

# Guidelines for the Development of Parish Pastoral Councils



Archdiocese of Ottawa

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# **GUIDELINES**

## **FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS**

### **ARCHDIOCESE OF OTTAWA**

#### **PART I**

##### **Section I           The Parish and its Pastoral Mission**

The parish is a community of people, people of faith including men and women, young and old, clergy, religious, and laity, called by God to share in the mission of Jesus Christ.

Although an integral part of the universal and diocesan church, to most Catholics the parish is the “Church” which they experience on a weekly basis; where they gather to share one faith; where they are nourished by the Sacraments and by the Word; and where they are supported by, or supportive of, other members of a Christian community.

Many Catholics spend the greater part of their lives in one or two parishes. They give material and spiritual support year after year to the building up of the parish community and they rightfully refer to it as ‘my parish’. It is only fitting then, that an organization exists in the parish which allows its members to play an active leadership role in the affairs of their parish.

The clergy and the laity must be committed to share actively in the Church’s four-fold ministry: the ministry of the Word, of community, of celebration, and of service.

##### **Section II           The Parish Pastoral Council**

The Parish Pastoral Council, hereafter referred to as the PPC, is that basic leadership grouping, called from, and by, the parish community, to share with the Pastor the building up of the body of Christ and to be concerned with the overall welfare of the parish family.

The PPC, as a consultative body, shares, with the pastor and his staff, the planning and coordinating of the overall policies and goals of the Parish.

The PPC is concerned with all aspects of parish life and once having established policies and goals, and the means to achieve these goals, it is essential that the PPC coordinates, monitors, and evaluates the work of the various ministries and committees in the parish. It does not, however, become involved in the day to day details. The implementation of the PPC policies is entrusted to Parish staff, ministries, and committees of the Parish.

### **Section III Purpose of the Parish Pastoral Council**

What does the Parish hope to achieve by means of the PPC?

Although there may be variations from parish to parish, the following objectives should be included as part of the constitution:

- proclaiming the Gospel, carrying forth the Good News;
- building up of a caring, Christian, community;
- acting as the representative of all members of the parish community;
- working for a spiritual renewal of all members of the parish community by a concern for, and attention to, the quality of the liturgical services and education programs;
- discerning the needs, spiritual and temporal, of the parish community and organizing and planning the structures required to fulfill these needs;
- working for a just society with other churches and organizations in the neighbourhood and in the wider community.

### **Section IV Relationship of Pastor to Parish Pastoral Council**

The Pastor is the spiritual leader of the Parish. He is also the president of the PPC in accordance with Canon Law. It follows, then, that his role on the PPC is a central one. He is, however, neither an authoritarian dictator nor a powerless symbol. His role of pastoral leadership in the PPC is similar to his role in the total parish. As preacher of the Word, the pastor has the responsibility of ensuring that the PPC is hearing and applying the Word of God in its fullness. In so doing, he is obligated to call the PPC members to pause and reflect on the Christian implications of an issue being considered. Pastors and priests are called to generously share responsibility with the PPC. They must be models for consensus building, which is the way of the church. Pastors and priests are, therefore, responsible for constantly working with the PPC to assist it in achieving the ideals that have been set forth in these guidelines.

### **Section V Authority of the Parish Pastoral Council**

The role or authority of the PPC is derived from the Archbishop as generally defined in these guidelines. Therefore, no PPC can be disbanded

without the specific authorization of the Archbishop. The Archbishop may approve additional roles for PPCs in specific parishes if they have special needs.

In consultation with its pastor, each parish will develop, within Diocesan guidelines as outlined herein, a constitution which will define the specific role of the PPC for that Parish.

Canon 536 states: "This pastoral council possesses a consultative role only and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop". In this Archdiocese, it is expected that the Pastor will consult with his Council on all significant matters affecting the members of the parish and having heard the consensus of the council, will ratify such decisions of the council unless there is good and just reason not to do so.

When, in the Pastor's judgement, church law, the teachings of the church, or known policy of the Archdiocese is being departed from, he is obliged not to accept the advice of his PPC. This should seldom happen if the Pastor is taking part in all the deliberations of the PPC.

