

Consensus Decision Making

The St. Thomas More Pastoral Advisory Council goes about its decision-making process through seeking consensus, rather than voting. Consensus building is a group process for choosing between alternatives or making recommendations that have been cooperatively developed and consented to by all in the group.

So what does it mean for a selection to have been "consented to by all in the group"? It does not mean that the selection is everyone's preferred choice, but rather, that everyone can understand it and support it. This sounds simple in theory, but in practice it is difficult because most of us are used to voting and majority rule. Why, then, is consensus building the mode of operation for the Council? There are four principal reasons:

1. **Unity**: The consensus process almost always creates unity and strength within the Council because it encourages cooperation among the members in seeking understanding and acceptance.
2. **Understanding**: Since the Council exists to provide consultation, its function is best served by the consensus process. The Pastor does not get much benefit from a Council recommendation on the basis of a 6-to-3 vote. It is important for the Pastor to understand all of the implications or consequences of an action. This cannot be determined from a vote, but it can be determined from the process of seeking consensus within the Council. This process can be of as much value in the Council's role of consulting and making recommendations as the final decision. For this reason, it is also essential that the recipient of the consultation (i.e., the Pastor) be part of the deliberations that take place.
3. **Continued Searching**: If all the Pastoral Advisory Council members cannot arrive at consensus, perhaps it is not the best action for the parish, and the Council should continue searching for a better choice. While this is not always possible due to external constraints, such as time, it presents a question that must be asked when consensus cannot be achieved.
4. **Strength**: When a consensus recommendation is made by the Council, the Pastor should prayerfully and thoughtfully consider the recommendation, unless it contradicts Church law or teaching. When the Pastoral Advisory Council speaks by consensus, the Pastor, as their father-in-faith, is morally obliged to listen.