

Presbyteral Council Meeting Notes, Diocese of Scranton— November 24, 2020

Call to Order. Fr. Lapera called the virtual meeting to order at 3:02 pm.

Roll Call. Present: Bishop Bambera, Fr. Shantillo; Monsignors Van Loon, Delaney, & Bendik; Frs. Albert, Burke, Cirba, Edwards, Evanko, Fox, Hvozdovic, Langan, Lapera, Loughney, McCreary, McGlone, Michelini, Polednak, Polmounter, Quinnan, Tudgay, and Wasnock.

Excused: Msgr Muldowney, Frs. Beck, Czachor, and Ricciardi.

Absent: Fr. Doris

Prayer Intentions were offered for all priests and people especially those who are sick in the Diocese. Fr. Lapera offered the prayer.

The minutes from the October 27, 2020 meeting were approved.

I. Vocation Update :

- Fr. Alex Roche, vocation director, gave a presentation to the council. He is picking up where Fr. Don Williams left off. There are regular meetings with discerners. Fr. Alex is inviting priests to talk to these men in a group setting along with individual meetings. Fr. Alex said on average he is meeting with one new man who wants to discern priesthood each week. There is also collaboration with office of youth and young adult ministry to have programs such as Pints with Priests and Bible Studies online. There are also videos about once a week made by Fr. Alex. There is a new vocation center, a place where men can go to discern and live and see the life of the diocesan priest. This is at St. Matthew's Parish in East Stroudsburg. This year there are two new applicants and two or three men looking to possibly apply. Currently the Diocese of Scranton has eight seminarians, two at Cathedral House of Formation in New York, four at St. Mary's in Baltimore, and two on pastoral year. Fr. Alex stated that there were going to give winter assignments to the seminarians but because of COVID that will not be happening. The spirits of the men are high and they are in good form. Fr. Alex said his approach is to help the men encounter faith and theology, to help them fall in love with the faith along with to help them encounter Jesus in a very real way. This year because of COVID there will not be a Project Andrew dinner. Fr. Alex is available to give talks to different parishes and will be doing more with parishes about vocations on the other side of the pandemic. Bishop thanked Fr. Alex for taking on this new roll as vocation director and offered his prayers.

II. Blueprint Discussion:

- Dr. Catherine Butel gave a presentation on the Blue Print that have been happening throughout the diocese that was started before COVID and is now continuing. The meetings with the deaneries have been completed. The information and conversation have been excellent. This information has been brought to the Episcopal Council and will be discussed over the next few months. Priority drivers are helping the conversation, not just looking at priests and parishes but finances, facilities, and demographics as well. This is meant to be more of a gradual process as the need arises

with some parishes already at that need. There will be a dvd and a manual as a tool to help the pastors in small group interaction in the parish to work on the continued discussion about the Blue Print.

- Fr. Lopera opened conversation about the Blue Print meetings. The Episcopal councils involvement has helped to advance the process making it easier and clearer for pastors to see the conversations that need to be happening and how to start having them.
- Bishop asked how we can make it easier to bring this information to the people? It has been hard to communicate with the parish during the pandemic and the pastors are looking for helpful options in this sharing of information. The DVD and meeting in small groups can be helpful to move forward. Suggestions for data in regions and sub-regions to see the make up of the parishes and deaneries today compared to 10 years ago will be helpful in the Blue Print process. *Mission Insite* is a resource that can be used to gain data about a given region. There was also mention of other agencies to help reach out to the people in our parishes and those who have slipped away. It opens new ideas and could help to reach out to younger generations.

III. Remark by Bishop Bambara

- Covid update: An email was sent out prior to the meeting as an update for the celebration of Mass and parish activities. Bishop offered the priests the option to wear masks throughout the whole celebration of the Mass. Overall the directives are being followed in the parishes. Care when it comes to using the ambo at Mass was stressed. This year the priests are able to celebrate 4 Masses Christmas Eve and 4 masses Christmas Day. No Christmas pageants and large parties should be held at the parish. Bishop gives some guidance on what to do when someone doesn't wear a mask and how to handle the situation.

- The Bishop shared the following observations:

"I'd like to conclude our meeting today by sharing with you a few thoughts that are more heartfelt, given this season of Thanksgiving in which we find ourselves. It is been a tough nine months since we have been confronted with the coronavirus and I thank you for all that you have done to keep faith alive and to serve our people. It has been a particularly tough month since last we met as a Presbyteral Council and I shared that the Diocese would be announcing the completion of our Independent Survivors' Compensation Program as well as adding new names to our list of credibly accused priests. It has been a tough time and I know some of you are angry. I know some of you are a bit fearful and anxious and some of you are disillusioned. I am too!

I wish that I could dispel all these unsettled feelings, but I cannot. The best that I can do is to attempt to assure you that no name of a priest is ever publicly noted by me or added to our list of accused priests without an incredible amount of thought, care, time, discussion, investigation and prayer. And still, it is never easy when a name is revealed publicly. The listing of a name rarely makes sense to most of us.

While we talk about transparency, there are always things that I know that the public and even you, my brother priests do not have a right or need to know. It is never easy. And while I cannot expect that you will understand or believe what I have just shared I need to share it with all of you. No one in his right mind would cavalierly approach this process. It simply hurts too much. It hurts our Church, accused priests, survivors and you, our good and faithful priests. And frankly, it hurts me too much as well.

Have we had false accusations in our Diocese? Yes, we have. Some of you who are listening to me know that firsthand. You know that we have gone to great lengths to carefully guard the well-being and reputations of our priests. Most of such accusations are never brought into public arena.

Will there be more false accusations? Who knows? I hope not but I am not that naïve. Brothers, I cannot change this reality. Our understanding of this painful chapter in our world and in our church has brought us to a vastly different place than many of us could have imagined when we were ordained.

We are not the only organization where abuse has occurred. It is occurred in the Boy Scouts. It is occurred in our schools. It is occurring in families. But people seem to expect more of us because of whom we claim to be as priests. Thankfully, given the suffering of so many survivors, priests, bishops, AND cardinals who are responsible are now being held accountable. That is a good thing. Yet, we still find ourselves embarrassed, unsettled and even angry.

I wish that I could say that this is over, but I cannot. Do I believe that we have finally turned a corner? I hope so. The best that I can say to you is to remain faithful to who and what you are as priests. Remain faithful and trust in the goodness of God. He will see us through the crosses that we carry and promises to bring us to a better place of peace. Thank you for your fidelity, for your priestly ministry and for the brotherhood that we share. God bless you and Happy Thanksgiving.”

Bishop Bambera gave the closing prayer and the meeting was concluded at 4:07pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Fr. Seth D. Wasnock, Secretary