

ST VINCENT DE PAUL PARISH COUNCIL AD HOC COMMITTEE ON ORGANIZATION AND GROWTH  
FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL  
SEPTEMBER, 2010

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Among the annual objectives of the 2009-2010 Parish Council of St. Vincent de Paul were internal self-evaluation of all parish committees and groups and the identification of innovative ideas for growth. These two efforts were completed in March 2010. Subsequently the Council charged this Ad Hoc Committee to examine our current organizational structure and function (salaried and volunteer) and evaluate the growth opportunities submitted by parish committees as one of the phases of transition planning in anticipation of Father Lawrence's retirement. The Council requested a report and recommendations for consideration in September 2010.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Organization and Growth [AHCOCG] was comprised of five council members representing all but one Mass community, four parishioners with specific expertise, and Fr. Lawrence. The AHCOCG met four times over the summer with extensive email interaction. The AHCOCG was provided with the summaries of the 2002 Council Retreat, the Listening Project, full committee and group self-evaluations, and all growth proposals with the family survey and young adult evaluations. These were to be evaluated in light of the new mission statement adopted by the Council in June 2010.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PARISH COUNCIL:

1. See that the Operations [To be Renamed *Facilities*] Committee is reconstituted with a defined scope of responsibilities which articulate smoothly with paid staff. These efforts can be assigned to this committee: create soft space, play area, and reorganized Gathering Space. **Approved by Council June 6, 2010.**
2. Request Anne Gibson to convene a group of parishioners with expertise in child and early adolescent development to suggest practical and effective ways to engage middle school youth. **Approved by Council June 6, 2010.**
3. Request the Liturgy Committee to explore securing/buying/writing an instructional Mass book for children and evaluate the Taizé service. **Approved by Council June 6, 2010.**
4. Ensure more fidelity to the provisions of the Council's constitution, specifically in how it interacts and involves its established committees in implementing the parish mission, setting parish objectives, and evaluating parish life and programs. The AHCOCG recommends to Council that the Constitution be amended in these specific ways: in Article V.1 (a) The Directors of Religious Education and Pastor be noted as *ex officio* members of Council with full voice; (b) committee chairs not only have voice in Council deliberations as currently stated but also have a role in Council consensus decision-making with the elected Mass representatives and corporators (the participants in consensus decision-making are not currently defined) and Article VIII.3 be revised to state that the "President in consultation with the committee members and with the advice and consent of the Council shall appoint a chairperson for the committee."

5. Revitalize the established committees by working with them to delineate a particular scope and function for each committee, including how committees interact with parish staff when responsibility for particular activities is shared.

6. To avoid confusion and enhance accountability, restrict the term ‘committee’ to functional groups established by the Council as the Council’s agents in discharging Council responsibilities under the Constitution. All other groups should self-designate as a ‘working group’ (a group that convenes for a specific episodic or recurring task) or a ‘special interest group’ (a group that convenes around a particular interest).

7. In light of the new mission statement and the parish self-evaluations, consider maintaining these functional groups as established committees:

- a. **Finance Committee**- this is the only canonically required committee;
- b. **Liturgy Committee**;
- c. **Social Action Committee**;
- d. **Facilities Committee**.

Consider expanding the scope of this established committee:

The Education Committee should become the **Education and Enrichment Committee** and assume responsibility for a Family Life Ministry.

Consider establishing the **Communications and Outreach Committee**.

[The scope and mission of the formerly established Pastoral Care Committee appears more in line with that of a working group. Art and Architecture has self-designated as a working group; Peace and Justice as a special interest group.]

8. The recommendation for the six established committees reflects the new mission; further, the AHCOC is proposing that all working groups and special interest groups fall within the ‘mission influence sectors’ of these six committees. While any group may come directly to Council with issues or concerns, it is hoped that its initial interaction will be with the corresponding committee who has delegated responsibility for efforts in that mission sector. The AHCOC has suggested sector placements for the working and special interest groups; these placements would require group affirmation or an alternative self-designation.

9. The AHCOC viewed the layers of this proposed structure as a set of concentric circles, defined by the degree of accountability inherent in each circle. The innermost, comprised of the pastor and the council, has the highest degree of accountability to the parish community. The circular nature of the proposed structural model is based on a Trinitarian discipleship of equals with mutual service demands of all.

