

August 14, 2020

DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL

MEETING MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m. via video conference by Jeff Hines, Chair, who also led prayer.

In attendance: Bishop Anthony B. Taylor, Sr. Mary Clare Bezner, Lloyd Cambre, Fr. John Connell, VG, Adrian Dominguez, Sr. Mickey Espinoza, Dcn. Matt Glover, Jeff Hines, Chair, Dennis Lee, Alma Stewart, Roberto Martinez and Greg Wolfe.

Not in attendance: Dr. Karen Hollenbeck, Paul James, Cynthia Solis, Vice Chair, and Dcn. Efrain Vargas.

Review and Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the May 1, 2020 meeting were accepted as written.

OLD BUSINESS

Resumption of Public Masses in May – Bishop Taylor

Bishop Taylor explained his decision to resume public Masses in May. He said these are unusual times and the situation changed after the council's May 1 meeting. After the governor announced at his May 4 press briefing the new guidelines from the AR Department of Health for churches and places of worship, he decided it was possible to have public Masses.

The use of masks (along with social distancing and hand hygiene) is considered the most effective way to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus. Bishop Taylor is very pleased with the high level of compliance in parishes to the credit of people. Mass attendance has been low. In the future a pastoral concern will be reaching out to the people who have stopped coming to Mass.

NEW BUSINESS

Report on Black Parish Communities – Alma Stewart

Alma Stewart, a member of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Diocesan Council for Black Catholics, shared her thoughts on racism and the concerns and unique needs of Black Churches. The following is a brief summary of her comments:

Racism occurs when a person ignores the fundamental truth that because all humans share a common origin, all people are brothers and sisters.

Racism can be seen in deliberate sinful acts, including when individual communities and even churches remain silent and fail to act against racial injustice when it is encountered.

Racism can be found in our hearts, and it can be institutional and systematic. Institutional racism occurs when practices and traditions are upheld that treat certain groups of people unjustly. Racism in our hearts can lead to thoughts and actions that we do not see as racist. Systemic racism is "How resources are allocated to communities de facto segregated." One example is the Flint, Michigan water crisis that resulted from policy decisions that negatively affected the inhabitants, the majority of whom were African Americans.

Racism affects our culture and it has no place in the hearts of Christians. We need a genuine conversion of our hearts, a conversion that will compel change and reform of our institutions and society. This means we need to “Open Wide Our Hearts.”

Our churches and our civic and social institutions are in need of ongoing reform. If racism is confronted by addressing its causes and the injustices it produces, then healing can occur.

Each letter in the word R-A-C-I-S-M stands for an important word.

The letter “R” stands for “Responsible.” We must take responsibility. We cannot change the circumstance, the season, or the wind, but we can change ourselves. Eventually we all have to accept full and total responsibility for our actions, for everything we have done and that we have not done. Being responsible means doing the things you are expected to do and to accept the consequences (results) of your actions. Only what we do for Christ will last.

The letter “A” stands for “Action.” People may doubt what you do, but they will believe what you do. Action is the basis of all success. Every action may not give success, but at the same time no success is possible without action. Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced. You don’t have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great. Your actions become your habits, your habits become your values, and your values become your destiny.

The letter “C” stands for “Community.” There is immense power when a group of people with similar interests get together to work towards the same goals. Alone we can do little; together we can do so much. We are better together. No one is an island; each person belongs to a community. Teamwork makes a dream work. Something incredible happens when teamwork and community happen the way they are supposed to happen. Racism changes when everyone on the team is equally invested in the overall purpose of treating every human being as a person and not according to the color of their skin.

The letter “I” stands for “Impact.” People will forget what you say, but they won’t forget what you did, and people will never forget how you made them feel. Every single individual can make a positive impact in the world. It all depends on the type of impact you are determined to make. Don’t underestimate the impact you can have on someone else’s life. It is critical to note that people who have made a real difference are not all privileged, advantaged, or “special” by any stretch.

The letter “S” stands for “Speak Up.” It is not unpatriotic to denounce an injustice committed on our behalf. Perhaps it is the most patriotic thing we can do. To say nothing is saying something. You must denounce things you are against or others might think you support things you really do not. Silence may be the safest answer, but it doesn’t mean it is the best answer.

The letter “M” stands for “Mentor Others.” A lot of people have gone further than they thought possible because someone else thought they could. To “Mentor Others” is to say, “Let’s go do it,” not “you go do it.” The great value of a mentor is their ability to see ahead what others cannot see and to help them navigate a course to their destination. A mentor empowers a person to see a possible future and to believe it can be obtained. The heart of a mentor is important. Getting the most out of life is not about how much you keep for yourself, but how much you pour into others.

Alma concluded this segment of her presentation by saying, “The question is what will we do to end our legacy of violence and oppression? There’s never been a more critical time for us to stop and learn about race and racism in the United States. There’s so much work to be done, but we can learn together to build a more equitable future.”

Jeff thanked Alma for her well prepared and thoughtful presentation on racism and asked how the Latino and Anglo parishes could identify and rid themselves of racism. She responded, "Let's move forward and educate ourselves about what is still going on – we have a lot of work to do."

