



PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING

Catholic Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania

Wednesday, May 7, 2025

St. Mark Catholic Center

10:30am

Members in Attendance in Person:

Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, Very Rev. Andrew M. Boyd, V.F., Rev. Benjamin Dagher, Very Rev. John J. Detisch, V.F., Very Rev. Michael P. Ferrick, V.F., Very Rev. V. David Foradori, E.V., Very Rev. Scott W. Jabo, V.F., Rev. Brandon M. Kleckner, Rev. Matthew J. Kujawinski, Rev. Ian McElrath, Very Rev. Justin P. Pino, V.F., Very Rev. Michael P. Polinek, V.F., Rev. James P. Power, Very Rev. Nicholas J. Rouch, V.G., Rev. Msgr. Richard Siefer, E.V., Very Rev. Richard C. Tomasone, V.F.

Members Excused: Rev. Christopher Singer

1. The meeting was called to order at 10:32 and began with Mid-morning prayer led by Fr. Power.
2. Review and approval of minutes of February 26, 2025 meeting.
 - a. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Fr. Power and seconded by Msgr. Siefer. The motion carried.
3. Amended Statutes of Presbyteral Council, 2/26/25 – see 3.3.1 – *Fr. Rouch*
 - a. Fr. Rouch distributed hard copies of the updated statutes of the Presbyteral Council to reflect the amendment approved by the Council and the Bishop at the last meeting.
4. Diocesan updates – *Fr. Rouch*
 - a. Diocesan Mailing Address
 - i. P.O. Box is being eliminated
 - ii. Parishes and institutions must take care to update their records.
 - b. Ministry Platform
 - i. At the previous meeting, questions/concerns were raised about Ministry Platform.
 - ii. Those will be addressed at the next meeting when both Fr. Singer and Deacon Hannah are available.
5. Catholic Campaign for Human Development and diocesan needs – *Bishop Persico*
 - a. Catholic Charities has lost federal funding for refugee services.
 - b. Father Rouch provided the Council with some background on how the CCHD collection is currently used

- i. 50% of proceeds stays in the Diocese for SSJ Neighborhood Network, Maria House Projects, Catholic Rural Ministry, etc.
 - ii. 50% of proceeds go to USCCB for national needs
 - c. The Bishop sought the Council's opinion on changing the percentage to 75% for local needs and 25% for national needs
 - d. Discussion followed about the troubled reputation of the CCHD
 - e. A motion was proposed by Msgr. Siefer and seconded by Fr. Detisch to
 - i. Use 75% of income for local needs and 25% for national needs in 2025 and
 - ii. Replace the CCHD in 2026 with a new Local Needs Collection in the Diocese of Erie.
- 6. Update regarding International Priests– *Fr. McElrath*
 - a. The diocese is currently working to vet three priests from Nigeria.
 - b. The psychological profile by Gatto Associates has proven to be a very useful tool.
 - c. If everything goes according to plan, two of the priests could be in Erie by September and ready for assignments by November.
- 7. Update from St. Mark Seminary & Vocation Office – *Fr. Jabo*
 - a. Seminary Updates
 - i. Two priests will be ordained on May 23.
 - ii. One man will be moving on from St. Mark Seminary to begin Theology at St. Vincent Seminary in the Fall.
 - iii. St. Mark Seminary anticipates receiving 4 new men in the Fall – 2 from Erie, 2 from Buffalo, bringing the total house size to 9 men from Erie, Buffalo, Kalamazoo, and Greensburg.
 - iv. So far, we have accepted 1 candidate to the Propaedeutic Year in Baltimore and anticipate 1 more candidate being accepted soon.
 - b. Vocations Initiatives
 - i. Quo Vadis Days discernment retreat will be held at St. Mark Seminary in June for high school students.
 - 1. Fr. Jabo will be contacting pastors and encouraging them to invite young men to attend.
 - ii. The Diocese will be beginning to participate in the *Called By Name* program for pastors to submit information for young men who will receive periodic updates and reminders about discerning their vocations.
- 8. Diocesan Eucharistic Revival and Congress and Diocese' 175th anniversary proposal – *Mrs. Jillian Zaczyk*
 - a. Background
 - i. Jillian and Fr. Rich Toohey have been meeting since the National Eucharistic Congress in 2024 to consider movements in the Diocese.