10. This new focus on accountability also translates to the need for keeping a ‘finger on the pulse of the parish.’ The Council should consider a regularly scheduled parish-wide ‘needs assessment’ to ensure that parish programs are responsive to documented needs and desires. For example, several growth proposals addressed changes in Mass and education scheduling (see Report I.B.1); and the AHCOC did not have enough information to recommend action. A change of this proportion is best assessed in a parish-wide survey format.

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## REPORT, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND RATIONALE

### I. GROWTH PROPOSALS

#### A. Overview

The AHCOCG received 45 growth proposals to evaluate. Of these, three specified the church facilities, six involved liturgy, eight involved education and enrichment, three concerned social action, and the rest identified new opportunities in our internal and external (outreach) communication. The AHCOCG divided the projects into those for which the parish already had committee support and those for which it did not. The former were assigned and decisions on the rest were deferred to the subsequent organizational evaluation (See Section II).

Table 1 [Pages 3-5] lists the growth proposals by committee assignment (this has been updated by the inclusion of the newly proposed Communications and Outreach Committee and the Expanded Education and Enrichment Committee: a decision coming from the organizational evaluation in Section II.) It has to be noted that 50% of all growth proposals had to do with 'marketing' or communication in general. This was a major identified need and recommendation of both the 2002 Retreat and the Listening Project that still has not been implemented. It is overdue and foundational for parish growth.

The AHCOCG considered most of what was proposed as feasible; and although considerable effort may be required for some, most can be accomplished with small to moderate costs. The AHCOCG chose to leave the actual choice of project and any prioritization to the committees themselves. Some projects (e.g. a Social Action Fair with accompanying liturgy and outreach to university campuses) would require coordination and planning among several different committees.

#### B. Specific Proposals For Which There Was Insufficient Information

##### 1. Proposal to Change Weekend Mass times

This proposal came from more than one committee. However, most Mass communities love their particular Mass time so this proposal always elicits strong responses. Nevertheless, change will come.

*(a) If we can control change:*

Fr. Lawrence will not be able to continue the midnight Mass after retirement since the plan is for him to reside elsewhere and it will be too great a burden for him to be back for Sunday Mass. In addition, within the 7:15 Saturday community there seems to be some support for an earlier Mass (5:30 or 6:00); it is believed by those attending other Masses as well that an earlier time for this particular Mass would be more attractive to people in the area who may have plans on Saturday night or conflicts for Sunday morning.

***AHCOCG recommendation:*** Any change in scheduling requires broad community input. We suggest a sequential approach: first, a survey of all Mass communities in a format that allows sub-setting responses by specific Mass communities; followed by a focus group to determine the character of the new Mass (if the survey determines support for time change).

This survey should be deferred until any and all other ‘needs assessment’ survey items are determined by the Council.

(b) *If we cannot control change:*

Fr. Lawrence shared unofficial information that the Archdiocese may be considering establishing the criterion of a ‘specific priest: congregation ratio’ for continuing weekend Masses in order to stretch the available priests to meet unmet needs. This could mean that we would lose some weekend Masses that do not meet this criterion and Fr. Lawrence will be assigned elsewhere to help with weekend Masses in other parishes.

*AHCOG recommendation:* The Council should monitor this very closely and formulate a plan to especially welcome those parishioners who may lose their regular Mass time into other St Vincent’s Mass communities.

## 2. Move FFF to Sunday and provide concurrent Adult Formation

39 families with young children were surveyed about this with only a 50% response rate. The survey group equally divided between wanting and not wanting such a change. Of those who disapproved, most did so because they did not want the 3 hour FFF added to a 90 minute Mass (options to have bimonthly 90 minute meetings or other arrangements were not offered). The AHCOG did not think there was adequate information to make a recommendation for change. It is acknowledged that we are essentially a commuter parish and we need to balance the burden on parishioners with the ability to accomplish our mission for youth formation. Since the AHCOG survey had such a poor response rate, the results that were obtained were equivocal, and possible options were not offered, a more formal evaluation of the FFF program is needed: attendance rates, parent and teacher satisfaction, any assessment of content knowledge if available, would be required to see if what we are doing is working.

