



# InFormation

**News for Pastoral Planners and Those Making the Plan a Reality!**

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## The Pope Addresses Parish Pastoral Councils



ROME (CNS) Reported -- In a world that does not seem interested in hearing about God, effective communication of the faith requires a group effort, Pope Benedict XVI said.

When many people seem unable or unwilling to recognize the presence of God, "it is important that a pastor not be a 'soloist,' but be surrounded by believers who, along with him, are bearers of the seed of the word (of God) and help it live and grow," the pope said during a visit March 29 to a Rome parish.

In addition to celebrating Mass at the Holy Face of Jesus Parish, the pope met with members of the parish council and with children preparing for their first Communion before he returned to the Vatican for the midday recitation of the Angelus prayer.

The pope told parish leaders, "The council is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and the pastor -- and even more a pope -- needs advice, needs help in making decisions. And so these (parish) councils are also a work of the Holy Spirit and a witness to the Spirit's presence in the church."

Arriving at the parish, Pope Benedict noted that the sun was hidden from view by storm clouds, but everyone knew the sun was still there.

In the same way, he said, "even though he is hidden, we know that God exists, he is near to us, he helps us and accompanies us." Let us go toward Easter knowing that suffering and difficulty are part of our lives, but knowing also that the sun of divine goodness" is always behind the clouds, he said.

Praising the parish Caritas program and the work of parishioners involved in the Community of Sant'Egidio, the pope said that especially at a time marked by a general social and economic crisis Catholics must make greater efforts to care for the poor and needy.

Returning to the Vatican for the midday recitation of the Angelus, the pope was greeted by hundreds of African students studying at the pontifical universities in Rome who wanted to thank him for his March 17-23 visit to Africa.

Thanking the students for their support, Pope Benedict said he was especially struck by "the visible joy in the faces of the people, the joy of feeling part of the one family of God" and by the "strong sense of the sacred that one breathed during the liturgical celebrations" in Cameroon and Angola.

## Ways to Pray in a Council Meeting

### Meeting

by Charles M. Olsen



I often hear the term book-end prayers used to refer to the perfunctory way in which prayer can be scheduled and offered at the beginning and close of a Parish Pastoral Council meeting. It traditionally separates out the spiritual aspects of the meeting from the "business at hand." The business part of the meeting still resembles the process that one would typically see outside the church—an emphasis on efficiency, a reliance on "reasoned" judgments, and a structure based on parliamentary rules, all ordered by a litany of reports with recommendations voted by majority rule.

If we redefine the activity of the people of God serving on parish pastoral councils and see it as worshipful work, then prayer will no longer be relegated to a book-end position; instead, it will saturate the agenda and thread its way throughout the meeting.

P.P.C.'s that are "doing council differently" are discovering ways to allow prayer to permeate the whole meeting. Here are several ways:

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those who implement those plans.

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should be directed to

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Phone: 1-215-587-3545

These suggestions are encouraged and welcomed

# Prayer for a Meeting



Dear Lord,

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.  
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted,  
knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own. We humbly ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in Jesus' name we pray  
Amen.

*This is known as the Romero prayer*

[http://bogners.typepad.com/church/2004/03/he\\_prayer\\_of\\_o.html](http://bogners.typepad.com/church/2004/03/he_prayer_of_o.html)

F.Y.I.

Some times I know exactly how to pray, for spiritual help, guidance or intercession but other times I'll have a senior moment and for the life of me I just cant find the right words so I go to:

<http://www.catholic.org/clife/prayers/>



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## Trivia Box

In the Philadelphia region Who are the top 3 non governmental employers

(Go to Page 5 in the answer box)

Has your parish or Cluster entered into a Planning Process?

Do you need a professional Facilitator?  
The office of Research and Planning maintains a list of trained and experienced Resource people.

Contact us at: The Archdiocese of Philadelphia  
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Phone 215-587-3545 [E-mail orp@adphila.org](mailto:orp@adphila.org)

## Ways to Pray in a Council Meeting

by Charles M. Olsen



### Frame the Agenda with Prayer

Use opening and closing prayers that relate to the agenda of the meeting. The invocation might focus on the image of God and create an openness to and awareness of the Spirit's presence and leading. The closing prayer might be a thankful offertory for the work of the meeting—lifted to God. Preparing for a night's restful sleep invites prayers of release and relinquishment, and acknowledgment that boards cannot maintain control. Entrust the staff of a meeting to God in the same way you prepare for sleep—by letting go.

