

April 23, 2021

DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL

MEETING MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m. via video conference by the Chair, Adrian Dominguez. Fr. John Connell, VG, led the opening prayer.

In attendance: Bishop Anthony B. Taylor, Lloyd Cambre, Vice Chair, Fr. John Connell, VG, Adrian Dominguez, Chair, Dcn. Matt Glover, Jeff Hines, Dr. Karen Hollenbeck, Dennis Lee, Roberto Martinez, Cynthia Solis, Alma Stewart, Greg Wolfe, and Maria Velazquez.

Not in attendance: Sr. Mary Clare Bezner, OSB, Sr. Mickey Espinoza, MCP, Paul James, and Dcn. Efrain Vargas.

Review and approval of previous meeting's minutes: The minutes of the January 26, 2021 meeting were accepted as written by acclamation.

Old Business

Parish Emergency Plans – Follow up by Lloyd Cambre

Lloyd Cambre said their team has met once, and they are meeting again next week. They are gathering information from five (5) parishes – Little Rock (2), Benton, Hot Springs Village, and Heber Springs – to create a working document that will be a generic protocol or template for parishes to review for emergency preparedness for events like a fire or tornado. Their intent is to help parishes identify their concerns and have a plan to address them. Eventually they will have a document for the Diocesan Pastoral Council to review and comment on.

Rotating terms and identifying new members for the Diocesan Pastoral Council – Adrian Dominguez

There was discussion about staggering terms so everyone is not on the same three (3) year cycle to roll off as they are now. There was support for doing this. Members were asked to let Bishop Taylor know if they had a preference for a one (1), two (2) or three (3) year term. Once terms are staggered, anyone reappointed will receive a three (3) year term.

Members were also asked to submit at least two (2) names of people they would like for Bishop Taylor to consider as new members. Since five (5) of the non-Ex Officio positions represent groups within the diocese, Bishop Taylor said he would also like to ask these groups for names. Adrian will follow-up with the members on submitting their names to Bishop Taylor.

New Business

Update on Religious Life Program: Men and Women – Sr. Mary Clare Bezner, OSB

This topic will be held over to the next meeting.

Next steps on Covid-related changes in the parishes – Bishop Taylor

Bishop Taylor said this topic was discussed at yesterday's Presbyteral Council Meeting. He is considering loosening the protocols now that vaccinations are available to everyone who would like to be vaccinated. He specifically wanted to consult with the members on relaxing mask wearing and receiving communion on the tongue. Bishop Taylor said he was planning to make a video/audio recording next week that will be played in all the parishes the weekend of May 8-9. Any Covid-related changes would be effective the weekend of May 15-16. He read a draft of a letter he was working on that would also summarize the Covid-related changes.

Members provided varied comments that included: support for relaxing mask wearing, concern about large crowds in small churches, gaining and losing some at Mass, having a Mass that requires masks, waiting until the state's fully vaccinated rate is higher (currently 23%) and the infection and hospitalization rates are lower. It was acknowledged that being vaccinated is a protection, and there was concern for people and children unable to be vaccinated. That wearing a mask protects not only the wearer but others in the interest of the common good was also expressed.

In addition to making mask wearing optional at Mass and communion on the tongue available in the regular communion line, Bishop Taylor said the physical distancing requirement of six (6) feet laterally between households would not be required. This will be a return to the more normal state with all the pews and seats open. However, communion would not be available yet under both forms, only with the hosts. Following the principal of subsidiarity, he said pastors will have some discretion on other restrictions they would like to have or lift with their parishes, for example, how to handle music and singing at Mass. Also, the Catholic Schools Office will have some discretion about the directives to be followed to close out the school year.

The hesitancy by some to be vaccinated was also discussed. Some Catholics will not be vaccinated and others will take a "wait and see" approach. There are parishes within the diocese hosting vaccination clinics, and the challenge is increasing the turn out. Bishop Taylor said that if the Covid situation worsens and we have to stop easing up on Covid-related protocols, we can if that is what needs to happen.

Bishop Taylor also announced that the Barton Coliseum in Little Rock has been rented for the five (5) upcoming priesthood ordinations to take place on Saturday, May 29 at 10 a.m. Everyone in the diocese is invited and encouraged to attend what will be a celebration for the whole Church in Arkansas. There will be plenty of seats (approx. 10,000) for people to feel comfortable. All the groups in the diocese (Knights of Columbus, Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver, Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulcher, youth groups, etc.) will be invited to participate.

The members said they liked the idea of bringing Catholics together at the Barton Coliseum because the big open space will allow physical distancing for those who want it. Also, those attending will have the option of wearing a mask.

Meeting Wrap-up

Bishop Taylor's closing remarks

Bishop Taylor said he was grateful for the Diocesan Pastoral Council's input, especially on the Covid-related changes. Their input gives him a chance to think through what he's considering, and it provides him with input to compare with other groups that he consults with. The members said they have appreciated his leadership and directives since the beginning of Covid, which has been a challenge.

Future Agenda Items

These can be sent to Adrian, Bishop Taylor or Maria Velazquez.

Next Meeting

The meeting scheduled for Friday, August 13, 11 a.m. has been canceled. The next meeting will be Friday, November 12 at 11 a.m. Bishop Taylor said that if something comes up and the Diocesan Pastoral Council needs to meet sooner, a meeting can be called.

Closing Prayer and Blessing

Bishop Taylor closed the meeting with the Covid prayer and his blessing upon everyone.

The meeting ended at 12:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Adrian Dominguez, Chair of the Diocesan Pastoral Council

Dennis Lee, Chancellor for Administrative Affairs