- ii. The 100+ people who attended the National Eucharistic Congress have continued to keep in touch with one another and are eager to share the fruits of the Congress with others.
 - iii. The effort would also coincide with the Diocese's 175th anniversary in July 2028.
 - b. The Proposal
 - i. The effort would focus on creating a movement rather than a one-time event and would allow a Christo-centric focus of the 175th anniversary of the Diocese.
 - ii. Elements of the proposal include:
 - 1. A monstrance traveling through the Diocese
 - 2. A Congress to be held at Gannon
 - c. Positive Feedback on the Proposal
 - i. Fr. Rouch pointed out some positive elements, including:
 - 1. Continuation of the national Eucharistic Revival
 - 2. Preparing a large event for the next Bishop of Erie to be involved in
 - ii. Bishop Persico further pointed out that this
 - 1. Gives the pilgrims who went to Indianapolis an opportunity to continue participating
 - 2. Focuses on the centrality of the Eucharist for the Diocese's 175th anniversary
 - d. Discussion
 - i. Fr. Kleckner pointed out that if we were going to have a Congress in Erie, it could not be business as usual in the parish.
 - 1. Limited Masses in parishes that weekend
 - 2. Focus of entire weekend needs to be singular effort
 - ii. Fr. Kujawinski pointed out that an effort like this requires buy-in from the pastors.
 - iii. The Council proposed that Vicariate meetings be held at which Jilian could present the idea to the priests.
 - iv. Fr. Kleckner suggested that there needs to be an explicit component for renewal for the priests.
 - v. Msgr. Siefer emphasized the importance of the centrality of the Mass.
 - vi. Fr. Pino suggested incorporating elements of the history of the celebration of Mass in towns, etc., along with the 175th anniversary.
 - e. The Council is in favor of continuing to explore the idea.
9. Parish Care and Concern– *Mrs. Erin Tubbs, Ms. Liz Slaby, Mrs. Diane Gallagher*
- a. Erin Tubbs reviewed the ways that Catholic Charities supports parishes
 - i. Pastoral Response Team for emotionally charged, significant situations, not limited to crisis-level situations (e.g., parish restructuring)
 - ii. Social Service Referrals
 - iii. Social Justice Education & Advocacy

- iv. Walking with Moms in Need
- v. Parish Care & Concerns
- b. Diane presented on the *Parish Care & Concern* program.
 - i. This program originated in the 1990s and included guidelines and a program manual.
 - ii. Several parishes adopted the model in the 1990s and some parishes still have Parish Care & Concern ministries.
 - iii. The Catholic Charities office has spent 18 months updating the manual to revamp the program.
 - iv. Program has the advantage of coordinating all social ministries in parishes under unified leadership.
- c. Diane Gallagher presented the 4 steps of the program
 - i. Parish-wide Needs Assessment
 - 1. Determine what the parish can realistically meet
 - ii. Prepare Volunteers
 - 1. Catholic Charities provides training.
 - iii. Gathering Requests for Help
 - iv. Provide Service
- d. Liz Slaby spoke briefly about the *Walking with Moms in Need* program
 - i. Nation-wide parish-based initiative to support pregnant and parenting mothers
 - ii. Could be part of Parish Care & Concern or stand-alone
 - iii. Goal: support women in unplanned pregnancy or difficult parenting situation at the parish level
 - iv. Opportunity to involve entire parish in pro-life work
 - v. Many resources are available from the national program but every parish's program would look different.

10. Diocesan budget – *Fr. Rouch*

- a. CSA 2025
 - i. As an aggregate, parishes have pledged 105% of the goal.
 - ii. A brief discussion followed about the circumstances of several parishes that are struggling to meet their goals.
- b. Director for Mission Advancement
 - i. The Diocese is slowly exploring possibilities for the creation of an advancement position.
 - ii. Efforts are being made to ensure that there will be no competition between the Diocese, the Catholic Foundation, and the parishes.

11. Diocesan financial matters – *Mr. Jim Hubert* (1:00pm)

- a. Property, Liability and Workers' Compensation insurance
 - i. Reminders of Basic Concepts
 - 1. Self-insurance: Diocese itself pays deductible up to \$350,000 per incident
 - 2. Parishes pay small amount of claim; diocese pays the rest.
 - 3. Above \$350,000, third-party insurer carries cost.

