



PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING

Catholic Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

Ss. Cosmas & Damien Parish, Punxsutawney

10:30 A.M.

Members in Attendance:

Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, 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. Matthew J. Kujawinski, Rev. Msgr. Edward M. Lohse, V.G., Very Rev. John P. Malthaner, V.F., Rev. T. Shane Mathew, Rev. Ian McElrath, Very Rev. Jeffrey J. Noble, V.F., Rev. Msgr. Joseph J. Riccardo, V.F., Very Rev. Nicholas J. Rouch, E.V., Very Rev. B. Lamounte Sayers, V.F., Rev. Msgr. Richard Siefer, E.V., Very Rev. Richard C. Tomasone, V.F., Very Rev. Thomas J. Whitman, V.F.

Members Excused: Rev. Brandon M. Kleckner, Rev. Christopher Singer

1. Opening Prayer

- a. The meeting was called to order at 10:36 and began with Mid-Morning Prayer.

2. Review and Approval of Minutes

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

3. Update on CSA and the review by Our Sunday Visitor

- a. Msgr. Lohse led the discussion.
- b. Following extensive consultation with the presbyteral council, members of the chancery staff, and pastors throughout the diocese, OSV has made a number of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of CSA.
- c. The recommendations include (but are not limited to) the following:
 - i. Retaining the parish project
 - ii. Moneys still to be collected directly by the parish
 - iii. CSA advertised clearly as a collection by both the diocese and the parish
 - iv. Bi-annual contact to households from bishop to increase rapport with people (not asking for money)
 - v. Many of the logistics will be handled centrally
 1. Advertisements, etc., drafted by OSV and distributed

- 2. pastors may still write their own letters but they will be produced and mailed centrally
- d. The diocese has decided to hire OSV to implement CSA for 2024
- e. The diocese will also to begin exploring the possibility of hiring a stewardship director/consultant either directly or through the Catholic Foundation.
- f. OSV will host a workshop for the priests on best practices.
- g. Discussion followed regarding the need to communicate more effectively the use of CSA funds to parishioners as well as to agencies within the Diocese that are subsidized by the Appeal.

4. Update on group health and property insurance

- a. Msgr. Lohse led the discussion on behalf of the Finance Office.
- b. Jim Hubert reports that property insurance premiums will increase 3.5% this year but will likely increase significantly next year.
- c. In the Fall, the Diocese will begin a review of the physical plants in the Diocese to ensure that properties are not over- or under-insured.
- d. Discussion followed on the significance of turnover in the Finance Office as an opportunity for fresh eyes to survey the situation but also as a time of learning curves for new employees.

5. Pastoral Planning

- a. Bishop Persico led the discussion.
 - i. The Bishop noted that Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest are not a pastoral need in any part of the Diocese.
- b. Feedback from the proposed preliminary plan for the Bradford deanery
 - i. In general, the feedback raised concerns about the ability of a smaller number of priests to minister effectively in the region while also staying healthy.
 - ii. At least one person suggested consolidating Warren County into one parish, possibly with one church.
 - iii. Feedback from St. Elizabeth, Smethport
 - 1. Suggest partnering with St. Gabriel, Port Allegany
 - 2. Suggest sending a younger priest to keep up with the increased workload
 - iv. St. Eulalia, Coudersport
 - 1. The pastor supports the plan as proposed.
 - 2. Other suggestions included bringing in foreign priests and live-streaming Mass to remote locations.
 - v. St. Gabriel, Port Allegany
 - 1. Some feedback expressed a desire to remain as a parish
 - 2. Some feedback expressed a preference to be partnered with Smethport, rather than partnered/merged with Coudersport

