

The Role of the Priest in Fostering Strategic Intent in the Parish Council

Introduction

Only the priest has the combination of theological education, training, vision, experience and sacramental grace that is essential in guiding the parish toward the Kingdom of God. He must not hesitate to periodically remind parish council members of the mission of the parish in light of the gospel and provide opportunities for the parish council to fulfill their calling to strategically focus on the ultimate purpose and intent of parish life.

The ever present temptation of parish councils is to descend solely into operational and tactical concerns and to address these from their professional or business backgrounds. This is not all detrimental. Oftentimes the parish will benefit much from their experience and the priest can learn much from the perspectives of parish council members. Yet strategic intent must be concerned with mission fulfillment in light of the gospel.

Parish life is a big tent. It would not exclude culture- or heritage-oriented programs or activities. Still, the primacy of the gospel must be emphasized. This is the task of the priest.

Ways the Priest can Instill Strategic Intent in the Parish Council

- The priest must envision the future of the parish and articulate this in a compelling way. What does the community look like five years down the road? What new programs and ministries are there? How are the facilities improved to provide better service? How is staffing grown to provide better and more responsible pastoral care? How have we invested in key volunteers to empower them to fulfill their calling to service? How is attendance, participation and spiritual growth enhanced? What does an active, vibrant, mission focused parish look like?
- Articulate a parish development plan for careful, periodic review by the parish council. Alternatively, focus on one or two key areas of parish life.
- Search the Stewardship Advocates Library for the numerous short exercises that facilitate parish council strategic focus and strategic intent.
- Use a comprehensive strategic plan developed in conjunction with the parish council to review progress against key goals and objectives.
- Conduct a parish council retreat every year to focus on parish council development in light of the mission of the parish.
- Structure parish council materials to direct parish council members' attention to issues of policy and strategy.

- Require parish council committees to do their work and get their reports in early for distribution prior to the meeting.
- Distribute relevant materials 5-7 days before parish council meetings so more time is made available for issues of greater importance or the recommendations coming from the committees.
- Occasionally, shape the parish council meeting agenda to allow one to two hour intensive exploration of a single, complex strategic issue.
- Equip parish council members with the capacity to monitor parish performance and progress. Construct a process to track and monitor Key Performance Indicators against strategic goals of the parish.
- Conduct an all parish survey and plan how to strategically respond to concerns and desires.