4. Replacement Cost = replacing as-is with same materials
5. Functional Replacement Cost = replacing with modern materials for same function
- ii. New valuation of properties was done last year, valuing properties at more than \$1 billion.
- iii. Self-insurance costs have increased by 56.8% since 2021.
- iv. Cost-saving measures implemented
 1. 151 properties moved from Replacement to Functional Replacement, saving over \$100,000.
 2. 22 churches insurance reduced to rebuild at 70% capacity
 3. 20 churches insurance reduced to rebuilt at 50% capacity
- b. Property Insurance Claims May 2024-April 2025
 - i. Almost \$1 million in insurance claims in this period
 - ii. Diocese has paid \$529,213 from its reserves to cover claims.
- c. Proposal for Update to Deductible and Claim Approval Process
 - i. Property Insurance Deductible Update
 1. Parish pays \$5,000 of first \$100,000
 2. Parish pays 25% of cost between \$100,001 and \$200,000
 3. Parish pays 50% of cost between \$201,000 and 350,000
 - ii. Liability Deductible
 1. There has never been a deductible for liability insurance.
 2. New model would follow same scheme as property deductibles.
 - iii. Claims Approval Process
 1. Diocese will need to approve property claims over \$50,000.
- d. Health Insurance
 - i. Insurance costs have been fixed for the last 18 months.
 - ii. January 1, 2026, parishes should budget at least 5% increase in medical; we will have more information in the Fall.
- e. Miscellaneous
 - i. Pat Barron has calculated updated parish assessments.
 1. Priest retirement fund assessment will go up.
 2. Diocesan Fund will remain the same.
 - ii. Erie Catholic School System will not change assessments for 2025-2026
 - iii. Other regional schools may or may not see assessment changes

12. Proposed parish planning initiative for St. Marys Deanery – *Fr. Rouch & Msgr. Siefer*

- a. Fr. Rouch reminded the Council that following the last round of Erie County pastoral planning, the decision was made to keep planning on a local level.
- b. The pastors of the St. Marys Deanery (minus Kane) have been discussing some options for restructuring.
- c. Msgr. Siefer presented the proposed process.
 - i. The Bishop will inform the pastors of the upcoming process.

- ii. Then, Msgr. Siefer and Deacon Marty Eisert will begin interviews with the pastors only to be completed by July.
- iii. A report will be compiled by Msgr. Siefer and Deacon Eisert to be reviewed by the pastors.
- iv. An updated report will be given to the Bishop.
- v. A report would be made to the local parishioners.
- vi. Final plan in November.
- vii. Changes (if any) would take effect in January 2026.

13. Update from the Office for Divine Worship – *Fr. Kujawinski*

- a. Corpus Christi Processions on Sunday, June 22
 - i. Fr. Kujawinski will reach out to deans about coordinating processions.

14. Updates – *Fr. Rouch*

- a. Clergy Office
 - i. Revision process for Priest Personnel Policy
 - 1. Fr. Rouch reminded the Council that a small committee of Fr. Jabo, Fr. Pino, Fr. Singer, Fr. Boyd, Msgr. Siefer, and Fr. Rouch have been meeting to discuss revision of the policy.
 - 2. The goal is to align the policy with the current practice.
 - 3. The process is moving along well.
 - 4. The committee is considering adding policies on
 - a. Pets
 - b. Smoking
 - c. Social Media
 - 5. The committee expects to have a draft policy for review before the September meeting.
 - ii. Email addresses for clergy
 - 1. All priests need to check their diocesan email accounts regularly.
- b. Vicar General
 - i. Annual visits to parishes/priests
 - 1. Fr. Rouch reminded the deans of the importance of the annual parish visits.
 - ii. Mileage reimbursement for dean visits
 - 1. The Clergy Office will develop a form submitting mileage to the Diocese for reimbursement.
 - iii. Selling/Leasing parish property
 - 1. Reminder that pastors must seek approval of the Bishop to lease or sell property.

15. Deans' reports

- a. Dubois – Fr. Detisch
 - i. Fr. Schmolt has asked about the possibility of raising the \$25,000 maximum expenditure threshold that a parish finance council can approve without the Bishop's written consent.
 1. The Bishop would need to do some research on this
 - ii. Fr. Detisch raised a concern about priests not taking vacation/days off.
- b. Erie East & West – Fr. Jabo
 - i. Fr. Larry Richards, Fr. Mark Hoffman, and Fr. Chris Beran are researching methods for conducting a census in the parish territory.
 - ii. The deaneries are in the process of evaluating Mass schedules.

16. Other business

- a. Priest Social Gatherings – Fr. Kujawinski
 - i. A small group is still looking at events in the summer but Lent and Easter have delayed the planning.

17. Future meetings:

Thursday, September 18, 2025 – Beloved Disciple, Grove City

18. Upcoming Dates

Dates for Priests' continuing formation events:

- Emmaus – June 23-26, 2025
Presenter: Fr. Greg Friedman, OFM
- Priest Retreat – September 8-12, 2025, at Villa Maria Education and Spirituality Center
Director: Bishop Ronald Gainer (Bishop Emeritus of Harrisburg)
- Fall Priests' Day of Recollection – October 8, 2025
Presenter: Fr. John Beal
Location: Good Shepherd Parish, West Middlesex

19. Adjournment

- a. A motion was made by to adjourn the meeting at 2:25 by Fr. Jabo. The motion was seconded by Fr. Foradori.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rev. Ian McElrath