



## **PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING**

Catholic Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania

Thursday, August 8, 2024

Virtual via Microsoft Teams

3:00pm

### **Members in Attendance in Person:**

Very Rev. Andrew M. Boyd, Very Rev. Michael P. Ferrick, V.F., Very Rev. V. David Foradori, E.V., Very Rev. Chris Hamlett, V.F., Very Rev. Robert Horgas, V.F., Rev. Brandon M. Kleckner, Rev. Matthew J. Kujawinski, Very Rev. John P. Malthaner, V.F., Rev. T. Shane Mathew, Rev. Ian McElrath, Rev. Msgr. Joseph J. Riccardo, V.F., Very Rev. Nicholas J. Rouch, V.G., Christopher Singer, Rev. Msgr. Richard Siefer, E.V.,

**Members Excused:** Very Rev. Jeffrey J. Noble, V.F., Very Rev. B. Lamounte Sayers, V.F., Rev , Very Rev. Richard C. Tomasone, V.F.

1. The meeting was called to order at 3:03 by Msgr. Riccardo; Fr. Rouch led a prayer.
2. Review and approval of minutes of May 15 meeting
  - a. A motion to approve the minutes as read was made Msgr. Siefer and seconded by Fr. Malthaner.
3. Update on Bishop Persico's health
  - a. Fr. Singer and Fr. Rouch gave the update.
  - b. Bishop Persico is making progress in recuperating but is concerned that his illness and recovery should not hinder the daily functioning of the diocese. The Bishop has delegated most of his daily business to Fr. Rouch. Much of this power belongs to the Vicar General by virtue of his office but to make all things clear, the Bishop has requested that a decree specifying Fr. Rouch's duties and powers will be issued.
    - i. Boards of Members and advisory boards will continue to meet with Fr. Rouch representing, including the Presbyteral Council, which is a possibility foreseen by the Law.
      1. Diocesan statutes for the Presbyteral Council require the presence of the Bishop but he has derogated from that particular law so that the business of the council can continue when he is not able to be personally present.

- ii.* Fr. Rouch will grant faculties and permissions for marriages, Confirmations, etc.
    - iii.* Fr. Rouch will handle most clergy matters with appointments, etc.
  - c. The full decree will be sent to the Vicars; all the priests will receive a summary.
  - d. Fr. Rouch and Fr. Singer have been visiting the Bishop in the hospital. He is engaged with the governance of the Diocese and his spirits are improving daily. He is very positive. His surgeries have been successful and his medical team is developing a treatment plan for him. He intends to focus on his recovery and recuperation in the days ahead.
- 4. Relegation of Our Lady of Fatima church, Canadohta Lake
  - a. This request was presented to the Bishop before his illness and hospitalization and he was able to discuss the matter with the pastor, Fr. Tom Whitman.
  - b. Fr. Singer reminded the Council of what the Law requires for the relegation of a church building to profane but not sordid use as well as the Council's responsibility under the Law to advise the Bishop in such a matter; the standard for relegating a church is a high bar – a grave cause.
  - c. The Bishop has noted that the pastor's reasoning for requesting the relegation of the Church is not due to one cause but rather would arise from a series of factors; furthermore, the history of the church building in question makes it a unique situation –
  - d. The History
    - i.* The Diocese has no record of the construction of a church being authorized
    - ii.* There is record of permission for Mass in the area for tourists in the summer in the 1950s
    - iii.* The Diocese has no record of the building being liturgically dedicated.
    - iv.* The church building has been used almost exclusively during the summer season throughout its history.
  - e. The Present Situation
    - i.* Sunday Mass ceased one year ago due to lack of priests.
    - ii.* No requests have been made for Masses, weddings, funerals, or baptisms since the cessation of Sunday Masses.
  - f. Discussion

- i. Msgr. Riccardo noted that the costs of maintaining Our Lady of Fatima church appear to impede the pastor's ability to effectively minister to the parishioners of his newly enlarged parish.
- ii. Msgr. Siefer noted that the primary burden is financial but that the pastor has noted that there is no pastoral need fulfilled by the church at this time.
- iii. Fr. Malthaner asked about the possibility of parishioners pushing back against the relegation of the Church;
  - 1. Fr. Whitman has informed Fr. Singer that he does not expect any push back
  - 2. some parishioners are sad but accepting of the decrease of practicing Catholics and clergy in our region.
- iv. Fr. McElrath asked Fr. Singer to clarify the proposed cumulative grave cause for the relegation of the Church, which he was told include the following factors:
  - 1. Financial
  - 2. Lack of pastoral need
  - 3. Lack of priests to provide ministry
  - 4. Lack of requests on part of people
- v. Fr. Kujawinski expressed that in this case, it seems that these circumstances do indeed impede the ability of the parish to evangelize and meet the needs of its people.
- vi. Fr. Shane asked whether or not Fr. Singer believes that a Roman dicastery would be satisfied with the proposed cumulative grave cause
  - 1. Fr. Singer believes the case could go either way if challenged due to the unique circumstances.
- vii. Fr. McElrath suggested that pastors requesting relegation be encouraged to make the financial situation of the parish clearer when they intend to use it in requesting relegation, for example, not speculating that "adding cemetery costs would deplete resources more quickly," but giving a fuller picture of how maintenance of the unused church building goes along with all aspects of parish life to deplete financial resources.

*viii.* Fr. Kleckner believes that the complete lack of use or requests of the use for the building in the last year is evidence that the people are content with its disuse.

*ix.* Msgr. Riccardo requested that anyone with further questions or input present it to the Council; hearing none, he asked if there was a motion to make a recommendation to Bishop Persico.

g. Motion

*i.* Msgr. Siefer made a motion to recommend to Bishop Persico that he accept the pastor's recommendation to relegate Our Lady of Fatima church, Canadohta Lake, to profane but not sordid use. The motion was seconded by Fr. Foradori seconded. The motion carried with 13 in favor, none opposed, and Fr. Rouch abstaining due to his current role in administering the diocese.

5. Update on Election of Deans

- a. There are some delays due to the postal service.
- b. The process of election is continuing.

6. Other business

a. Vicar for Eastern Vicariate

*i.* Bishop Persico has asked Msgr. Siefer to continue in his role as Episcopal Vicar of the Eastern Vicariate.

b. Faith Formation Office

*i.* Fr. Kujawinski recommended to Bishop Persico and Fr. Rouch that the functioning and structure of the Office of Faith Formation be re-evaluated based on the fact that:

- 1. 3 of the 5 full-time members of the department have resigned recently
- 2. The remaining 2 full-time members are intending to retire in the next year.

*ii.* Fr. Rouch noted that this current situation was not planned but involves a number of factors that have occurred together and that there has already been discussion of reevaluating the structure of the Faith Formation Office.

c. Dates for Priests' continuing formation events:

- i.* Priest Retreat – September 16-20, 2024, at Villa Maria Center
- ii.* Fall Priests' Day of Recollection – October 9, 2024, at Cross Creek Resort

7. Future Meeting(s): A new Presbyteral Council will be appointed by the Bishop after the election of new Deans this summer or early Fall. Until that time, the current Council remains in place and will be assembled for any necessary meeting(s).

**8. Adjournment**

- a. A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 3:44pm by Fr. Kujawinski and seconded by Fr. Singer. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Fr. Ian McElrath