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The
Parish Council

(A Council of Parochial Organisations through which the varied interests are focused and co-ordinated to form a "Team for Christ").

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The Parish Council

Sometimes known as "The Council of Parochial Organisations."

Note.—The term "Vestry" is used for the business committee elected annually by the congregation to assist the Churchwardens. Vicar and Rector are interchangeable terms.

For over 1000 years the "parochial system," whereby England was divided into "dioceses," each subdivided into smaller units called "parishes," has been the basis of organisation in the Church of England. In recent years the system has not been without criticism, and slowly modifications suitable to various conditions are being introduced, but there is nothing to suggest that the system itself is likely to be replaced excepting in places where the circumstances are abnormal.

Nevertheless we must recognise that the conditions for which it originally provided are vastly different from those we know to-day. In the course of the years, and not least in the last fifty of them, great social changes have occurred, calling for sundry adjustments in every phase of life. It would be strange if, in such a period, the Church, too, has not seen much change, yet it remains true that we are slow to adapt, and we are, to an extent which hinders our effectiveness, still utilising methods and machinery appropriate enough in its day, but inadequate to the problems of our present time.

The nature of the modern parochial problem is indicated by the much larger population of town parishes, by the higher standard of average education, and the greater amount of time free from earning a livelihood which is the general experience.

The growth of "Societies" of various kinds has been one response to the problem of larger numbers, but this important and necessary development has not been without its own peculiar dangers. By gathering together persons with similar interests, either for fellowship or for the furtherance of some special aspect of the Church's work, organisations may divide a parish into more or less isolated units. Occasionally sectional rivalries arise, there may be lack of contact with others of the congregation, and sometimes even adults may develop a loyalty to their "Society" far greater than that given to the Church itself.

Along with this goes a second danger. A large parish, with numerous healthy organisations each doing an important job, involves multitudinous activities which may be allowed to become an intolerable burden on the parish priest, and interfere with his general ministry.

That both these serious dangers can be avoided is undeniable: they are avoided most effectively when the parish recognises its special mission as "a team for Christ." Under such circumstances, the laity are consciously fellow-workers with the clergy. The parish priest is then the spiritual director; with him are instructed lay leaders to whom he entrusts the care of the various organisations. In such a parish, certain useful organisations are probably not commenced until a capable or potentially good lay leader is discovered. St. Christopher's Parish is no longer "Mr. So and So's church," for all are fellow workers with Christ.

The Parish a Team for Christ.

Perhaps nothing can better foster this sense of the parish as a team than a "Parish Council" or "Council of Parochial Organisations." "What!" you say, "another organisation?" Let this pamphlet supply the answer. For the present, let us say that (in a sense supplementary to the worship, always the central activity of the Church) the Council can be the power house of the parish; the centre in which the "missionary" activity of the congregation is planned; the means of welding all phases of the parish life into a progressive whole.

In every parish, the Annual Meeting normally appoints a Council, Committee or Vestry, which, working with the clergy and churchwardens, controls the business affairs of the parish. Its chief function too often is that of "spending the money which the efforts of the Rector and the ladies have raised." It is often treated as the most important section of the church, although seldom does it really earn the right to be so considered. Normally, it represents in a way the legal side of the parish's function, in that ultimately all resources and activities come under the control of the Rector and his Council or Vestry. This Vestry usually confines itself to the business duties for which it was appointed. The Council of Organisations, on the other hand, because it constantly has constructive work in mind, will be larger: it has the advantage, too, of directly representing all sides of the parish's activities, and its very reason for existence will be to forward the central purposes of the parish and of all its organisations.

Its General Structure and Work.

On the Council, in addition to the senior organisations, will be representatives of the youth societies (including some of the young people themselves if, say, 18 years of age). The Choir, Missionary Committee, M.U., C.E.M.S., will be some of the older people with whom they meet; learning in the process to discuss problems, and from whom they will discover some of the responsibilities involved in parish life. The adults, too, will learn something more of the young people's outlook, and come to hear of the special interests, and perhaps difficulties, of every other section of the parish.

The alert Missionary Committee will here have its opportunity to do some stirring up; one such Parish Council now allots in succession to each organisation represented, the duty of writing to the parish's "own" Missionary month by month. The Choir, short maybe of numbers or music money, will probably report the fact, and ways of dealing with one or both perhaps found. The broken piano becomes not a matter for severe censure by the Churchwardens, but a matter to be explained by the Boys' representative at the next meeting of the Council, together with an account of "what they are doing about it"—a much healthier way of dealing with such issues (provided, of course, the Wardens recognise that a sense of responsibility is better engendered so, and allow the Council to deal with it).

It has been found that this central "Parish" Council, if properly officered, not only knits together all the parish forces in a strong bond of fellowship and mutual understanding, but provides a spearhead of attack upon many a problem facing the clergy or the Churchwardens. It is the custom for each organisation to report briefly on its past activities and future intentions, especially such as should be generally known, but where the Vestry sees fit it may make (not a "report" but) a "communication" to the Council, one which takes the Council into confidence in matters that need to be known. Such a Vestry is assured of immediate publicity for the need, and the next meeting may even reveal an immediate response because representatives of all organisations were able to bring it right home to their members.

