



ARCHDIOCESE of BALTIMORE

Archdiocesan Pastoral Council meeting Saturday, Feb. 24 at St. Paul, Ellicott City *Meeting notes*

Present: Archbishop William E. Lori, Mr. Michael Chorabik Jr., Mr. James Conway, Mr. Andrew Likoudis, Ms. Sara Miller, Ms. Gloria Olivares, Mr. Emory Plitt, Ms. Lee Anne Santiago, and Mr. Alexander Wright.

Excused: Ms. Elaine McCubbin, Ms. Agnes Nepomuceno, Ms. Uju Okwesili, Ms. Consuelo Petro, Ms. Annalynne Reddington, and Mr. Larry Simmons.

Guests: Ms. Geri Royale Byrd and Ms. Yvonne Wenger.

Archbishop Lori called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. He offered a greeting, led the group in prayer and then welcomed two new members, including retired Judge Emory Plitt Jr., who is the new Harford County representative. Judge Plitt is a longtime parishioner of St. Patrick in Harve de Grace, where he has served as a parish council member, longtime corporator and a Eucharistic minister. Archbishop Lori also welcomed Michael Chorabik Jr., who joined the APC as a second at-large representative of the young adult community. He is a student at Georgetown University, a member of the Knights of Columbus at his college, and a parishioner at Holy Rosary Church in Baltimore. The Archbishop thanked outgoing member Sara Miller for her service. Ms. Miller is a founding member of the re-established APC, and she has served for more than four years.

The Archbishop highlighted the Archdiocese's "Faith in Action" campaign, which members may be seeing in the news, on social media and in their parishes. He said this is a robust telling of the Archdiocese's story that spotlights the good works of the Church by the faithful. He directed members to their packets to find his column in the Catholic Review, an article in WBAL-TV and a flier with facts and figures. The group watched a brief video.

The council agreed to approve the meeting notes from November 18.

Topics Addressed

I. Seek the City to Come

Archbishop Lori welcomed a presentation by Ms. Byrd on the Seek the City to Come initiative, which launched 18 months ago and has guided thousands of people on a prayerful journey to reimagine, realign and revitalize the Church in Baltimore City. Ms. Byrd is the Archdiocese's director of community and external affairs. She has been leading the Seek the City to Come initiative with Bishop Bruce Lewandowski.

The first phase of the initiative involved extensive listening and in-depth visits and engagement with the 61 parish communities involved in the initiative. The visioning phase began in the fall and stretched until early 2024. This second phase involved workshops and focus groups that provided valuable data and feedback to Archdiocesan leaders. Currently, the Seek process is in the discernment phase that will conclude in May. The group is gathering data and engaging in prayerful discernment with a focus on transparency. A citywide Mass was held in early February, and there is currently a Lenten pilgrimage underway; members received information in their packet. In early March, the Seek team will guide draft modeling sessions that will ask parish leadership to consider one of three parish types: “mosaic,” “radiating” and “Catholic Commons.”

Ms. Byrd discussed the efforts by the Seek team to study successes and lessons learned from other dioceses that have gone through similar processes. The hallmark of the Archdiocese’s initiative has been the creation of a groundswell of voices. Pastors, parish leadership and members of the faithful are the ones who are shaping the recommendations that the Archbishop will receive in the coming months.

Ms. Byrd said her main takeaway from this process has been that “we are one mission, one Church and one in Christ.”

Discussion with Members

Mr. Chorabik asked whether the parish types envision worship in traditional churches or other facilities, such as an auditorium. Ms. Byrd said his question is precisely the type of question that is under deliberation by those engaged in the draft modeling sessions.

Ms. Olivares noted that the St. John the Evangelist campus in Columbia could provide inspiration to the Seek process, specifically embodying some of the goals of the “Catholic Commons” model. She also commended the Archdiocese for the approach that’s been taking on the entire initiative.

Mr. Plitt asked about the process after the recommendations are adopted. Archbishop Lori responded, saying an implementation process will follow with individual parish timelines varying.

Mr. Wright asked how real estate holdings factor into the Seek process. Ms. Byrd said a real estate committee has been working alongside the Seek process to evaluate properties and the potential for adaptive reuse. Sophisticated dashboards have been created for each campus to guide deliberations.