*AHCOG recommendation:* A formal evaluation of FFF should be conducted. In the interim, some adult education, with special emphasis on parenting skills, child psychosocial development, and the provision of religious formation within the home should be offered simultaneously to the FFF sessions within a comfortable, coffee-clatch format for parents.

## TABLE 1. GROWTH PROPOSALS BY CHURCH AND MISSION FOCUS AREAS

### **A. Proposals Requiring Little Effort or Resources And Now Being Implemented**

Survey younger parish members on attracting more young families, single people

Responsive group: Ad Hoc Committee [Done]

Use Bulletin to invite people to volunteer to take up gifts on special occasions in their life.

This invitation should begin appearing in March 7 Bulletin.

Responsive group: 9:30 Altar Dresser Ministry [Done]

Host Taizé Services

Hosted Taizé Baltimore for their May 7 Service to assess the resources required for our own monthly service in this tradition. Responsive group: Liturgy Committee [Council approved]

### **B. Others**

#### **1. Environment and Scheduling**

a. Create “soft space” (rug, rocking chair) in Gathering Space for parents with fussy children.

b. Create a ‘play area’ in the Undercroft for children during coffee gathering.

Responsive group: Facilities Committee [Council approved]

c. Reorganize the Gathering Space to be *attractive, inviting, and informative* of who we are

Responsive group: Facilities Committee

d. Change times of weekend Masses and committee meetings to be more accommodating to families and 21<sup>st</sup> century lifestyles (one proposal is Saturday at 5 PM and Sunday at 10:30)

Responsive group: NONE, see TEXT.

#### **2. Liturgy**

a. Inform visitors of Liturgy of Word (LOW) for children through greeters, bulletin, and signs and link them to LOW leaders.

Responsive group: *To Communications and Outreach*

b. No Liturgy of Word for middle school who are old enough to hear general homily; they should also be prepared to dress altar, bear gifts, and lector. Responsive group: Anne Gibson [Council approved]

c. Prepare a “training wheels liturgy book” for elementary and middle school children to explain the Mass and how to participate in it. Responsive group: Liturgy Committee [Council approved]

d. Institute a “Teaching Mass” every other month coordinated with theme and homily

Responsive group: Liturgy Committee

e. Invite young people to a special mass. Responsive group: To be considered Liturgy Committee possibly coordinated with Social Action Fair

#### **3 Education and Enrichment**

a. Move FFF (or some variation) to Sunday and conduct a Sunday morning adult formation (e.g. Bible study, lectures, group discussions, *lectio divina*) simultaneously

Responsive group: NONE, see TEXT.

**TABLE 1. GROWTH PROPOSALS BY CHURCH AND MISSION FOCUS AREAS [CONTINUED]**

- b. Institute home visits to the newly baptized to demonstrate the community's commitment to support the child and the parents
  - bring helpful materials
  - inform of relevant parish activities
  - recruit to dedicated email tree for parenting tips
- c. Establish a Family Life Committee to coordinate marriage and family life enrichment efforts
  - offer Marriage Enrichment sessions in conjunction with FFF sessions
  - offer One-Day Retreats for Married Couples
  - establish email tree for marriage and parenting tips
- d. Use Married Couples Group to help prepare couples who are considering marriage thereby introducing them socially into the parish
- e. Adult education in discussion format; focus on spiritual enrichment, such as meditation.
- f. Invite new and established parishioners to get to know each other better through the "*Dinner for Eight*," informal pot luck dinners or restaurant dinners.

