

Suggested Structures for PARISH ADMINISTRATION

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"This is the age of the laity." "The laity should be involved in the running of the parish." "The laity should have a say in parish matters." "Much of the administrative detail of the parish should be turned over to capable laymen!" No doubt pastors have heard or read these or similar statements many times. These ideas are being advocated quite strongly in some areas.

Many pastors are in favor of involving the laity in parish administration. However, in most cases, they do not know how to go about setting up a structure that would involve capable laywomen and laymen in the administration of the parish.

Our Protestant brethren have much to offer us in regard to involvement of the laity in parish administration. Most Protestant communities have a lay board which is in complete charge of the church. The board makes all the decisions regarding the material aspects of the parish. In this way, the minister is free to devote himself fully to the work of the ministry.

Some Protestant communities have a theme which serves as an incentive and unifying force for the whole parish. A theme which is quite prevalent in Protestant churches is that of "stewardship."

Stewardship

In this article a rather brief and simplified explanation of stewardship is given. Everyone is a steward (administrator) not an owner of

the things he calls his own — time, talents, and material blessings. All that he has is a trust to him from God. So, each parishioner is expected to assume a joint responsibility for the work of the parish.

The practice of Christian Stewardship is an art, and a difficult one to master. It must be cultivated and developed through years of nurture, training and experience. It helps to bring out Christlike qualities in parishioners — to care, to share, to love.

The Pastor

The pastor may be interested in looking into the idea of stewardship. Naturally, he should also study the documents of Vatican II concerning the role of the laity in the parish. He should share all these ideas with his parishioners by homilies, pastoral letters, and through the Sunday bulletin. He should also encourage the study groups in his parish to discuss these ideas. If he is sincerely interested in the proper use of the laity in his parish, then he will try to diffuse as many of these ideas as possible.

First Home Visit

The pastor, then should organize a group of men and women who are willing to visit every home in the parish. The pastor should instruct these volunteers that this parish wishes to serve completely every individual who lives in this area. In order to do a job of this magnitude, it must involve the laymen, and laywomen of the parish. These volunteers are to convey these ideas to all the members of the parish. Also, at this time it would be a good idea to bring the parish census up-to-date.

Two by two, the volunteers go to every home in the parish. After greeting the family, they explain the program of the parish; what the parish intends to do in the future; and that the parish needs the help of every individual. Then the volunteers could fill out the census cards. At this time, no money should be asked for, nor any pledges taken. Once the volunteers have left, the family should be left with the idea that the parish is sincere in its interest to help all who live in the area; that the parish needs their help, that the parish is not just looking for more money.

Parish Board

During the visits the pastor should be concretely planning a parish board. He also must keep his parishioners informed concerning these plans for the involvement of the laity in parish administration. The original board may be set up by the pastor in the following way: he may appoint all the presidents of the various organizations in the parish, plus appoint an additional number to serve on the original parish board.

Sub-Committees

The parish board then can set up the following sub-committees:

- The Worship Committee would be responsible for the entire liturgy program of the parish. It would attend to the scheduling of Masses, the celebration of the other sacraments. It would be responsible for the commentators, servers, ushers, and the choir. Such matters as the passing out of books, hymnals, and similar such matters for services would also be a part of the work of the Worship Committee. This Committee would also be responsible for the care of the church, altar and sacristy.

- The Education Committee would be responsible for the grammar school, the CCD Program, and adult education. In other words, the entire educational program of the parish would be in the hands of this committee. It would treat such matters as the school plan, salaries, tuition, teaching needs, playground activities, study clubs, and any other matters or programs that would be helpful for the education of the community. The principal of the school should be considered an *ex officio* member of this committee.

- The Little Parish Committee would be in charge of dividing the parish into small geographical sections. This committee would appoint a chair-couple as the leaders of this area. The chair-couple, with the aid of the other parishioners from the area, would welcome new families moving into the parish, and report those who move out. They would keep census and interest cards on all the parishioners in their section. The names of those who might be interested in a particular parish activity would be passed on to those in charge of that activity. The chair-couple would also report births, sick persons, and those who have some problems

so that the parish can help. The Little Parish Committee would be in charge of coordinating all the above mentioned activities.

- The Finance Committee would be responsible for drawing up the parish budget; banking the money from the Sunday collection (pledges) and other projects; making any necessary disbursements, and keeping detailed financial records.

- The Maintenance Committee would be responsible for the upkeep of the entire parish plant. The caretakers and custodians of the various parish buildings would report to the chairman of this committee. They may contact individual parishioners to help with the upkeep of the parish.

- The Community Relations Committee would be responsible for working with groups and other organizations outside of the parish for the good of the neighborhood and the community at large. This committee would see to it that the parish is in the community stream.

Naturally to have a smooth running parish board will take time, patience, and cooperation of all concerned. It may take a number of years to get things to run smoothly. The pastor and the parishioners should not be discouraged.

Second Parish Visit

The pastor and the board should plan in great detail a second home visit. The primary purpose of this visit is to seek from every parishioner a definite pledge of time, talents, and money for the parish programs. This, naturally, is a touchy topic and has to be delicately handled.

The whole community should be prepared for this visit by homilies and letters. They should be informed that no other form of fund-raising will be used in this parish. All the home visitors should be aware of all the parish programs. They also should be taught the techniques of securing pledges. Separate cards could be used to record the pledges of time and money. These cards later could be directed to the respective sub-committee, as finance, maintainance, etc.

Conclusion

This outline is quite simplified. However, an imaginative pastor should be able to build with this plan. Some pastors may want more detailed information. The writer of this article did a research project on this subject. The dissertation goes into quite some detail concerning the mechanics of setting up a parish board.

The laity must be allowed to play their role in parish life. This brief article offers a plan. The result could be a real, living Christian community — a real parish.