



## **PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING**

Catholic Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania

Thursday, Sept. 7, 2023

Immaculate Conception, Clarion

10:30 A.M.

### **Members in Attendance:**

Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, Very Rev. Andrew M. Boyd, V.F., Very Rev. V. David Foradori, E.V., Very Rev. Chris Hamlett, V.F., 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. Jeffrey J. Noble, V.F., Rev. Msgr. Joseph J. Riccardo, V.F., Very Rev. Nicholas J. Rouch, V.G., Very Rev. B. Lamounte Sayers, Rev. Christopher Singer, Rev. Msgr. Richard Siefer, E.V., Very Rev. Richard C. Tomasone, V.F.,

**Members Excused:** Very Rev. Michael P. Ferrick, V.F.

### **1. Opening Prayer**

- a. The meeting was called to order at 10:38 and began with Mid-Morning Prayer.

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

- a. Meeting of May 10, 2023
- b. Meeting of June 22, 2023
- c. A motion was made by Fr. Mathew to approve the minutes and was seconded by Msgr. Siefer.

### **3. Pastoral Planning** (Bishop Persico led the discussions)

#### **a. Proposed plan for the Clearfield deanery**

##### **i. St. Mary of the Assumption, Frenchville**

1. Fr. Rouch reported that Fr. Barron (pastor) has recommended merging the parish into Morrisdale with St. Mary's as a secondary church and St. Severin as a secondary church with mission status
2. Fr. Horgas (dean) suggested that Frenchville might be able to retain mission status based on.
3. The dean and vicar suggested that the Saturday anticipated Mass is more in-demand in the Morrisdale area than at its current location in Frenchville.

4. Robust discussion about the pastoral situation in the Morrisdale and Frenchville parishes, especially relating to the ability of the faithful to attend Sunday Mass, followed.
5. Msgr. Siefer made a motion that the Council recommend to the Bishop that St. Mary of the Assumption parish, Frenchville, with its three churches – St. Mary, St. Severin (Drifting), and Ss. Peter & Paul (Grassflat), be merged into St. Agnes parish, Morrisdale, with St. Severin church as a secondary church with mission status and St. Mary Church and Ss. Peter & Paul as secondary churches. Fr. Horgas seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**b. Proposed plan for the Dubois deanery**

- i. Msgr. Siefer presented the history of the locally-driven pastoral planning effort in the DuBois area.
- ii. Fr. McElrath inquired about the opportunities given to the faithful to offer feedback on the plan.
  1. Msgr. Siefer explained that the plan was locally developed by a committee of parishioners from all the involved parishes, that updates have been consistently published to parishioners, and that they have been given a number of opportunities to offer commentary on the plan.
- iii. A discussion followed regarding considerations the Bishop might make when selecting the secondary mission church for the proposed parish.
- iv. Fr. Mathew made a motion that the Council recommend to the Bishop that the five parishes in the DuBois area – Assumption of the BVM (Sykesville), St. Bernard (Falls Creek), St. Catherine of Siena (DuBois), St. Mary (Reynoldsville), and St. Michael the Archangel (DuBois)– be merged by means of an extinctive union to form a new parish – the name to be determined by the Bishop – with St. Catherine of Siena church as the parish church. Fr. Foradori seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**c. Preliminary plan for the parish of Erie County**

- i. Fr. Rouch updated the Council on the preliminary plan as presented to the people of Erie County last week.
- ii. The Bishop shared with the Council his desire to keep the Cathedral as a pastoral hub that offers a full schedule of sacramental and pastoral services to all the people of the area every day of the week.
- iii. The Bishop also shared with the council his intention that any priest in the chancery also serve as a pastor.

- iv. Fr. Rouch noted that, having presented the Erie plan, the Diocese will soon present the final plans to the Bradford and Clearfield deaneries; the Oil City deanery's only significant action being taken is merging Emlenton into Grove City, and a meeting does not seem necessary to present that single change.

- 1. Proposed Meeting Times

- a. Bradford Deanery – Tuesday, Oct. 17 in Smethport
    - b. Clearfield Deanery – Wednesday, Oct. 25 in Clearfield

- d. **Planning in St. Marys**

- i. The Archabbot recommended to the Bishop that St. Mary and Sacred Heart parishes share a (Benedictine) pastor and parochial vicar.
  - ii. The local dean was also involved in this conversation with the Bishop and the Archabbot.
  - iii. The local priests are working hard to help their people through this transition and are emphasizing that this is a first step in planning in St. Marys.

