



Parish Council Guidelines

Introduction

These guidelines have been created to assist parish leaders in the unique roles they serve with an Anglican congregation in the diocese. They are not a substitute for the Canons of the Diocese of British Columbia. Additionally, there are common practices in the diocese and these guidelines are meant to complement them.

Essential Characteristics of a Parish Council

Parish council is both a process and a structure to enable parishioners to accept and to share more fully the task of continuing the church's work in the parish and neighbourhood. Its work should call forth and affirm the many gifts and competencies needed to meet the pastoral needs of God's people and make manifest the presence of Christ in the communities it serves.

In order that a parish council successfully serve its leadership role in the parish, it should foster some important characteristics so it doesn't get bogged down in avoidable conflicts.

A parish council is **prayerful**. Its members are to be persons of prayer; that is, they see the value of private prayer for their own personal growth in holiness, as well as the value of community prayer for growth in Christ's community of faith and love. The council spends time together in prayer and retreat experiences to draw together in love and trust, to heal divisions, and for the discernment of God's will for the community.

A parish council is **pastoral**. It strives to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit among God's people in the parish for investigating and weighing matters that bear on pastoral activities affecting the lives of parishioners. The council decides what specific actions or programs a parish should adopt to perform its mission—that of making the Gospel known and of helping people in their spiritual journeys. Only then can it determine what resources (people, facilities, money) it needs to carry out those activities and how to provide such resources.



A parish council is **representative**. It is a representative body rather than a body of representatives. A council member is not the representative for a particular neighbourhood, age bracket, special interest group or organization: each council member ministers to the entire parish community. Thus, the council represents, in a holistic sense, all the demographics of a parish; old and young, men and women, laity, clergy and religious people with divergent viewpoints, experiences and ethnic/cultural backgrounds. All work together in an atmosphere and spirit of trust and openness, merging their expertise, insights and experiences to further the mission of Christ among all people. The priests of the parish and a representative number of people, with their respective gifts and talents, are to be members of the council. Eligibility requirements for council membership are to be reasonable; some form of elective/selective process in which the entire parish is involved is necessary. All members of the council are voting members of the council.

A parish council is **discerning**. Its members participate in the policy-making process for the parish by bringing together the needs and the hopes of the parishioners and of the entire community (neighbourhoods) in which they live or serve. Through dialogue and deliberation, it merges the insights, the diverse experiences, the expertise and the faith of council members to provide vision and direction for the parish community. That vision finds expression in the priorities established and the broad policies adopted. Four principles are to be observed in this connection:

Principles

1. Only policy decisions are to be made by the parish council; day-to-day parish administrative decisions are made by the parish staff.
2. Council decisions are to be consistent with Anglican faith and teachings, as well as civil and canon law.
3. The clergy/pastoral team ratifies the decisions of the council through their presence at meetings and participation in the discussion and refinement of proposals.
4. The pastoral team is accountable to the diocesan bishop for the parish, and is responsible for the spiritual life of each parishioner. Council members must be open to reconsideration of any decision in light of this responsibility.



A parish council is **prophetic**. Experiencing the fullness of God's word brings a broader, more challenging vision to parish life. Parish council should strive to move outward, seeking ways to be instruments of justice, peace, reconciliation and practical love, while bearing witness to and engaging in what God is already doing in the world. Council is a group of people unafraid to challenge and take risks; who support, affirm and share their convictions with one another as they strive to build more trusting relationships in the process of building up the body of Christ. Council membership calls people to be sensitive to the anguish and pain of others and to respond in healing, reconciling ways.

A parish council is **enabling**. It strives to recognize and acknowledge the gifts in God's people and to enable each person's unique gifts to contribute to building up the community of faith. To accomplish this, council works with standing committees which correspond to the church's vision.

The council works to promote unity in diversity—keeping the parish together by enabling people to think, pray, work and play together.

Practical Considerations

Who should be on a parish council? Anyone who wishes to serve on a parish council should understand that he/she serves the whole parish and not just one part of it or constituent group such as the choir. Members must be clear about their responsibilities and about the respective roles of the council and clergy. The council should model Christian community.

What is a parish council supposed to do? A parish council cooperates with the clergy for the good of the parish. This idea of cooperation or collaboration is not as passive as it may sound. Getting along is a goal of mature people who want to accomplish something, and it works two ways. The "good of the parish" should be the litmus test for all our motivations and reactions, for what we say and do. Personal likes and dislikes should be minimized and issues should, whenever possible, not be personalized.

When should a parish council meet? Monthly meetings are the best pattern to keep people interested and get results. Councils do not always have to be doing business; a couple of meetings a year there should be worship and a social. The dates for the meetings for the year should be established at the beginning of the year so members



can prioritize the time in their calendars. Choosing one night of the month and sticking to it will help attendance. Having the dates pre-set will help people determine whether they should seek appointment or election if there is a conflict in their schedule. Reminders in the form of meeting announcements should be sent out ten days before each session. Meetings should begin and end on time, and we recommend that they take no more than ninety minutes. Consider having coffee and other refreshments ready fifteen minutes before the scheduled starting time to encourage promptness and to create a social environment conducive to collaboration.

