



## **PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING**

Catholic Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

St. Mark Catholic Center

10:30 A.M.

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

Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, Very Rev. Andrew M. Boyd, V.F., Very Rev. Michael P. Ferrick, V.F., Very Rev. V. David Foradori, E.V., 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, Very Rev. Jeffery J. Noble, V.F., Rev. Msgr. Joseph J. Riccardo, V.F., Very Rev. Nicholas J. Rouch, V.G., Rev. Christopher Singer, Rev. Msgr. Richard Siefer, E.V., Very Rev. Richard C. Tomasone, V.F.

**Members Excused:** Very Rev. Chris Hamlett, V.F., Very Rev. B. LaMounte Sayers, V.F.

### **1. Opening Prayer**

- a. The meeting was called to order at 10:31 and began with Mid-morning Prayer led by Bishop Persico.

### **2. Review and approval of minutes**

- a. A motion was made by Msgr. Siefer to approve the minutes as read and seconded by Fr. Foradori. The motion carried unanimously.

### **3. Pastoral planning**

- a. Final plan for Erie County
  - i. Fr. Rouch & Fr. Singer led the presentation.
  - ii. Fr. Singer reviewed the canonical processes with the Council.
  - iii. Fr. Rouch reviewed the planning timeline and presented the proposed plan to the Council.
  - iv. Fr. Rouch asked the Council about the advisability of the Bishop preparing a proposed Mass schedule for Erie County.
    1. The Council recommended that the Bishop present a weekend Mass schedule to the pastors who then provide feedback to be used for the formulation of a final plan.
  - v. Robust discussion followed on the proposed final plan for Erie County.
  - vi. **Votes**

Bishop Persico asked the Council for discussion and its recommendation on the following actions. Discussion followed on all the proposals, after which the Council made the following recommendations:

## **1. Stand Alone Parishes**

- a. That Our Lady of Peace parish, Erie, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- b. That Blessed Sacrament parish, Erie, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- c. That St. George parish, Erie, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- d. That Our Lady of Mercy parish, Harborcreek, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- e. That St. Lawrence the Martyr parish, Albion, with its secondary mission church of St. Philip, Crossingville, remaining as-is. Recommended unanimously.
- f. That St. John the Evangelist parish, Girard, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- g. That Holy Cross parish, Fairview, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- h. That St. Julia parish, Erie, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- i. That St. Gregory Thaumaturgus parish, North East, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- j. That St. Peter Cathedral parish, Erie, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- k. That St. Patrick parish, Erie, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- l. That St. Boniface parish, Erie, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- m. That All Saints parish, Waterford, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.
- n. That St. Francis Xavier parish, McKean, remain a standalone parish. Recommended unanimously.

## **2. Mergers & Partnerships**

- a. That St. Andrew parish, Erie, be merged into St. Jude the Apostle parish, Erie, with St. Jude church as the parish church and St. Andrew church as a secondary church without mission status, and that St. Stephen of Hungary parish, Erie, be partnered with the newly enlarged St. Jude the Apostle parish. Recommended unanimously.
- b. That St. Paul parish, Erie, be merged into Sacred Heart parish, Erie, with Sacred Heart church as the parish church and St. Paul church as a secondary church with mission status, and that the newly enlarged Sacred Heart parish be partnered with

St. Joseph/Bread of Life parish, Erie. Recommended unanimously.

- c. That Holy Rosary parish, Erie, be merged into St. John the Baptist parish, Erie, with St. John the Baptist church as the parish church and Holy Rosary church as a secondary church with mission status, and that Holy Trinity parish, Erie, be partnered with the newly enlarged St. John the Baptist parish. Recommended unanimously.
- d. That Mount Calvary parish, Erie, and St. Mark the Evangelist parish, Lawrence Park, both be merged into St. James parish, Erie, with St. James church as the parish church, St. Mark the Evangelist church as a secondary church with mission status, and Mount Calvary Church as a secondary church without mission status. Recommended unanimously.
- e. That St. Luke parish, Erie, be partnered with Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish, Erie. Recommended unanimously.
- f. That St. Stanislaus parish, Erie, with its secondary mission church of St. Hedwig, Erie, be partnered with Our Mother of Sorrows parish, Erie, with its parish church of St. Casimir, and secondary churches of St. Ann and Holy Family. Recommended unanimously.
- g. That St. Anthony parish, Cambridge Springs, with its secondary mission church of St. Bernadette, Saegertown, be merged into Our Lady of the Lake parish, Edinboro, with Our Lady of the Lake church as the parish church, St. Anthony church as a secondary church with mission status, and St. Bernadette church as a secondary church without mission status. Recommended unanimously.
- h. That St. Teresa of Avila parish, Union City, with its secondary church of Our Lady of Fatima, Canadohta Lake, be merged into St. Thomas the Apostle parish, Corry, with St. Thomas the Apostle church as the parish church, St. Teresa of Avila church as a secondary church with mission status, and with Our Lady of Fatima church as a secondary church without mission status. Recommended unanimously.

b. Implementation Guides

- i. Fr. Singer made the presentation.
- ii. The guides for partnered parishes, merging parishes, and preparation for restructuring have been thoroughly updated after broad consultation.

