



Conversation, Discernment, Sharing of Gifts: Effective Planning with Pastoral Councils Presentation Overview

Monday, July 27

Afternoon - Foundations of Synodality and Implications for Ministry

In 2021, the International Theological Commission published “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” to provide a theological framework for the exercise of leadership and ministry in a synodal way. This session will begin with an outline of the framework articulated in this document and others associated with the Synod on Synodality. Participants will then consider how their own discipleship and practice of ministry and is informed, challenged and supported by this ancient and emerging ecclesiology.

Evening - Engaging Synodality: A Communal Discernment Experience

*“It is not simply a method but a spiritual experience that **forms those who live it**, educating them in mutual listening and communal discernment.” (Final Document §§28–31).*

The Final Document of the Synod on Synodality emphasizes that synodal methods are best understood through lived experience. This session will model a Conversation in the Spirit, inviting members of the DPN to discern how the Holy Spirit is calling our network to journey together with one another and with the wider Church. In doing so, it will provide a practical foundation for Tuesday’s keynote as we consider the implications of synodality for the ministry of pastoral planning.

Tuesday, July 28 - Morning

Pastoral Councils: Exercising the Organs of Synodality in the Body of Christ

*“The synodal style requires that structures such as **pastoral councils** be places of listening, dialogue and communal discernment.” (Final Document §107)*

Synodality has significant implications for the practice of pastoral planning at every level of the Church. The Synod documents identify pastoral councils as key structures for fostering synodal practice. But how do they do so?

At the heart of synodality are communion, participation, and mission. Drawing on these three dimensions, this presentation will explore how pastoral councils can strengthen communion at every level of the Church, promote active participation and co-responsibility, and clarify and support leadership roles. It will also consider how they can serve as spaces for discernment and decision-making, enabling the implementation of mission-oriented actions that are faithful to the Gospel and responsive to the needs of the community.



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Tuesday, July 28 – Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Block A: 1:00pm – 2:15pm

- **Peripheral Listening: A Synodal Process at the Margins of the Church**

Dr. Robert Choiniere, D.Min

“The Church is called to listen with particular attention to the voices of those who experience various forms of poverty and exclusion.” (Final Document §42)

True synodal conversion occurs when we listen across boundaries and move to the peripheries and edges of our belonging. Those on the margins and beyond are central to the Church’s synodal journey. This session will offer a clear and tested process for listening to voices on the margins in a way that deepens relationships grounded in empathy, understanding and welcome.

- **Parish Pastoral Councils: Best Practices in Recruitment and Formation**

Jim Barrette (Secretariat Director - Pastoral & Educational Ministries, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston)

A vibrant and effective Parish Pastoral Council begins with finding and forming members of the council. How you choose new members sets the tone and expectation for how the council will operate. If you would like to have a vibrant Parish Pastoral Council that co-responsibly discerns the will of God for your parish and recommends practical actions on that mission, attend this workshop.

- **From Data to Discernment: How Data Supports Council Discernment and Planning**

Jim Weiland (Managing Director) and Thad Pals (Mission Strategy Consultant, Emmaus Partners)

This session will explore how parish pastoral councils can use data to enrich their work of listening, dialogue, and communal discernment in support of mission-focused planning. Participants will learn how to interpret key indicators, such as demographics, participation, and sacramental trends, and bring these insights into council conversations in a practical and meaningful way. The session will emphasize how data can inform, rather than replace, spiritual discernment. Participants will leave with a clear framework for moving from information to action in ways that are responsive to the needs of their parish community.

Block B: 2:30pm – 3:45pm

- **Parish Pastoral Councils: Best practices in discernment**

Ricardo Medina (Director, Office of Family Life Ministry, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston)

The session presents concrete tools for fostering deeper participation, building consensus, and strengthening mission-focused leadership, with special attention to Lectio Divina as a proven method for communal prayer, reflection, and discernment. Whether you are clergy, a pastoral council member, or a ministry leader, this presentation will equip you to cultivate a culture where prayer, listening, and shared responsibility guide pastoral decision-making.

- **Planning in Rural Communities**

Brenda Kresky (Director of Pastoral Planning, Diocese of St. Cloud) and [Catholic Rural Life](#)

Pastoral planning in rural areas provides unique opportunities and challenges. This session will explore those realities while highlighting strategies for collaboration, leadership and faithful response to changing community needs. Participants will reflect on practical approaches to strengthening ministry, engaging local voices and planning in a rural setting.



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Wednesday, July 29

Morning – Panel: Councils in the Diocesan Planning Process

Panelists: *Laura Carrillo (Director, Office of Strategic and Pastoral Planning, Diocese of Fall River)*

Aimee May (Director, Center for Parish Vitality, Archdiocese of Cincinnati)

Andrew Reinhart (Parish Life Coordinator, Intentional Planning Ministry, Diocese of Toledo)

Moderator: *Elijah Morgan (Director of Planning and Mission Effectiveness, Archdiocese of Seattle)*

Building on our discussions of pastoral councils in the parish context, join us for a panel of (arch)diocesan strategic and pastoral planners to explore how councils have been utilized in the diocesan planning context. Panelists will discuss working with councils as diocesan leaders, best practices for forming councils for this work, and experiences with councils in the different types of planning (e.g. restructuring/reorganizing vs. pastoral/visioning).