

## **DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL**

### **MEETING MINUTES**

**Friday, December 1, 2023**

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

**In attendance:** Bishop Anthony B. Taylor, Fr. John Connell, VG, Dcn. Matt Glover, Mr. Dennis Lee, Sr. Mickey Espinoza, MCP, Mr. Greg Wolfe, Dcn. Steve Mallett, Ms. Anabel Garcia (Zoom), Ms. Alma Stewart, Sr. Cecilia Nguyen, OSB, Dr. Karen Hollenbeck (Zoom), Mr. Adrián Dominguez, Mr. Jeff Hines, Mr. Paul James, Mr. Roberto Martínez, and Mrs. María Velázquez.

**Not in attendance:** Mr. Alan Halman.

**Review and approval of previous meeting's minutes:** The minutes of the August 11, 2023, meeting were approved by acclamation.

### **Old Business**

#### **Synod on Synodality Synthesis – Bishop Anthony B. Taylor**

The Presbyteral Council has continued to discuss topics that surfaced in our diocese from the listening sessions and comments that were submitted during the local diocesan phase of the Synod on Synodality. Bishop Taylor has asked the Diocesan Pastoral Council members to discuss the same topics with him. The topic for discussion at this meeting was the “Role of Women in the life of the Church.”

Several comments were made about the need for women to be involved in decision making within the Church, and then the discussion turned to the current situation for women Religious in our diocese and what can be done to support more vocations. Sister Cecilia Nguyen shared what she does in her diocesan position as Minister for Religious, including hosting an annual “Come and See” retreat weekend that all the Religious communities in our diocese are invited to participate in. Last year 8-10 women attended to learn more about Religious life. The response, measured in terms of how many followed-up by contacting a Religious community in Arkansas to learn more, has been low.

A few ideas were suggested that included: asking the Knights of Columbus in our diocese to invite families to come together in support of vocations; coming up with a way to reach women in our diocese who are involved with their parishes that do not come to Little Rock, maybe with a team that is bi-lingual that can lead a retreat day in a region, including helping parents understand more about Religious vocations; prayer cards for Religious vocations; mentioning Religious vocations at Mass; and it makes a difference when Religious sisters are working in a parish and are visible to families.

Bishop Taylor said there were some other themes that came up in our diocesan Synod process that he would like to discuss with the council members at a future meeting. These did not fit into the general themes that have already been discussed. He also mentioned that Vatican officials are drafting a working document on the Synod on Synodality for the world-wide Church.

## **New Business**

### **Boy Scouts – Deacon Matt Glover**

Deacon Matt Glover, Chancellor for Canonical Affairs, briefed the council members on the status of the Boy Scouts of America's bankruptcy as it relates to Catholic entities. This was followed with a discussion of the options for scouting available to parishes with the Boy Scouts of America and Trail Life USA.

### **October Mass Count – Mrs. Maria Velazquez**

Mrs. Maria Velazquez, Executive Secretary for the Bishop's Office, provided a handout with the Mass attendance for the month of October 2023. The Mass counts were broken down by deanery, parish, and language (English, Spanish, Bilingual, Latin, Vietnamese, Korean, Igbo, and American Sign Language).

A few observations were made by Bishop Taylor and the council members that included: Mass attendance has increased to about what it was pre-Covid; in most deaneries attendance at the English Masses declined while the Spanish Masses and others increased; 43 of 130 churches offer Mass in Spanish; 25 parishes had fewer than 50 at Mass; 10 parishes had more than 1,000 attending; 8 counties have no Catholic church, and 36 counties have no resident priest. There was also some discussion of ideas for increasing Mass attendance that included an emphasis on attracting more youth and young adults in their 20's and 30's.

### **Future Agenda Items**

These can be sent to Mr. Paul James, Chair, Bishop Taylor, or Mrs. Maria Velazquez in the Bishop's Office.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be Friday, January 12, 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, input and good discussion, and the meeting ended at 1 p.m. with the Lord's Prayer and his blessing.

Respectfully recorded by:

Dennis Lee  
Chancellor for Administrative Affairs