- iii. The deans are asked to remind the pastors that these guides are particular law and their provisions are to be adhered to.
  - c. Requests for relegation of churches
    - i. St. Stephen, Oil City
      - 1. Bishop Persico received a letter from Fr. John Miller, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Oil City, requesting the relegation of St. Stephen church building in Oil City. Fr. Singer reviewed the pastor's letter presenting the history of restructuring in Oil City leading up to the proposed action, various reports on the condition of the building, and proposed figures for repair of the church building.
      - 2. Discussion followed on the material presented by the pastor, including the concerns raised by the City of Oil City about the physical plant of St. Stephen church, the finances of St. Joseph parish, the pastoral circumstances in Oil City, and the proposed grave cause to relegate the church.
      - 3. A motion to recommend to Bishop Persico the relegation of St. Stephen church, Oil City, to profane but not sordid use was made by Msgr. Siefer and seconded by Fr. McElrath. The motion carried with 14 ayes, 0 nays, and 1 abstention.
    - ii. St. Brigid, Meadville
      - 1. Bishop Persico received a petition from Fr. Jeff Lucas, pastor of Epiphany of the Lord Parish, Meadville, requesting the relegation of St. Brigid church building. Discussion followed on the proposed cumulative grave cause for the relegation of St. Brigid church, and the Council's obligation to advise the Bishop on this matter.
      - 2. The Council considered the need for additional detail on the financial standing of The Epiphany of the Lord parish (what is the total of the unrestricted assets? for what purposes are the other funds designated?), the need for a better understanding of the condition of St. Brigid church, the need for more detail on the parish's ability or inability to meet the costs of on-going maintenance of the church, and the impact that the maintenance of St. Brigid church may be having on parish's ability to provide adequate pastoral care to its parishioners.
      - 3. A motion to table the discussion regarding the relegation request for St. Brigid church pending further information from the pastor was made by Fr. Kujawinski and second by Fr. Rouch. The motion carried unanimously.
- 4. Election of Deans for new Presbyteral Council in 2024**
  - a. Fr. Rouch made the presentation.
  - b. The new configuration of deaneries will come into effect around August.
  - c. The current deans and Presbyteral Council will remain until new deans are elected after the reconfiguration.

**5. Proposed priests salary adjustment for 2024-2025**

- a. Pat Barron made the presentation.
- b. The salary will continue to be based on a base rate for newly ordained priests which increases by \$10 per month per year of ordained ministry.
- c. The base rate will increase by 3% from 2023-2024 as in previous years.

**6. Catholic Services Appeal 2024**

- a. Calculation of parish goals
  - i. Pat Barron made the presentation.
  - ii. The process of calculating a parish's taxable (assessable) income was explained.
  - iii. The process of allocating a parish's assessment based on the total taxable (assessable) income for the diocese was explained.
  - iv. A discussion followed about the benefit of using the language of "parish assessment" (vs. "goal") for CSA as a transparency measure.
- b. Discussion of revised appeal and materials
  - i. Fr. Rouch led the discussion on the new materials from OSV.
  - ii. Msgr. Siefer commented that the new method took a burden off the parish staff.
  - iii. Fr. Kujawinski observed that the video was very well done and that there may have been an issue with his parish's envelopes.
  - iv. Other pastors reported no issues with their envelopes.
- c. "Impact statements" for CSA and Diocesan Fund
  - i. Fr. Rouch informed the Council that the Diocese is working on articulating more clearly what the CSA and Diocesan Fund actually pay for.
  - ii. This material should be useful for pastors and parishioners.

**7. Review of parish indebtedness (from assessments)**

- a. Pat Barron made the presentation.
- b. The Diocese is owed \$2,499,967 in overdue parish assessments. Approximately 98% of the debt is owed by 9 parishes, and approximately 80% of this debt is from just 3 parishes.
- c. The Finance Office is working with the parishes on re-payment plans.

