



Parish of Saint Monica

Atlantic City, NJ



An Explanation of Parish Governance

Updated September 30, 2016

The Parish of Saint Monica

An Explanation of Parish Governance

Purpose of this Document

This document offers parishioners a comprehensive yet brief explanation of the governance of the Parish of Saint Monica. It cites several sources relevant to the governance of the parish:

- Code of Canon Law
- *Decree of the Merger of the Parishes of Atlantic City and Establishment of The Parish of Saint Monica*, June 5, 2015
- Title 16 of the New Jersey Permanent Statutes, "Corporations and Associations, Religious"
- *Certificate of Consolidation of The Parish of Saint Monica, Atlantic City, N.J.*, June 24, 2015
- Bylaws of The Parish of Saint Monica, Atlantic City, N.J.
- *Guidelines for Parish Finance Councils*, Diocese of Camden, December 21, 2006
- *Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils*, Diocese of Camden, November 2010

This document is not meant to replace these authoritative documents. Instead, this document is meant to summarize and systematize their substance. Where latitude exists, this document also determines some of the details of governance for our parish.

Article I. The Parish in Canon Law

Section A. Canonical Definition of Parish

"A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the diocesan bishop." (can. 515 §1)

"As a general rule a parish is to be territorial, that is, one which includes all the Christian faithful of a certain territory." (can. 518)

Section B. Establishment of the Parish

The Bishop of Camden's *Decree of the Merger of the Parishes of Atlantic City and Establishment of The Parish of Saint Monica*, issued June 5, 2015, united the parishes of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine, Our Lady Star of the Sea, Saint Michael, Saint Monica, and Holy Spirit into a single parish called the Parish of Saint Monica, effective July 1, 2015.

Section C. Parish Territory

"The territorial boundaries of the Parish of Saint Monica will be the same as the municipal boundaries of Atlantic City." (*Decree of the Establishment of The Parish of Saint Monica*)

Section D. Churches

Canon law states that a parish is "constituted in a *particular* church" (emphasis added). For this reason, the episcopal decree names Our Lady Star of the Sea as the "parochial church" and St. Nicholas of Tolentine as a "second worship site." Nevertheless, we will not refer to St. Nicholas as a "worship site." The ordinary celebration of the sacraments, i.e. the Mass schedule for Sundays, weekdays, and holy days of obligation, is to occur only in these churches. Baptisms should also be celebrated only in these churches.

Parochial functions, like the blessing of the pastoral council, liturgical ministers, and catechists, will normally occur in Star of the Sea. Due to its historic beauty and size, St. Nicholas will often host civic functions.

The church of Saint Michael may be used for extraordinary occasions: weddings, funerals, and special events.

Article II. The Parish in Civil Law

Section A. Establishment of the Religious Corporation

A certificate of consolidation recorded by the Clerk of Atlantic County on July 1, 2015 and filed with the Treasurer of the State of New Jersey on July 2, 2015 constituted the parish as a religious

corporation operating in accordance with New Jersey state law with the name of "The Parish of Saint Monica, Atlantic City, N.J."

Section B: Board of Trustees

Title 16:15-3 of the New Jersey Permanent Statutes requires five trustees. The bishop and the vicar-general of the diocese and the pastor of the parish are *ex officio* members of the board of trustees. The other two trustees are parishioners who serve renewable one year terms beginning October 1.

The parish bylaws name three officers: the bishop as president, the vicar-general as vice president, and the pastor as secretary and treasurer.

At their last meeting before October, the pastoral council and finance council should each nominate one of their members to serve as trustee. The pastor will submit their names to the diocese for their election by the bishop and vicar general.

According to by the bylaws and New Jersey statutes, the pastor and the lay trustees may meet alone to conduct business as necessary, but their acts are not valid until they receive the sanction of the bishop.

Article III: Clergy

Section A: Pastor

"The pastor (*parochus*) is the proper pastor (*pastor*) of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share, so that for that same community he carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, also with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful, according to the norm of law." (can. 519)

Section B: Parochial Vicars

"Whenever it is necessary or opportune in order to carry out the pastoral care of a parish fittingly, one or more parochial vicars can be associated with the pastor. As co-workers with the pastor and sharers in his solicitude, they are to offer service in the pastoral ministry by common counsel and effort with the pastor and under his authority." (can. 545 §1)

Section C: Deacons

Deacons "are empowered to serve the People of God in the ministries of the liturgy, the word, and charity" (can. 1009 §3). They have their own part in the celebration of the Eucharist, they are ordinary ministers of holy communion, and they may preach, baptize, and witness marriages.

