



## PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING

Catholic Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

St. Catherine Church, Dubois

10:30 A.M.

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

Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, Very Rev. Andrew M. Boyd, Very Rev. Michael P. Ferrick, V.F., Very Rev. Chris Hamlett, V.F., Very Rev. Robert Horgas, V.F., Rev. Brandon M. Kleckner, Rev. Matthew J. Kujawinski, 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, V.G., Very Rev. B. Lamounte Sayers, V.F., Rev. Christopher Singer, Rev. Msgr. Richard Siefer, E.V., Very Rev. Richard C. Tomasone, V.F.

**Members Excused:** Very Rev. V. David Foradori, E.V., Very Rev. John P. Malthaner, V.F.

1. The meeting was called to order at 10:32am and began with Mid-morning prayer led by Bishop Persico.
2. Review and approval of minutes of February 28, 2024 meeting
  - a. A motion to approve the minutes as read was made by Fr. Sayers and seconded by Fr. Boyd.
- a. Pastoral planning
  - a. Final plan for Erie County
    - i. Fr. Rouch gave the updates.
    - ii. St. Anthony, Cambridge Springs
      1. The announcement of the Erie plan did not include partnering St. Anthony (Crawford County) with Our Lady of the Lake (Erie County)
      2. The Bishop recently met with parish leadership to discuss the need for change with Fr. Nowak's impending retirement
      3. Parish leaders seemed to be positive about working with Our Lady of the Lake.
    - iii. Other
      1. Several pastors in Erie are struggling to begin preparations for partnerships/mergers due to conflict of leadership style, etc.
      2. Fr. Rouch and the Bishop are planning to meet with these pastors to help them begin the transition

- b. St. Andrew Parish, Erie
  - a. Bishop Persico led the discussion.
  - b. A parishioner requested that the Bishop amend his decree to make them a partner parish with St. Jude and St. Stephen.
  - c. The Bishop, together with the pastor, had a meeting with parish leaders to discuss the situation.
  - d. The Bishop is seeking the council's advice on amending the decree to allow for mission status.
    - i. A robust discussion followed on the details of the proposed partnerships including the complexities of the pastoral circumstances at St. Stephen's, St. Andrew's expressed desire to work with St. Jude, the difficulty of providing an additional Mass given the number of priests available, the resistance of some St. Andrew parishioners toward their pastor over the last 7 years, the fact that the other proposed partnerships in the area seem to be working, the workloads on the priest, the canonical circumstances of the proposed merger, etc.
    - ii. The bishop asked for a vote on the following question: Should the decree effecting the merger of St. Andrew parish into St. Jude the Apostle parish be amended to give mission status to St. Andrew church?
      - 1. Vote:
        - a. 12 against amending the decree
        - b. 1 abstention
- c. Update on St. Brigid Church, Meadville
  - a. Fr. Singer gave the update.
  - b. After the Council tabled discussion of the pastor's petition to relegate St. Brigid Church at the February 28 meeting, Fr. Singer visited the parish to gather additional information.
  - c. Fr. Singer reported the following:
    - i. While St. Brigid church is physically connected to both the rectory and education center/social hall complex, the facilities were constructed separately and could, in theory, be separated.
    - ii. The church building appears to be in better condition than the rectory and education center.
    - iii. The church steeple is expected to need repair in the future but is not an imminent concern.
    - iv. The parish has approximately \$1.9 million in reserve; most of which is either unrestricted or specifically designated for the maintenance of certain facilities, including the Barko Fund, originally established for the maintenance of St. Brigid church but currently re-designated for the maintenance of all parish facilities.
    - v. The high annual expenses reported in the pastor's petition included maintenance, wastewater management, high tax rates for rectory and social center.

- vi. It appears that the parish is able to afford the general upkeep of St. Brigid church and that there are no extraordinary repairs needed at present.
  - vii. Fr. Singer does not believe there is grave cause to relegate the church to profane use.
  - viii. A discussion followed on the situation in Meadville
    - 1. The council discussed recommending to the pastor that he should look at the possibility of renting what facilities can be rented rather than focusing on alienating the entire complex.
    - 2. The council by consensus agreed that there is no reason to reconsider the pastor's petition at this time.
- d. Other situations
- a. Fr. Rouch gave the updates.
  - b. East Brady & Rimersburg
    - i. Fr. Kuba is no longer able to care for the parish.
    - ii. Fr. Sayers – the dean – is currently the administrator.
    - iii. Fr. Sam Bungo has been offering a Sunday Mass at Rimersburg.
    - iv. The Bishop is in discussion with the Bishop of Greensburg about arranging sacramental assistance from their nearby parish.
  - c. Our Lady of Fatima, Farrell, and St. Anthony, Sharon
    - i. A new pastor will not be appointed
    - ii. The current pastors in the area will be taking them on.
  - d. Mass Scheduling in Erie County
    - i. The committee to consider Mass scheduling in Erie is going to slow down its work.
    - ii. It seems advisable to let the dust settle a bit following announcements of partnerships and mergers.
    - iii. Owing to the new configurations, some schedules will need to be adjust anyway.
    - iv. Consideration of coordinating Mass schedules in the region will resume in time.
3. Election of Deans for new Presbyteral Council in 2024
- a. Fr. Rouch gave the reminder.
  - b. This is the last scheduled meeting of the current Presbyteral Council.
  - c. New deans will be elected in July/August and a new Council constituted.
  - d. Fr. Rouch asked the current deans if they considered it advisable to attempt to finish annual parish visits before the election of new deans or allow the new deans to finish the 2024 parish visits.
    - i. The current deans suggested that the new deans be allowed to finish this year's visitations.
4. Update on Catholic Services Appeal
- a. Fr. Rouch gave the update.
    - i. About 23% of parishioners participate in Diocesan appeals in the country; we seem to be on par.

