

DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL

MEETING MINUTES

Friday, August 11, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m. by Paul James, Chair, and Bishop Taylor led the opening prayer.

In attendance: Bishop Anthony B. Taylor, Fr. John Connell, VG, Dcn. Matt Glover, Mr. Dennis Lee, Dcn. Steve Mallett, Ms. Anabel Garcia, Mr. Alan Halman, Sr. Cecilia Nguyen, OSB, Dr. Karen Hollenbeck, Mr. Adrián Dominguez, Mr. Jeff Hines, Mr. Paul James, Mr. Roberto Martínez, and Fr. Daniel Velasco.

Not in attendance: Sr. Mickey Espinoza, MCP, Mr. Greg Wolfe, and Ms. Alma Stewart.

Review and approval of previous meeting's minutes: The minutes of the April 21, 2023, meeting were approved by acclamation.

Old Business

Eucharistic Revival Update – Bishop Anthony B. Taylor

Bishop Taylor reported that attendance was very good, about 500 people at each place in Springdale and Little Rock. Everything was in English and Spanish, and there was good enthusiasm on the part of the participants, including the procession from the Cathedral to the Divine Mercy Shrine at St. Edward. The Shrine's Mass, confession, and adoration schedule can be found on the diocesan website at <https://www.dolr.org/parishes/shrine-divine-mercy-little-rock>.

Bishop Taylor also said some parishes are having their own activities. There will not be an organized group going to the national meeting because the emphasis in our diocese will be at the local level. He also mentioned that 2025 will be a Holy Year with jubilee events throughout the year that will begin with the opening of the Holy Doors of St. Peter's Basilica in December 2024. Fr. Juan Guido will provide more information at a later date about the 2025 jubilee.

School of Spiritual Direction – Fr. Daniel Velasco

Fr. Daniel Velasco, Director of Spiritual Direction Formation for the diocese, said the application process over the summer resulted in 16 people applying. Twelve (12) were accepted for year 1: 8 English-speaking and 4 Spanish-speaking. Year 2 they plan to take 12 more, and the same number for year 3. The first session will be the weekend of September 15 – 16. *Arkansas Catholic* will run a story after the first session. (This story ran on September 28, 2023 and can be found at <https://www.arkansas-catholic.org/news/article/7994/Diocese-relaunches-its-school-of-spiritual-Direction>.) Participants are from different parts of the diocese and include deacons and lay women. After 3 years they will be trained to provide spiritual direction. The instructors for the school will come from experienced, certified spiritual directors within our diocese. No instructors will be brought in from outside our diocese. The school is based on Ignatian spirituality, including the spiritual exercises, and there is an academic component as well.

Synod on Synodality Synthesis – Bishop Anthony B. Taylor

Bishop Taylor explained that the Presbyteral Council has been looking at topics that came up in our diocese from the listening sessions and comments that were submitted. He has asked the Diocesan Pastoral Council members to discuss the same topics with him.

On the topic of “Need for Priest Presence, Accountability, Transparency, Trust, and Communication” the following comments were made: people like it when their priest can remain after Mass to greet them as they leave; the diocese and Bishop Taylor are accessible for matters concerning our priests; and there was general support and appreciation for all that the priests in our diocese do through their ministry.

On the topic of “Rigidity of Church Law, especially regarding divorce and annulment” Bishop Taylor began by briefly explaining the process for reviewing the validity of a marriage (commonly called an “annulment process”). A marriage is always presumed to be valid, and there is a process to judge whether there is enough evidence to demonstrate that a marriage was in fact invalid from the very beginning. Comments included: not much is known about annulments by Catholics in general. There were questions about the factors that impact how fast a case moves through the process. Deacon Matt Glover, Chancellor for Canonical Affairs, explained that arriving at a declaration of invalidity is also a legal process that includes required waiting periods in between the various stages of the process. The ultimate determination has to do with looking at the “moment of consent” and what was going on leading up to it. (Additional information about how the church explains whether a marriage can be judged to be invalid can be found on the diocesan website under the Tribunal at <https://www.dolr.org/diocesan-tribunal>.)

New Business

Confirmation Classes – Ms. Anabel Garcia

The topic of Confirmation classes was brought to the Diocesan Pastoral Council because questions have been raised about how they are offered and how many are required. Ms. Anabel Garcia spoke about her experience in the Fort Smith area. The diocesan guidelines for preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation were explained by Mr. Jeff Hines, Director of the Faith Formation Office. He shared a draft of revised Sacramental Policies and Requirements for Confirmation that are being reviewed and discussed with the Presbyteral Council. He said the emphasis should be on readiness, not requirements, and because there are different pathways to readiness, it is unlikely the diocese will be more specific about requirements. He said the local pastor has discretion over what he wants the preparation requirements to be, and parents should prepare within their own parish. Bishop Taylor remarked that it can be beneficial for a program to be inconvenient because it will require effort and commitment.

Knights of Columbus – Mr. Alan Halman

Mr. Alan Halman, immediate past State Deputy of the Knights of Columbus Arkansas State Council, mentioned a new program that involves the individual councils using Patrick H. Kelly’s book, *Story of the Knights of Columbus Pilgrimage* (1920), for study and reflection. He said this was started in TN last year by young men who were looking for more in their meetings. More information will be shared at the next meeting.

Future Agenda Items

These can be sent to Paul James, Chair, Bishop Taylor, or Maria Velazquez in the Bishop’s office.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Friday, December 1 at 11 a.m. at St. John Catholic Center in the large meeting room in Fletcher Hall.

Closing Prayer and Blessing

Bishop Taylor thanked the Diocesan Pastoral Council members for their attendance and participation, and the meeting concluded at 12:30 p.m. with the Lord's Prayer.

Respectfully recorded by:

Dennis Lee
Chancellor for Administrative Affairs