

## PREFACE

The following statement by Metropolitan Philip in 1994 sets the tone for virtually everything contained in this Parish Council Guidebook:

***“The topic which I will discuss with you is the following: ‘All Together, We Perform a Sacred Task. There is no room for ‘Them and Us’. For in Christ, we are all ‘Us.’***

## INTRODUCTION

A Guidebook for the Parish Council of St. John the Baptist Antiochian Orthodox Church, in the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

The goal of this guidebook will be to help Parish Councils better prepare themselves to understand and to follow the principles of Orthodox Christian parish governance. The parish is the key environment for most Orthodox Christians to learn about and to know the true mission and purpose of the Orthodox faith. Orthodox parish governance is the best vehicle through which to teach the beauty and the truth of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian within the realm of the secular world.

Our purpose here is to encourage more thought, study, and action on parish governance issues in a calm and impartial atmosphere of mutual respect...

### **Five Guidelines for Personal Conduct Before, During and After Every Council Meeting**

1. Confidentiality – Feel free to be as candid as you would like during our sessions and our discussions, knowing that what we say and do here will be heard in the context of open and honest discussion by committed Orthodox Christians. We will willingly share everything that we learn here when we return home, but specific comments and specific questions raised during our sessions is what we are referring to when we ask you to honor the spirit of confidentiality.
2. Beware of Gossip – The Parish Council meeting must take place during the meeting and not in the parking lot before or after the meeting, and certainly not over the telephone following the meeting. Full and open

discussion, free from worry about gossip about the exchange of ideas, will make for better meetings and wiser decisions.

3. Everything is a gift from God – The expression, “God, why did you do this to me?” will hopefully become, “God, why did you do this for me?” We can easily say that we believe that everything we have in life is a gift from God, but do our actions reflect a literal belief in this tenant of the Orthodox Christian faith?
4. Listening is the Key – During discussions, each council member is required to behave with the ultimate mutual respect. Listen to the ideas and opinions being expressed, and then formulate your response rather than simply formulating your response as another speaks. The dilemmas and challenges our Parish Councils face can be more successfully handled if we learn and apply proven problem solving techniques

First and foremost, problem solving begins with the need to define the issues accurately and arrive at a thorough definition of the problem before possible solutions are considered. This definition step involves listening carefully to all segments involved in order to accurately assess the various perspectives held by each council member. We must consciously and deliberately listen with an open mind and a loving heart. Before we judge the comments we hear from our fellow participants, remember that they are doing their best and that their comments are made from their unique perspective based on their frame of reference ... their life experiences. At the same time, each of us should be open-minded enough to realize that we can always learn from each other. Most importantly, each of us must be humble enough to know that there is much we can learn about biblical and Orthodox Church teachings. Under the direction of our Parish Priest, we must always be willing to learn and to grow in the faith. Armed with new knowledge, our ideas and opinions will most certainly be different.

### **Who Serves on the Parish Council?**

Introduction: Recruiting parishioners to serve on the parish council can be a daunting task. This guidebook is based on the notion that the goal is not only to find people who are willing to serve, but to find people who are also willing to learn. The goal is to learn and to grow in their understanding of the role and function of the parish council in an Orthodox Christian parish

### **Requirements for Service on the Parish Council**

The Model Constitution for parishes in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America provides for a Parish Council that includes the pastor, some lay members who are elected by the parishioners, and some who are appointed by the parish priest. In addition, it is typical for the choir director, church school director, and auxiliary presidents to be full voting members of the council. Appointed committee chairpersons often sit on the council as non-voting participants. Normally, for the purposes of establishing a quorum at meetings, only the elected and appointed members are counted.

Beyond the basic make-up of the Parish Council, thought must be given to the character of those selected to serve on the council. Remembering the sacred duties involved in this type of service, the consideration of the following character traits are an important part of the development of productive and effective Parish Council.