3. Suggestions included seeking priests from outside the Diocese from religious orders.
- vi. St. Bibiana, Galeton
 1. People who attend Sacred Heart happy with proposal.
 2. People who attend St. Bibiana have proposed allowing more time for the parish to improve its financial situation before considering merger and loss of Sunday Mass in Galeton.
 3. People who attend St. Augustine suggested remaining open seasonally for campers and/or finding international or religious priests
- c. Feedback from the proposed preliminary plan for the Clearfield deanery
 - i. St. Basil, Coalport
 1. Satisfied with present proposal
 2. Some parishioners noted that that parishes in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown are closer to their homes than other parishes in the Diocese of Erie
 3. Those who attend Mass in Ramey are satisfied with the lack of changes.
 - ii. Christ the King, Houtzdale
 1. No notable feedback reported to the Council.
 - iii. St. Timothy, Curwensville
 1. Grateful St. Timothy's status is currently not changing but recognize a merger with St. Francis seems inevitable; some parishioners have suggested simply merging with Clearfield now; "rip the band-aid off."
 - iv. St. Bonaventure, Grampian
 1. No notable feedback presented to the Council.
 - v. Immaculate Conception, Osceola Mills
 1. Concerns that pastor is overworked
 2. All 6 responses suggested partnering Osceola Mills with Houtzdale but this suggestion may not reflect awareness of the proposed changes to the Morrisdale and Frenchville parishes.
 - vi. St. Mary of the Assumption, Frenchville
 1. Civil leaders are concerned about loss of picnic
 2. Suggest becoming a secondary mission church of Clearfield due to shared school, shopping, convenience of drive
 - vii. St. Agnes, Morrisdale
 1. Suggest retaining Mass in Frenchville
 - viii. St. Severin, Drifting
 1. Suggest partnering Osceola Mills with Houtzdale and keep Mass at Frenchville
 - ix. Ss. Peter & Paul, Hawk Run

1. Pastor overworked; suggest closing and combining other churches
2. Parishioners not happy with interim loss of Sunday Mass while Fr. Baron has been overseeing Frenchville parish.
3. Many parishioners are going to Phillipsburg (Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown) for Sunday Mass instead of one of the other churches in the partnered parishes.
- x. Ss. Peter & Paul, Grassflat
 1. Parishioners feel their difficulties could be resolved with a new pastoral vision.
- d. Feedback from the proposed preliminary plan for the Oil City deanery
 - i. St. Joseph, Oil City
 1. Pastoral Council recognizes the need for further change in the region
 - ii. St. Eusebius, East Brady
 1. Happy with no changes
 - iii. Immaculate Conception, Clarion
 1. Concerned about taking on St. Michael's financial obligations and cemetery
 2. Looking for ways to make former parishioners from Emlenton feel welcome
 3. Expressed concern that no changes are being made in Erie at the present time
 - iv. St. Michael, Emlenton
 1. Suggest looking for priests from outside the Diocese to cover the parish
 2. Suggest retaining 1 weekend Mass, even by merging with Franklin instead of Clarion, if necessary
 - v. St. Michael, Fryburg
 1. The pastor is opposed to the preliminary plan.
 2. People are happy with their current pastor but are afraid he will become overworked under the proposed changes.
 - vi. St. Joseph, Lucinda
 1. Same as Fryburg
 - vii. St. Mary, Crown
 1. Suggest chancery priests need to take parishes
 - viii. St. Ann, Marienville
 1. Opposed to change; will have to travel furthest of anyone else impacted
 2. Too much work for 1 priest
- e. Feedback from Dubois Deanery
 - i. Assumption, Sykesville

- 1. Not enough parking at St. Catherine's
 - 2. Need to keep 1 Mass in Sykesville
 - ii. St. Mary, Reynoldsville
 - 1. Want to remain as partner parish
- f. Processing Feedback
 - i. Planning committee will meet on May 30, to review any further feedback, and make proposals.
 - ii. Changes in the deaneries will probably take longer than originally proposed.
 - iii. It would be ideal to announce Erie's preliminary plan at the same time as the final plan in the other deaneries.
- g. Update on the proposed restructuring of the parishes in Erie County
 - i. Erie planning sub-committee will meet on May 15 to continue developing a preliminary plan
 - ii. Msgr. Lohse noted that the parishioners in Erie who attended the meeting at St. Mark's on March 30 seemed shocked by the data presented and by how many changes were made in the rest of the diocese over the last few years.

6. Proposed Relegation of Our Mother of Perpetual Help church, Lewis Run

- a. Msgr. Lohse presented the request from Fr. John Jacquel, pastor of St. Bernard parish, Bradford.
- b. The dean and regional episcopal vicar support the pastor's proposal.
- c. A discussion was had concerning the lengthy pastoral process that has been in place to prepare the people for the recent merger of the two parishes in Bradford and the relegation of this church.
- d. The Council discussed at length the proposed cumulative grave cause for the relegation of the Church, including financial and pastoral concerns.
- e. In many ways, the people are already behaving as if the church had been relegated (e.g., preparing a final Mass).
- f. Fr. Rouch noted that there is no evidence that the people are seeking the church out as a place of devotion since regular Sunday Masses ceased.
- g. Fr. Mathew observed that Fr. Gramata and Fr. Jacquel should be commended for the way in which they have pastorally handled the changes in Bradford over a number of years.
- h. The Bishop solicited further questions or concerns from the council
- i. No further questions or concerns were raised.
- j. Fr. Whitman made a motion to recommend to the Bishop that Our Mother of Perpetual Help parish in Lewis Run be relegated to profane but not sordid use. The motion was seconded by Msgr. Siefer. The motion was approved unanimously.