Responsive group: *To Education and Enrichment for consideration*

Did not support these:

Offer family-oriented, community-based education during the summer. [Unclear on this proposal]

Host performances of popular local musicians onsite [Low priority]

**4. Social Action** *All to be assigned to Social Action Committee for consideration*

- a. Promote the parish's reputation for its commitment to social justice by increasing emphasis on the social gospel in bulletin, website, public communications and liturgies. This may appeal particularly to young Catholics in the city.
- b. Sponsor social outreach and action activities (Coordinated with Communications/Outreach)
  - recruit from campus ministries
  - commissioning service
  - host big potluck for the above and post pictures on website
- c. Post volunteer opportunities in Jonestown on the web site and distribute as a flier

**5. Communication and Outreach** *All to be assigned to Communications/Outreach Committee for consideration*

- a. Market Research
  - focus groups in parish of younger age groups
  - survey University communities
  - survey Fells Point and Canton
  - visit other parishes who do this well
  - direct mail to determine location and needs
- b. Enhance the technology of liturgies and communication
  - interactive blog
  - video screens for liturgies
  - use *Facebook*; Add a *Facebook* page

**TABLE 1. GROWTH PROPOSALS BY CHURCH AND MISSION FOCUS AREAS [CONTINUED]**

- Directory with committee info
- c. Sponsor social outreach and action activities (*With Social Action Committee*)
- recruit from campus ministries
  - commissioning service
  - host big potluck for the above and post pictures on website
  -
- d. Set up booths at university events; Outreach: grad schools.
- e. Provide *Introduction to Parish* handout
- f. Update parish website to sell the parish
- g. Add a chat room or forum to the parish website.
- h. Phone-e-thon to call through the church directory and ask what people would like specifically that would bring them back or get them more involved. Have two scripts for those absent and those still here.
- i. Get a phone list for 11:45 people. Have a greeter at 11:45 mass to see if they are registered and get to know them
- j. Canvass the neighborhood, including Scarlett Place, to give them a Bible with our info or flyers showing what we do and invite them.
- k. Publicize holiday mass hours with a nice sign by park.
- l. Give our info to local hotels
- m. Reach out to QOP families and high schools to let them know our activities.
- n. Improve website for more timely announcements
- o. Identify environmental groups and send info to them
- p. Outreach gay community, start a group here.
- q. Outreach deaf community- need to advertise at Schools for the Deaf.
- r. Advertise: Fells Point, Canton, Federal Hill community papers.
- s. Feature the parish retreat prominently on the website to encourage attendance.

## **6. General Efforts**

- a. Actively recruit young people to committees and activities
- b. Look for new people in church, introduce yourself and ask what they need.
- c. Subscribe to *Survey Monkey* to survey parishioners quickly via email for opinions on topics.
- d. Identify ourselves as members of St. Vincent's when visiting the sick and other public contexts.

## II. THE ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION OF OUR PARISH COUNCIL AND ITS COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

### A. Overview

As the AHCOG turned to this task, we adopted as our two points of reference the new mission statement approved by the Council in June and our Council's constitution. It became clear in evaluating our function that a drift away from the provisions of the Constitution has slowly occurred over the years. So the critical question for our committee became: do we accept our current function and recommend that the Constitution be amended to reflect how we have come to operate <or> do we recommend that our current structure and function be re-aligned to the provisions of the Constitution? We chose the latter approach.

### B. Rationale

Our Parish Council Constitution has many unique provisions: it proposes a model of shared governance that is profoundly lay-empowering, fostering collegiality and promoting consensus in providing for our parish community life. We are in a gifted position to test this new model of being church in the face of the declining numbers of priests available to staff the old model. With this opportunity comes a coincident responsibility not to turn away or chose a path of least resistance. Consequently the AHCOG is calling the Council back to its constitutional identity in presenting our recommendations.

### C. Our Recommended Structural Organization

#### 1. Constitutional Provisions

Under the Constitution, the Council has a number of responsibilities, among them under Article III are to "appoint and terminate committees" and "implement, directly or through committees, such activities and missions as shall from time to time appear appropriate to further its overall responsibilities." Thus it is clear that the established committees are agents of the Council with delegated responsibility. The Constitution also provides for the Council to approve through a recorded vote the constitution (sic- preferred term to be *mission and scope*) of each established committee (Article VIII.2) Further, each standing Committee shall send its chairperson or a designated representative, to each meeting of the Council to render a report on the work of the Committee (Article VIII.5). In addition, under Article V.1, the chairs of the Council's Committees are members of the Council and have a full voice in the Council's deliberations.

