



ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS
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The Student Council in the Catholic Elementary School

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THE STUDENT COUNCIL IN THE CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PHILOSOPHY	p. 2
WHY STUDENT COUNCILS EXIST	p. 3
STEPS TO TAKE IN ESTABLISHING A STUDENT COUNCIL	p. 4
Step 1 Conduct a Feasibility Study	p. 4
Step 2 Establish a Faculty Steering Committee	p. 4
Step 3 Select a Student Steering Committee	p. 4
Step 4 Draft a Constitution	p. 5
Step 5 Appoint a Student Council Moderator	p. 5
STUDENT COUNCIL STRUCTURES	p. 6
THE STUDENT COUNCIL CONSTITUTION	p. 7
What the Constitution Is	
Why the Constitution is Necessary	
Who Writes the Constitution	
How the Constitution is Written	
What the Constitution Includes	
A FRAMEWORK FOR DRAFTING THE CONSTITUTION	p. 8
State the Formal Name of the Organization	
Policies and Procedures	
Membership	
Nominations and Elections	
Officers	p. 9
Recall procedures	
By-laws	
Amending the Constitution	
Ratifying the Constitution	
Appendages to the Constitution	
APPENDICES	p. 10
A SAMPLE CONSTITUTION	p. 11
PETITION TO RUN FOR STUDENT COUNCIL OFFICE	p. 15
POSITION PAPER FOR STUDENT COUNCIL OFFICE	p. 16

THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE STUDENT COUNCIL IN THE CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

One of the primary goals of education is the growth of the total person. Students in a Catholic elementary school are to be afforded opportunities that will foster Christian growth in themselves and others, strengthen healthy social relationships, contribute to the encouragement of a positive environment within the school and parish community, and promote a spirit of service to others.

A student council can do much to promote these growth areas. In a school setting, children are given many opportunities to follow – they must also be given opportunities to discover and foster the growth of their Christian leadership abilities.

The purpose of a student council is to provide a practical experience in government by means of co-curricular activities designed to supplement the academic theory of government found in the basic curriculum of the school.

The student council in a Catholic elementary school

- fosters Christian discipleship based on Gospel virtues
- encourages a spirit of Christian service
- promotes good citizenship
- encourages scholarship
- raises school spirit
- demonstrates democratic principles
- advances the general welfare of the school
- enhances a positive environment where Christ is the center

Why Student Councils Exist in Catholic Elementary Schools

In general, the student council is designed to achieve these outcomes:

- promoting a deeper love of Jesus within each student
- providing opportunities for students to engage in servant leadership
- fostering positive relationships among students based on Gospel virtues
- nurturing a Christ-centered School atmosphere where every person is respected
- promoting respect for school rules and regulations
- learning principles of Christian citizenship and leadership
- teaching young people leadership skills through active participation
- serving as a communications instrument between students/faculty/administration
- encouraging students to strive for high academic standards
- setting an example for others to follow
- fostering positive school spirit and energy
- providing a means to promote the general welfare
- identifying problems and working to resolve them
- encouraging positive attitudes toward one another and school rules
- organizing and executing student activities to enhance the school climate
- fostering activities that encourage Christian service
- establishing and carrying forward existing school traditions
- cultivating positive faculty/student relationships
- listening to others, both faculty and peers
- representing student interests and concerns in administrative decisions
- being a vehicle to bring administration ideas and concerns to students
- promoting school policies and rules
- representing student opinion

STEPS TO TAKE IN ESTABLISHING A STUDENT COUNCIL

STEP 1 Conduct a Feasibility Study

Examine the feasibility of beginning a student council and secure administration and faculty support. Whether the idea originates with the faculty, with the administration, or with the students, there must be sufficient discussion to arrive at an understanding of the value and purpose of the council. Without consensus and commitment from the faculty and administration, the student council will never be effective.

STEP 2 Establish a Faculty Steering Committee

Establish a steering committee of interested faculty members (perhaps two or three) plus the principal and/or other administrative team member.

Determine the activities and duties in which the students are already involved such as safety patrol, bulletin boards, milk distribution, PA announcements, charitable outreach, school spirit and pride.

