

Temporal goods and Diocesan/Parish Finance Council

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Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. Through baptism and confirmation, the laity likewise shares in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world (AA. 2; Can. 204 §1). All priests have the obligation to promote this specific mission of the laity (Can. 275 §2 **There is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ's faithful.** Because of this equality they all contribute, each according to his or her own condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ (Can. 208). In the Church, there is **a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission.** Suitable lay persons can be appointed to **ecclesiastical offices and functions** and when they excel in necessary knowledge, prudence, and integrity are qualified to assist the pastors of the Church as **experts and advisors, even in councils** according to the norm of law (Can. 228).

Every part of the Mystical Body contributes

No part of the structure of a living body is merely passive but has a share in the functions as well as life of the body: so, too, in the body of Christ, which is the Church, "the whole body . . . in keeping with the proper activity of each part, derives its increase from its own internal development" (Eph. 4:16). Indeed, the organic union in this body and the structure of the members are so compact that *the member who fails to make his proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to himself.*

Participatory structures in the service of Communion

Priests are thus at the service of communion, **with the bishop, other priests, Religious and lay members of Christ's faithful.** Communion needs to be fostered by dialogue both on an individual level and structural level with due

regard for the equality of dignity and action of all those involved. **Participatory structures offer a special possibility** for the faithful to **contribute to the mission of the Church** and to **make known their needs and manifest their views** to the sacred pastors and other members of Christ's faithful (CC. 465, 511, 536). The council of priests and the college of consultors facilitate listening to the **views of the presbyterium** by the bishop. The expertise and suggestions of persons of integrity in the finance councils contribute to **greater transparency and accountability** in dealing with the temporal goods of the Church. The competent authorities in the Church for their part **should not quench the Spirit** but examine everything (LG. 12b). The bishop and the parish priest **must listen to the faithful as his true children** and exhort them to cooperate (LG. 27c).

1. A brief history of laity in the administration of temporal goods

Temporal goods are intimately linked to the life of human beings. Right from the time of its foundation, the Church has made use of the temporal goods for the fulfilment of its mission (Acts 2: 44-45; 4:35). Those responsible in the governance of the Church were conscious that they were not owners but only administrators of ecclesiastical goods. Especially after the Edicts of Milan (313 AD) and of Constantine (321 AD), there was a notable increase in Church property and there was a corresponding necessity for the correct administration of the temporal goods of the Church.

The Council of Ancyra (314 AD) prescribed that priests should not use the goods of the Church without the prior permission of the bishop. There was sufficient number of lay collaborators to the bishop in the administration of temporal goods towards the middle of the 4th century. While the bishop had the prerogative to make important decisions concerning the finances of the Church, he did not directly and personally do everything concerning the administration. He did not hesitate to enlist the services of the laity for the purpose.

In some churches, the head of the administration was the Archdeacon and in some others especially in the east a cleric was appointed "Economus" Financial Administrator which was made obligatory by the Council of Chalcedon. Popes Suplicius and Gelasius brought about a notable modification by prescribing that the income of the church must be divided into four parts: **For the Bishop, the Clergy, the Poor and the Church**. The fourth Synod of Rome (502 AD) forbade the laity to appropriate the church property or to sell them (can. 4). Even the bishop was not to act independently when it concerned alienation. The third and fifth council of

Aurelia (538 AD & 549 AD), the fourth council of Toletano (531 AD) and the second council of Nicea (784 AD) gave appropriate norms concerning the temporal goods. The sixth Council of Paris (829 AD) **affirmed the sacred character of the ecclesiastical goods** and exhorted the priests to **administer them with the maximum care**. The elaboration of the concept of juridical person constituted a special progress in the administration of the goods of the Church. Henceforth, the juridical person was the owner of the church property who had lawfully acquired the same as against the individual physical persons who were only stewards and administrators in the name of the juridical person. What was important was that the ecclesiastical goods must be administered by the competent ecclesiastical authority for the purpose for which it was acquired.