#### 2. Reinvigorating the Committees

Our current process is not constitutionally adherent. Committee chairs, if they attend Council meetings, have the perception that their sole function is to report on committee activities. The Constitution endows the committee chairs with a greater role and this fuller function needs to be reclaimed. To further this end, while the Constitution gives 'voice' to the committee chairs and restricts 'voting' to the elected representatives and corporators, it also notes that voting is a default procedure if consensus decision-making has not been successful and a decision is required. However, the Constitution is silent on who participates in the consensus decision-making which is

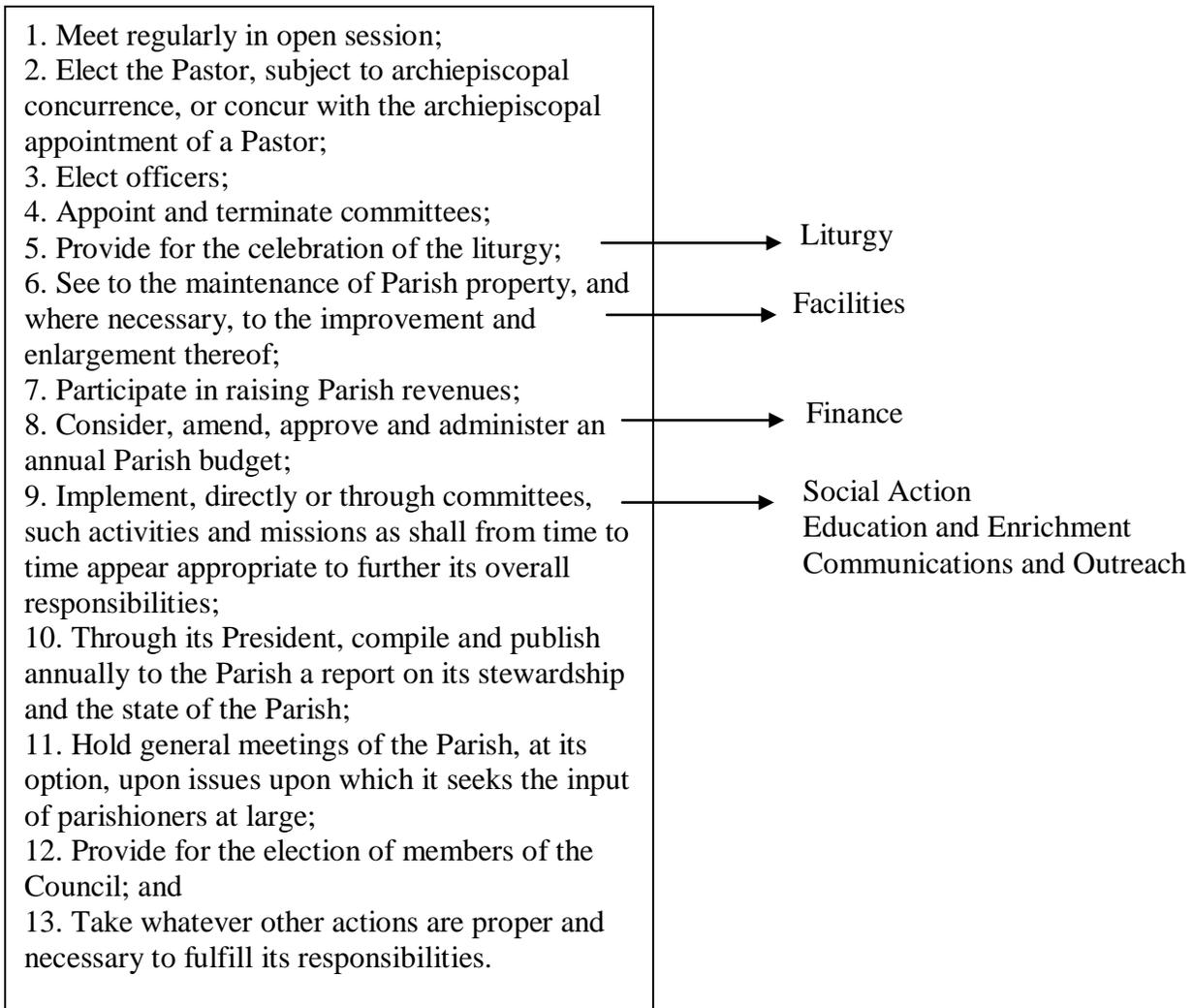
procedurally different from having a constitutional ‘voice.’ The AHCOC recommends that the committee chairs be involved in consensus decision making by the Council. In this way, the interest and concerns of the mission of the parish that is supported by their committee are fully involved in the deliberations in addition to the individual wisdom of the chair. This keeps the Council faithful to our mission by always weighing the impact of Council’s decisions on our mission. To insure that this is accomplished, the AHCOC recommends that each committee has a chairperson through a process of committee discernment and Council engagement.