When the Pastor is unable to ratify a decision of the PPC, he will explain to the PPC why he is unable to do so. If the PPC, after prayerful reflection, is unable to resolve the issue, it should, along with the Pastor, appeal to the office of the Archbishop to arbitrate a decision. The Archbishop would normally begin the arbitration process by asking the Regional Vicar to intervene.

## **Section VI            Relationship of the Parish Pastoral Council to the Parish Finance Council**

Since the PPC is responsible for carrying out the Parish mission and establishing the over-all goals and priorities of the parish, it is essential that there be a close liaison with the Parish Finance Council, hereafter referred to as the PFC. (See Article X, # 37, Administration Manual.) With the pastor, the PFC is responsible for the temporal administration of the parish (finances, supplies, maintenance of properties, bookkeeping, budgeting, inventory, etc.) and does not report directly to the Parish Pastoral Council.

After setting the parish goals and priorities for the coming year, the Pastoral Council will dialogue with the PFC to ensure that financial resources will be available.

The PFC will advise the PPC when there are any major concerns regarding parish finances or parish facilities which might hinder the parish from carrying out its planned activities.

It is recommended that a member of the PPC act as a liaison with the PFC and that the chairperson of the PFC attend meetings of the PPC when required.

## **PART II**

The following are important elements of a PPC Constitution along with Archdiocesan Guidelines:

### **Section I            Constitution**

Each parish will develop a constitution in accordance with these guidelines and the needs and aspirations of the parish community. This constitution will state the name of the parish and council. A copy of the constitution, signed by the pastor and the PPC chairperson, must be submitted to the Archbishop for approval.

#### *Important Components of a Parish Pastoral Council Constitution*

1. Name and Mission Statement.
2. Purpose and Functions (see Part I, Section III).
3. Eligibility for Membership.
4. Composition.
5. Conditions of Service for Members.
6. Election of Members.
7. Specific Roles of Members
8. Committees: Formation and Responsibilities.
9. Meetings.
10. Authority.
11. Parish Assemblies: Purpose and Function.

### **Section II            Mission Statement**

Vatican II declares that the laity has an active part to play in the life of the church by sharing in the mission of Christ, and encourages the joint participation of the laity and clergy in parish life.

The mission statement reflects who the parish is and what the parish is about as a faith community. Careful reflection precedes the development of

such a statement which summarizes and provides a cornerstone around which the PPC is developed.

### **Section III Eligibility for Membership**

All fully initiated Roman Catholics over the age of 16 and registered in the parish are eligible for membership on the PPC. Persons in open conflict with the basic precepts of the church would normally be excluded from membership on the PPC.

### **Section IV Composition of the Parish Pastoral Council**

1. Depending on the size and needs of a parish, five to nine persons are to be elected by the general membership on the PPC.
2. Clergy and pastoral assistants officially assigned to the parish are encouraged to attend the PPC meetings. However, these clergy and pastoral assistants should not exceed the number of elected members of the PPC and should be considered "ex officio members", with voice but no vote. Moreover, since "the functions exercised by the members of the parish finance council (PFC) are to be gratuitous, [and] no paid employee, or member of an employee's immediate family may be a member", the same requirements will apply for the members of the PPC. (See Article X, #36, of the Administration Manual.)
3. Those persons appointed by the PPC to replace an elected member until the term is completed will serve temporarily until the next election.
4. The PPC is not meant to be a co-ordinating body of Parish organizations; however, representatives of major parish organizations, *may* be given membership on the PPC.
5. The PPC may appoint one or two members from among the Parish membership in the event certain segments of the parish, e.g., youth or large ethnic groups, in the opinion of the PPC, were not represented through the regular election process.

### **Section V Conditions of Service for Parish Pastoral Council Members**

1. The term of office for an ordinary member of the PPC should be two or three years. No ordinary member is to be elected for more than three two-year terms or for two three-year terms. After a break of not less than one year, such a person may again stand for re-election.

2. A member may be removed from the PPC by a two-thirds majority vote of the PPC if one is unable to fulfil one's responsibilities as a member due to illness, non-attendance at the PPC meetings or for other reasons.
3. All members of the PPC shall serve gratuitously. This does not mean that legitimate expenses incurred by a member on the PPC business should not be paid by the Parish.