- All those nominated to serve on the Parish Council must be approved by the Parish Priest in order for their name to be placed in nomination. This approval will assure all parishioners that the points and principles concerning Parish Council service outlined in this guidebook and in the Parish Constitution apply to each and every candidate.
- Knowledge and understanding of the theology and practices of the Orthodox Church, and the attitude that there is more to learn about the faith. While no one is all knowing, the church member without a good Orthodox Christian understanding will be a hindrance to the effective operation of the Parish Council.
- Good and regular attendance at church services and special programs of the parish and its organizations
- Those who serve on the council should already be serving the parish in other capacities. Giving of one's own time and talents and resources must precede working on the council to organize the time and talent and resources offered by others in the parish. Look throughout your parish for the humble, the unselfish, the faithful in

attendance, and those who lead and teach by example. Seek those who seek the joy of life in the church and who see the best in others.

- Collectively, the Parish Council should reflect the various segments of the parish population in terms of gender, age, and background, both culturally and professionally.
- Consider developing a document which can be given to all prospective council members in advance of the Annual Parish Meeting where elections are held. Ask all those who agree to have their names placed in nomination sign the document indicating the awareness of and their willingness to follow basic member guidelines

(Thanks to St. Mark Antiochian Orthodox Church of Irvine, California, for sharing the document, with some modifications, found on the next page.)

**Affirmation of Potential Candidate for Election to the Parish**

Council of St. John the Baptist Antiochian Orthodox Church\*

- I understand and affirm that I am willing to have my name placed in nomination for election to the St. John Orthodox Church Parish Council for a regular term of three (3) years.
- I understand and agree that it is vital for Parish Council members to be active in the liturgical life of the Church, including attendance and participation in the Sunday Divine Liturgies, Saturday Vesper Services, Feast Day Services, and other services, including the Sacrament of Holy Confession, and affirm that I will participate in these services frequently and regularly.
- I understand that the Parish Council operates according to the theology and practices of the Holy Orthodox Church.
  - I also understand that Council members must set good examples of Orthodox Christian Stewardship, including the offering of time and talents to the church, as well as sacrificial monetary support
  - I understand that the Parish Council holds regular meetings once a month and special meetings as needed, and I affirm that if nominated and elected, or appointed, I will do my utmost to attend every meeting.
  - Furthermore, if nominated and elected, or appointed, I am willing to assume responsibility of chairing a standing or special committee, and/or making myself available to be elected an officer of the council.
  - I understand that the typical time commitment of a Council member is approximately ten (10) hours every month.
    - I understand that my agreement to fulfill the above requirements is a prerequisite for nomination.
    - In signing this affirmation, I pledge to fulfill the above requirements to the best of my ability, with God’s help.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Potential Council  
Candidate

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

\*(This document was developed by St. Mark Antiochian Orthodox Church, Irvine, California)

## **Roles for Clergy and Laity**

This segment of the Parish Council Guidebook provides information about the relationship between clergy and laity on the Parish Council.

A healthy, loving, and open relationship within the context of an Orthodox Christian parish between the priest and the laity is vital to the establishment and maintenance of a strong church community. The manner in which the priest and the parish council interact sets the tone for the rest of the parish. Parish council members need to be open minded when learning about the clergy/laity relationship. The list of components in this section is in no particular order and is probably not an exhaustive list. Each item should be viewed separately and on its own terms and not necessarily compared to the others.

### **Directions:**

At a parish council meeting called for the special purpose of discussing the clergy/laity relationship, discuss each item listed below. The discussion should be led by the priest, with assistance from the parish council chairperson. Discussing these items should be seen as a first step in an ongoing process. When discussing each item, it is crucial to think of real-life examples from the parish's experiences to use as illustrations of each item. Referring to other segments in this Parish Council Guidebook and other available resources will be needed as the parish council further examines this important topic.

No one is to be excluded from any phase or aspect of parish life. While the parish priest has a number of important and unique responsibilities that can only be supported in a peripheral manner by the laity, there is virtually nothing in parish life that does not benefit from the mutual cooperation and support of the clergy and the laity.

The priest is the spiritual leader of the community, and the bishop's representative as the father of the congregation. Therefore he must be involved in all aspects of parish life. For practical reasons, the priest might be absent from some church functions and activities, but this can never be due to either the parishioners or the priest feeling that he does not have a role to play in any particular activity, meeting, or program. All church practices, programs, and activities must be consistent with the beliefs and teachings of the Holy Orthodox

Church. Asking the question, “What would the Lord do in this situation?” is always a relevant question for parish council members to ask when contemplating a decision about any subject.

