial communio.

The pastoral council will assist the program for the Church in every age, found in the Gospel and the church's living Tradition, to be enfolded in the detailed pastoral plan of each particular Church, as envisioned by Pope John Paul II in *Novo millennio ineunte*.

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