## **Section VI Election of the Parish Pastoral Council**

How are the PPC members chosen? It is important that the parish community has a say in who become leaders of the Parish. One way to ensure that this happens is to give members of the parish the opportunity to elect those persons who they feel are best suited to represent them on the PPC. Other methods of choosing candidates are acceptable providing that the parish community has a say in who is finally selected to sit on the PPC.

1. It is recommended that elections take place on an annual basis so that not more than 50% of the ordinary members of the PPC have to be replaced at any one time.
2. In each parish a nomination committee is to be appointed by the PPC at least 7 weeks prior to the date of elections. It is recommended that this committee be composed of the Pastor, a current member of the PPC, and one or two parishioners who are not candidates for the PPC.

This is a very important committee which must actively seek candidates who are known to be of strong faith and exhibit qualities of maturity and leadership necessary to lead the parish in its stated mission.

3. The nominations committee will advise candidates who do not meet the qualifications stated in these guidelines. It will ensure that the parish membership have ample opportunity to propose their own candidates to the committee and to learn something about the slate of candidates standing for election.
4. The nomination committee will also:
  - establish procedures for the nominations of candidates;
  - ensure that notice of elections, and names of the final slate of candidates is publicized well in advance of the elections;
  - decide on all electoral procedures and monitor the election process;



- see that the names of successful candidates are published in the parish bulletin and announced from the pulpit. Installation services during Mass or at the Parish Assembly are to be encouraged.
5. The nominations committee will be dissolved immediately after the installation of the new members.

## **Section VII      Specific Roles within a Parish Pastoral Council**

### *1. President:*

This responsibility falls upon the Pastor or upon that person mandated by the Archbishop to provide pastoral care for the Parish. A PPC cannot function properly without the full support, encouragement and guidance of its president.

### *2. Chairperson:*

This role should normally be filled by one of the elected members as chosen by the full PPC. As this role is key to the successful functioning of the PPC meetings, appointment of same should not be made without careful deliberations and discernment of the motivations and skills of potential candidates.

The Chairperson is responsible for:

- preparing meeting agendas in consultation with the Pastor and other members of the PPC executive;
- chairing all meetings (see IX Meetings of the PPC);
- assisting the Pastor in providing leadership, support, and encouragement to other members of the PPC and especially to chairpersons of standing committees;
- ensuring that the spirit and intent of the parish constitution and diocesan guidelines are adhered to, in collaboration with the Pastor;
- participating in regional and diocesan meetings for the PPCs.

### *3. Vice-Chairperson:*

The Vice-Chairperson assists the Chairperson with the PPC duties and temporarily assumes these duties when the chairperson is absent.

### *4. Secretary:*

The Secretary attends to the physical arrangement for meetings of the PPC; keeps minutes of all meetings of the PPC and the Parish Assembly;

arranges for or conducts all necessary correspondence; assists in the preparation of meeting agendas, and assumes any other duties the PPC may assign.

*5. Other Roles:*

The PPC may determine other roles for its members such as the chairing of special committees or acting as the liaison person between the PPC and the standing committees.

*6. Term of Office for Members of Council Executive:*

It is recommended that the terms of office of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Secretary be for one year, thereby giving the opportunity to both old and new members of the PPC to participate in the selection of their executive officers. Officers could be re-affirmed for two one-year terms.

## **Section VIII Committees of the Parish Pastoral Council**

1. Only through the organization of committees can the pastoral mission of the parish be carried out in an organized and efficient manner. The committee system also provides an opportunity for many members of the parish community to play an active role towards fulfilling the mission of Christ and His Church. Members of small committees working together for the good of all members of the parish experience a strong sense of Christian community.
2. The PPC will, therefore, establish, train, coordinate, and evaluate committees in accordance with the needs of the Parish.

The following standing committees are recommended for all parishes:

- Liturgy (Worship) Committee
- Christian Education Committee
- Social Action Committee
- Parish and Community Life Committee

A sample outline of the responsibilities of standing committees is given in Appendix A.