Ms. Santiago offered insight into the process in Western Maryland to combine five parish communities into one. She said the changes resulted in some families leaving to worship elsewhere, although some have since returned. Realigning the Church community has brought new opportunities for ministry and service – and has also opened up avenues for new evangelization. Archbishop Lori noted that the Archdiocese carried inspiration from Mountain Maryland into this process in Baltimore City.

The Archbishop said the APC will receive future updates on the initiative.

II. Mental Wellness Ministry

Ms. Wenger, director of public relations, offered an update on the Archdiocese’s Mental Wellness Ministry. This work builds on the Archdiocese’s efforts during the pandemic to create a curated list of resources with the help of a working group of mental health practitioners in Catholic parishes and entities. From there, the group facilitated trainings for cohorts of Mental Health First Aid instructors from parish and school communities, and they, in turn, trained a network of nearly 1,000 first responders.

The working group is now surveying the Mental Health First Aiders and parish leadership to establish two pilot sites for parish-based mental health ministries, Ms. Wenger said, noting that such ministries did not provide mental health treatment. This work falls under the careful framework created by the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers.

A retreat is being planned for May 15, on St. Dymphna's Feast Day, at the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg. Ms. Wenger also said another goal for the Archdiocese is to publish existing parish-based resources on the website to guide Catholics toward treatment and resources.

Discussion with Members

Mr. Wright asked how parish communities and members of the faithful could engage with this ministry. Ms. Wenger said the Archdiocesan website would be a good starting point, and more will be known soon with the results of the surveys from parish leadership and the Mental Health First Aiders.

Ms. Miller said she was encouraged by this work and hoped it could also help break down the stigma related to accessing mental health treatment.

Mr. Plitt recommended looking into the work the courts have done to evaluate situations involving people who have encountered mental health and behavioral health challenges and subsequently channel them to resources.

III. Synod

Archbishop Lori said the Holy Father has called the Church to journey together through the Synod, recognizing the divisions in our country, the world and the Church. Synod discussions are continuing with another planned gathering of bishops in Rome this fall. To prepare for that, the Archdiocese is holding listening sessions with various Archdiocesan groups, including the APC, the Presbyteral Council, the Board of Financial Administration, the school board and area priests. Regional sessions will also take place in March St. Joseph in Hagerstown, St. Francis of Assisi in Baltimore and St. Philip Neri in Linthicum. Dates are being determined. The information received from these sessions will be included in a draft submitted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The APC split into two groups and discussed the following questions:

1. Where have I seen or experienced successes—and distresses—within the Church's structure(s)/organization/leadership/life that encourage or hinder the mission?
2. How can the structures and organization of the Church help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?

Discussion with Members

The members reconvened and discussed their responses to the questions.

Ms. Miller reported responses from one half of the membership gathered. In response to the first question, she said the success of the Church leadership is dependent on the inclusion of more lay people (outside of just Sunday services). Parishioners should be invited and encouraged to take on different roles, such as serving as Eucharistic ministers to homebound Catholics. This will do more to make people invested in the parish and free up time and energy of priests.

Mr. Chorabik provided a summary of the responses from the second group. In response to the first question, he said the service provided by the faithful is a way to draw in and engage people while connecting them to the purpose they can find in the Lord. However, some challenges exist. Some are the Chapter 11 reorganization and Confirmation being viewed as a graduation in faith formation.

In response to the second question, Ms. Miller said, Church structures are defined enough to create responsibility but free enough to allow for creativity. Parishioners can find a path to move their church communities forward for today's world.

Mr. Chorabik offered for the second question the following responses. Too many see Confirmation as a graduation from their Church formation, and the direction and engagement provided by youth ministers isn't consistent across the Archdiocese. Likewise, a generation of parents are in need of continuing their own formation. Additionally, the USCCB's Journeying Together work has been aimed at forming bonds between cultural groups, and this has the promise to lead the Church back to the true meaning of being the Catholic, or universal, Church. The ability for the Church to be inclusive is central to the ability to proclaim the Gospel and live together as a community love and mercy in Christ.

Archbishop Lori thanked the members for their deliberations and insight. He said a key to faith formation is to increase engagement of entire families, not only young people. Many parents are catechized but not evangelized. He said he looks forward to providing updates to the APC.

IV. Closing prayer

Archbishop Lori offered closing remarks, including a brief update on the Chapter 11 reorganization and the May 31 "bar date" for claims to be filed.

He led the group in prayer and the meeting concluded at 12:03 p.m.