### 3. The Model [Figure 1: Page 11]

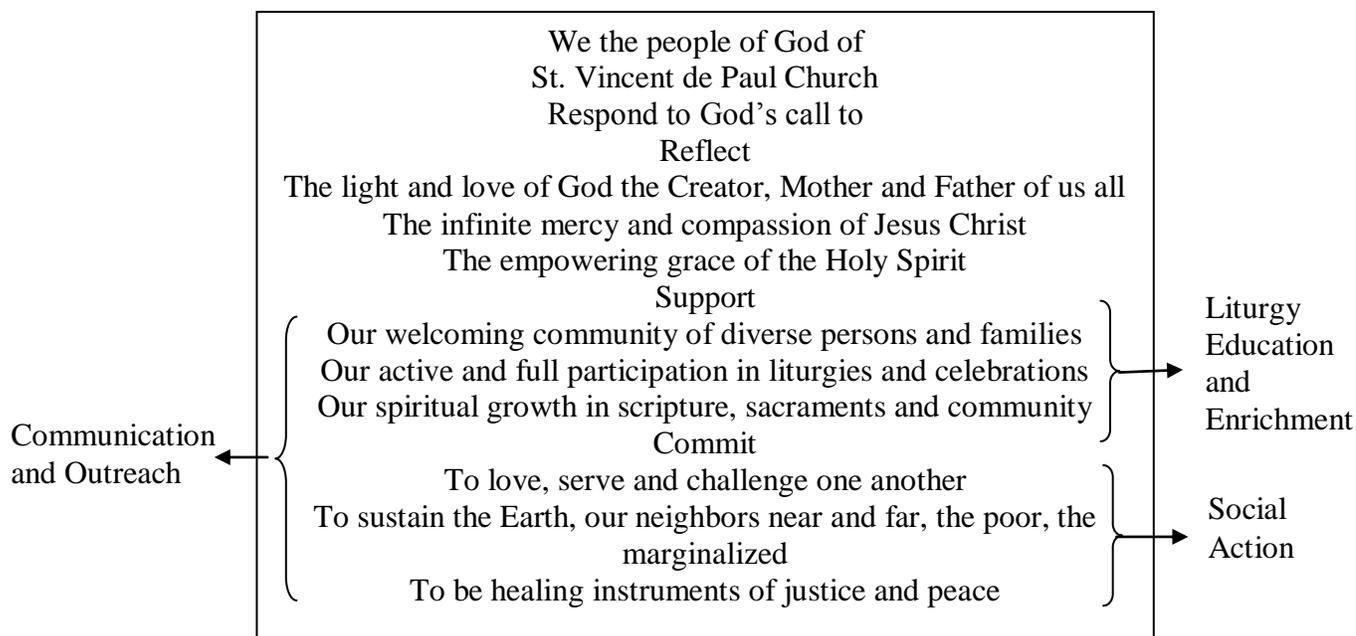
Our new mission statement defines us *in Trinitarian terms* and consequently the model reflects the circle dance of the Trinity, rather than a classic hierarchical design. It is intended to convey a discipleship of equals, all in mutual service. The circles are concentric only to express the degrees of accountability to the parish community with council and pastor owing the greatest.

There are six committees representing six sectors: finance, facilities, communication and outreach, liturgy, social action, and education and enrichment.

#### (a) Relationship to Council Constitutional Responsibilities



## (b) Relationship to Parish Mission Statement



## (c) Interrelationships: Committees, Working Groups, and Special Interest Groups

Committees are established by the Council to assist in discharging Council responsibilities and are guided by a scope and mission. Committees are self-governing in identifying the duties and responsibilities required to implement the committee's scope and mission. As the committees are agents of the Council, so the working groups may be agents of the committees for specific recurring or episodic tasks. Working groups of long standing may also operate fairly independently within the sector for which the committee has delegated responsibility.