3. Other standing committees or temporary ad hoc committees may be formed as the needs arise.

4. Each committee will have a chairperson appointed by the PPC after consultation with members of the committee. In smaller parishes, an elected member of the PPC may be selected to fill the role of committee chairperson. In larger parishes, the PPC would be well advised to select a person outside of the PPC with the necessary skills and a keen interest in that particular ministry.
5. The Pastor is an ex-officio member of all committees.
6. The chairpersons of standing committees, i.e. Liturgy, Education, Social Action, Parish and Community Life, are not necessarily members of the PPC. The PPC may name a member of the PPC to act as the liaison between each committee and the PPC.
7. The PPC will also:
  - provide a charter of responsibilities for each committee;
  - ensure good communications between committees and the PPC;
  - provide for any necessary training of committee members;
  - call for accountability from the committees on their goals and programs;
  - prioritize resources and settle questions of how available funds can best be utilized.
8. A fixed term of office not exceeding 2 years should be established for all committee chairpersons. The PPC may reappoint for an additional term.

## **Section IX Meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council**

Meetings of the PPC should be held, if at all possible, on the parish premises on a regular, usually monthly basis except during summer months. A fixed night of the week and starting time should be established early in the year. All meetings should be open to members of the Parish. An agreed time for adjournment will make for more efficient use of time.

### ***Decision making through Consensus:***

Many parishes have adopted a consensus approach to reaching a decision rather than a voting procedure. This approach is strongly recommended in this Archdiocese when the PPC is making major decisions concerning the policies and overall goals and objectives of the Parish. ***A consensus has been reached when everyone can live with the decision.*** No significant part of the parish, no one who is important to the implementation of the

decision, should feel left out. In fact no one may have achieved exactly what he or she wanted but everyone will have had an opportunity for input and everyone's input was seriously considered. Consensus as a community way of decision-making places emphasis on persons and on the growth of people rather than on simply getting things done.

If a formal vote is required, no major policy or proposal should proceed without a two-thirds affirmative vote. Simple administrative decisions can be decided by a simple majority.

## **Section X Parish Assembly**

Each year, parishes should invite all eligible members (see Section III) to a general meeting. The Pastor as the PPC President, should be present and address any such meeting while the PPC Chairperson may chair the meetings.

Purpose of the meeting may include opportunity for:

- parishioners to meet members of the PPC;
- parishioners to raise parish issues of concern to them;
- parishioners to question the PPC on policies and programs of the PPC;
- the PPC to report to the parish community and invite suggestions from the parish;
- installing of new PPC members (if not done during Mass);
- reporting on the financial status of Parish by the PFC
- parish approval of amendments to constitution  
**NOTE:** all amendments to the Parish Constitution, signed by the Pastor and the PPC Chairperson, should be forwarded within 30 days to the Archdiocese for approval.
- introduction of any major policy change or project in the Parish.

## Resources

Some of the resources used in the development of these guidelines for which we are most appreciative are:

Archdiocese of Ottawa. (1993) *Guidelines for Development of Parish Pastoral Councils*. Ottawa. (revised 1999)

Laity Commission (1984) *The Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines for the Development of Constitutions..* Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

W. J. Rademacher (1988) *The New Practical Guide for Parish Councils*. Mystic, CT: Twenty Third Publications.

Mark Fischer. (1998-99) web site of articles on Pastoral Councils.  
<http://www.west.net/~fischer>

## **APPENDIX A**

### **A-1 Education Committee**

#### ***Composition***

The Pastor, the Chairperson, and the co-ordinators or chairpersons of:

- RCIA Process
- Baptismal Preparation Team
- Marriage Preparation Team
- Adult Religious Education Program
- Landings
- Family Religion Program
- School Councils (or parish representative on school councils)
- Sacramental Preparation Team
- Any other parish education program.

#### ***General Purpose:***

The Education Committee is responsible for discerning needs, developing, promoting, and evaluating all parish education programs. It is particularly concerned with religious education for all members of the parish and will, therefore, strive to provide all its members with religious learning opportunities which are aimed at fostering a personal faith and expressing that faith through service. As the pastor is the spiritual leader and teacher in the parish, it is expected that he will play a very active role in this committee and will be called upon to give direction in all areas of religious education.