Section D: Clergy Meetings

The clergy, particularly the pastor and parochial vicars, should meet regularly "concerning proposed and existing pastoral endeavors in such a way that the pastor and the vicar or vicars, through common efforts, are able to provide for the pastoral care of the parish for which they are together responsible" (can. 548 §3).

The clergy may decide issues of lesser importance at their meetings. Issues of greater importance should also be considered by the pastoral council.

Article IV. Pastoral Council

Section A. Purpose

The pastoral care of a parish is primarily entrusted by the bishop to the pastor (can. 515 §1) with the cooperation of parochial vicars and deacons (can. 519). The pastoral council assists the pastor in fostering pastoral activity (can. 536 §1). Examples of pastoral activity are preaching and catechesis, the celebration of the sacraments, evangelization, works of social justice, Catholic education, the support of married couples and families, care for the sick and dying, care for the poor and afflicted, care for those in special difficulties like exiles and refugees, and the support of associations of the laity.

As a structure defined by canon law and required by diocesan statute, the pastoral council is superior to all other parish councils, committees, etc., without prejudice to the specific rights and responsibilities of the finance council.

Section B. Role of the Pastor

The pastor presides over the pastoral council (can. 536 §1). The pastoral council cannot meet without the pastor.

Section C. Ex Officio Members

Parochial vicars and deacons are *ex officio* members (see can. 536 §1). Although not members, the trustees have the right to speak at pastoral council meetings.

Section D. Elected Members

There shall be nine elected members serving three-year terms. Three members shall be elected each year so that the terms of the elected members are staggered.

Each year a discernment meeting shall be held. The meeting shall be open to all registered parishioners. A bulletin announcement shall invite to the meeting all parishioners with a serious interest in the parish's future, particularly those interested in serving on the pastoral council

("prospective members"). At this meeting, the pastor and current council members explain the work of the council. Prospective members then explain their activities in the parish and their vision for its future. After some time of open dialogue, those still interested in serving on the council shall give their names to the council chair. If the number of names exceeds the number of seats to be filled, an election is immediately held. All parishioners at the meeting, including current council members but excluding the pastor, may vote. The parishioners with the highest numbers of votes are elected to the council with their terms beginning the coming October 1.

Only active and registered parishioners in good standing with the Church may serve on the pastoral council.

Section E. Appointed Members

The pastor may appoint as many as three members, but only if necessary to insure that significant groups in the parish, especially cultural groups, are represented on the council.

Section F. Officers

Although the pastor is the canonical president of the pastoral council (can. 536 §1), diocesan guidelines allow him to delegate the responsibility of chairing meetings. After new members are seated in October, the council must elect three officers for a one-year term: a chair, a vice chair, and a secretary. These officers form the executive committee. *Ex officio* members may not be elected as officers.

In the week before a meeting, the pastor confers with the executive committee to prepare the agenda, which the secretary promptly sends to the whole council along with the minutes from the last meeting. The chair leads meetings or, in his or her absence, the vice chair. The secretary records the minutes and, after they are approved by the council, submits them (with amendments, if necessary) to the parish office to be made public.

Section G. Meetings

The pastoral council should meet every month except July, August, and December unless the council decides otherwise by a majority vote. A majority of the membership constitutes a quorum.

Council members must submit agenda items to the chair at least one week before a meeting.

Meetings are open to parishioners, although they may not speak. The pastoral council may decide to meet in closed session by a majority vote, but the minutes must still be made public.

Section H. Responsibilities

To foster pastoral activity, the council identifies needs, suggests priorities, and proposes strategies. To do this work well, the council must conduct research.

The council's greatest work is the writing of pastoral plans. A pastoral plan provides not only a comprehensive vision for the parish (or some part of its activity) but also strategies to realize the vision and a timetable for their implementation. Pastoral plans should be communicated to parishioners through altar announcements, the bulletin, the Web site, and other appropriate channels. After a plan is announced, the council should monitor its implementation and suggest "course corrections" as necessary.

When there is not a clear consensus on matters under discussion, it is appropriate for the pastor or chair to call a vote. Each member has one vote, including *ex officio* members but excluding the pastor. The vote, however, is consultative (can. 536 §1). Nevertheless, the vote must be recorded in the minutes.

Section I. Resignation and Removal of Members

Members may resign from the council by notifying the pastor and the chair. If they resign in the first year of their term, their seats should be filled at the next discernment meeting.

The pastoral council is not a forum merely to suggest ideas to the pastor. Ideas must be tested. Each lay member is expected to do the work of the council even outside of council meetings, for instance by serving on committees. If a member does not meet this expectation, he or she may be removed if the pastor and chair are in agreement. Their decision must be shared at a meeting and recorded in the minutes. If the removed member was in the first year of his or her term, the seat should be filled at the next discernment meeting.