For this, as for other reasons, the Churchwardens, plus two or three chosen Vestrymen, should be on the Council. Again the parish priest is provided with an excellent channel for rallying a large section of his people to any important project, and, by taking the Council into his confidence where desirable, he may stimulate a team of fellow workers consciously striving with him to forward the Kingdom.

How it works.

Its value and scope will depend largely on the goodwill and vision of the Churchwardens and Vestrymen who, once they realise that the Incumbent and Wardens have always the right to veto any unwise activity, may recognise that there are some responsibilities better handled by a Council representing all the organisations. For example, in some very active parish, constant clashing of dates for functions, or perhaps numerous money appeals by organisations for sectional purposes, needs correcting; who better than a Council of the Organisations could effectively adjust future fixtures? The constitution of one such Council, appended in this pamphlet, shows just how this parish has learned to deal with such matters. Apart from the general duties suggested in this constitution, the following examples from its recorded activities illustrate what can be attempted.

The funds which this particular Council administers are mostly gained from general parish activities "sponsored" by, though not "managed" by, the Council. For instance, it sponsors a monthly dance and a monthly card night, but does not personally run them. (Running things is definitely not a task for members of such a Council). The Council fixes the date and the charges, and decides which organisation in turn should be invited to arrange and manage the function, i.e., not for itself but for the parish. The funds go to the Council, which allocates them from time to time. Usually the young people take charge of the dance, handing the net proceeds over. This, of course, does not preclude any society from arranging separate efforts for its own funds, after consultation with the Council to prevent needless overlapping and an orgy of ticket selling. Often organisations needing money found that their special need so appealed to the rest that money from the Council's own fund was allocated to them, or the next monthly function set aside especially for their benefit. A loan to the Tennis Club, a contribution to help the Choir, another for C.E.B.S. uniforms, and half the cost of repairing the piano broken by the boys (who themselves paid the other half) represent actual instances where the parish as a whole co-operated to the quick solution of pressing difficulties. A Parish concert was planned with a minimum of effort because various organisations (including the Vestrymen) provided an item each. The Annual Anniversary was expanded into an Annual Reunion with several interesting features suggested by various members. The policy of "sponsoring" functions run in the name of the Council is not, of course, an essential feature of its activities: it may decide to leave such matters completely to each organisation, seeking only to prevent clashing of fixtures and monetary appeals.

One Council was impressed with the "Five fields of Service" principle developed by the Episcopal Church of America, under which the year is divided into periods wherein the various organisations give special emphasis to some avenue of Christian activity. They arranged it so that from Christmas to Easter all were asked to give special emphasis to parochial needs, planning work and gifts on that behalf and including at all meetings a certain prayer. To Trinity some special charitable cause (eg., an orphanage) is chosen for similar co-ordinated effort. Overseas Missions are emphasised for three months ending with a joint "Box" despatched to "our own Missionary." For the two months around Synod and the Diocesan Festival, the Diocese and Home Mission Funds are remembered, whilst various Community activities mark the month before Christmas. Apart from the joint "Box" to "our own Missionary," each organisation works on its own lines and more or less independently within the framework outlined. It is a great thing when boy and girl and even Father and Mother, through different channels maybe, are all working for the same ideal. (See Note No. 1).

The Secretary and the Members.

As will be readily understood, the success of the Council depends upon ultimately discovering an alert man as Secretary. He should, indeed he must, be a real Churchman first, and also a forward-looking man, capable of working in complete harmony with the Incumbent and of recognising the great things Christians can achieve. The best work would be done by a man with some measure of executive experience, and with a large view of the work to be done, and of the means by which important objectives can be achieved. How often Church work is hindered by smallness of outlook, by cheapness of conception!

It is important that the Council be regarded as chiefly advisory; as a clearing house for ideas. The representatives will be largely drawn from your very busiest people, so seldom, if ever, should membership involve them in new personal activity. Their job is to help make decisions and then, returning to their organisations, invite them to co-operate with the rest of the parish in this or that direction. Often we overload our best talent and rob it of its inspiration; too often we shirk the sweat and delay involved in finding the right person for a given responsibility.

Appended is a copy of the Constitution of a Council which has been functioning for some few years. It may be a guide to others as well as clarifying what is involved. It has played no small part in welding the parish into a real fellowship for Christ and in keeping a busy single-handed priest, with numerous parochial activities, in touch with his leaders. It has helped him to keep ever before his organisations as a whole a keen sense of joint responsibility for the work of the parish. Such an instrument does not absolve him from frequent visit to the various groups and from occasional direct contributions, but he is not involved in their multitudinous endeavours. He can bless and align all that is being attempted, because he is the leader of a team of leaders, and through them of a team for Christ.

NOTES

No. 1. Re the "Five Fields of Service Plan."