#### ***Functions:***

1. To identify the educational needs of the parish.
2. To recommend to the PPC short and long term educational goals and priorities.
3. To determine the various educational programs to be carried out in the Parish and to schedule, promote, and support these programs.
4. To recruit co-ordinators and volunteers to carry out these programs and ensure good communications are maintained between co-ordinators.

5. To ensure co-ordinators and volunteers are made aware of educational seminars and programs offered by the diocese and other organizations, and to encourage training of volunteers where required.
6. To encourage co-operation and dialogue for the unified and harmonious integration of families, schools, and parish in the religious education of children.
7. To evaluate all parish educational policies and programs.
8. To establish an annual budget of expenses anticipated by the committee for submission to the PFC.

## **A-2 Liturgy Committee**

### ***Composition:***

The Pastor, the chairperson, and the co-ordinators of music, readers, hospitality, eucharistic ministers, altar servers, sacristans, decorators, or other interested persons.

### ***General Purpose:***

The Liturgy Committee plans and provides for the spiritual development of each member of the parish community through liturgical celebrations, days of prayer and spiritual renewal, and any other special devotions.

### ***Functions:***

1. To recruit and train members of the parish community to serve in the various ministries; e.g., musicians, readers, eucharistic ministers, hospitality ministers, altar servers, and sacristans.
2. To co-ordinate these ministries by appointing co-ordinators and developing guidelines for each of the various ministries.
3. To educate itself through study, prayer, and participation in workshops and seminars, and to encourage other parishioners to participate in these programs and those sponsored by the diocese.
4. To review the community worship celebrations to ensure they serve the liturgical needs of the parish and to identify areas in need of development.
5. To ensure advanced planning and preparation is carried out for each of the major liturgical seasons; i.e., Lent/Easter/Pentecost and Advent/Christmas.
6. To work with other parish committees to co-ordinate parish celebrations of Baptism, First Communion, First Reconciliation, Confirmation, RCIA, Marriage, and the Sacrament of the Sick, and funerals.
7. To prepare an annual budget of expenses anticipated by the committee for submission to the PFC.



### **A-3 Parish and Community Life Committee**

#### ***Composition:***

The Pastor, the chairperson, and at least one member representing each of the following segments of the parish community:

- People with special needs
- Pastoral Care Team
- Youth
- Married Couples
- Senior Citizens
- Adult Singles
- Also representatives from any men's or women's organizations active in the Parish.

#### ***General Purpose:***

The Parish and Community Life Committee is responsible primarily for building the parish into a faith community by identifying and providing for the social and communal needs of the parishioners including children, youth, adults, and senior citizens.

#### ***Functions:***

1. To identify communal, social, and recreational needs for all parishioners; e.g. children, youth, newcomers, families, single adults, and senior citizens.
2. To determine goals and priorities that will build the parish into a true faith community.
3. To co-ordinate social and recreational activities of existing organizations and to support and help promote those activities and those sponsored by the diocese.
4. To develop activities where needed through the recruiting of volunteers and establishment of sub-committees.
5. To welcome new parishioners and help them participate in parish life.

6. To work with other churches and civic groups in the community to provide for the social needs of our own parishioners as well as the larger community.
7. To explore ways and means of involving more members of the parish in the activities of the parish and to ensure that all activities are well publicized.
8. To prepare an annual budget of expenses anticipated by the committee for submission to the PFC.

## **A-4 Social Action Committee**

### ***Composition:***

The Pastor, the Chairperson, and the co-ordinators or chairpersons of:

- St. Vincent de Paul
- Interchurch Council
- Pro-life Committee
- Immigration and Refugee Affairs
- Development and Peace
- Any other programs concerned with the social needs of the community.

### ***General Purpose:***

The Social Action Committee represents the parish community, in expressing its concern about poverty and justice in both the local and broader community and in transforming that concern into commitment and action. Solutions to human suffering should always be faithful to the mission of Christ and His Church.

