CONCENSUS BUILDING

Consensus Building: Participating in the Deanery Pastoral Council decision making process through consensus calls for a definite procedure for the Council.

1. A thorough investigation of all facets of the issue should be undertaken individually or by a committee.
2. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, every effort should be made to achieve a deep understanding of the issue, using whatever talents and expertise are available within the parish community.
3. Full participation by Council members in open forum discussions of the issue should then take place; each member should be invited to express reasons why they take a given position.
4. The collective opinion, or consensus, should then be called for and provided.
5. When the Deanery Pastoral Council members work with the consensus model, they must give concrete reasons why they agree or disagree with the proposed action.

Role of the Individual Council Member

1. Analyze his/her own position as thoroughly as possible before the meeting, realizing that the task is incomplete until the missing pieces are supplied by other members of Council. Each person has a part of the truth. To accomplish this well one should have the agenda and proposal under study at least seven days prior to the meeting.
2. Recognize an obligation to express his/her own opinion and explain it fully so that the rest of the DPC will have the benefit of all members' thinking.
3. Recognize an obligation to listen to the opinions and feelings of other members and to be ready to modify his/her position on the basis of logic, understanding and sensitivity.
4. Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as voting, compromising or giving in to keep the peace, realizing that differences of opinion are both acceptable and helpful. By exploring differences, the best course of action will gradually become apparent. Consensus begins only when members are listening and open to all possibilities.

Results of Consensus

Consensus incorporates the realization of the group that:

- The decision being made is the most acceptable under the circumstances
- The decision represents areas of agreement rather than disagreement
- No one side or faction has been "defeated"
- The welfare of the entire parish has been considered; and
- Each member of the group can consequently live with the final recommendation.

Benefits of Consensus

In Deanery Pastoral Council work, resolving issues by consensus means that:

- Emphasis has been placed on people and consideration has been given to their growth in faith.
- Everyone has had an opportunity for input.
- The resulting conclusions should be beneficial in some degree to all members.
- Everyone affected should be comfortable with the conclusion.

Obstacles to Consensus

- Rigidity in one's opinions. Strong opinions and closed mindedness make consensus nearly impossible.
- Aggressiveness. A hostile suspicious attitude toward contrary opinions and a determination to "win" the discussion eradicates the possibility of consensus.
- Smothering, interrupting or "over-talking" others and expressing impatience with the dialogue can serve to cut short the process of consensus. Such behavior may indicate a lack of openness to change or masks a fear of conflict.

How Consensus is Different than Compromise

Compromise is achieved by "mutual concessions" - each person settles for something less than what is desired. Consensus is "general agreement" and since each person's position is respected and fully heard, the emotional climate is far better.

There is also a relational difference between compromise and consensus. The process of consensus tends to create closer relationships in a group, building group solidarity. Persons usually favor consensus over compromise because individuals and their gifts are recognized, creativity is encouraged and there are no losers.

The Deanery Pastoral Council's use of the consensus model is most authentic when used in the context of prayerful discernment and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.