It will be understood that the plan by no means requires that interest, prayer and work in any matter is necessarily confined to one period: it does mean that all are assured of a special emphasis at one period and that these various fields of Christian endeavour are overlooked by none.

No. 2.

Adequate "tools" for Church work are essential. Frequently "cheapness" mars the Church's efforts: the cheap and shoddy has no appeal and gets no response, yet we continue to ignore the truth and to delude ourselves that we are saving money by doing without, or using second-rate things. By so doing, we belittle the work of God and give no little support to the outsiders' conviction that

religion is an unimportant affair, a secondary thing to which one does not give the best in either cash or loyalty: it's the "penny wise and pound foolish" policy. A nice letter paper, a printed Notice of Meeting paper, an agenda paper suitably prepared, are not the waste the man handling a small weekly wage is apt to think. A sample copy of a printed combined Notice and Agenda with fixed items of business printed and space for special items is included in this booklet.

No. 3.

The booklets parallel with this series should also be consulted for fuller information regarding the work of the layman in the parish.

Appendix I.

THE CONSTITUTION OF ST. _____ PARISH COUNCIL

I. Objective—

- (a) To further the work of God and His Church amongst the people of the Parish.
- (b) To assist the Parish Priest, Churchwardens and Vestry, by promoting the co-ordination of the various social activities of the parish, and especially activities concerned with the raising of money, for Church Funds or other purposes.

II. The Council shall consist of:—

The Churchwardens and representatives of Church organisations as follows:—

Vestry	3	representatives.
C.E.M.S.	3	"
Ladies' Guild	3	"
Mothers' Union	3	"
Sunday School	3	"
Choir	2	"
Guild of the Sanctuary	2	"
Missionary Committee	2	"
District Visitors	2	"
Fellowship of Marriage	2	"
Servers	2	"
Tennis Club	2	"
C.E.B.S. (Seniors)	2	"
.. (Intermediates)	1	"
.. (Juniors)	1	"
G.F.S. (Seniors)	2	"
.. (Intermediates)	1	"
.. (Juniors)	1	"
Mothers' Club	2	"

Other Church Organisations may be given representation as the Vestry may from time to time determine.

III. Duties—

(a) The Council shall:

1. Seek to promote the welfare of the Church.
2. Seek to strengthen fellowship amongst parishioners.
3. Discuss matters of common interest and seek by joint action, where deemed desirable, to further the distinctive aims of any organisation.
4. At each ordinary meeting, and at the first meeting for the year in particular, receive a brief report of past activities and of future hopes and intentions, presented by a representative of each organisation.
5. Undertake where the Council is prepared to do so such other responsibilities wherein the Vestry invites its co-operation.
6. Furnish a report to the Vestry within thirty (30) days of each ordinary meeting, and at such other times as the Vestry may require, including in particular a resume of Social and Financial activities contemplated by the various organisations.

(b) Members shall—

1. Provide reports of past and proposed activities as required in "(a)4," and, in particular, give a clear indication of social, and/or special money raising activities contemplated.
2. Seek to promote all the objectives and duties of the Council and promote the wellbeing of each and every organisation and of the Church.
3. Not less than one week before the Annual Meeting of the congregation lodge an audited statement of accounts and report of activities for presentation to the Parish Secretary and the Annual Meeting of the parish.

IV. Meetings—

1. There shall be at least three (3) meetings in each calendar year, the first of which shall take place not later than the end of March, and, if convenient, before the Annual Meeting of the Church.
2. More frequent meetings may be held as the Council shall from time to time determine.
3. A special meeting may be called upon eight days' notice being given by the Vicar or the Churchwardens.

V. Voting, etc.—

1. A motion may be passed by a simple majority of the representatives voting; provided that, should the motion be one making a request upon an organisation which half the representatives of that organisation oppose, such a motion shall require the assent of two-thirds of representatives present at the meeting.
2. Nothing herein shall be considered to interfere with the right of veto vested in the officers of the Church acting in that capacity.
3. Seven (7) persons including representatives from four organisations shall form a quorum.

VI. Officers—

1. A Secretary and a Treasurer shall be appointed by the Council.
2. Other Officers may be appointed as the Council shall determine.

Appendix II.

The Next Meeting

of St. ——— Parish Council
will be held at 8 p.m. on

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AGENDA

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES.

BUSINESS ARISING FROM MINUTES.

CORRESPONDENCE.

ROLL CALL AND APOLOGIES.

LETTER TO O.O.M.

REPORTS.

- (a) Secretary. (b) Treasurer.
- (c) Re recent Card Night.
- (d) Re recent Dance.
- (e) Other Reports (if any).

COMMUNICATIONS FROM VESTRY.

REPORTS FROM ORGANISATIONS.

REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL DATES.

REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS.

REVIEW OF CALENDAR.

OTHER BUSINESS.

1.....

2.....

GENERAL BUSINESS.

(Note.—At Roll Call the number of representatives of each organisation is recorded).