FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What is a Diocesan Finance Council?

A. A Diocesan Finance Council is required by canon law in every diocese. The members of the Diocesan Finance Council provide advice and, in certain instances, direction to the diocesan bishop about financial matters affecting the diocese.

Q. Why does the Church require a Diocesan Finance Council?

A. Based on the biblical principle of stewardship, Diocesan Finance Councils exist to assist the diocesan bishop in his responsibilities for the financial health and welfare of the diocese entrusted to his care. Diocesan Finance Councils also serve to strengthen accountability and ensure that good financial practices are in place and followed.

Q. How are the members of the Diocesan Finance Council selected?

A. In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, a Nominations Committee of the Diocesan Finance Council proposes prospective members to the Archbishop who has the authority to appoint members. Members have a five-year term of office and serve a limited number of terms to provide for ongoing refreshing of the council.

Q. Who is eligible to serve on a Diocesan Finance Council?

A. Members of the Diocesan Finance Council must be Catholics in good standing with the Church. Canon law requires that they be “truly expert in financial affairs and civil law, outstanding in integrity.” (c. 492, § 1) Persons more closely related to the diocesan bishop than first cousins, by blood or marriage, may not be appointed. With the exception of the Diocesan Finance Officer, employees of the Archdiocese or individuals with business interests with the Archdiocese may not serve on the Council.

Q. What are the responsibilities of the Diocesan Finance Council?
A. The Diocesan Finance Council has the following basic responsibilities:

- preparation of the annual diocesan budget
- acceptance of the annual financial report
- provide consultation on the appointment or removal of the finance officer
- provide consultation on any new diocesan tax/assessment
- provide consultation on more important acts of administration
- review the means for investing endowments
- provide consultation to diminish endowment obligations
- vote on acts of administration and alienation requiring their consent.

Additional tasks may also be assigned to the Diocesan Finance Council by the Archbishop in order to provide other assistance in financial and legal matters. (For explanations of technical terms, please refer to the Glossary of Terms.)

Q. How often does the Diocesan Finance Council meet?

A. Meetings are held at least quarterly. The Diocesan Finance Council can be convened for special meetings as well. Inability to attend, or lack of attendance at, regularly scheduled meetings, can be grounds for removal from the Council.

Q. Are Diocesan Finance Council meetings considered "open public meetings"?

A. The concept of “open hearings” or “open meetings” is one that derives from civil law and applies mostly to governmental or public agency meetings. Any member of the faithful is free to submit a written question or request to the Diocesan Finance Council and it will be given attention.

Q. Who oversees the investment of the finances of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee?

A. The Diocesan Finance Council has an Investment Committee. It is their responsibility to set investment policies that are socially responsible and consistent with the moral and ethical standards of the Catholic Church. They are also to see that fund managers are provided with investment goals and they periodically review the performance of each manager.
Q. What is meant in the Church by “advisory bodies” and is the Diocesan Finance Council one of these bodies?

A. The Archbishop is required by canon law to establish certain advisory councils. The College of Consultants, Finance Council and Presbyteral (Priests) Council are all required by canon law. Canon law further encourages the establishment of a Pastoral Council. In some matters of major import, the bishop requires the consent of the Finance Council; in those cases they move from being advisory to being deliberative.

Q. What actions require the consent of the Diocesan Finance Council?

A. Canon law requires that the diocesan bishop seek the consent of the Diocesan Finance Council in order to perform acts of extraordinary administration as established on a national basis by the USCCB. These are acts which go beyond the ordinary and regular financial administration of the diocese. The consent of the Council is also required for the diocesan bishop to alienate property of a certain value, that is, to transfer ownership of property that belongs to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee to another entity, whether a Catholic group or not. Finally, the consent of the Council is required if a transaction, while not an alienation, could worsen the financial (patrimonial) condition of the diocese. The USCCB annually sets the maximum amount of a transaction beyond which the Archbishop must also receive permission from the Apostolic See.

Q. How are Diocesan Finance Council meetings conducted?

A. The Diocesan Finance Council exists to assist the Archbishop who attends all meetings in person or by an appointed delegate. He presides over the meetings, meaning that he is attentive to the discussion, advice, or consent of the Council, asks questions and provides information. A Chair of the Council is elected by the Council for a two year term. It is the responsibility of the Chair to conduct meetings according to the agenda which is set by the Chair in consultation with the Finance Officer and other Council members. A Vice-Chair acts in the place of the Chair when the Chair is absent. The Archbishop is free to add items to the agenda in advance or at the Council meeting.

Q. How does the Archbishop obtain the canonically required consent or counsel of the Diocesan Finance Council?
A. Canon law requires that when the Archbishop needs the consent or counsel of the Diocesan Finance Council, he must convene the group, present the matter at hand, and allow free discussion of it. When counsel is required, he must hear those present, who are required to offer their opinions sincerely, and he is not to act contrary to their opinion, especially if it is unanimous, without a serious, overriding reason. When consent is required, a vote must be taken of the members present. The Archbishop cannot act contrary to the majority vote on the matter.

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