Determine what other activities and/or duties might be delegated to the students such as bookstore sales, liturgy planning, cafeteria cleanup, playground equipment distribution.

Determine areas where students will have no authority. The council may be a voice for input in these areas, but would have no control over such things as textbook selection, uniform code, schedules/calendars, teacher personnel, school budget).

Responsibilities may be added or deleted through amendments to the Constitution. The important element here is to make the duties of the council FIT THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF THE SCHOOL.

STEP 3 Select a Student Steering Committee

Form a steering committee of six to eight interested students from seventh and eighth grades. Discuss with them the concept of a student council for the school, solicit their ideas as to the nature/function of a student council, and determine the level of interest and enthusiasm. Be prepared for many wild ideas about running the school, making changes, using power, etc. These would be natural responses. Part of the learning process is exploration. As the work of the steering committee progresses, clarity will be given as to the true role of the council. This steering committee will be the first "student council" and will be the group that will sell the idea to the students.

STEP 4 Draft a Constitution

The constitution should be broad in scope and reflect the unique structure and needs of the school. It is to be understood by all that this constitution will exist for one year only and will be reviewed prior to the election of a council for the second year. This will allow for any adjustments to be made. After the second year, the constitution should be amended through a process outlined in the document itself, allowing for faculty/student review and ratification.

Each school must determine the type of government which can best serve the unique situation of the school. If at all possible, student membership on the council should not be limited to eighth grade only. Broad membership increases the level of enthusiasm among all and fosters ownership that crosses all grade levels. The top leadership generally should be limited to students in the eighth grade, but other members could come from grades five, six, or seven.

STEP 5 Appoint a Student Council Moderator

After the organization work is completed and the Constitution is written, the faculty must select a moderator. Most probably, and appropriately, the person would be chosen from the steering committee. The principal/administrative representative should not be the moderator. The principal is the ultimate authority in the school and the students might feel inhibited in expressing ideas to that person. The principal also remains the objective watchdog with veto power, but this should not be the principal's only role. The principal must encourage and be supportive at all times.

The person chosen as moderator should understand and support the concept of student service, have a good rapport with colleagues on the faculty, the administration, and the students. The moderator should also have the time to devote to the program and the enthusiasm necessary to encourage the members of the student body to try things, and to convince the faculty of the need for student involvement in the school. The moderator, along with the student steering committee, becomes the key to presenting the concept of student government to the school. The moderator offers the concept, describes the direction, presents the constitution for ratification, and oversees the election process.

STUDENT COUNCIL STRUCTURES

Student council structure may take one of the forms below or may be created to suit the needs of the individual school. There is no one best structure; the best structure is the one that meets the needs of the school.

- **Traditional**

President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer –
elected at large by voting population.

Class Representatives –

would be included and elected from the individual classes by class members.

- **Board of Commissioners**

**Commissioner General, Assistant Commissioner General,
Commissioner of Finance, Commissioner of Religious Affairs, etc.**
– elected at large by voting population.

Commissioners at Large –

may be elected by individual classes/grades to represent those classes/grades.

- **Parliamentary**

Representatives –

elected by grade level by either total voting population or by grade levels.
Once elected to the council, the members elect officers.

- **Bi-Cameral**

Student Council Officers (Senate) and House of Representatives –
elected separately.

Class Representatives –

would be included and elected from the individual classes by class members.

- **Combination**

The suggestions above are just that – suggestions.

There could be combinations of the above or a completely different configuration.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each.

THE CONSTITUTION

What the Constitution Is

A constitution is a document stating the fundamental principles or rules according to which a student council is governed. A constitution explains what will be expected of a student council and its individual members. It gives a sense of both order and purpose and defines the authority of the group. It also describes how the school's administration, faculty and student council interact and work together productively.

Why the Constitution Is Necessary

A constitution is necessary to keep the student council organized. It affords both general direction and purpose as well as specific directions and guidelines. It is referred to when a problem arises about the authority of individual members and of the collective council.

Who Writes the Constitution

Responsible people should be chosen from among the faculty and students. The steering committee outlined earlier could serve in this capacity.

How the Constitution Is Written

The group designated to write the constitution should follow the guidelines below.