## (d) The Special Case of Special Interest Groups

St Vincent's has always been blessed by the charisms of people who gather around a particular interest or need. These groups spontaneously form within a community that is alive in its faith. The model accommodates these groups in order to recognize them within our family. They are otherwise self-defining and their only accountability is to our common Gospel values.

## (e) Council and all Structural Groups

While any group (working or special interest) may come directly to Council with issues or concerns, it is hoped that its initial interaction will be with the corresponding committee who

has delegated responsibility for efforts in that mission sector. This is consistent with the long-honored principle of subsidiarity (the most proximate unit with capacity to respond to and resolve an issue should). It also makes practical sense: if a committee can resolve or address a problem or concern, it should without requiring a petitioner bringing it to Council. The AHCOCG has suggested a provisional sector placement for the working and special interest groups; these placements would require group affirmation or an alternative self-designation.

#### D. Our Recommended Functional Organization [Figure 2: Page 12]

The single goal of all structural groups (Pastor and Council, Council Committees and Working Groups, and Parish Staff) within our parish functional organization is the support of the entire St Vincent de Paul Parish Community and is thereby required to be fully responsive to it. The Pastor and Council are jointly accountable to the parish community.

#### E. Council Committees: Mission and Scope

(1) The AHCOCG endorses the mission and scope of the following committees as approved by Council:

##### **Liturgy Committee [approved by Council 2007]**

The Liturgy Committee serves the needs of the worshipping community at St. Vincent's. The goal of this Committee is the spiritual development of the entire community and the empowerment of the priesthood of the community. Through training and collaborative efforts with ordained ministers, we seek the full manifestation of the Word and Sacrament in liturgy. Liturgies span the sacramental life of parish members.

##### **Social Action Committee [approved by Council 2007]**

The Social Action Committee supports the activities and programs of the parish in fulfilling its mission specific to social justice and identifies, plans, and coordinates new ministries to address gaps, needs, and opportunities. The Committee serves as an umbrella organization with both primary and supporting duties. The Committee serves as primary contact with the Archdiocesan *Beyond the Boundaries Program* and the *Baltimore Regional Initiative Developing Genuine Equity* (BRIDGE).

(2) The AHCOCG recommends that Council revise the scope and mission of the current Education Committee to reflect an expansion into family life and other enrichment efforts as the **Education and Enrichment Committee**.

(3) The AHCOCG recommends that Council revise the scope and mission of the **Facilities Committee** to reflect a more collaborative approach with parish staff to achieve an acceptable level of order and cleanliness for the church and common areas.

(4) The AHCOCG recommends that the **Finance Committee** submit a scope and mission to Council for approval, consistent with constitutional provisions since this committee is canonically required and operates within Archdiocesan guidance and requirements.

(5) The AHCOCG recommends that Council define the scope and mission of the proposed **Communications and Outreach Committee** to improve our internal communication through better layout design of bulletin and website and use of current technologies; and to establish our ability to communicate externally through outreach and publicity.

Figure 1 places possible areas for working group support under this committee; whatever committee is established by Council should make decisions to implement its charge related to working groups (e.g. some may be needed on an ad hoc basis for design and review; others or individuals may take responsibility for maintenance).

In addition, it is noted that Archdiocesan guidance indicates the need for salaried staff to be at the center of parish communications. Although limited parish resources and current staff configuration have obligated us to a purely volunteer effort up until now, it is the judgment of the AHCOCG that attention to efforts in this area are critical enough that Council should consider seeking the advice of parishioners proficient in these media on what is needed and then identifying the funds to implement their suggestions. Ultimately the leadership and administrative transition process will most probably culminate in a different staff configuration and there must be attention at that time to finding staff with proficiency in the most effective communication procedures.