Article V. Finance Council

Section A. Purpose

"In each parish there is to be a finance council which is governed, in addition to universal law, by norms issued by the diocesan bishop and in which the Christian faithful, selected according to these same norms, are to assist the pastor in the administration of the goods of the parish." (can. 537)

The council specifically assists the pastor in three areas: finances, facilities, and personnel.

Section B. Role of the Pastor

The pastor is not a member of the finance council, although the council cannot meet without him.

Section C. Ex Officio Members

The trustees are *ex officio* members. Although not members, the parish clergy have the right to speak at finance council meetings.

Section D. Appointed Members

At least two and no more than eight members should be appointed by the pastor. They are appointed for renewable three-year terms beginning October 1.

Section E. Officers

After new members are seated in October, the council must elect two officers for a renewable one-year term: a chair and a secretary. *Ex officio* members may not be elected as officers.

In the week before a meeting, the pastor confers with the chair to prepare the agenda, which the secretary promptly sends to the whole council along with the minutes from the last meeting. The chair leads meetings. The secretary records the minutes and, after they are approved by the council, submits them (with amendments, if necessary) to the parish office. The secretary also sends a second version to the office, which is to be made public. The second version omits specific information about sensitive matters like salaries and uncompleted real estate transactions.

Section F. Meetings

The finance council must at least meet quarterly. A majority of the membership constitutes a quorum.

Council members must submit agenda items to the chair at least one week before a meeting.

Section G. Responsibilities

The finance council is chiefly responsible for assisting with the following:

- Creating or at least approving the annual parish budget
- Approving the annual report for the review of the diocesan finance council
- Preparing the annual report of the parish's financial health to parishioners
- Offering to the bishop, through the pastor, its opinion of financial matters which exceed the pastor's authority to act independently

When there is not a clear consensus on matters under discussion, it is appropriate for the pastor or chair to call a vote. Each member has one vote, including *ex officio* members. The vote must be recorded in the minutes and may be required by the diocese for certain decisions.

Section H. Resignation and Removal of Members

Members may resign from the council by notifying the pastor and the chair.

Appointed members may be removed from the council for breach of confidentiality or abandonment of duties if the pastor and chair are in agreement. Their decision must be shared at a meeting and recorded in the minutes.

Article VI. Parish Staff

Section A. Purpose

The pastor hires staff to help realize the parish's mission and to support that mission in the business operation of the parish.

Section B. Relationship to the Pastor, the Pastoral Council, and the Finance Council

Employment decisions belong to the pastor. The pastor should ask members of the pastoral and finance councils to serve on screening and interview committees when a position is to be filled. While the decision to hire an employee is ultimately the pastor's, the finance council advises the pastor on the staff budget. It is also appropriate for the pastoral council to consider whether the work of the pastoral staff, even of individual members, is realizing its vision for the parish.

Section C. Divisions

There are two basic divisions of the parish staff: pastoral and support. The pastoral staff works with the clergy in the area of pastoral activity, like liturgy and catechesis. The support staff is responsible for the operation of the parish office, the maintenance of the buildings and grounds, and financial and legal work. This staff is supervised by the business manager.

Article VII. The Parishioners

Section A. Role in the Parish

"From their rebirth in Christ, there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality regarding dignity and action by which they all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ according to each one's own condition and function" (can. 208).

Although people often use the word "parish" to refer to the parish office or the clergy and staff, canon law states that the parish is the whole community. Parishioners as much as clergy, council members, and staff are called to support the mission of the parish but all according to their state in life.

Section B. Responsibilities

"The Christian faithful are obliged to assist with the needs of the Church so that the Church has what is necessary for divine worship, for the works of the apostolate and of charity, and for the decent support of ministers" (can. 222 §1).

Section C. Rights

"The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires.

"According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons" (can. 212 §2-3).

Regarding their needs and opinions, parishioners may speak to a member of the pastoral council or to the pastor or anyone of the parish clergy or pastoral staff. The person who hears the concern should bring it to the proper forum. Parishioners have the right to expect some reply.

Section D. Apostolates

"The Christian faithful are at liberty freely to found and direct associations for purposes of charity or piety or for the promotion of the Christian vocation in the world and to hold meetings for the common pursuit of these purposes" (can. 215).

Apostolates which wish to advertise in the parish bulletin or use parish meeting space should communicate their existence to the parish office. A staff liaison will be assigned to them, through whom they will post announcements, book meeting space, and manage finances.