2. The Code of 1917

Canon 1519 of the 1917 Code underlined the role of the local ordinary in being vigilant about the administration of all ecclesiastical goods present in his territory. In order to fulfil this responsibility, he was asked to constitute **a council of two or more suitable men expert in so far as possible in civil law**. He chooses them after consulting the Cathedral Chapter and he presides over this council. He may be exempted from this obligation if law or particular custom or by other equivalent manner, he has already made provision (Can. 1520). Those related to him in the first or second degree of consanguinity or affinity were excluded from this council without apostolic indult. The members had to make an oath in the presence of the Ordinary to fulfil their duty well and faithfully. It was also prescribed that local ordinary shall not fail to hear in administrative actions of greater moment this council of administration. The members had only a consultative vote unless common law or the document of foundation provided otherwise in in express special cases.

Canon 1521 wanted the local ordinary **to associate with himself suitable men of good repute** to administer the goods of churches and pious places which did not have their own council of administration. Their term of office was **three years** and they had to be replaced with others unless circumstances of the place suggested otherwise. Even if the laity lawfully took part in the administration of ecclesiastical goods, they were to conduct all administration in the name of the Church and with due regard for the right of the Ordinary and his requirement of accounting and of prescribing the manner of administration.

3. Vatican II

Gaudium et Spes speaks of the close links between earthly things and those elements of man's condition which transcend the world. **The Church herself makes use of temporal things insofar as her own mission requires it.** She, for her part, does not place her trust in the privileges offered by civil authority. **She will even give up the exercise of certain rights which have been legitimately acquired, if it becomes clear that their use will cast doubt on the sincerity of her witness or that new ways of life demand new methods.** (GS 76)

The role of the laity with regard to the administration of the temporal goods of the Church has also been highlighted by Vatican II.

Presbyterorum Ordinis **10 states**, “Ecclesiastical goods, properly so called, according to their nature and ecclesiastical law, **should be administered by priests with the help of capable laymen as far as possible** and should always be employed for those purposes in the pursuit of which it is licit for the Church to possess temporal goods—namely, for the carrying out of divine worship, for the procuring of honest sustenance for the clergy, and for the exercise of the works of the holy apostolate or works of charity, especially in behalf of the needy”.

Apostolicam Actuositatem emphasizes the special contribution that the laity can make both to Church and to the world. **The laity are sharers in the role of Christ as priest, prophet, and king.** Their activity is so necessary within the Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is often unable to achieve its full effectiveness. **They are called to offer their special skills to make the care of souls and the administration of the temporalities of the Church** more efficient and effective (AA 10).

In dioceses, insofar as possible, **there should be councils which assist the apostolic work of the Church** either in the field of evangelization and sanctification or in the charitable, social, or other spheres, and here it is fitting that the clergy and Religious should cooperate with the laity (AA 26).

4. Revision of the 1917 Code

The DFC appears in the 7th session of the Pontifical Commission of the Revision of the Code in the meeting held from 2nd to 9th February 1970. Can. 26 speaks of a council presided by the bishop, that has to be constituted in each diocese. It

comprises at least three persons, clerics or laity truly expert in financial matters and known for their honesty. They are appointed by the bishop **after consulting the Council of priests.**

Can. 27 spoke of the task of this Council in preparing the budget for the whole diocese and of examining the account at the end of the year. Paragraph §2 stated that the bishop required the consent of this council for extraordinary expenses which though not included in the budget, the bishop judges they have to be attended to. Later the majority of the consultors did not want to give a role to the council of priests in the choice of the DFC. It was even suggested that **the DPC should have a say** in the matter. Later, this proposal too was given up since consultative role of the DPC concerns pastoral matters while administration of the temporal goods belongs to the governance of the Church. Since local circumstances must be taken into consideration in this matter, **it was also suggested that the Episcopal conference is to issue norms on the subject.**

The stability of the DFC was protected by the norm that the duration is for 5 years which can be renewed **unless the Episcopal conference prescribes otherwise.** Regarding the qualification of the members it was also decided to insist on the expertise in civil law besides financial affairs. The reference to the role of Episcopal Conference in issuing norms was retained.

