

Celebrating and Counting Councils
In Parishes of the Santa Barbara Pastoral Region
A Report to Bishop Slawomir Szkredka by the
Santa Barbara Regional Pastoral Council
January 27, 2025

Executive Summary

The Santa Barbara Pastoral Region contains 37 parishes. 32 of those pastors participated in this study, and they reported that their parishes include 17 pastoral and 29 finance councils. Success within councils is defined by the Church's official documents. Councils succeed when pastors consult them, receive good advice, and put the advice into practice. The report consists of three sections.

1. *Success.* The first and largest part of the report describes council success stories. Pastoral councils have recommended initiatives to care for parishioners and to achieve other goals. Finance councils, which are better understood than pastoral councils, have successfully advised pastors regarding the parish budget and the solution of various problems.
2. *Challenges.* The second part of the report describes various challenges that have discouraged pastors from consulting councils. These include the drop in Mass attendance following the COVID pandemic, negative experiences with consultation, and misunderstandings of the nature and purpose of councils. The success of consultative decision-making depends on the one who consults.
3. *Development.* The third part of the report is about the development of councils. Pastors consult and hope for good advice. Council success depends on good relationships between the pastor and the members and mutual trust. It also depends on what he asks the council to study and on how he guides its investigation, reflection, and conclusion.
4. *Consultation.* The study notes that, although the councils are consultative bodies, pastors are reluctant to say that they "consult" or that the members are "consultants." Pastors rarely define consultation in the language of the Church's official documents – the process of investigation, reflection, and the recommendation of decisions. This prevents councils from succeeding, that is, knowing that they have accomplished their threefold purpose and that the pastor has implemented their recommendations.

The Santa Barbara Regional Pastoral Council learned that much depends on the kinds of questions it poses to pastors and on how it poses them. The council has generated several further questions about how other regions that will "Celebrate and Count Councils" could do better than we did.