



PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING

Catholic Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania

Tuesday, November 28, 2023

St. Mark Catholic Center w/ Virtual Participation

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., Rev. Brandon M. Kleckner, Very Rev. John P. Malthaner, V.F., Rev. T. Shane Mathew, Rev. Ian McElrath, Very Rev. Nicholas J. Rouch, V.G., Rev. Christopher Singer, Rev. Msgr. Richard Siefer, E.V.

Members in Attendance Virtually:

Very Rev. Robert Horgas, V.F., Very Rev. V. David Foradori, E.V., Very Rev. Chris Hamlett, V.F., Rev. Msgr. Joseph J. Riccardo, V.F., Very Rev. B. Lamounte Sayers, Very Rev. Richard C. Tomasone, V.F.

Members Excused: Rev. Matthew J. Kujawinski, Very Rev. Jeffrey J. Noble, V.F.

1. Opening Prayer

- a. The meeting was called to order at 10:34 and began with a prayer led by Fr. Kleckner

2. Review and approval of minutes

- a. A motion was made by Fr. Singer to approve the minutes and seconded by Msgr. Siefer

3. Pastoral planning

- a. Update on final plans for the Bradford, Clearfield, and Oil City deaneries
 - i. Fr. Rouch gave the update.
 - ii. Bradford Deanery
 - 1. All proposed changes will become effective the First Sunday of Advent.
 - 2. The most significant pushback is coming from St. Bibiana's in Galeton.
 - iii. Clearfield Deanery
 - 1. The data upon which the original plan for St. Mary's, Frenchville had been based was found to be inaccurate.
 - 2. Consequently, the Frenchville parish will still merge into St. Agnes, Morrisdale, but St. Mary church will have mission status in addition to St. Severin church.

3. The mission status of those churches will be evaluated after a trial period.
- iv. Sharon/Oil City Deaneries
 1. Decree effecting the merger of St. Michael, Emlenton into Beloved Disciple, Grove City is forthcoming.
- b. Preliminary plan for restructuring the parishes of Erie County
 - i. Bishop Persico gave the update.
 - ii. General Information
 1. The circumstances in the City of Erie are complicated, though feedback has included good proposals.
 2. One complicating factor is that many pastors in Erie also have assignments outside their parishes.
 3. The final plan will likely include provisions for next steps to be taken when a pastor retires or is transferred from certain parishes.
 4. There may also be possibilities for collaboration across county lines.
 5. The plan is coming together but is not yet ready for review by the Council.
 - iii. Specific Clarifications
 1. The Bishop reiterated to the Council his conviction that the Vicar General should also be a pastor.
 2. The Bishop is currently satisfied with St. Julia as the Vicar General's parish.
 - iv. Additional Council Meeting
 1. The Bishop may call an extraordinary meeting of the Presbyteral Council to discuss the proposal when it is ready.
- c. Canonical procedures
 - i. Fr. Singer made the presentation.
 - ii. Fr. Singer reminded the Council of the definitions of the terms involved in pastoral planning, including parish, church, merge, partner.
 - iii. Fr. Singer emphasized that the word "closed" should never be used by anyone in the current planning process. Closure refers only to relegation of a church to profane use, which is always initiated by the parish community itself and not by the Bishop.
 - iv. Fr. Singer reminded the Council that parishioners have 10 useful (i.e., business) days from the publication of the bishop's decree to make an appeal to the bishop against that decree.
- d. Pastoral planning Implementation Guides
 - i. Fr. Singer made the presentation.
 - ii. The guides published in 2017 were geared specifically to that round of planning. The guides are being updated to be useful for all future planning phases.
 - iii. The updated guides for partnered and merged parishes are nearly ready for publication.

- e. Discussion of possible initiatives to complement parish restructuring
 - i. Fr. Rouch led the discussion.
 - ii. Fr. Noble had contacted Fr. Rouch about the possibility of entrusting the care of parishes to deacons or lay people, as well as foreign priests, and initiatives for renewal of parish life.
 - iii. The Council discussed its previous recommendations about the possibility of inviting international priests and the inadvisability of doing so at the present time.
 - iv. A discussion followed on canon 517.2's provision for deacons or lay people as coordinators of parish life. It was noted that:
 - 1. This only works when there are priests left to provide the Sacraments
 - 2. There still has to be a priest with faculties of a pastor to "direct the pastoral care" (CIC 517.2)
 - v. A discussion followed on the possibility of parish renewal initiatives throughout the Diocese coordinated with the Eucharistic Revival, the upcoming Holy Year, etc. A committee may be created to investigate this.

