

Appendix 3: The Diocesan Pastoral Council

Introduction

Recognizing that sound pastoral decisions are informed by the wisdom of the People of God, Bishop David D. Kagan established the Pastoral Council of the Diocese of Bismarck on March 1, 2012. The documents of the Second Vatican Council recommend the establishment of pastoral councils. The documents state that Catholics have a right and duty to express their opinion on what pertains to the good of the Church. Bishop Kagan as Bishop of the Diocese of Bismarck established a pastoral council in acknowledgement of the wisdom of the people of the diocese and as an expression of his desire to share with them the responsibility of discerning the will of God for the Catholic Church in Western North Dakota.

Purpose

The purpose of the diocesan pastoral council is to investigate pastoral matters, to consider them thoroughly, and to propose practical conclusions about them. The council's task is, first of all, to study those matters brought to its attention and shed light on them. Its second task is to reflect on them thoroughly, to discern their true nature, to evaluate and to ponder them. Its final task is to draw sound conclusions. The council presents these conclusions to the Bishop in the form of options. After the Bishop has accepted the options from the council and chooses a course of action, he directs the implementation. Council members may assist him, but strictly speaking, implementation is the responsibility of the Bishop, not the council.

Scope

The scope of the council is pastoral matters. These include everything that pertains to the mission of the diocese to "Be Ambassadors for Christ, who Live Stewardship in Word, Sacrament and Service." The scope includes all the practical matters of faithful Catholic life: to promote the spiritual good of the diocese; to create unity within the diocese; to open a better means of dialogue between the clergy and the laity of the diocese. There is nothing about which the Bishop may not consult the council, apart from faith, orthodoxy, moral principles or laws of the universal Church.

Membership

Twenty to thirty pastoral council members are chosen, above all, for their ability to accomplish the main task of the council—the work of investigating, considering and recommending practical conclusions. They are baptized Catholics, in good standing with the Church, who reflect various regions of the Diocese, social and professional groups, and apostolates. The Pastoral Council is a representative body, not a body of representatives. It reflects the wisdom of the People of God, not constituencies within the Diocese. Members are chosen because they have the gifts necessary for the work of the pastoral council.

Operation

The Bishop presides at every meeting of the council. He consults, he accepts or rejects recommendations, and he develops the agenda with the assistance of the director of pastoral planning. The agenda states the goals for each meeting, the means and group process for reaching the goals, and the materials needed to accomplish them. The pastoral planning director serves as executive secretary, keeps the minutes and ensures that they are sent, along with the agenda and supporting documents to each councilor. Each meeting will begin and end with prayer, include a review of the minutes of the previous meeting and conclude with a brief evaluation. Individual councilors may volunteer or be asked to assist with various operations and activities of the council. The Pastoral Council will meet approximately quarterly or four times per year.

Relationship to Other Consultative Groups

The Bishop consults others besides the Pastoral Council about diocesan governance. He relies on the Presbyteral Council, College of Consultors, Priests' Personnel Board, Finance Council and Staff. The Finance Council members are chosen for their technical skill in realms of accounting and finance. There are some matters that require the consent of the College of Consultors and the Finance Council. The Pastoral Council offers practical wisdom and the ability to investigate pastoral matters in a general way, to reflect on them deeply in dialogue and to propose conclusions appropriate to the Diocese.