

SERVING THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN CENTRAL KENTUCKY



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Teaching Our Faith – Finance councils are vehicles of stewardship



(<https://i0.wp.com/therecordnewspaper.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/RecordLogo-F.jpg?ssl=1>) This series of teaching editorials focuses on consultation in the Church and the role of boards and councils on the parish and the diocesan level.

The “Code of Canon Law,” which regulates the Universal Church states: “Each parish is to have a finance council which is regulated by universal law as well as by norms issued by the diocesan bishop; in this council the Christian faithful, selected according to the same norms, aid the pastor in the administration of parish goods ...” (Can. 537). The law of the church thus mandates that every parish is to have a finance council.

Christians are called by their baptism to share in the mission of Jesus Christ, within and outside of the faith community. Lay participation in pastoral leadership in the parish occurs in two important areas, the pastoral council, which promotes the Gospel mission, and the parish finance council, which

helps procure and maintain resources necessary for that mission. The two councils have separate functions but are united by the same goal.

Both councils have a consultative role to the pastor. Pastoral and financial parish decisions remain the responsibility of the pastor who is to consult with his councils. Thus, consultation, the sharing of information, honest discussion, critical listening and a final consensus must form the heart of the pastor's decision-making process.

A wise pastor, whether trained in financial matters or not, should invite advisors to help manage resources, assist in good governance and encourage his accountability to the parish. A good council contains members who have financial expertise, understand church fiscal procedures, show a love for the Gospel and its mission and have knowledge of the structure, demographics and the goals of the parish. Advice of the finance council is to be sought for "ordinary administration," for example, review and approval of the budget, the annual financial report, the care and maintenance of existing facilities and ensuring parish compliance with diocesan policies. The council also advises the pastor on "extraordinary administration," such as capital projects, renovations and construction, the purchase of new property and planning for long-term capital improvement.

With this said, it would be a mistake to see the finance council merely as an advisory board that monitors parish finances. The council is a true ministry that acts as a vehicle of good stewardship.

A parish living true stewardship acknowledges that we are God's stewards who, as individuals and as faith communities, will be held accountable for the development and use of all gifts (Matthew 25:14-30). What we do with divine gifts fulfills our Gospel calling and renders honor and glory to God. As a major actor in parish stewardship, the finance council assists the pastor and consults with the parish by annually reporting on the financial condition of the parish. This includes the sources of parish income, parish savings and investments and the status of parish expenses and parish debt. This consultation is a vital element of accountability, which completes the circle of stewardship and so directly encourages the faithful to give from their abundance of time, talent and treasure – all for the honor and glory of God (1 Peter 4:10).

Under the ministry of the finance council and strengthened by the pillars of stewardship, justice and especially love, the parish utilizes its gifts for the common good, for building up the Body of Christ. Stewardship is obedience

to God's mandate to use our divine gifts for the service of others. Justice is treating each child of God with due respect based on God's love for every person. Love is caring for another by respecting that person and seeking to provide for the needs of that person. Within this Gospel framework, the parish finance council models for the parish true Gospel ministry. This example builds confidence and trust among the faithful and inspires the parish to accomplish its mission more fully.

Finally, the finance council enjoys a unique position to assist the parish in the ongoing Parish Discernment Process and in our Lenten journey. The finance council joins the parish in an intensification of prayer. It offers consultation in retaining parish resources (fasting) to ensure a greater effort in the Gospel mission (almsgiving) as the parish discerns its future efforts in sustaining family life, in promoting lifelong formation and education and in reaching out in charity within and outside of the parish.

In the main, the relationship among parish finance council, pastor and parish should be a positive, productive partnership. The shared consultation of this partnership works together for the spiritual well-being of all, and as such, produces true Gospel inspired ministry and fulfills the great command to love God and neighbor.

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