The priest provides leadership in teaching the faithful about the beliefs and traditions of the Orthodox Church. And there are opportunities for these teachings to help us properly and successfully navigate our way through all aspects of parish life, so the role the priest plays as a teacher is always needed. The priest can and should work with and train members of the laity to assist in this task. Respecting and seeing the importance of this role is crucial in the establishment of a healthy clergy/laity relationship.

The priest is free to speak about all subjects, including money, from the pulpit. The reason it is included here is because the idea is often expressed that, “the priest should not talk about money from the pulpit.” The manner in which we teach about stewardship in our Archdiocese and in our personal study of the Bible reveals how the church uses money and how the laity contributes money is an issue that is very much a part of the spiritual health of a parish community.

A parish stewardship or member-giving program should be initiated and maintained through the joint efforts of the priest and the parish council. This point simply follows from earlier items which state that all aspects of parish life must be consistent with scriptural teachings and church traditions and practices. Stewardship is neither the sole responsibility of the priest or the laity, but must clearly be a team effort. Abdication of a role in stewardship by the clergy or by any of the lay leaders diminishes the potential success of a parish stewardship program. A parish stewardship program must be designed, implemented, and perpetuated by the joint efforts of the clergy and the laity. A reason for making this statement here because there have been times when a priest or the laity have expressed the notion that the stewardship program is the sole responsibility of one or the other. It is clearly the responsibility of both.

The key to establishing and maintaining a positive relationship among the clergy and the laity is to foster the commitment that everyone is trying their best and working toward the same goal. Taking the time to listen and making the effort to be properly educated about true Orthodox Christian parish practices is the best way to minimize, to heal, and to overcome strife within the parish family. It is all about prayer and about education, and our parish priest is the leader who must help us progress in these two aspects of our lives as Orthodox Christians.

Since everything done by the parish must be founded in spirituality, and since the priest is the spiritual leader of the parish, meetings of the parish council must always include the priest and the council members. On page 15 of the Clergy Guide, Third Edition 2011, we read, “The pastor is the presiding officer of every organization in his parish. He should direct efforts to increase parochial income in every good way. He should be an active leader of his Parish Council. The Parish Council chairperson serves on behalf of, and with the blessing of, the pastor. In terms of the parish council, the priest, in the truest sense of church organization, is the chairperson of the parish council. In his role as father, his wisdom, guidance, and training puts him in the position of making sure that all aspects of parish life are properly conducted. While many parishes may not be ready to adopt the literal notion that the priest should be the chairperson of the parish council, our study of the proper role and function of the parish council will certainly lead us to the point where we understand that this concept and practice is truly consistent with church teachings. This is an area where there needs to be much discussion, reading, prayer, and dialogue.

The keys to building a strong and productive working relationship between the priest, the parish council, and, among the parish council members themselves, can be found in the analysis and implementation of these four words:

Confidentiality ... Communication ... Consensus .....Education

#### Confidentiality

Hold the parish council meeting in the meeting room and not in the parking lot following adjournment. Talk openly with parishioners about the decisions the council makes, but do not feel the need to “gossip” about every comment every member made during the course of a particular discussion leading up to a council decision.

#### Communication:

Be aware of the need to practice good two-way communication skills. Be open, honest, and loving in the comments you make to others and be equally open, honest, and loving as you listen to their views. It is much harder yet much more important to be a good listener than it is to be a good talker.

#### Consensus:

Study about the virtues of consensus building. Making decisions by reaching consensus is so much more productive than voting when it comes time to decide both routine and weighty matters which come before the council. It takes time, study, and practice to use this method

of decision making effectively, but the results are worth the effort. A parish member familiar with the use of this process can be helpful in teaching the Parish Council how to incorporate the use of consensus as a main decision making strategy.

#### Education:

Whether you are a novice parish council member or a seasoned veteran, there is so much to learn about what it means to be an effective parish council member in the context of the Holy Orthodox Church. Accepting this fact and working with your priest to design a parish council education program is vital to the success of any parish. The goal of this Parish Council Guidebook is to help foster this ongoing educational process.

### 1. AUTHORITY

These rules of procedure for the conduct of St. John's Antiochian Orthodox Church Parish Council meetings are hereby adopted by the Parish Council on \_\_\_\_\_. These rules are subordinate to the code of ordinances, and laws of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America, Sacred Canons of the Holy Church, and the governing Church constitution.