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FIGURE 1. RECOMMENDED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE PENDING CONCURRENCE BY WORKING AND SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

New Committee or Group  
*Change in Designation*  
Expanded Scope

C Circle: Mission Driven Committees  
W Circle: Working Groups  
S Circle: Special Interest Groups

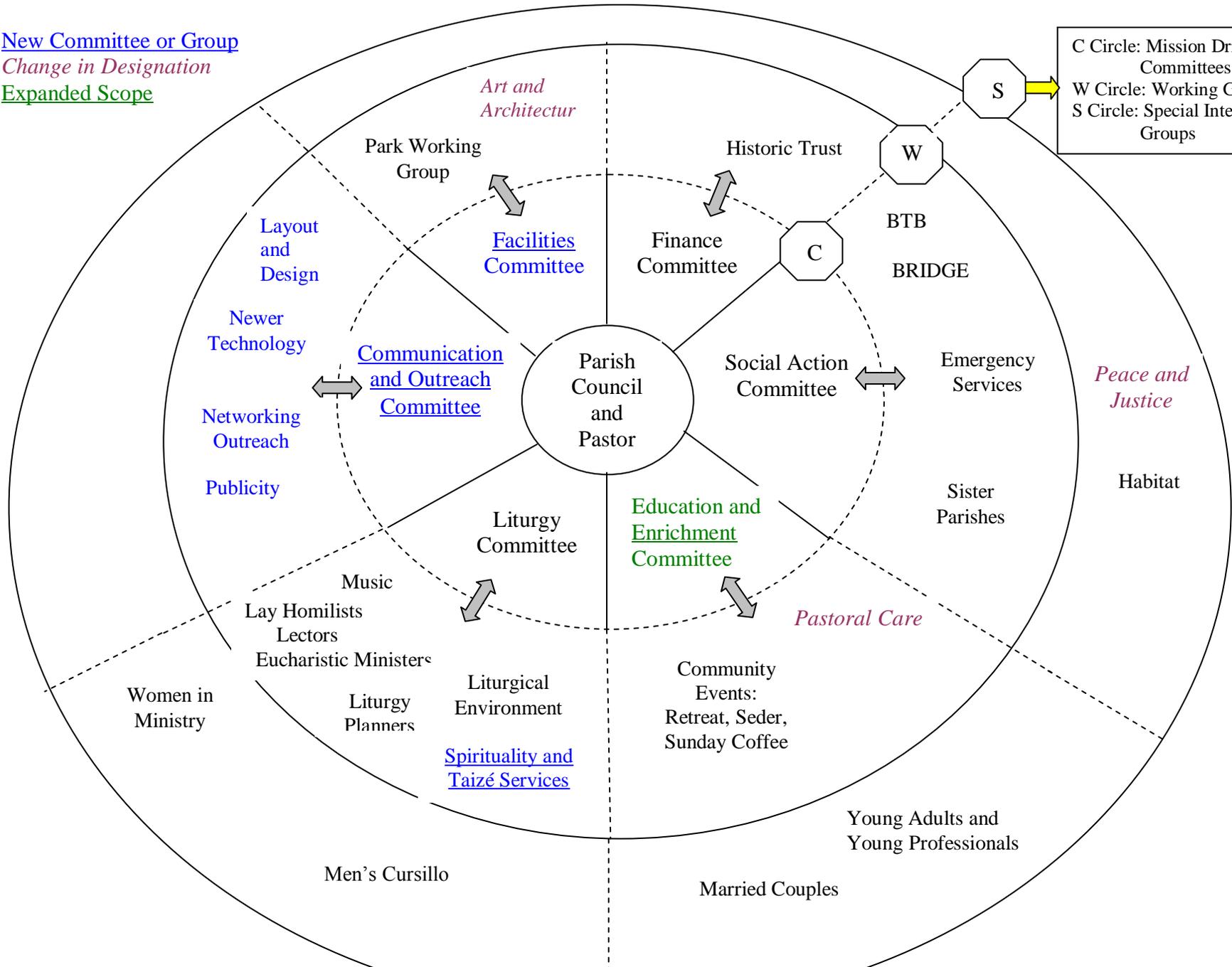


FIGURE 2. RELATIONSHIP AND FUNCTION OF CONSTITUTIONALLY SPECIFIED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE TO PARISH COMMUNITY AND PARISH STAFF