The schema De populo Dei of 1977 made it clear in the *Praenotanda* that the DFC has the role of giving direction while DFO has the role of executing the direction given in the budget prepared by the DFC. Can. 360 §1 states, “In each diocese the DFC is to be constituted and it is to be presided over by the bishop or his delegate. It is to be composed of at least three persons, clerics or laity who are truly expert in financial affairs and civil law and eminent for integrity. **They are appointed by the bishop in accordance with the norms of the Episcopal Conference.** It was also established that **at least one of the members should be from the presbyteral council.** The duration was 5 years renewable **unless Episcopal conference provided otherwise.** The exclusion of those related to the bishop up to the second-degree consanguinity and affinity was retained.

The 1977 schema “*De iure patrimoniale Ecclesiae*, Can. 21 affirmed the principle that the diocesan bishop has to consult the DFC for acts of importance of major importance and in certain cases he has to obtain its consent. The 1980 schema further clarified that the above consultation **takes into consideration the economic condition of the diocese** besides extending the exclusion from

membership of DFC those related to the bishop up to 4th degree consanguinity and affinity.

5. The Code of 1983

The two essential features of the diocesan financial management in the 1983 Code are the constitution of the diocesan finance council and the office of the diocesan financial administrator. While the finance council is a **collegial body** that gives directives for administration, the finance officer is **an individual who executes the directives of the same council under the authority of the diocesan bishop.** The DFC exercises properly speaking a function of consultation, control and planning. Its competence extends to all ecclesiastical goods of the diocese that are subject to the authority of the bishop.

5.1 Establishment

It is an obligatory institution for each and every diocese unlike the DPC. Irrespective of the size of the diocese, no bishop can be exempted from the obligation of constituting this council which has certain specific tasks. In fact, the DFC is a concrete application of the general principle stated in Can. 1280: Every juridical person is to have its own finance committee, or at least two counselors, who are to assist in the performance of the administrator's duties, in accordance with the statutes. **The DFC does not substitute the bishop in his duty of vigilance on the administration but collaborates with him to fulfill his function.** The DFC is one of the essential components of the diocesan curia. However, it is a section of the curia that functions **in a way independently and autonomously** in the administration of the temporal goods. It is not necessary that other members of the Curia to be necessarily members of the DFC.

The purpose of the DFC is not to limit the powers of the diocesan bishop or to make the particular church more democratic. **The council of Administration in the 1917 Code had more a pragmatic and contextual approach.** But the DFC of the present Code is born of **precise theological and juridical motives.** The vocation of Christ's faithful to live the ecclesial communion and to participate in the mission of the Church in concrete cooperation and co-responsibility has received juridical expression in the DFC. **In this way the supreme authority has endeavoured to protect and ensure honesty and transparency in the**

administration of the temporal goods for the effective mission and witness of the Church.

5.2 Presided over by Bishop

The DFC is presided over by the Bishop or his delegate. The delegate can be clerics or laity, men or women. As president, the bishop does not form part of the council. The provisions of Canon 127 must be faithfully observed, when the bishop requires the consent or advice of this collegial group. Whenever consent is required, he can proceed only when he obtains the absolute majority of those present. In the event of a tie, the bishop is not permitted to break it with a casting vote. In the cases of consultation, he has to seek the advice of all even if he may obtain the same individually if particular law permits it. **Giving of consent or counsel by the group or council and the act of the competent superior are two distinct but complementary acts.**

We should not consider the DFC as diminishing the authority of the bishop or as challenge to him. The DFC is only an expression of the participation of the diocesan community in the responsibility of the bishop. The DFC while being a technical organism to give suggestions on the economic matters should never forget the pastoral outlook which should guide its deliberations and decisions.