Bishop Taylor reported that the Diocesan Council for Black Catholics (DCBC) recently held a listening session with seminarians at the House of Formation that went well and was very effective. A recent listening session by the DCBC with the deacon formation group at St. John Catholic Center also went well, and more DCBC listening sessions around the diocese are expected in the future, including with the other deacon formation group that meets at Subiaco.

The second part of Alma's presentation was on "The Concerns and Our Unique Needs of the Black Churches." Some of the issues she identified included:

- People to visit the sick and shut-ins;
- Compassion for all people;
- Ministers of Holy Communion;
- The ability to relate to what is going on in our church communities;
- Support for the work of the Diocesan Council for Black Catholics;
- Youth participation in Diocesan activities; and,
- More African Americans on the staff at the Diocese.

Jeff mentioned a statement and some homilies in which Bishop Taylor addressed racism as being very helpful for the people in our diocese.

Jeff and other council members thanked Alma for her presentation.

Faith Formation classes and Covid-19 - Fr. Erik Pohlmeier, Director of the Faith Formation Office

Fr. Erik said he has been receiving calls from parishes asking for information and guidance on ways to do faith formation while in the pandemic. In response he plans to send a letter to the pastors and all involved with faith formation at the parishes with some ideas for what they can do. Fr. Erik said he would like to see faith formation move in a different direction so that instead of getting back to normal in the parish setting (for example, with religion classes), he wants to move towards helping parents with faith formation for their children in their homes. And he said he would be interested in feedback from council members.

A Covid-related issue Fr. Erik brought up is that in a parish the children are attending multiple schools, and with many of the catechists being volunteers, asking them to teach a class that brings together kids from all over can be challenging. He said we have to leave it to parishes to figure out things they have to do, but there has been a definite shift to more on-line content.

There are three publishers that he recommends for their on-line content: Our Sunday Visitor, Loyola Press and the Sophia Institute. Each one offers webinars for families on how to use their on-line materials. Their offerings are in English and Spanish and they have support personnel to assist their users (catechists and parents). Our Sunday Visitor offers a discount to parishes. They have done the whole program – how to teach, lesson plans, additional support for families. Coordination is important. The cost varies but it is typically no more than what a book would cost. Smaller parishes might be on-

line only, try a combination of in person and on-line classes, or try in person for sacramental classes; or try in person and shift to the home where the family can sit together at one table and take as many days as needed. Bigger groups can use the church to handle social distancing. A concern is some families will resist using on-line resources, so there will need to be a follow-up interaction with how to work with these families.

A question was asked about how to build community under the current circumstances when you bring together students from Catholic and public schools for sacramental preparation? Fr. Erik said this depends on how technology is used. Being on-line is not ideal, but it is better than nothing. The Our Sunday Visitor platform is easily customizable. He said parishes will have to look at what is possible. Maybe the church building can be used to bring groups together as long as everyone wears a mask and practices social distancing.

Sr. Mickey Espinoza, MCP said it would be good to let people know that the approach to faith formation is changing, but it is not being suspended due to Covid. She said it will be important to communicate how faith formation will be done going forward. Fr. Erik agreed that communication is crucial for acceptance by the people in the parishes.

Fr. Erik mentioned again that he will be sending a letter to Faith Formation leaders and pastors. His message will be about the good that can be accomplished, rather than just hanging on. He said he will include links to resources and mention how other parishes are doing.

Fr. Erik concluded his remarks by commenting on an upcoming on-line workshop for RCIA. At this time there are no new Covid-related guidelines for RCIA. With in person meetings not possible at this time, an alternative might be to consider a mentoring approach for people wanting to enter the church.

A comment was made about how much it might mean to people to receive a phone call for someone with their parish to check on how things are going with their kids and faith formation. This was thought to be a good idea since parents are feeling more responsibility for the education and faith formation of their children. A suggestion was maybe having a hotline for parents to call.

Bishop Taylor thanked Fr. Erik and said he was doing a very good job with the way he is addressing the new approach to faith formation.

Bishop Taylor's remarks

Bishop Taylor said he is pleased about how well things are going despite the challenges. He went on to say that while the Diocese can provide guidelines, their implementation is left to the local parish and school where there has been good cooperation. He likes the creativity pastors and parishes are using to deal with special circumstances. He noted there is a good attitude throughout our diocese and he is grateful that everyone is being so cooperative.

Next Meeting

The next video conference meeting is scheduled for Friday, November 13, 2020 at 11 a.m.

Future Agenda Items

Please submit any suggestions for future agenda items to Bishop Taylor or Jeff Hines.

Sr. Mickey asked what action would be taken on Alma's presentation about racism, and specifically whether the diocesan directors could have a listening session with the Diocesan Council for Black Catholics? Jeff replied that perhaps a series of listening sessions could be organized for diocesan staff, and he said this topic will be listed as an agenda item under "Old Business" for the next meeting.

Closing Prayer

Bishop Taylor closed the meeting with a prayer for the end of Covid-19 followed by a blessing.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Jeff Hines, Chair of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, and Dennis Lee, Chancellor for Administrative Affairs
Meeting ended at 12:15 p.m.