### 2. MEETINGS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

#### 1. Regular Meetings:

The Parish Council shall meet regularly once a month on the second Tuesday of the month.

#### 2. Special Meetings:

Special meetings of the Parish Council may be called at any time by the Priest upon the written or verbal request of three or more members of Parish. Notice designating the time and purpose of such meeting shall be delivered by Council Chairman by phone, email, or in writing. The notice of such meeting shall be visibly posted in the hallway.

#### 3. Place of Meetings:

All regular and special meetings of the Parish Council shall be held at St. John church unless otherwise stated in the meeting notice.

#### 4. Time of Meetings.

All regular meetings of the Parish Council shall begin at 7:00 PM unless the Parish Council, by majority vote, sets a different starting time. Special meetings may be scheduled for other times.

5. Changes in Meeting Schedule:

Changes in the regular meeting schedule may be made with the approval of a majority vote of the Parish Council.

6. Notice of Meetings.

The Parish Council Secretary shall post a notice of the regular meeting for the ensuing month on the bulletin board in the hallway. At its discretion, the Parish Council may hold a closed meeting, i.e. one that is restricted to Council members only and accordingly noted in the Minutes. Repeated below under Closed Sessions

7. Agenda:

The Parish Council shall conduct its business from a pre-established agenda. Items for the agenda must be submitted to the Chairman no later than the Sunday immediately preceding the meeting. Any council member may request an item be placed on the agenda.

8. Quorum for Conduct of Business.

Six members of the Parish Council shall constitute a quorum for the conduct of business at all meetings (per the Parish Constitution).

9. Rules of Order.

The current edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised is adopted and made part of these rules of procedure. The Council Chairman shall serve as the parliamentarian for the Parish Council and shall advise the Council members on matters pertaining to parliamentary procedure.

10. Voting Duty.

Whenever a question is called by the presiding officer, every member of the Parish Council shall vote on that question by a yea or nay roll call vote, except on procedural motions. No member shall abstain from voting unless that member states a bona fide conflict of interest. Conflict of interest shall be the only reason for a request to abstain from voting. The Parish Council shall, by a majority vote of the remaining members, determine if the member will be allowed to abstain from such vote. A majority vote of the entire membership of the Parish Council shall be necessary to approve any action of the council.

11. Public Participation at Meetings:

Members of the parish shall speak only when recognized by the presiding officer. Members of the parish shall be limited to speaking only for issues not on the meeting agenda and following Parish Council discussion on each agenda item prior to a vote by the Parish Council on that item. Each speaker shall be limited to ten (10) minutes unless the rules are waived by a majority vote of the Parish Council. Prior to addressing the Parish Council, members of the Parish shall register with the Parish Secretary who will give them the approved presentation form. This form should be filled out with copies given to Council members prior to presentation. The Parish Secretary shall record in the meeting minutes the name of the person(s) addressing the Parish Council and the topic to which they speak.

12. Disorderly Conduct at Meetings Prohibited:

The Parish Priest, Sergeant at Arms, or Chairman may call to order any person who is breaching the peace or being disorderly by speaking without recognition, failing to be germane to the topic or issue being considered, speaking longer than the allotted time, speaking vulgarities, name calling, personal attacks, or engaging in other conduct which is determined by the Priest or Chairman to be disruptive to the meeting.

13. Minutes of Proceedings:

A journal of the proceedings of each meeting of the Parish council meeting shall be prepared and maintained by the Secretary, and shall be available to the general Parish. The minutes shall be summary in nature but shall properly record all actions of the Parish Council with respect to motions, including the name of the maker of the motion, the member seconding the motion, and the result of the vote. The Secretary shall not be required to maintain a written record of discussion or comments of the Parish Council or members of the public made at Council meetings unless directed to do so by a majority vote of the Parish Council. If a member of the Parish Council is permitted to abstain from a vote, the abstention shall be recorded in the meeting minutes together with the reason for abstention. The Parish Council shall make any corrections to the minutes at the next meeting after the meeting to which the minutes refer. The corrected minutes shall show both the original entry and the correction.

14. Publication of Proceedings:

Within ten (10) days after each meeting of the Parish Council, a synopsis of the proceedings showing the substance of each separate

proceeding of the Council, prepared by the Secretary and approved by the Chairman, shall be published and a copy placed in the hallway on the bulletin board. Individual copies will be made at parishioner's request.