5.3 Composition

The members of the DFC are freely appointed by the diocesan bishop. They may be clerics, religious or lay persons, men or women. The minimum number is three. The Code does not establish the maximum which would depend on the size of the diocese, income and the extent of transactions. With regard to the need of consultation prior to nomination of members, the 1983 code is silent while the Code of 1917 obliged the bishop to consult the Cathedral Chapter. It would be commendable if the diocesan bishop consults the college of consulters and other responsible persons in the curia as required in CCEO can. 263 §1. **The absolute freedom accorded to the bishop in the choice of the members is only to guarantee that those selected have the capacity for collaboration with the bishop in the administration of the goods.**

5.4 Term of office

The members of the finance committee are appointed for a term of five years. Their term can be renewed for further terms of five years. (CCEO is completely silent about the term of office of the members. It also seems to suggest that the eparchial bishop who presides over the DFC is part of the DFC). They do not lose the office *sedevacante*. Membership will cease by voluntary resignation accepted by the diocesan bishop. Members cannot be removed by the diocesan bishop from the council except for grave and documented reasons. If a new member is to be appointed in the interim period before the expiry of the five years term of the council, it is advisable that he/she holds office only for the remaining period of the council. However, he/she can be re-appointed for another term. Though nothing is mentioned concerning the dissolution of the council *durantemunere* as in Canon 501 §3, it is possible for the same reasons. A grave cause will be required if any of the members needs to be deprived of the office before the expiry of the term (Can. 193 §2). In principle, the members render their service without a remuneration with due regard for the reimbursement of travel and other expenses lawfully authorised.

5.5 Qualification

The members of the DFC need to be: experts in financial affairs and civil law. The law however does not require a degree as in the case of judges of the tribunal (Can. 1421 §2-3). It appears that effective competence is sufficient and the requirement is to support and justify concretely the input they are supposed to offer the bishop for the proper administration of the goods of the Church. The members must also be known for their integrity. Unfortunately, another important qualification mentioned in *Ecclesiae Imago*. *Ecclesiae apostolatusque studio praeditos* did not find a place in the text of the Code. The members must be filled with a profound ecclesial spirit and love for the apostolate. Only then they can assist the bishop to accomplish the mission of the Church. **CCEO speaks that the members must be ‘suitable’ and if possible expert in civil law (can. 263 §1)**

5.6 Exclusion

Persons who are related to the bishop up to the fourth degree of consanguinity or affinity cannot be members (Can. 492 §3). This norm appears to be stricter than what is prescribed for the office Vicar General and Episcopal Vicar since only consanguinity is mentioned there. However, in the case of Can. 478 affinity is not possible except in rare cases since both of them are priests who are bound by the law of celibacy. Can. 1298 also echoes the same principle to protect the Church

from nepotism. “Unless they are of little value, ecclesiastical goods are not to be sold or leased to the administrators themselves or to their relatives up to the fourth degree of consanguinity or affinity, without the special written permission of the competent authority”.

5.7 Functions of the Finance council

The finance council fulfils the general functions entrusted to it in Book V, The Temporal Goods of the Church. The members have the obligations *servatisservandis* of all administrators of ecclesiastical property (CC.1282ff). they are to perform their functions in the name of the Church in accordance with the law (C. 1282). They must take an oath before assuming office that they will fulfil their functions faithfully and well (C.1283 §1). They should not arbitrarily relinquish the office entrusted to them and freely accepted by them (C. 1289). Unlike the CCEO, **the 1983 Code does not state expressly that the DFC has only a consultative vote.**

5.7.1 General Functions

1. To prepare every year a budget of income and expenditure over the coming financial year for the governance of the whole diocese in accordance with the discretion of the diocesan bishop. 493)
2. To plan and provide the modalities according to which the financial administrator should administer the goods of the diocese (c. 494 §1)
3. To monitor the financial administrator's implementation of its provisions and policies (c. 494 §3)
4. To help the financial administrator to prepare the annual statement of income and expenditure, accounts and balance sheets at the end of each financial year (c. 493, 494 § 4)
5. Scrutinize, review and evaluate the already audited annual statements of accounts of the diocese and all the public juridical persons subject to the diocesan bishop (c. 1287 §1)
6. To elect a temporary diocesan financial administrator '*sedevacante*' if the incumbent has been appointed as the diocesan administrator (c. 423 §2)

7. To help the bishop to prepare the annual financial report to be sent to the congregation for the Evangelization of peoples.

