

DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL

MEETING MINUTES

Friday, October 18, 2024

The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m. by Paul James, Chair, and Bishop Taylor led everyone in a prayer for a productive meeting for our diocese.

In attendance: Bishop Anthony B. Taylor, Fr. John Connell, VG, Mr. Dennis Lee, Sr. Mickey Espinoza, MCP, Dcn. Steve Mallett, Ms. Anabel Garcia, Ms. Alma Stewart, Mr. Jeff Hines (Zoom), Sr. Cecilia Nguyen, OSB (Zoom), Mr. Paul James, Mr. Roberto Martinez, Mrs. Kristy Dunn, and Marguerite Olberts.

Not in attendance: Dcn. Matt Glover, Mr. Greg Wolfe, Mr. Alan Halman, and Mr. Adrian Dominguez.

Review and approval of the previous meeting's minutes: The minutes of the August 2, 2024, meeting were approved by acclamation.

Old Business

Jubilee Year and the conclusion of the Eucharistic Revival (Update) – Bishop Taylor

Bishop Taylor shared a handout from Fr. Juan Guido, Director of the Diocesan Office of Divine Worship, with important dates and planned activities for the Jubilee Year of Hope that will begin on December 29, 2024, and the conclusion of the National Eucharistic Revival that will occur within the Jubilee Year. Specific dates and activities will be posted on the diocesan website, www.dolr.org, and published in *Arkansas Catholic*.

Bishop Taylor also announced that the following churches in Arkansas have been designated as jubilee churches: Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock, St. Edward (Divine Mercy Shrine) in Little Rock, Immaculate Conception in Fort Smith, St. Joseph in Pine Bluff, and St. Mary in Helena. These are pilgrimage sites that will allow the faithful – especially those unable to travel to Rome – to obtain the jubilee indulgence. Bishop Taylor said that he encourages Catholics in our diocese to embark on a pilgrimage to one of these jubilee churches “as an opportunity to encounter God’s abundant mercy and become true agents of hope in our world.”

“Love Thy Neighbor” Interfaith Event (Follow-up) – Paul James

Paul James reported on this event that took place at St. Mark Episcopal Church in Little Rock on September 5th. He said it was moving to see so many different religious backgrounds represented at the service that lasted about an hour and included prayer, music, and dance. He said it reminded him of a comment Pope Francis made on his recent visit to Singapore about all religions being a path to God.

LEARNS Act (Update) – Marguerite Olberts

Marguerite Olberts, Associate Superintendent in the Catholic Schools Office, provided an update on the LEARNS Act, an Arkansas law in its second year that allows families with students attending private and parochial schools to receive state funds through Education Freedom Accounts (EFAs). Some of the points she mentioned included: total enrollment in Catholic schools for this year increased by 3.19% to 6,810; based on a survey, 2,674 students are on EFAs compared to 1,427 students last year; this year the maximum EFA allotment for tuition and fees is \$6,718; and next year the EFAs will be universal, meaning open to any student in grades K-12 subject to funding by the state. Marguerite’s report was followed by some discussion about the impact of the LEARNS Act on the Catholic schools in our diocese.

New Business

Membership on the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DCP) – Bishop Taylor

Bishop Taylor mentioned that some of the DCP members have terms that are expiring. He will consult with them and the group or organization they represent about another term or a replacement.

Diocesan Council for Black Catholics (DCBC) – Alma Stewart

Alma Stewart provided a brief report on the Fall Funfest Event the DCBC hosted at St. Peter Catholic Church in Pine Bluff.

Catholic Young Adult Ministry – Anabel Garcia

Anabel Garcia reported on a Catholic young adult group that is meeting in Fort Smith.

Meeting Wrap-up

Bishop Taylor's remarks

Bishop Taylor thanked the council members for their attendance and discussion with him.

Future Agenda Items

These can be submitted to Paul James, Chair, Bishop Taylor, or María Velázquez in the Bishop's Office. Topics that are on the agenda for the Presbyteral Council will also be used for the Diocesan Pastoral Council meetings.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Friday, January 17, 2025

Closing Prayer

The meeting closed at 12:15 p.m. with a prayer and blessing from Bishop Taylor.

Respectfully recorded by:

Dennis Lee
Chancellor for Administrative Affairs