### Glean for Prayer

From my boyhood days on the farm I remember that Gleaner was a brand name for a combine, a machine that separated the seed from the chaff and straw. At the beginning of a meeting, you might assign four people to keep notes with an eye toward separating out items for prayer. (They do not record the decisions being made. That is the task of the recording secretary.) One of the four should note anything that would be the basis for thanksgiving. Another would record needs or opportunities in the church or wider world that call for intercession. Still another would note situations within the board itself that would be the basis for prayers of petition. The fourth would note the work of the Spirit of God in the life of the council or parish. At the end of the meeting, focus worship on the four areas of thanksgiving, intercession, petition, and praise.

### Offer Prayers of Confession

One worship order I have seen includes the sentence "We admit how we are." Confession covers not only errors and sins but also weariness, frustration, confusion, elation, boredom, fulfillment, and so forth. The prophets in the scriptural tradition were "seers," those who had sight for things as they actually were. Naming "how things really are" and "what is left undone" are healthy processes for a board, but by themselves they can bind and paralyze it; the board needs to have a safe place to work through these issues. If both the parish and board have a corporate life, the council's confession can also be corporate. In an era of individualism in our culture and faith, understanding corporate spirituality is difficult. Perhaps confession is a good starting place.

### Sing Prayers

Send each board member home with a hymn book and the assignment to select one verse of any hymn that best captures the most appropriate prayer for the parish at the present time. Pause to sing these hymns at appropriate moments throughout the meeting. The blending of many voices moves the council along the path of corporate spirituality. Often discussion and discourse are anything but harmonious. Singing together models the harmony to which they aspire.

The presence of wonder and mystery in music also helps break up the framework of most meetings by adding some "grace notes."

### "Time Out" for Prayer

After twenty minutes of debate and discussion over an issue on which people seem divided, the egos take over. Some deliberative groups have found value in taking three to five minutes of silent "time out" for personal refocusing and prayer. Let each one silently consider these questions: Am I closing myself off from information that we need to make this recommendation? Who do I need to forgive to be more fully present here? What is an image of God that needs to come to bear in this setting? How does the scripture that we read shed light on us now? Am I operating in a need-to-win or need-to-save-face mode? How would servant leaders make this decision? Time out periods could be called by a strict clock setting by the meeting moderator or by any member who requests it at any time for any reason.

### Rotate Prayer

At the beginning of the meeting, assign each person to a certain fifteen-minute segment of the meeting; during that assigned time, members should pray silently for each person in the group and for the deliberative process in which the board is engaged.

### Draw upon Model Prayers in Scripture

When educational consultant Donald Griggs was asked in a workshop how one might begin to use the Bible in committee meetings, he advised, "Don't introduce it as a new, complicated program. Just start doing it because that is what the people of God do. It won't be long until they can't remember doing it any other way!" The following samples are suggestive—certainly not exhaustive!

*The Psalms* can be used in many ways. For instance, have someone read a psalm slowly and deliberately, inviting any who would like to ponder a phrase to say "yes" out loud after that phrase has been read. The reader will stop for one to three minutes of silence, then continue reading until the next "yes."

*The Lord's Prayer* contains many phrases that rhythmically rise and fall. These phrases can be attached to the inhaling and exhaling of breath to create a common centering discipline.

*Jesus' prayer for his friends and disciples* (John 17) contains a cluster of specific petitions beginning with "that they may..." Let the council choose the petition that is most appropriate in the council's current situation.

*Paul's heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving for his friends* (Phil. 1:3–11) can be used in a special way when new council members are coming on or when others are exiting. Identify aspects of the "heart life" of which Paul speaks that the council can value for its own life. See where that applies to transitions within the council.

*Claim Paul's great prayer for the church* (Eph. 3:14–21) for your board. Find ways to report back how that prayer is being lived out during and between meetings.

Continued on Page 4

## Ways to Pray in a Council Meeting

by Charles M. Olsen



In Matthew 18:19–20 Jesus invited his followers to agree on what to pray for. The most significant decision a council can make is about what its prayer will be. The prayer is not a strategic plan to be accomplished but a petition that cannot be accomplished by our own efforts

### Acknowledge Subliminal Prayer

Prayer may be ceaseless and subliminal, even when we engage in active work or deliberation. Such prayer plays just below the conscious level. The old desert saints wanted to pray without ceasing, so they attached the Jesus Prayer (“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me, a sinner”) to the rising and falling of their breath. For a while the breath carries the prayer. Then in a mystical moment the prayer carries the breath without one’s thinking about it!

### Meetings Are Worship

Resistance to infusing the work of a council with prayer tends to come from the conviction that “there is a place for everything and everything should be in its place”—that worship belongs to Sunday and sanctuary and prayer belongs to worship. But an inspirational moment in a meeting does wonders in loosening the strings of resistance, and those inspirational moments will come once worshipful work is attempted. Let the only rule be “meetings are worship.” All else will flow to and from that fountain. Then we can drink from its fullness!