- ii. About 90% of parishes are meeting the Diocesan assessment
- iii. The Bishop reiterated that the success of fundraising depends heavily on the pastor. In cases of pastoral planning, there must be patience with allowing people to adjust to change or to settle in to a new parish.
- iv. Next Year's CSA
  - 1. The Diocese intends to continue to work with OSV.
  - 2. Efforts will be made to further improve communication about diocesan-level mission and parish-level mission in CSA materials.
  - 3. There is some thought to inviting major donors to regional receptions with the Bishop.
    - a. The Council recognized that this would be a best-practice as part of improving the CSA.

#### 5. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

- a. Fr. Kujwinski gave the update.
- b. In light of the recent change of to the age of Confirmation, the Office for Divine Worship has been discussing the possibility of changing the minimum age for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
- c. The office would currently propose that the minimum age be, "having completed the 9<sup>th</sup> grade" and at the pastor's discretion.
- d. The Council discussed the issue and supports the Office for Divine Worship's proposal.

#### 6. New federal requirements for salaries of exempt employees

- a. Fr. Rouch made the presentation.
- b. The federal government is changing the minimum salary threshold to be considered overtime exempt.
- c. Fr. Shane gave some pointers from the Gannon experience
  - i. Salaried vs. hourly and exempt vs. non-exempt are two different questions
  - ii. An employee is considered non-exempt unless proven otherwise; there are legal tests.
  - iii. Religious organizations have FLSA waivers which may help with this but there could be pastoral complications when considering the Church's teachings on a living wage.
- d. Fr. Rouch will work to get clear guidance for pastors from the finance office.

#### 7. Updates from the Clergy Office

- a. Priest Retirement – *Planning and Procedure Guide*
  - i. Fr. Rouch presented the first draft of a document that could be presented to priests approaching retirement age and asked for observations from the Council.
  - ii. Msgr. Siefer believes this document will be very helpful for the priests.

- iii. Msgr. Riccardo suggested that the Diocese should evaluate the annual income to retirees provided by the Diocesan pension plan.
- iv. Fr. Noble welcomed the option for parishes to charge room & board or not to retired priests.
- v. Several priests noted that retired priests are currently able to supplement their income significantly by providing Mass coverage to parishes.
- b. International priests
  - i. Bishop Persico has previously consulted with the Presbyteral Council on the pros and cons of bring international priests to serve in the Diocese.
  - ii. The Bishop is interested in taking the next steps to create a program for bringing international priests to the Diocese in an organized manner.
  - iii. More detail will be provided at a future date.
- c. Clergy Personnel Policy – revision process
  - i. The policy has not been comprehensively updated since 2014
  - ii. Revisions are in process
- d. Continuing Formation
  - i. Invitations and registrations – USPS or on-line?
    - 1. Mailed invitations are very expensive
    - 2. Fr. Rouch asked the Council’s opinion on using email vs. mailed invitations.
    - 3. The Council felt email was a reasonable option.
  - ii. Priest Day
    - 1. The event Initially began as the result of disruptions from COVID and has continued beyond the pandemic.
    - 2. Fr. Rouch asked if the Council it beneficial to continue hosting this event.
      - a. The Council noted the importance of gatherings to facilitate priestly fraternity.
      - b. It was recommended that the event carry on as planned this year and that discussion on the event’s future be taken up by the new Presbyteral Council

8. Deans’ reports

- a. Oil City Deanery (Fr. Sayers)
  - i. Fr. Kuba is currently hospitalized and would benefit from prayers.
  - ii. The East Brady parish is eager to learn of permanent provisions for its pastoral care.

9. Other business

- a. Dates for Priests’ continuing formation events:
  - i. Emmaus – June 17-20, 2024
  - ii. Priest Day – August 6, 2024, St. Jude Parish

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

10. Future Meeting(s): This is the last scheduled meeting of the current Presbyteral Council. A new 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).

**11. Adjournment**

- a. A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 1:19 by Fr. Mathew and seconded by Fr. Sayers.

Respectfully submitted,  
Fr. Ian McElrath