### ***Functions:***

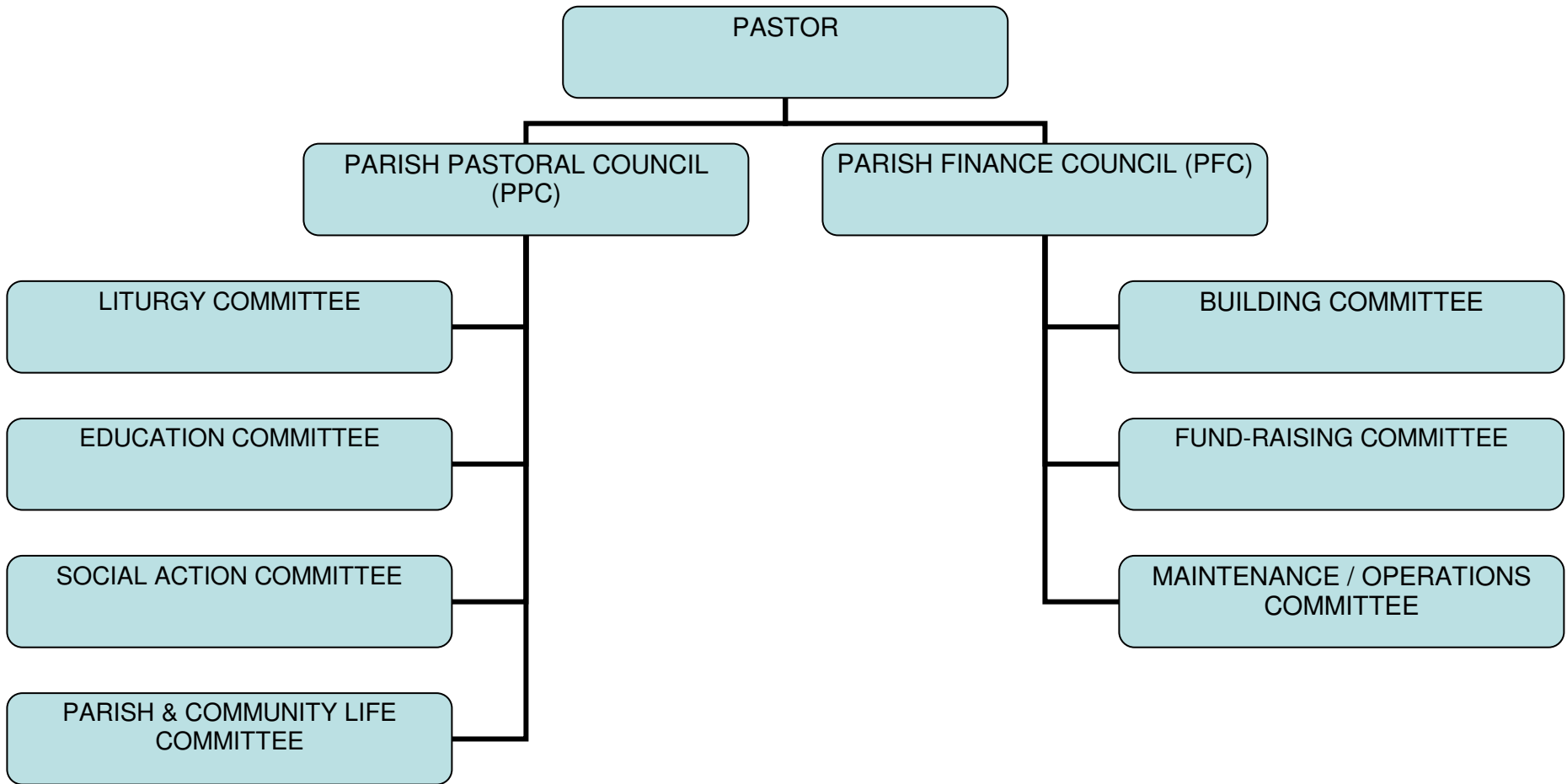
1. To identify the social issues and human needs in the parish and in the community.
2. To develop an action plan and assign programs to specific communities.
3. To develop an education program in co-ordination with the Education Committee to inform the community about human needs and social issues.
4. To act as liaison between the parish and the Diocesan Centre on social development and other diocesan programs.
5. To promote the overall social well-being of the community in co-operation with other denominational or non-denominational organizations.
6. To represent the parish, with PPC approval, in voicing concerns of the church about social issues to all levels of government.

7. To set up sub-committees and recruit committee members to carry out functions of the committee.
8. To prepare an annual budget of expenses anticipated by the committee for submission to the PFC.

**NOTES**



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