An effective process to write the constitution is to have one or two adults designated as the scribes who assume the responsibility for composing a document based upon ideas generated in committee. Once the document has been drafted, input should be received from the administration and faculty. These suggestions are then incorporated into a final draft. This constitution will be the guiding document for the first year.

At the end of the first year, the constitution is to be RE-WRITTEN to reflect any revisions the faculty, administration, and/or students deem necessary. The revised constitution is then presented to the faculty and students for ratification.

What the Constitution Includes

What follows is an outline of a constitution that includes by-laws. This model is for a parliamentary council configuration. Other constitutional formats may establish bylaws in a separate document.

A FRAMEWORK FOR DRAFTING THE CONSTITUTION

TITLE OF THE ORGANIZATION

ARTICLE I NAME AND OBJECTIVES

State the name of your council and the purpose or objective. Objectives might include the evangelization within the community, promotion of good citizenship and student directed service opportunities, encouragement of scholarship, improvement of school spirit/pride, and providing a visible demonstration of the principles of democracy.

ARTICLE II POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

State clearly that the policies and procedures of the school take precedence over any conflicting policy and/or procedure initiated by the student council, and that the principal has the authority to veto any project or activity if in the best interest of the school.

ARTICLE III MEMBERSHIP, QUALIFICATIONS, DUTIES, VACANCIES

State the makeup of the council, including the number of members and grade levels that will be eligible. This section also outlines the general structure of the council.

State the qualifications for each office, including grade level, scholastic achievement and behavior guidelines. Different offices may have different qualifications.

State the procedures to be followed in the event a vacancy occurs on the council, whether through resignation or recall.

ARTICLE IV NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

State the specifics involved in the election process. Include information about filing petitions, procedures for primary and general elections, time of year elections will be held, voting eligibility, etc.

ARTICLE V OFFICERS

State the specific duties of each officer if not listed under another article.

ARTICLE VI RECALL

State the cause and the reason why a member might face recall, such as failure to fulfill one's responsibilities, lack of meeting attendance, change of academic status or display of conduct detrimental to the welfare of the council.

ARTICLE VII BY-LAWS

State the general procedures by which meetings shall be run, business transacted, and programs enacted.

ARTICLE VIII AMENDMENTS

State the procedure to be followed when amendments to the constitution are necessary.

ARTICLE IX RATIFICATION

State the procedure to be followed to ratify the constitution. This process involves the administration, faculty, and students. It is important that the document be duly ratified by these three elements of the school community.

APPENDAGES

Appendages may be added to the constitution document, which may offer further clarification on the roles and responsibilities of the council.

APPENDICES

A SAMPLE CONSTITUTION	p. 11
PETITION TO RUN FOR STUDENT COUNCIL OFFICE	p. 15
POSITION PAPER FOR STUDENT COUNCIL OFFICE	p. 16

Below is a sample constitution exemplifying the framework outlined above. Any constitution should reflect these basic elements, but each must be tailored to the needs of the local school.

CONSTITUTION OF SAMPLE CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCIL

ARTICLE I

NAME AND OBJECTIVES

SECTION I This organization shall be known as The Sample Catholic School Student Council.

SECTION II The purpose of this organization shall be to foster Christian discipleship and service learning opportunities, to promote good citizenship, to encourage scholarship, to raise school pride, to demonstrate democratic principles, and to advance the welfare of the school and its community in every possible manner.

ARTICLE II

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

SECTION I The policies and procedures of Sample School shall always take precedence over any conflicting policy and/or procedure initiated by the Sample School Student Council.

SECTION II The principal/administrator may veto any policy, procedure or activity established by the Council.

ARTICLE III

MEMBERSHIP, QUALIFICATIONS, DUTIES, VACANCIES

SECTION I MEMBERSHIP

- A. The Student Council shall be composed of nine members.
- B. The Student Council shall consist of five students who shall be in the eighth grade while in office, three students who shall be in seventh grade while in office, and one student who shall be in sixth grade while in office.

SECTION II QUALIFICATIONS

- A. Candidates for office shall have a scholastic average of B, with no grade lower than a C for the three quarters prior to election.
- B. Candidates for the office shall exhibit Christian behavior and have recorded satisfactory conduct grades during the three quarters prior to election.

