



Mayor Garret W. Hagedorn, Carl Kemm Loven, Rev. Francis J. Ballinger, Frank Sposa, Contractor

### The Parish Council

One reform prompted by Vatican II was "shared responsibility" between the clergy and the lay members of parish communities – not just for the finances of a parish but also for worship, education, and all other aspects of parish life. The chief vehicle for this new participation is the parish council.

The groundwork for a parish council in Nativity was started under Fr. Ballinger with a countywide meeting on the formation of councils. But the actual implementation fell to Msgr. McGrath. A former pastor at Blessed Sacrament in Newark, Msgr. McGrath brought a wealth of experience with him in coming to Nativity. He had served as spiritual director of the Legion of Mary in the archdiocese, chaplain of the Newman Club at Rutgers in Newark, and administrator of St. John's parish in Newark, the oldest Catholic Church in New Jersey dating from 1829.

A month after arriving at Nativity, he called the first meeting of a steering committee to form a parish council. This 18-member group met weekly for almost one year, drawing up a proposed constitution, pondering the number of members and types of committees. They tried to educate themselves and the parish to this new concept in the church – shared responsibility. This was done from the pulpit, the bulletin and through pamphlets and letters mailed to the parishioners. As Fr. McGrath wrote in one of these letters: "You, as members of Nativity Parish, have a right or a voice in the decision-making policies of the parish, and that right can be exercised in a democratically-elected council, which will be the decision making body, along with the priests of the parish."

The first council members were elected in May 1972, and Tom Dierker was chosen president. Succeeding presidents have been Fred Barbaro, Al Turchick, Jack Weis, Bob O'Hagan, Bill Colgan, and presently Mike Luhn. Serving with Mike are Vice-President Eileen Flynn, Treasurer Michael Hurley, Recording Secretary Karin Gifuni, and Corresponding Secretary Larry O'Donnell. The council is comprised of five committees: Community, Education, Finance, Maintenance, and Spiritual. There are a minimum of five open meetings a year and input of ideas from the general parish is encouraged. As with most new concepts and organizations, there have been growing pains and changes have been made in the constitution and the size of the council to reflect these problems. However, there is little doubt as parish councils mature, they will play an even stronger role in the church in general and Nativity, in particular.