5.7.2 Consultation

1. For the appointment and the removal of finance officer “durantemunere” (can. 494 § 2). (College of consulters also has to be consulted)
2. For the acts of administration of major importance in the light of the economic situation of the diocese (can.1277). (College of consulters also has to be consulted)
3. Before investing the money and movable goods assigned to an endowment carefully and properly (can. 1305).
4. For levying ordinary and extraordinary taxes in accordance with canon 1263.(Presbyteral Council also has to be consulted).
5. For determining for the public juridical persons subject to the diocese bishop concerning what constitutes extraordinary administration (can. 1281 § 2).
6. For reducing, modifying or commuting the obligations arising from the intentions of the faithful in pious causes (can. 1310 § 2)

5.7.3 Consent

1. For all the acts of extraordinary administration when the amount involved is more than the maximum fixed by the Episcopal Conference (can.1277). (The consent of college of consultors is also required).
2. For the alienation of property between the minimum and maximum (can. 1292 §1). (The consent of college of consultors is also required).
3. Prior to getting the permission from the Holy See to alienate property the value of which exceeds the maximum amount of Rs. 1.5crore (can. 1292 §2).
4. Prior to obtaining the permission from the Holy See to alienate precious objects donated to the church (can. 1292 §1).
5. To carry out any transaction by which the patrimonial condition of a juridical person may be jeopardized (can. 1295). For all the above, the consent of college of consultors is also required).

5.8 Finance Officer

In every diocese, the bishop is to appoint a Finance officer who is truly expert in

financial affairs and absolutely distinguished for honesty. The Finance officer is to be appointed for a five year term but can be appointed for other five year terms at the end of this period. The bishop is obliged to consult the college of consulters and the Finance council before appointing him or removing him for a grave cause before the expiry of the term.

It is for the Finance officer to administer the goods of the diocese under the authority of the bishop in accord with the budget determined by the Finance council and, from the income of the diocese, to meet expenses which the bishop or others designated by him have legitimately authorized. At the end of the year, the Finance officer must render an account of receipts and expenditures to the Finance council. Some of the authors say that DFO is not to be a member of the DFC or its delegated president since the former has to give an account to the latter. **CCEO however makes the DFO ex-officio member of the DFC. It also leaves the term of office to the determination of the particular law. The functions of the DFO mentioned in book V, are summarised in this canon itself for the CCEO. It also speaks of giving account to the bishop whenever he is asked to do so besides the annual account.**

6. The Parish Finance Council

The parish is a certain community of Christ's faithful stably established within a particular church, whose pastoral care under the authority of the diocesan bishop is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor (can. 515). The community of faithful is called to live and grow in faith nourished by the Word of God and the sacraments and witness to the charity of Christ in the service of the humanity.

6.1 Influence of Vatican II

The conciliar ecclesiology has received juridical expressions in the Canons on parish and parish priest. Parish is primarily a community of Christ's faithful and not merely a benefice and territorial unit of the diocese. The role of the laity is emphasized even in the very definition of the parish priest who is called to exercise the pastoral care with their assistance. Besides Vatican II, the Synod of Bishops of 1971 and the Directory *Ecclesiae Imago* gave a new impetus to the contribution that laity can make in the administration of the temporal goods of the Church.

6.2 Evolution of Canon 537

There was nothing with regard to the PFC in the 1977 Schema. The first formulation of the Canon is found in the 1980 Schema prepared by the group that worked on *De Populo Dei*. Initially the Canon had three paragraphs and it was later simplified and took the present form of Can. 537. This canon is the practical application of the general principle stated in Canon 1280 which did not have an equivalent in 1917 Code. It was inserted in 1979 at the proposal of one of the consultants of Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code.

The parish too as a juridical person needs to have the finance committee. Canon 537 states: “In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish without prejudice to c.532. It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop and it is comprised of members of the faithful selected according to these norms”.

CCEO leaves the establishment of this council to the particular law. Canon 295 states, “In the parish **there are to be appropriate councils dealing with pastoral and economic matters**, according to the norms of the particular law of its own Church *sui iuris*”.