4. Reconfiguration of deaneries for new Presbyteral Council in 2024

- a. Fr. Rouch led the discussion.
- b. Fr. Kujawinski had worked with a committee in 2022 to make recommendations on reconfiguring the deaneries.
- c. The implementation of the restructuring was intended to align with the new Presbyteral Council Priest Personnel Board in summer 2024.
- d. The proposals had been taken to the priests in Fall 2022, with the deans reporting back to the Council at the November 2022 meeting.
- e. Discussion followed on the proposed mergers of Sharon-Meadville and Clearfield-Dubois deaneries.
- f. Msgr. Siefer made a motion that the Council recommend to the Bishop the mergers of the Sharon and Meadville deaneries and the Dubois and Clearfield deaneries as proposed. Fr. Ferrick seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Catholic Services Appeal 2024

- a. Fr. Rouch gave the update on new procedures.
- b. Letters will be sent from OSV on January 22 with the local parish modifications and pastor's signatures.
- c. No cost will accrue to the parish from the mailings.
- d. Information is forthcoming about a webinar for parishes.

6. Update on the Permanent Diaconate Program

- a. Deacon Tom McAraw gave the update.
- b. Deacon McAraw and a team have developed a new formation program for diaconal candidates which the Bishop has encouraged them to move forward with.

- c. Deacon McAraw and his team are working with Dr. Eric Dart at Gannon to coordinate an online Master's program to be completed by all diaconal candidates.
- d. The intention would be to accept a new cohort of candidates in September 2024.
- e. Current focus would be advertising in coordination with the Communications Office.
- f. Significant Changes to Candidate Evaluation:
 - i. Each candidate and spouse will have 5 inquiry sessions with current deacons and their wives before being given an application to the formation program.
 - ii. Each candidate will also have a personal assessment team including a deacon couple, a priest, a religious sister, and a psychologist throughout the program.
- g. The goal is to form professionals who will be of service to the parishes.
- h. Program Requirements
 - i. All applicants must have an undergraduate degree.
 - ii. All candidates will complete an MA in Pastoral Ministry through Gannon (entirely online)
 - iii. Formation will occur 9 times during the year from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon
 - 1. Saturday afternoon will be focused on experience in parishes
 - iv. Program will include significant contact with pastors
 - v. Formation for wives will help them to support their husbands' ministries without taking over the ministries.
- i. Initial Recruitment
 - i. Recruitment efforts will begin in January, focusing on the Eastern Vicariate.
 - ii. The first cohort will include a maximum of 10 men.
 - iii. If there are not enough candidates, Gannon will allow lay people recommended by pastors to fill the remaining class seats at the same discount offered to the deacon candidates.

7. Updates from the Clergy Office

- a. Fr. Rouch gave the updates.
- b. Dean visits and documents
 - i. Deans should be sure to schedule parish visits if they have not already done so. It is important that the deans visit the parishes personally.
 - ii. The Bishop encouraged the deans to visit secondary churches as well as parish churches to ensure the facilities are being properly maintained.
- c. Priest Retreat
 - i. The 2023 retreat in West Middlesex was well received.
 - ii. Feedback was split on staying at Good Shepherd or going back to Villa Maria.

- iii. We have reserved Sept. 16-20, 2024 at Villa Maria but may go back to West Middlesex in 2025.
- d. Upcoming Dates
 - i. Ministry Assignment Questionnaires – January 2024
 - ii. Priest Day – August 6, 2024, St. Jude Parish

8. Chancery Updates

- a. Fr. Singer gave the updates.
- b. The Diocese will be reissuing a guide on political participation in anticipation of the upcoming presidential election. As always, we can preach on policies and issues but not candidates and parties.

9. Deans' reports

- i. Fr. Malthaner raised a question about Catholic Youth Organization basketball.
 - 1. The Erie pastors have met to discuss the purpose of CYO and will be taking steps to see that the program fulfills its intended function
 - 2. Fr. Mathew recommended that the pastor's review the liability issues involved with screening of volunteers, having clearances for coaches, etc., and ensure compliance with all Diocesan policies.

10. Meetings dates for 2024

- a. February 28, 2024 (Wednesday) – St. Mark Catholic Center
- b. May 15, 2024 (Wednesday) – Holy Spirit Parish, DuBois,
St. Catherine Church

11. Adjournment

- a. A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 12:26 by Msgr. Siefer and seconded by Fr. McElrath.

Respectfully submitted,
Fr. Ian McElrath