#### **4. Pastoral Planning Implementation Guides**

- a. Fr. Singer gave the update.
- b. The guides from 2016/2017 are being updated in general to be applicable to new waves of pastoral planning.
- c. The members of the Council were asked to provide feedback on the current guides' suggestion for a transition team.
  - i. Fr. Mathew noted that he did not form a transition team because his parish was small, the parishioners were adequately prepared, and he was remaining in residence.
  - ii. Msgr. Siefer stated that he formed a transition team but found the model cumbersome and shifted to using the staff as his primary resource to help in the transition.
- d. Msgr. Riccardo noted that some pastors have not understood the concept of merger adequately.
- e. Fr. McElrath noted that it would be helpful to use deanery meetings to make sure the priests fully comprehend the distinctions between the terms parish, church, merger, partnering, etc.
- f. Fr. Noble observed that pastors are sometimes placed in difficult positions by being both employers and shepherds to the staff, especially when it comes to downsizing staffs.
- g. Fr. Rouch and Fr. Singer noted that it will take time for parish assessments to be updated to reflect the realities of mergers and that the finance office is currently working with the chancery to help adjust assessments following possible mergers.

- h. A discussion followed on the calculation of Diocesan assessments:
  - i. Msgr. Riccardo proposed that the formulae for calculating assessments might need to be revised.
  - ii. Fr. Mathew noted that the formula currently assigns the share of a pre-determined sum to each parish in the diocese.
  - iii. Fr. Noble made the observation that the schools and the diocese must decrease the amount of money they expect to receive from the parishes.
  - iv. Several members echoed Fr. Noble's sentiments.
- i. Fr. Singer requested commentary on the experience of having secondary mission churches.
  - i. Several priests commented on the experience in general.
- j. Fr. Singer requested commentary on the experience of requests for Sacraments at secondary churches.
  - i. Several priests commented on the experience in general, noting in particular the small number of requests from the faithful to utilize the secondary churches.

#### **5. Inquiry regarding revised CSA procedures**

- a. Fr. Rouch led the discussion.
- b. The Catholic Foundation has received no questions about the CSA from the pastors and wants to ensure that the pastors are "OK" with the revised approach.
- c. Fr. Rouch summarized the implications for pastors of contracting with Our Sunday Visitor (OSV) to organize the CSA:
  - i. Parishes must choose their projects earlier.
  - ii. Pastors must write their letters to parishioners earlier.

#### **6. Reconfiguration of deaneries and new Presbyteral Council in 2024**

- a. Fr. Rouch led the discussion.
- b. Fr. Rouch reminded the Council that a working group of the Council had developed a proposal for modifications to the current deanery structure and that it is time to decide if we wanted to proceed in formally evaluating this matter.
- c. The Council is in favor of resuming work on this project.
- d. Fr. Kujawinski and Fr. Rouch will work to place this on the agenda for the November meeting.

#### **7. Updates from Divine Worship**

- a. Fr. Kujawinski gave the updates.
- b. Two travel opportunities are upcoming:
  - i. Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis

1. Our Lady of Peace and Holy Redeemer parishes are leading the charge to organize a trip to the Congress.
2. Information will be forthcoming for parishes.
- ii. Holy Year 2025
  1. Diocese will likely organize a pilgrimage to Rome in Fall 2025.
  2. Information will be forthcoming.

## **8. Catholic Extension**

- a. Fr. Rouch led the discussion.
- b. Catholic Extension has contacted the diocese asking if they would like to partner with the annual parish calendars.
- c. The pastors noted that each parish makes its own decision on this matter.
- d. The consensus was that this matter should continue to be handled on the local level.

## **9. Pet Policy to be developed by Clergy Personnel Board**

- a. Fr. Rouch led the discussion.
- b. The Bishop noted that recent clergy appointments have been made difficult because of the complications brought about by pets.
- c. Fr. Rouch distributed a document with some best practices gleaned from other dioceses' policies.
- d. This led to a larger discussion of the obligation of pastors to safeguard the parochial patrimony.
- e. A committee will meet to draft a policy for the Council's consideration.  
Members include:
  1. Fr. McElrath (chair)
  2. Fr. Kujawinski
  3. Fr. Boyd
  4. 1-2 to be determined

## **10. Updates from Clergy Office**

- a. Fr. Rouch gave the updates.
- b. Deans should make sure they are planning their parish visits.
- c. 42 priests have signed up for the September priest retreat.

## **11. Deans' reports**

- a. Fr. Sayers for the Oil City Deanery
  - i. Approximately two or three parishes have begun to reintroduce the Precious Blood.
  - ii. Bishop Persico reiterated that the decision to do so or not is the pastor's.
- b. Fr. Hamlet for Meadville

- i. Asked for a clarification from Fr. Rouch on the timeline for priests approaching retirement age to notify the Diocese of their intentions to retire/stay on.
- ii. Fr. Rouch will send letters to these priests soon.

## **12. Other Business**

- a. Fr. Kujawinski made a motion to extend the terms of the officers of the Presbyteral Council until June 30, 2024. Seconded by Msgr. Siefer. The motion passed.

## **13. Meetings dates for 2023/2024**

- a. November 28 (Tuesday) – Saint Mark Catholic Center
- b. February 28 (Wednesday) – Saint Mark Catholic Center
- c. May 17 (Wednesday) – St. Catherine Church, DuBois

## **14. Adjournment**

- a. A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Fr. Sayers, seconded by Fr. Foradori at 1:44pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Fr. Ian McElrath