6.3 Implications of canon 537

The canon is a radical innovation with reference to the earlier law. The PFC is now **obligatory in all parishes irrespective of the number of members and the quantity of temporal goods they possess**. It is meant only to assist the parish priest. It does not specify any other constitutive element other than by referring generically to universal law and Episcopal norms. The Council is to function, making use of the provisions of Book V, Title II, “The administration of goods” and the relevant norms governing DFC which can be applied to it analogously.

Following the principle of Canon 492, the PFC is **presided by the parish priest** and it must consist of at least three persons who are experts in financial affairs and civil law beside being eminent in integrity and known for their love for the Church and her apostolate.

The parish finance council does not have **the task of administering the goods of the parish but only collaborates with the parish priest in the administrative management of the parish** in accordance with the law. According to Canon 532, “In all juridic affairs the pastor represents the parish according to the norm of law. He is to take care that the goods of the parish are administered according to the norm of canons 1281–1288”. **It is the competence of the parish priest to administer the goods of the parish and not that of the parish finance council itself.**

The Code does not explicitly state that the parish finance council has a consultative or deliberative vote. However, **the diocesan law can grant it deliberative vote in certain cases or at least require the parish priest to get its consent to perform certain acts.** The parish priest and the members of the PFC need to be well informed about the financial condition of the parish. The parish priest who presides has to be vigilant to avoid abuses in the administration and ensure the fulfilment of the proper purposes of the parochial goods and promote charity both inside and outside the parish. Y. Sugawara gives a long list of activities in which the PFC should have a considerable influence.

The assistance to be offered by the PFC must be specified in the law of the diocese within the scope of the universal law. Diocesan law may for example require the council’s involvement in the preparation of the annual budget of the parish (can. 1284 §3), the annual parish financial report (can. 127 §1). It may mandate obligatory consultation on the part of the parish priest with the PFC before he seeks the written permission from the diocesan bishop to perform acts of extraordinary administration (can.1281 §1) alienation (canos 1291-1294), leases (can. 1297) or contacts which may threaten the patrimonial condition of the parish (can. 1295).

It is also for the particular law or statutes to specify the number, the qualifications, method of selection, term of office, quorum, rules of order, minimum number of annual meetings, approval and amendment of the statutes and possible dissolution of the council.

It is a bit surprising that the revised law does not explicitly require that particular law specify the working relationship between the parish pastoral council and the parish finance council. We need to take into account that in many parishes both the councils are amalgamated into one and the same council and it is entrusted with diverse tasks, pastoral and economical. Since the parish finance council is

mandatory in universal law, a bishop may permit such an arrangement, if he finds it appropriate for some parishes.

7. Concluding Remarks

7.1 Councils – Useless since they are often consultative?

Often, we hear the lament of some persons who say that the structures of participation since they have only a consultative vote and not deliberative vote are inefficient. The primary purpose of councils in the Church is not to fulfil a certain **need for sociological representation** or even a **strategy for greater organizational efficiency**. On the other hand, Councils are essentially **the practical deduction and consequence of the new understanding of the Church as a communion**.

7.2 Who is victorious?

The group with numerical majority should not consider itself victorious on the other group with less number and impose its will. Instead, both the majority and minority **must seek the truth and the good of the Church and arrive at ecclesial consensus**. Such a consensus is not arrived at by the counting of votes but by **an encounter of faith** under the action of the Holy Spirit. What is important is not whether the vote is consultative or deliberative, but whether it is at the service of truth and the Church. A good superior should not disregard the opinion of the majority and all the more so if it is a unanimous one. Only when there is a serious overriding reason, he can go against the views expressed by the majority (C. 127 §2).

All should understand the real purpose of participatory structures. It would be **an error to judge ecclesial structures of participation and co-operation by secular democratic standards** or to consider them as forms of power-sharing or means of imposing partisan ideas or interests. They should be looked on as forms spiritual-solidarity proper to the Church as a communion of persons who, “though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom 12, 5). **Such structures are fruitful, to the extent that they manifest the true nature of the Church as a hierarchical communion, animated and guided by the Holy Spirit**.