**8. Diocesan line of credit**

- a. Bishop Persico made the presentation.
- b. Several years ago, the Diocese took out lines of credit to cover costs associated with the Independent Survivors' Reparation Fund and other costs related to clerical sexual abuse.
- c. Interest at time of maturity was expected to be \$1.2 million/year.
- d. The Diocese paid off the entire debt of just over \$21 million this week out of its reserve assets.
- e. Consequently, fewer assets are available for discretionary spending, including supporting ministries.
- f. The Diocese is preparing resources to make information on this available.

**9. Update on Ministry Platform**

- a. Deacon Frank Hannah gave the update.

- b. Ministry Platform is essentially a single, large, diocesan-wide database with parishes able to send and receive data.
- c. Implementation of the new system has not gone smoothly.
  - i. "We didn't know what we didn't know."
  - ii. Insufficient thought had been given to how human reaction would change with the technology (PDS vs. Ministry Platform) before beginning the transition.
  - iii. Training provided by the vendor was sub-par.
- d. Nevertheless, parish staff seems to be adjusting to the software.
- e. Questions coming in from parishes are much more detailed and much more specific.
- f. New training from the vendor is of high quality.
- g. Pastors should contact Kathy Papalia or Deacon Frank to help access these new training resources.
- h. St. Luke is piloting the Capital Campaign component.
- i. St. Mark (Erie) is piloting the Ministries coordination component.
- j. St. Jude is piloting parishioner self-input of data.
- k. We are currently utilizing less than 10% of the capabilities of the system.
- l. Questions
  - i. Fr. Noble had a series of questions; Deacon Frank will contact Father's parish to provide assistance.
  - ii. Fr. Kujawinski and Msgr. Siefer expressed concern that the majority of users are frustrated and have simply given up.

#### **10. Office for Spiritual Healing**

- a. Fr. Singer made the presentation.
- b. Bishop Persico established 9 years ago an Office for Spiritual Healing to care for persons claiming to experience extraordinary demonic activity.
- c. The Diocese would like to start doing very basic trainings for the priests and deacons later this year, including an explication of the theology of demonology, first lines of defense that pastors can provide for their parishioners without a need for diocesan resources, and how to notice what is beyond the pastor's capability.
- d. Fr. Singer sought input from the Council on what format the training might follow, and whether or not priests only or deacons also should be involved.
  - i. A recommendation was made that presentations could be made at Emmaus.

#### **11. Review of draft *Policy for Pet Ownership by Priests***

- a. Fr. McElrath made the presentation.
- b. A committee consisting of Fr. McElrath, Fr. Kujawinski, Fr. Boyd, and Fr. Mark Hoffman formulated a policy on the ownership of pets by priests.
- c. The committee intended the document to balance the mental health benefits of pet ownership by priests with obligations priests have to their parishes and to the Church as a whole.
- d. The Council offered the following feedback for the Committee:
  - i. Should there be a policy distinction between priests responsible for rectory damage due to a pet vs. smoking?

- ii. A lawyer should be consulted for provisions relating to ADA.
- iii. Is the dean the best enforcement mechanism?
- iv. In section III.A the provisions related to ordinary and extraordinary cleaning should be clarified.
- e. Fr. McElrath will review the feedback with Fr. Rouch, and the committee will update the policy for review by the Council in May.

## **12. Discussion on pastoral experiences regarding gender identity issues**

- a. Fr. Rouch led the discussion.
- b. Fr. Noble suggested that it would be helpful to see the CSO guidance on these issues.
- c. Fr. Rouch recommended calling the Chancery if there are concerns, especially regarding Sacraments.

## **13. Updates from the Clergy Office**

- a. Fr. Rouch gave the updates.
  - i. 44 ministry questionnaires have been received so far; the deadline is tomorrow.
  - ii. The Clergy personnel policy is currently being revised.
  - iii. The next Continuing Formation event is the Lenten Day of Recollection next week; 49 priests will be attending.

## **14. Update from the Office for Divine Worship**

- a. Fr. Kujawinski gave the update.
- b. The Office would like to coordinate the Eucharistic processions throughout the Diocese again this year.
- c. Fr. Kujawinski will contact the pastors who hosted the processions last year.

## **15. Deans' reports**

- a. None.

## **16. Other Business**

- a. Fr. Singer is working to coordinate the Mission Co-op appeal in light of parish restructuring; pastors should contact the Mission Office if they are aware of any scheduling conflicts.

## **17. Meetings dates for 2024**

- a. May 15, 2024 (Wednesday) – Holy Spirit Parish, DuBois,  
St. Catherine Church

## **18. Adjournment**

- a. A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 3:32 by Msgr. Siefer and seconded by Fr. Foradori.

Respectfully submitted,  
Fr. Ian McElrath