



PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING

Catholic Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania

Wednesday, November 6, 2024

St. Mark Catholic Center

10:30am

Members in Attendance in Person:

Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, Very Rev. Andrew M. Boyd, Rev. Benjamin Daghir, Very Rev. Michael P. Ferrick, V.F., 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. Christopher Singer, Rev. Msgr. Richard Siefer, E.V.,

Members Excused: Very Rev. John J. Detisch, V.F., Very Rev. V. David Foradori, E.V., Very Rev. Richard C. Tomasone, V.F.

1. The meeting was called to order at 10:30am and began with Mid-morning prayer led by Msgr. Siefer.
2. Bishop Persico welcomed the new Council and thanked them for their willingness to serve on this body in addition to their other obligations.
3. Review and approval of minutes of August 8, 2024 meeting
 - a. A motion to approve the minutes as read was made by Fr. Kujawinski and seconded by Fr. Singer.
4. Responsibilities of the Presbyteral Council
 - a. Fr. Singer reminded the members of the canonical responsibilities of the Council, in assisting the bishop to govern the diocese, including the following:
 - i. The Council is an advisory body to the diocesan bishop.
 - ii. The Council is to act as a "senate" advising the bishop on a variety of matters.
 - iii. The Bishop is required to seek the Council's advice on certain matters, including:
 1. Parish mergers
 2. Relegation of church buildings
 - b. Bishop Persico noted that the Council's responsibility to advise him is not to be a rubber stamp; must be true consultation.
 - c. Fr. Singer encouraged members to review the statutes of the Presbyteral Council.
5. Election of Officers

- a. Fr. Rouch noted that the Council has three officers:
 - i. Chair
 - ii. Vice-chair
 - iii. Secretary
 - b. Terms of officers are for one year.
 - c. Only members who are *not* ex-officio are eligible for these offices but all members of the Council vote for the officers.
 - d. The Vicar General will conduct an election of officers by email before the next meeting.
- 6. Appointment of Consultors
 - a. Bishop Persico reviewed some of the responsibilities of the College of Consultors, including advising the diocesan bishop on extraordinary financial matters and electing a diocesan administrator in case the See becomes vacant.
 - b. The following will serve as the College of Consultors:
 - i. Fr. John Detisch
 - ii. Fr. Foradori
 - iii. Fr. Jabo
 - iv. Fr. James Power
 - v. Fr. Nick Rouch
 - vi. Msgr. Richard Siefer
 - vii. Fr. Christopher Singer
- 7. Selection of Pastors Review Board
 - a. If the Bishop is forced to remove a pastor from office, the Law requires that he consult with two pastors.
 - b. The Presbyteral Council is to approve the names of the pastors with whom the Bishop will consult.
 - c. A ballot was distributed to the Council for the selection of four priests to serve in this capacity.
 - d. Ballots will be tabulated at a later date.
- 8. Meeting of Newly Elected Deans
 - a. Fr. Rouch informed the Council about a recent meeting of the newly elected deans.
 - b. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the responsibilities of the dean, especially the required visitation of each parish.
 - i. Note: The Bishop has dispensed the requirement that each parish be visited in 2024 owing to the limited time left in the year.
 - c. The deans were also consulted about the new CSA formula and the obligation to attend Mass on December 9, 2024.
- 9. Election of Clergy Personnel Board
 - a. Nominations are due on Monday.
 - b. An election will be held by mail soon.
- 10. Update on International Priests
 - a. Fr. McElrath gave the update.
 - b. He has been working to establish a program for the recruitment and training of International Priests to serve in the Diocese.

- c. He has met with the Vicars General and/or Vicars for Clergy from seven (7) other dioceses to discuss their programs.
- d. He has identified several characteristics of a successful international priest programming, including:
 - i. A healthy relationship between the sending and receiving bishops.
 - ii. Clear expectations from the receiving bishop.
 - iii. An orientation program.
 - iv. Plans to meet the human needs of the international priests.
 - v. Ongoing oversight from the Clergy Office.
- e. Any priests recommended by their bishops to serve in Erie will be screened by a psychologist.
- f. Initial orientation would last for 4-6 weeks.
- g. Both Bishop Persico and Fr. McElrath observed that the Diocese of Erie will be deliberate about inviting international priests and will not rush.