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Adapted to Parish Pastoral Councils by the Editor

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### "I think I might be called to the priesthood, but how will I know?"

We only know our vocation by coming to know God. He is the source of everything, the author of life and it is He who gives our life direction. Therefore, in coming to know our vocation, it is important to come to know the Lord. This is prayer. Prayer is the act of bringing everything before God -- our ideas, thoughts, concerns and situations. As we bring these things to Him, he begins to reveal himself to us and will show us the way through consolations of the Holy Spirit. <http://www.heedthecall.org/faq.html>



“God speaks in the silence of the heart, and we listen.  
And then we speak to God from the fullness of our heart,  
and God listens. And this listening and this speaking  
is what prayer is meant to be....”

- Mother Teresa

### Answer Box

1-University of Pa /University of Pa. Health System 34,868 Employees

2- Thomas Jefferson University/Jefferson Health system 32,795 Employees

3-Catholic Archdioceses of Philadelphia 10,134 Employees



**Attention Pastoral Council  
Members!**  
**Save the Date**  
**Saturday, November 14, 2009**

The 2009 Archdiocese of Philadelphia Catholic Life Congress is offering a highly focused series of sessions for pastoral council members at all levels of experience. New and experienced members will find much of interest and value in one or more of the presentations, which are:

**PPC Orientation and Overview:** Marti Harrington, Coordinator of Parish Pastoral Councils, Archdiocese of Philadelphia



**Role of Prayer in Effective Pastoral Councils:** Rev. Thomas M. Higgins, Pastor, Holy Innocents, Archdiocese of Philadelphia



**Envisioning the Church of the 21st Century:  
The Cyclical Nature of Pastoral Planning,** Robert J. Miller, Director, Office for Planning and Research, Archdiocese of Philadelphia



**From Vision to Action: Bringing Life to your Parish Pastoral Plan:** Robert Choiniere, Director, Pastoral Planning Office, Diocese of Brooklyn



**Contact Marti Harrington at :**  
[maharrin@adphila.com](mailto:maharrin@adphila.com) for an invitation to attend or exhibit at this event.

F.Y.I.

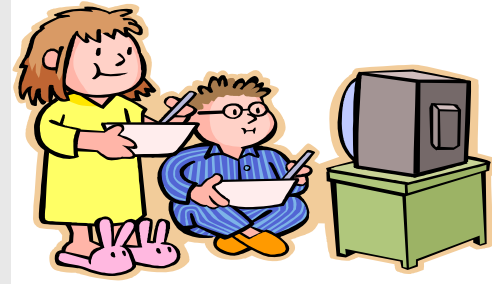
**How will the numbers  
change in 10 years?**

**Projection to 2020**

**For the Archdiocese of Philadelphia**

- According to the office for Research and Planning, Archdiocese of Philadelphia -Catholic population will be up about 73,000 or 6%
- AON Consulting Actuary study  
Priests in parish ministry will be down by 95 priests or 26%

**Study connects watching sexual  
content on TV to teen sexual activity**



There's been a lot of concern about whether television is influencing kids to have sex. However, there was very little scientific evidence on the issue up to this point. "We knew that kids who have sex at an earlier age also watch a lot of sex on TV. But we haven't known which direction that causality goes, we just knew there was an association," explains Rebecca Collins, senior behavioral scientist at Rand Corporation. Rand surveyed 12- to 17-year-olds about their sexual experience and their television viewing habits and then followed up with the group a year later. The results, while logical, gave scientific support to the idea that watching sex on television helped to predict sexual behavior in teenagers. "If you compared the kids who watched the very most sex, to the kids who watched the very least, the rates of intercourse were nearly double in the high exposure group "Collins says. Exposure to all this sex on television apparently makes these teens advance faster sexually. In effect, they're acting older than they really are. Since sexual content appears in about 64 percent of all TV programs, how can we fix the problem? One suggestion is for parents to watch television with their kids and use sexual content as an opportunity to discuss sex. "A lot of parents do talk to their kids about sex, but bringing it up in a context would make it a lot easier, and television could provide that opportunity," Collins believes. It's highly doubtful that sex on TV is going away. Therefore, it is important that parents take notice, know what their kids are watching and be active in their children's lives.

**Married with Children**

Among the counties in the state of Pennsylvania, Chester (27.1 percent), and Bucks (26.2 percent) are two with the highest percentages of married couple households with (their own) children.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey release Date: September 23, 2008

The Pennsylvania State Data Center Research Brief