

Policy Statement on the
Roles of the Pastor and the Parish Life Coordinator
(Revised 12-10-09)

Background: In the 1983 revised Code of Canon Law, canon 517.2 states:

If because of a shortage of priests, the diocesan Bishop has judged that a deacon, or some other person who is not a priest, or a community of persons, should be entrusted with a share in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish, he is to appoint some priest who, with the powers and faculties of a parish priest, will direct the pastoral care.

In *Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership, "Parish Life Coordinators, Profile of an Emerging Ministry"*, it is pointed out that *the basis for canon 517.2 is the conviction that participation in the mission of the Church is a right and duty of all believers. Among the areas of ministry within the parish this would include "the care of souls". "Full care of souls" is entrusted to priests (c. 150), but partial care is a responsibility that can be shared by many, including laity, deacons, and vowed religious.*

Another more recent document which comments on and may add to a better understanding of the implementation of canon 517.2 is the 4 August 2002 instruction from the Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*. This document notes that while specific responsibilities are entrusted to the parish priest, they are not mandated to the priest personally but can "in a canonically approved manner, 'be entrusted to' a person or persons who have not been invested with priestly character."

In recognizing the needs of the faithful in parishes where the priests are few and the people underserved, Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation on the Laity, *Christifideles Laici*, urged local church authorities to foster "adaptation of parish structures according to the full flexibility granted by canon law, especially promoting participation of the lay faithful in pastoral responsibilities." When we look at the shrinking number of priests and an expanding Catholic population, we can see how implementing canon 517.2 through the appointment of Parish Life Coordinators by bishops can better serve the needs of the Church by giving the bishops an alternative to closing or merging parishes due to a shortage of priests.

With this as background, it is important to clarify the roles of a Parish Life Coordinator and a pastor (priest moderator) in a parish served by both.

The ***Parish Life Coordinator*** (PLC) is a suitably trained individual appointed by and accountable to the Bishop of Ogdensburg (or his delegate). The PLC is entrusted with the leadership of a parish and works in close collaboration with and under the guidance of the pastor as specified in the Parish Life Coordinator Agreement. The PLC, as a unifying presence within the parish, is the leader of all parish ministries and is instrumental in creating new ministries as needed. With the support of the pastor, the PLC enables and empowers the community to be a faithful witness to Jesus Christ and of the Kingdom of God.

The PLC has the responsibility for providing for the overall day-to-day pastoral care and administration of a parish. This would include, among other responsibilities, the faith formation of parishioners, liturgy preparation, planning, the signing of checks, supervision of parish staff and the monitoring of parish income and expenses. Major financial decisions involving amounts over \$5,000 or the sale of church property are to be made only after consultation with the pastor and the approval of the Bishop. The Bishop will determine salary and benefits of the PLC according to the financial means of the parish. The PLC would be responsible for submitting all parish reports required by the Diocese, including the annual financial report and the annual budget in accordance with canon 1284.

The PLC is also responsible for organizing and convening the parish finance and pastoral councils. The PLC presides at council meetings. With the exception of the sacraments, the PLC possesses the same responsibilities and duties as that of a pastor in collaborating with all parish councils, committees and staff. If the PLC is a deacon, he would also be responsible for those sacramental duties that are not reserved to an ordained priest (c. 517.2, see "Role of Pastor").

In a parish where the Bishop has appointed a Parish Life Coordinator (PLC), the **pastor (priest moderator)** will work in conjunction with the Bishop and the Parish Life Coordinator, to serve the needs of the parish community. Sacramental ministry is reserved for the clergy by the norms of Canon Law (c. 530). The pastor's role is one of guidance and support of the PLC. He is to assure that the pastoral ministry truly responds to the needs of the people.

In some cases, the priest may be pastor of one or more parishes with all that the canonical office of pastor implies in those faith communities, but in a parish with a PLC his role is distinct. In the latter situation his role is primarily sacramental. He will provide spiritual and pastoral guidance and nourish faith life in order to ensure that the liturgical and spiritual needs of the parish faith community are met, especially through the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments.

Due to the close collaboration needed, it is understood that there would be regular meetings between the pastor and the PLC with a goal of reaching consensus on all major areas affecting the faith life of the parish. This collaborative role should include an annual meeting with the pastor (and the Bishop or his delegate) for an evaluation of the PLC's service.