11. Update on the Permanent Deacon Formation Program

- a. Deacon Tom McAraw gave the update.
- b. Review of history
 - i. The program is based on the 2022 USCCB Revised National Norms.
 - ii. Bishop Persico approved a program in October 2023.
 - iii. Recruitment efforts began in January; from 12 initial inquirers, 5 will begin formation this weekend.
 - iv. The formation program will be directed by
 - 1. Deacon Richard Shewman, overseeing the academic program with Gannon & in-house formation faculty
 - 2. Deacon Ray Sobina, overseeing facilities and scheduling
 - 3. Dcn. Richard Winschel as coordinator of pastoral formation
 - 4. Pam McAraw = coordinator of wives and families
 - 5. Fr. Mark O'Hern as director of spiritual formation
 - v. Dr. Eric Dart, chair of Gannon's Theology Department will be the liason at Gannon.
 - vi. The candidates must complete a 30 credit Masters degree program (all online)
 - vii. An assessment team will re-evaluate each aspirant annually
 - viii. Another cohort of aspirants will be recruited in 2027

12. Jubilee of Hope Promotion

- a. Anne-Marie Welsh and Kristine Rilling spoke to the Council.
- b. Kristine is creating a monthly Jubilee Newsletter featuring "short, digestible content for all ages" that can be shared digitally and in print.
 - i. Will include info on key global and local Jubilee events
 - ii. Child's engagement activity
 - iii. Reflection discussions for families
- c. There will also be multimedia components available on the Diocesan website.

13. Jubilee of Hope Liturgical Info

- a. The official diocesan phase of the Jubilee will begin with a Mass at the Cathedral on December 29.
- b. On the 4th Sunday of Advent, pastors will be asked to utilize a simple ritual at the end of their principal Mass to prepare their parishioners for the Jubilee.
- c. The pilgrimage destinations in the Diocese will be St. Peter Cathedral & St. Leo Magnus church in Ridgway.

14. Priest Day

- a. Since 2021, we celebrated Priest Day in August at St. Jude.
- b. The original purpose (fraternity in the pandemic) is no longer relevant.
- c. Fr. Rouch asked the Council's feedback on retaining, modifying, or eliminating the celebration.
- d. Fr. Polinek suggested that the day does not need to be an "official" Clergy Office event.
- e. Fr. Kujawinski informed the Council that Fr. Ross will probably continue to host the event whether the Clergy Office is involved or not
- f. Fr. Kujawinski will chair an *ad hoc* committee to coordinate dates in vicariates w/ Fathers Ross, John Detisch, Boyd and Power; the Clergy Office will advertise the events.

15. Revision of the Priest Personnel Policy

- a. The policy was last updated in 2014 and is outdated.
- b. The Bishop would like to update the policy to reflect current practice before a transition in episcopal leadership occurs.
- c. Fr. Rouch is recommending that a committee be established to begin revisions.
- d. Several members volunteered to work on a committee which will be formed before our February meeting

16. Role of the Presbyteral Council in Pastoral Planning

- a. Fr. Singer reminded the Council that it will regularly hear about proposals to merge/suppress/erect a parish or to relegate a church to profane but not sordid use.
- b. The Council often gives advice on large-scale pastoral planning over two meetings.
- c. The relegation of church buildings
 - i. The Law requires grave cause to permanently close a church building (i.e., to relegate to profane but not sordid use) such that it may be sold or demolished.
 - ii. Modifying a parish requires merely a just cause.
 - iii. Permanently closing a church cannot be a merely pragmatic decision.
 - 1. This is difficult for the American mind to understand.
 - 2. But the Church requires that church buildings be kept open until it is *impossible* to maintain them.
 - iv. The Presbyteral Council must advise the Bishop on whether or not there is grave cause to relegate a church to profane but not sordid use.

17. Updates to Public Disclosure List

- a. Fr. Singer encouraged the Council to review the rationale for the Public Disclosure List as described on the diocesan website.
- b. Fr. Singer noted especially that there are a number of reasons why a person might be placed on the list, and it is not limited to those who have been directly involved in child sexual abuse.
- c. The final section of the list describes individuals as, "Under Investigation."
 - i. Fr. Singer reminded the Council that individuals are only added to this category after initial investigation determines that the allegations are not manifestly false or frivolous.
- d. The diocese will be updating the "Under Investigation" list soon.
 - i. Sister Stella Ochs, OSB will be removed from the list entirely.
 - ii. Fr. John Schulz and Fr. Michael Allison will remain under investigation.
 - iii. Msgr. John Hagerty will be moved to the credibly accused portion of the list.

18. Consulting on the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

- a. The Archbishop has asked the bishops of Pennsylvania to ask their presbyteral councils about the possibility of moving the Ascension to Sunday in Pennsylvania.
- b. A robust discussion followed on the role of holy days in the life of the Church.
- c. The consensus of the Council is that the Ascension should continue to be observed on the Thursday of the 6th week of Easter.

19. Deans' Reports

- a. None

20. Other Business

- a. Fr. Rouch informed the Council that the September Priest Retreat will be at Villa Maria in 2025.

21. Future Meetings

Wednesday, February 26, 2025 – St. Mark Catholic Center

Wednesday May 7, 2025 – St. Tobias Church, Brockway

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

Wednesday, November 19, 2025 – St. Mark Catholic Center

22. Adjournment

- a. A motion was made by Fr. Ferrick at 3:05 to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Fr. Kujawinski.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rev. Ian McElrath