

Discerning new Parish Pastoral Council Members

What is “Discernment?”

Discernment is a process of listening with openness for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, - to that still, small voice - in our prayer and in our communal considerations for the good of the parish.

To discern means to come to knowledge. A process of prayerful discernment is one in which we come to knowledge of the God’s plan for the parish. The process involves calling upon the Holy Spirit to be present, being open to input from the community, and providing the opportunity for prayer and reflection in the process. Discernment of parish council membership is a process of prayer, formation, and the deepening of people’s relationship with the Holy Spirit as individuals and as a community of believers.

In the final phase of the selection of Council membership, a discernment process should be used. Each parish needs to develop the specifics of its own process. The actual discernment of new parish pastoral council members involves prayer, the naming of the gifts that an individual brings to the parish community that resonate with the context of the issues facing the parish. At the end of the process each nominee, along with the group that has been gathered, will discern who should come on the council at this time. For additional input, see “Discernment” on page 11 of the diocesan *PPC Guidelines* (2010).



St. Francis of Assisi has left us a prayer of discernment that he prayed. It contains the elements that we might prayerfully consider in this personal and communal process.

**Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness
of my heart,
and give me right faith,
certain hope,
and perfect charity,
wisdom and
understanding,
Lord, that I may carry out
your holy and true
command.
Amen.**

The Discernment Process

In order to discern the “who,” we consider the gifts and talents of members of the community.

To discern new members, a steering committee of 2/3 people is formed from the existing parish pastoral council. They will coordinate the “in pew” forms, assist the pastor in reviewing the nominees and determining who will be invited to the INFORMATION NIGHT and the DISCERNMENT NIGHT. They will assist with communication and prepare the environment. *The discernment of new members occurs in the following parts:*

1. **Publicity** - Bulletin and pulpit announcement or other means of advertising to make the parish aware of the existing council and their role in the parish. Pastors may want to speak about the meaning of “discernment” (see above as well as page 11 of the 2010 PPC Guidelines) as the term may not be a familiar one. He may also want to share some of the work that has been accomplished by the council in this year.¹
2. **Nominations** - All parishioners are encouraged to submit names (or self- nominate) at a Sunday liturgy or drop the “in pew form” off at the parish office during that week.²
3. **Invitations** – The pastor and steering committee review the names of people who have been nominated. They decide who will be invited. Invitations are sent to invite them to attend a NIGHT OF INFORMATION to learn more about Parish Pastoral Councils and to ask questions.
4. **Night of Information**³ – This is a session to explain the Parish Pastoral Council, including explanation of roles and duties of PPC members and time for nominees to ask questions. This INFORMATION NIGHT ends by encouraging nominees to consider and pray over what they have heard and, if they still feel called, to come during the following week to the DISCERNMENT NIGHT. Participants may be asked to read the diocesan PPC Guidelines found in English and in Spanish on both the diocesan website and on the Harvesting Gifts website under “Pastoral Planning.”
5. **Discernment Night**⁴– One or two weeks after the INFORMATION NIGHT, the current PPC and returning nominees gather to discern new council members in the context of prayer. The number of new members needed is announced. The nominees answer a series of questions and listen to everyone else as they offer their answers to the same questions. The council members and participants then come to consensus on those they wish to join the council.⁵
6. **Commissioning of New Members** - This is usually conducted by the pastor at the following Sunday liturgy. This could also be a time to recognize those who are leaving the council after their years of service.

¹ For sample announcements, see attachment A.

² A sample “in pew” form is attached, see Attachment B.

³ This may be a local presentation on the *Diocesan Guidelines for Pastoral Councils (2010)*, - and an introduction to the process of pastoral planning, or pastors may request a presentation of Toolkit #4 found on the **Harvesting Gifts Website** under the *Pastoral Planning section*.

⁴ A sample Discernment Night Model is attached, see Attachment C.

⁵ A worship aid for prayer and process should be distributed. A sample is attached