SECTION III DUTIES

- A. The Student Council shall responsibly foster the objectives of the Constitution and execute other duties as agreed upon by the Council and the Principal.
- B. The Student Council shall involve members of the student body in the initiation, planning, and execution of all activities.
- C. The Student Council shall initiate, plan, and execute activities designed to foster the goals of the Student Council.
- D. The Student Council shall elect from its membership a President, Vice President, and such other officers as deemed necessary.
- E. The Student Council shall meet every two weeks. Special meetings may be called by the President or a majority of the membership.

SECTION IV VACANCIES

- A. If a vacancy occurs, except in the position of President, the Student Council shall, with the concurrence of the Student Council Moderator and Principal/Administrator of the school, appoint a qualified member to complete the term of office.
- B. If a vacancy occurs in the office of President, the Vice President shall assume the duties of President.
- C. Upon the succession of the Vice President to President, the Student Council shall elect a qualified Vice President from its membership and appoint a member of the Council according procedures in Article V.

SECTION V RESIGNATION

- A. A Student Council member wishing to resign shall, after discussion with the Moderator, submit a written letter of resignation stating the reasons for the resignation at a formal meeting of the Student Council.
- B. This resignation shall take effect upon a majority vote of the Student Council members and approval of the Moderator.

ARTICLE IV

NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

SECTION I PROCEDURE

- A. The student body of Sample School from grades five, six and seven shall elect in the fourth quarter of the academic year a nine-member Student Council.
- B. The Moderator shall appoint an eighth grade student to be the election commissioner.

SECTION II NOMINATIONS

- A. Any student wishing to be a candidate for Student Council and who meets all the qualifications for office shall file a petition prior to the date set by the election commissioner. The candidate shall obtain the required number of student signatures and approval of faculty representatives, parent, and principal.
- B. Eligible candidates shall have their names placed on the ballot in the order of filing.

SECTION III ELECTIONS

- A. The Australian ballot system shall be used in all student body elections.
- B. A primary election shall be held one week prior to the general election when the following circumstances arise:
 - 1. More than ten seventh-grade students seek election and/or
 - 2. More than six sixth-grade students seek election and/or
 - 3. More than three fifth-grade students seek election.
- C. The ten, six, and two candidates in grades seven, six, and five respectively receiving the highest number of votes shall be placed on the ballot for the general election.
- D. Students in grades seven, six, and five shall vote in the general election for nine representatives: five from grade seven, three from grade three, and one from grade five.
- E. The candidates receiving a plurality of votes at each grade level shall be the duly elected members of the Student Council.

ARTICLE V

OFFICERS

SECTION I PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT

- A. Within two weeks after the general election, the Student Council shall meet to elect from its membership a President and Vice President.
- B. The President and Vice President must be eighth grade students while fulfilling the duties of office.

SECTION II ADDITIONAL OFFICERS

- A. Such officers as deemed necessary by the Student Council shall be elected by the membership to guarantee the execution of the duties and activities of the Council.
- B. The officers established by the Council shall be re-determined upon the election of the new Council.

ARTICLE VI

RECALL

SECTION I CAUSE FOR RECALL

- A. Behavior detrimental to the spirit of the Student Council and/or Sample School shall be considered just cause for recall.
- B. Failure to fulfill the responsibilities of office shall be considered just cause for recall.

SECTION II PROCEDURE FOR RECALL

- A. Student Council members shall be advised in writing by the Moderator of the cause for petition to recall.
- B. Discussion shall be held by the Student Council members.
- C. A two-thirds vote of the Student Council members in favor of recall and approval of the Moderator shall recall the student.
- D. The Moderator shall inform the recalled student of the decision.

APPENDAGES

Clarification on the roles and responsibilities of the council and meaningful documents such as petition and position papers.

POSITION PAPER

Name of Candidate

Grade

The questions below are to be completed by the candidate and submitted with the Petition for Office to the designated election official.

I would like to serve on the Student Council because . . .

I believe I can serve as a Student Council officer because . . .

If elected, I will try to . . .

Signature of Candidate