7.3 Theological problem rather than juridical or functional

The problems with regard to the participatory structures are more theological than technically juridical and functional. They have to do with “**the view of the Church**” that most Christians have. There is a fear in certain persons that they will lose power. There is on the other hand a drive from below to achieve power, to make the Church more democratic. Power in the Church cannot be divided or at least the ultimate responsibility and the specific service of leadership belong to the Roman Pontiff and the college of bishops. Without the last word from the authority **numerical majority alone is not enough** to protect ecclesial communion.

7.4 Instruments of Diakonia

If the diocesan and parish councils do not function as expected, that means they are **not used from above and lived from below in the ecclesial spirit**, they are treated as “**mini-parliaments**” and not as **instruments of Diakonia** for the building up of the people of God and for the fulfilment of the mission of the Church. The members of the Councils are only **structurally called to contribute** to the **formulation of the judgement of faith** of those who have the responsibility to express it as the common judgement that is binding on all. It is not the limitation of power of those in the Councils but **a necessary inherent in the dynamics of communion**. (CC. 618-619 on superiors)

7.5 Adequate preparation

Councils in the Church must be **well-informed** about their proper mission and **well-trained** in the art of dialogue and planning. It is imperative that the members receive **adequate preparation** before assuming their responsibility. They should be **made aware of the basic theological and pastoral foundations** of these bodies and **the relevant laws and statutes** by which they are governed. The diocesan bishop and the parish priest can **make use of qualified persons** for the necessary instruction and formation.

7.6 Supply the necessary information

The diocesan bishop and the parish priest must **provide the members of these bodies with the necessary information** and the accompanying special circumstances of time, person and place before proceeding to deliberate on the subject and arrive at an appropriate decision. In fact, it is the right of those whose consent or counsel is required for the performance of certain juridical acts. Every member must be **prepared for the meeting by advanced study**.

7.7 Necessary atmosphere

Those who preside over the sessions and meetings must be persons who **facilitate a free exchange of views**. Care is to be taken that **the meeting is not hijacked by a select few** while all others remain **passive spectators**. Superiors are those who can **listen willingly** to their subjects and **foster the cooperation** of all for the good of the Church. All questions proposed are to be subject to the **free discussion** of the members. If the freedom of the members is impeded in any way either by the leader or by other members, the consultative body cannot achieve its purpose. We should not forget that Christ's faithful are at liberty **to make known their needs**, especially their spiritual needs, and their wishes to the Pastors of the Church. They have the **right, indeed at times the duty**, in keeping with their **knowledge, competence and position**, to manifest to the sacred Pastors **their views on matters which concern the good of the Church**. (C.212 §1,2).

7.8 Sincere sharing

The members for their part are obliged to **give their opinions sincerely**. It does not matter **even if their view is different from that of the group that elected them**. For, the Christian concept of representation is different from that of parliamentarianism. Leaders of the people of God even if they are elected, do not receive their authority from below, but from above, by sacrament and mission. Besides, faith cannot be represented by anyone because salvation is something eminently personal and cannot be attained by proxy.

7.9 Say it with reverence and humility

It is not merely what one says, but also how one says it is also important. While expressing their views and suggestions, the members of participatory structures must not harm the **integrity of faith and morals**. Where pastors are involved they should show them **due reverence**. Like all Christ's faithful they are bound to show Christian obedience to what the sacred Pastors, who represent Christ, declare as teachers of the faith and prescribe as rulers of the Church. All must take into account both **the common good and the dignity of individuals** (C. 212 §3). If the seriousness of the matters requires it, members are obliged carefully to maintain secrecy, and the Superior can insist on this obligation (C. 127 §3).

7.10 Let us promote participation and communion

In spite of all the interests that the councils created soon after the Vatican II, and more so after the promulgation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, there is today certain stagnation in the organization and functioning of these participatory structures. **We should not accept passively the malfunctioning of the councils or renounce them altogether.** It would mean that we admit the practical failure of Vatican II about some of its stimulating provisions for the renewal of the Church. What is needed is the formation of all the faithful in the understanding of ecclesial communion and the cordial openness and trust of those in positions of responsibility in eliciting the collaboration of all in the decision-making.

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