7. May 22 events at St. Mark Catholic Center

- a. Msgr. Lohse made the presentation.
- b. 1:30pm presentation on impact of federal civil rights legislation on parishes, schools, etc. given by the FBI Office in Pittsburgh
 - i. Topics include: when people prevent access to churches for worship (e.g., protesters)
- c. 7:00pm Mass with the relics of Bl. Carlo Acutis and St. Manuel Gonzales Garcia.
 - i. Not a public Mass.
 - ii. For St. Mark's staff, their families, and all clergy.

8. COVID-19 protocols and distribution of the Precious Blood

- a. Fr. Kujawinski led the discussion.
- b. The council discussed the end of the COVID-19 emergency declarations.
- c. The bishop would prefer to leave the distribution of the Precious Blood up to the discretion of the pastors.
- d. The Bishop noted that this would be an option, not a command.
- e. A discussion was had about making both intinction and directly drinking from the Chalice as options at concelebrated Masses.
- f. There is a need for catechesis about reception of the Precious Blood and the methods by which it may be consumed before resuming reception of the Precious Blood at Mass.
- g. It was proposed that the Office for Divine Worship prepare catechetical points for pastors in order to prepare for optionally resuming the distributing the Precious Blood on the Feast of the Transfiguration (Aug. 6).
- h. The council suggested that updated catechesis on the nature of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and their use should be discussed at a later time.

9. Update on the Eucharistic Revival

- a. Fr. Kujawinski gave the update.
- b. A letter will be coming from the Office for Divine Worship on May 11 containing suggestions for Eucharistic Revival activities in the parish.
- c. Fr. Kujawinski sought the Council's advice on proceeding to develop a diocesan-wide calendar of devotions beginning July 1.
- d. The Council and the Bishop recommended proceeding as planned.

10. Updates from the Clergy Office

- a. Fr. Rouch gave the updates.
- b. Approximately 62-64 priests completed the ministry survey.
- c. Fr. Rouch enquired about the wisdom of continuing to send this survey in January. By consensus, the Council recommended continuing this practice.
- d. Approximately 24 pastors' terms expire in July. Fr. Rouch will be reaching out to them to enquire about their willingness to remain in their current assignments, etc.

- e. There should be fewer personnel changes than last year but these will probably not all be coordinated for the beginning of July; some situations need to be addressed immediately while some others may take longer due to ongoing pastoral planning efforts.
- f. The Clergy Office is struggling to make provisions to care for the many chaplaincies (e.g., prisons, nursing homes, etc.) throughout the Diocese that are requesting priests/deacons.
 - i. Catholic institutions are being given first priority
- g. Fr. Noble recommended that the clergy assignment timeline take into account the need of educational institutions to know about changes to their priests' assignments early in the summer.

11. Dean's Reports

- a. No reports were given by the deans.

12. Other Business

- a. Msgr. Siefer requested the final number of Confirmandi for 2024 from the deans of the Eastern Vicariate ASAP
- b. Msgr. Siefer asked the bishop if the Pennsylvania Bishops have given any thought to transferring Ascension to a Sunday.
 - i. The Bishop said it has not been discussed.
- c. Fr. Kujawinski asked for an update on Pennsylvania Statute of Limitations legislation.
 - i. The Bishop informed the Council that the state legislature is still divided on legislation. No legislation is expected this year but next year is always a possibility.
- d. Fr. Kujawinski pointed out that the original proposed deadline for deanery modifications was set for next July.
 - i. The Bishop indicated that he wants to focus on pastoral planning in parishes at the present time but that the Council might re-consider the deanery issue in September or November.

13. Remaining meeting dates for 2022

- a. September 7 (Thursday) – Immaculate Conception, Clarion
- b. November 28 (Tuesday) – Saint Mark Catholic Center

14. Adjournment

- a. A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 1:55 by Siefer and seconded by Foradori . The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Fr. Ian McElrath