



ARCHDIOCESE of BALTIMORE

Archdiocesan Pastoral Council meeting Monday, April 22 via Zoom *Meeting notes*

Present: Archbishop William E. Lori, Mr. Michael Chorabik Jr., Mr. James Conway, Mr. Andrew Likoudis, Ms. Elaine McCubbin, Ms. Gloria Olivares, Mr. Emory Plitt, Ms. Annalynne Reddington, Mr. Larry Simmons and Mr. Alexander Wright.

Excused: Ms. Agnes Nepomuceno, Ms. Uju Okwesili, Ms. Consuelo Petro and Ms. Lee Anne Santiago.

Guests: Bishop Bruce Lewandowski, Ms. Geri Royale Byrd, Mrs. Lia Garcia, Mr. Christian Kendzierski and Mr. Andrew Middleton.

Archbishop Lori called the meeting to order shortly after 6 p.m. He offered a greeting, led the group in prayer.

The council agreed to approve the meeting notes from Feb. 24.

Topics Addressed

I. Seek the City to Come

Archbishop Lori offered introductory comments about the conclusion of the two-year Seek the City to Come initiative that has guided thousands of people on a prayerful journey to reimagine, realign and revitalize the Church in Baltimore City. The initiative is in its final state of consultation following the release of a proposal. The Archbishop stressed that no final decision has been made. He said this period has been difficult with members of the faithful expressing grief, anger and reservation. While deeply painful, the decision is necessary and overdue. The Church must move from maintenance to mission and ministry to move forward as we embrace the Eucharistic vision to foster newly formed parishes that are vibrant and welcoming centers of evangelization, where mercy, trust and the love of Jesus abound.

The Archbishop welcomed Bishop Bruce Lewandowski who has been leading the Seek the City to Come initiative with Ms. Geri Byrd, the Archdiocese's director of community and external affairs.

Bishop Lewandowski explained population shifts and disinvestment in the city have created unsustainable conditions. The Church has been trying to do more with less, which is not conducive to long-term vibrancy. At this point, the Church in Baltimore must get smaller to get bigger. Parishioners have been heroic in their efforts to keep the buildings maintained and serve their neighbors; however, from a position of strength, parishes can provide strong family formation activities, more robust evangelization and thriving ministries.

Ms. Byrd offered information on the three parish types included in the proposal: “mosaic,” “radiating” and “Catholic Commons.” She said the proposal is a starting point for discussion and the feedback and input received will be critical to shaping the final plan. Importantly, she noted that the seated parish is not hosting the ones merging; together, they become a newly formed parish that forms a new entity.

Implementation of the final plan, when decided, will be gradual and phased-in over a period of six-months to a year, although the timeline could vary depending on individual needs. It is during the implementation phase that parish leadership will be determined. The driving focus with incorporating the Archdiocese’s “Eucharistic Vision” in parish life. The vision calls for Christ-centered parishes with liturgies and sacraments fully alive with the Gospel, engaged parishioners who are constantly growing in their faith and churches where everyone feels welcomed.

Ms. Bryd invited the members to join the upcoming public comment sessions.

Discussion with Members

Mr. Simmons asked what would happen to any real estate owned by parishes that will be scheduled for merging. Ms. Byrd said adaptive reuse is the goal, although the outcomes for the churches that are merging will be determined during the implementation phase by the newly formed parish.

Mr. Simmons asked how the newly formed parishes will become spiritual homes for the congregation. Bishop Bruce said the Emmaus teams will accompany parishioners on the journey. While he acknowledged that there will be pain, through the joy of the Gospel, the newly formed parishes can find a way forward.

Judge Plitt said the Seek the City mergers are necessary given the population shifts in the city and the challenges of engaging young people in the Church. He said the focus going forward must be evangelization.

Mr. Conway said while change is necessary, the Seek process has not allow enough room for re-growth. Specifically, options for Black Catholics are too limited. He emphasized that people worship differently and all need to find a spiritual home that suits them. He fears the plan as it is now will hamper the Church’s ability for revival. Additionally, he is concerned about the Church’s ability to retain today’s parishioners going forward.

Judge Wright said help is on the way to accompany parish communities through this process, including formation teams and grief support. The faithful won’t be asked to go through these changes alone.

Mr. Simmons said there must be a standard set for the transitions.

Mr. Chorabik said if Seek’s goal is to regrow the Church in Baltimore, how can that happen if the Church has fewer properties and risks parishioners walking away completely. Bishop Bruce pointed to outcomes in other dioceses, such as Pittsburgh, that show the process takes time but can work.

Mr. Chorabik raised questions about the “Catholic Commons” idea and pointed to the challenges of closing St. Veronica Church and opening a new Catholic Commons space.

Mr. Likoudis asked about the future of Holy Rosary and said the church’s evening Mass for young people offers a bright opportunity for the Church. Mr. Chorabik agreed and said at a recent celebration that church was full.

Ms. Olivares said the city certainly has many beautiful, historic churches. The Seek process promises to bring new life to the Church in the City. She said change is hard, but it can lead to a promising new chapter for the Church.

Mr. Simmons noted that the proposal should be broadly circulated, and the public comment sessions must be heavily promoted to ensure engagement.

The Archbishop encouraged the APC members to attend the public comment sessions and thanked them for the extended conversation this evening.

II. Apostleship of the Sea

Andrew Middleton, director of the Apostleship of the Sea in Baltimore, said seven ships are still stranded in the harbor following the collapse of the Key Bridge, including the Dali. Contact with that crew stopped after the criminal investigation started. The ministry had been working to keep them occupied, including taking some members of the crew to an Orioles game. The ministry has been accepting donations for seafarers which help provide resources for care packages that are being delivered. The ministry has also coordinated Mass for stranded crews.

Mr. Middleton thanked the Archdiocese and the APC for the support.

Discussion with Members

Mr. Conway thanked Mr. Middleton and all involved with the ministry and asked him to reach out if there was anything needed.

III. National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry

Lia Garcia, director of the Office of Hispanic Ministry, said the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' national plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry is now being implemented. Members can review it in its entirety online. The plan looks at the gifts of the Hispanic/Latino community and ask how to amplify what's working well and improve what could be done better, including incorporating more Hispanic/Latino Catholics in Church leadership.

The plan includes 10 pastoral priorities that have been adopted by the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

IV. Closing prayer

Archbishop Lori offered closing remarks, including a brief update on the Chapter 11 reorganization, upcoming victim-survivor comments in court and the May 31 "bar date" for claims to be filed.

He led the group in prayer and the meeting concluded.