15. Meeting agendas:

- a. Preparation: The Parish Council Chairman shall be responsible for the preparation of the agenda for all meetings of the Parish Council and for the distribution of the minutes to the Council members with the agenda, supporting materials and explanations on or before the Tuesday prior to the next scheduled meeting. "Petitions and Communications", are presented to Parish Council at a meeting, and shall be placed on a meeting agenda for consideration only after a member of council requests such placement and fills out the correct presentation forms that will be distributed to the Parish council for review.
- b. Agenda Format and Changes:  
The agenda may be changed at a regular meeting by a majority vote of the Parish Council under the "Approval of Agenda" section of the meeting.

16. Basic Format for Meetings: **Review order and #4/#10 and approve**

1. Opening Prayer
2. Call to Order by President
3. Roll Call / Quorum
4. Approval of Last month's Minutes
5. Guest Presentations
6. Petitions and Communications
6. Additions to current Agenda Can we make such last minute changes?
7. Priest's report
8. Financial Report
9. Old Business/Action Items
10. Guest Presentations I would like to move this to #4, before any regular Council business gets under way.
11. New Business
- 12 Team Coordinator Reports I added "Coordinator"
13. Closing comments Remove
14. Closing Prayer
15. Adjournment

17. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION:

All items for consideration by the Parish Council shall be initially placed under Study Session for discussion by the Parish Council. After discussion, the Parish Council shall give its concurrence to the transfer of a study item to the Action Items portion of the agenda for final action by the Council. The Parish Council, by majority vote of its members, may remove an item from the Study Session and from consideration or action by the Parish Council.

18. CLOSED SESSIONS:

The Parish council may convene into a closed session. The proceedings of closed session items shall be listed separately on the agenda.

19. ADJOURNMENT OF MEETINGS

The presiding officer shall adjourn all meetings of the Parish Council.

20. AMENDMENTS TO COUNCIL RULES OF PROCEDURE

Procedure for Amending Rules, Any member of the Parish council may request that the Parish Council meeting rules of procedure be amended by submitting such request in writing to the Parish Council Chairman together with the specific change being recommended. The Parish Chairman shall submit the request to the Parish Council Secretary to add the request on the Council's Study Session agenda. A majority vote of the Council shall be necessary to approve any Amendment to the rules of procedure. Upon approval, the Council Secretary shall revise the rules of procedure and provide a copy of the revised rules to each member of Council and post the change on the wall in the hallway no later than the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Council after approval of the amendment.

21. COPIES OF RULES

Posting and Distribution of Rules: The duly adopted Parish Council Rules of Procedure shall be posted in the church hallway, on the website, and be available for the general Parish at all Council meetings.

**The Parish Council**

(Most of this content is in the Parish Constitution)

The responsibilities of the Parish Council shall include, but are not be limited to:

- 1) Responsible not only for the spiritual and material needs of the Parish, but also for the parish's unity and connection with the Diocese and the Church, for the Parish is called to be a living cell and a member of the Body of Christ, and carries responsibility for the entire Church.
- 2) To assist the Chairman in the implementation of the decisions at the Parish Council Meetings.

- 3) To approve and present an annual Budget, created by the Financial PMT or their representative(s), for consideration at the Annual Parish Meeting.
- 4) To assure the funding of the programs approved by the Parish Meeting in the Parish Budget, and any other funding requests that may come within the purview of the Council.
- 5) To enter into contracts, or to purchase all necessities for the Parish not to exceed the amount of \_\_\_\_\_) per project. Amounts in excess of \$\_\_\_\_\_ shall be voted upon at the Annual Meeting or at a Special Meeting. When possible, the Parish Council shall anticipate such expenses and include a request for said item in the Annual Budget.
- 6) Parish Council members shall be informed of and follow the Policies, Standards, and Procedures of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese on Sexual Misconduct, and oversee the implementation of said Policies for the Parish body. We need to see these and need to post them on our website perhaps.
- 7) Exercise day-to-day stewardship of the properties and programs of the Parish, being mindful at all times of the reality that ownership belongs to God, not the Parish.
- 8) Any other responsibility that would normally fall to the Parish Council in any question regarding the Parish.