How can we make the council effective? Like good parties, good meetings require good preparation. Here are some things to consider:

Advance Preparation

- Churchwardens and clergy should meet and setup the agenda two weeks in advance.
- Chair (usually the incumbent, but can alternate with churchwardens) should ensure, in advance that, persons or committees scheduled to give reports are present and prepared.
- Set an established agenda for all meetings. For example:
 - Opening prayer
 - Chairperson's report (procedural matters, announcements, updates)
 - Clergy report
 - Special focus discussion
 - Committee reports
 - Old business
 - New business
 - Closing prayer

At the Meeting

A **chairperson** should facilitate, never dominate. Your role is to encourage and moderate. For example, by ensuring all voices are heard and those most willing to speak up do not dominate. Here are a few suggestions:

- Offer each member a chance to speak at each meeting.
- Accept conflict in the group—this is the necessary steam to get movement. No pressure—no movement. BUT work hard to ensure conflict does not become dispute.



- o Keep meeting post-mortems to a minimum; encourage people talk in the meeting, not after or between meetings.
- o Be creative in setting the agenda.
- o Be realistic—you will not please all the people all the time.
- o Be patient—results are often hard to see.

Stand by Decisions

Decision-making is often by consensus or by show of hands. The minutes state merely the decision reached and the names of the mover and seconder. Occasionally a council member will ask for their name to be noted as abstaining from voting; this is done normally to avoid conflict of interest situations. Once a decision is reached and recorded for the minutes agree as a group to support the decision regardless of personal feelings and avoid gossip regardless of the outcome.

Relevant Diocesan Canons

CANON 6.8—APPOINTMENT AND ELECTION OF CHURCHWARDENS

- a. In every parish there shall be two churchwardens selected from the communicants, one to be appointed by the incumbent and one to be elected by the electors; provided that, if the incumbent declares a desire to waive the incumbent's right of appointment, both the churchwardens shall be elected by the electors.
- b. If any incumbency is vacant at the time fixed for the election and appointment of churchwardens, one shall be elected by the parishioners duly assembled (normally at the annual general meeting) and the other shall be appointed by the bishop or the commissary. The churchwarden appointed by the bishop or the commissary shall remain in office until the incumbent shall has been duly appointed.
- c. No person shall be appointed or elected as churchwarden who has held the office for the previous six years.
- d. No churchwarden may be removed from office except by direction of the bishop.



CANON 6.9—PARISH COUNCIL

- a. In every parish there shall be a parish council elected from and by the parishioners of not less than three nor more than twelve in number in addition to the ex-officio members. This council shall meet at least quarterly.
- b. The council may, at a meeting after the parishioners' meeting, add to its membership a number not more than one-third of those elected at the vestry meeting, with the unanimous consent of its members to each appointment.
- c. The incumbent shall be entitled to appoint a number equal to those added under paragraph b. above.
- d. Unless elected or appointed to parish council, the treasurer and secretary do not have a vote.
- e. Members added under the provisions of paragraphs b. and c. above shall have the same powers and privileges as those members elected by the vestry.
- f. Alternate lay delegates to Synod not elected or appointed to parish council are not ex-officio members of parish council, unless the elected lay delegate states that he/she cannot attend Synod.
- g. The incumbent, any other clergy licensed to the parish, the churchwardens and lay delegates to Synod shall be ex-officio members of the parish council and all have the right to vote.
- h. No paid lay employee of the parish shall be a member of the parish council without the unanimous consent of the council.
- i. The duty of the parish council shall be to assist and support the incumbent and the churchwardens in the general business and the programs of the parish.
- j. The incumbent shall be the convener of the parish council; if there be no incumbent, then the meetings shall be convened by the churchwardens.
- k. The incumbent, the incumbent's nominee, or a person elected by the council, in that sequence, shall be the chair of the parish council. If the parish be vacant, or



if the absence of the incumbent is approved by the archdeacon or the bishop, the council shall elect as chair one of the churchwardens.

- l. The incumbent shall call a special meeting of the parishioners or parish council on receiving a written requisition to that effect, signed by the churchwardens and by a majority of the parish council or on such requisition signed by any ten parishioners.
- m. A quorum of the parish council shall be the chair and one of the churchwardens and one-third of the membership of the council.
- n. Between annual and special meetings of the parishioners, their powers shall be vested in the parish council.

Other Considerations

- o Spouses are not encouraged to be on council together.
- o Seasonal members (people who are out of the parish for long periods of time each year) should not undertake churchwarden duties without the support of a deputy churchwarden.
- o Whenever possible, candidates should be members of the parish for one year prior to election.