

ARCHDIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL

**May 24, 2007
Minutes**

Cardinal Sean welcomed APC members to the meeting at 6:45 PM and introduced two members of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Committee, Regina O'Connor and Fr. George Evans.

Reports and Recommendations

Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Committee

Two years ago, Cardinal Sean expressed concern about the limited number of priests likely to be available for ministry in the Archdiocese given the loss of about 25 active priests per year through retirement, death or disability and the small number of priests being ordained (5 in 2006, 7 in 2007). He formed the Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Committee to examine current programs and services provided by archdiocesan priests, to review the best practices locally and nationally and to formulate recommendations and priorities to guide the archdiocese into the future. The committee met 18 times. In addition, sub-committees reviewed relevant literature and contacted other North American dioceses that have initiated or implemented steps to establish new parish models in response to similar challenges. Fr. George Evans presented the committee's report.

The committee's recommendations include the following:

- the Cardinal mandate all parishes to engage in a diocesan-wide pastoral planning process
- an Implementation Committee be formed to guide the planning process
- education of all clergy, staff and parishioners about the attitudinal shifts necessary for developing more creative responses to parish pastoral needs in the 21st century
- development of a culture of planning, including annual evaluation and accountability at all levels (parishes, collaboratives, regions, archdiocesan cabinets and agencies)
- Archdiocesan officials and diocesan consultative groups review the parish staffing options currently available and determine which models would be viable in Boston (individual parish with priest pastor, two or more parishes with one priest pastor or a team of priests, two or more neighboring parishes coordinating specified services to avoid duplication of ministries, etc.)
- education of clergy, staff and parishioners to develop skills for effective pastoral planning, group dynamics, interpersonal relationships and leadership/organization; formation programs for parish business managers (and parish administrators, if this model is approved)
- collaborative parishes develop and present a five-year pastoral plan to their regional bishop within two years

- final plan approved for collaborative within one year after diocesan review including timeline for implementation

Fr. Evans distributed comment forms to solicit written feedback from the APC. Discussion after the presentation included the following questions and comments:

- Excellent communication between the Archdiocese and parish would be needed for successfully transitioning a parish to function without a full-time pastor.
- Planning needs to begin at the grassroots level in order to be successful.
- Boston should look to recruiting priests from other countries.
- Will lay ministers be required to sign a commitment to the Magisterium?
- Which parish models will be used in Boston? At this time, Boston has no pastoral administrators.
- The “special ministry” of some priests mentioned in the report was clarified to include military service, academia, chaplaincy, Chancery assignments and the Society of St. James.
- Concern was voiced that the recommended changes might be like the recent unpopular Reconfiguration. It was noted that there were problems early on with some of the changes already taking place in Manchester, NH. However, communication has improved and parishes are adjusting better.
- One council member mentioned that he has seen plans like this twice over his 30 years of priesthood, but nothing was ever done.
- Cardinal Sean commented that it will require committed lay people who have appropriate formation. He noted that in Japan, some Catholic communities kept the faith for years without priests. It’s also important that everyone renew their sense of fostering vocations and holiness.
- Will priests who have left ministry to marry be invited back to minister?
- Has the idea of married priests been considered?

Archdiocesan Committee on Marriage

Cardinal Sean established this committee two years ago. Committee chair Kari Colella presented their findings.

The number of Catholic marriages celebrated in the Boston Archdiocese has decreased 60.9% over the last 21 years. Between 1960 and 2004, cohabitation increased nationally 1200%.

There are now 86 marriage preparation programs available each year in the archdiocese. On average these programs consist of three meetings for a total of about ten hours. Young Catholics receive some additional marriage preparation via Confirmation classes, youth and campus ministry programs and Respect Life programs.

The committee recommended that new guidelines for marriage preparation programs be developed by the Family Life Office and a priest be assigned to assist them. Proximate (just prior to marriage) programs should be organized on a regional basis to alleviate the strain on parish priests and volunteers while at the same time ensuring the quality and content of the program. The curriculum should include:

- a minimum of 16 hours instruction
- a mix of catechesis and witness talks
- completion and discussion of a pre-marital inventory such as FOCCUS® or PREPARE ®

The content, length and cost of marriage preparation programs should be consistent throughout the Archdiocese so that all engaged couples receive proper formation. The new guidelines should include a post-marriage course requirement. Team members should be trained directly through the Archdiocese or an Archdiocesan-approved program.

The committee recommended collaboration with the Archdiocesan Committee on Youth and Young Adult Faith Formation to evaluate opportunities within their recommendations for “remote” (prior to engagement) marriage preparation.

A comprehensive Marriage Education Manual should be developed by the Religious Education Office, the Vocations Office, Marriage Ministries, Youth Ministries, Young Adult Ministries, Campus Ministries and the Respect Life Education Office. It should present age-appropriate outlines and materials for use by Directors of Religious Education, Catholic School teachers, catechists, chaplains and other educator of youth in the Archdiocese. The Manual should include content from John Paul II’s **Theology of the Body**.

The committee emphasized the importance of parents as primary educators and cited the need for parents to receive assistance in educating their children on human sexuality from a Catholic perspective.

The need for marriage enrichment opportunities was highlighted. The Family Life Office should create a comprehensive listing of programs throughout the Archdiocese. Priests should be encouraged to be involved in these programs. The Archdiocese should compile a list of Catholic marriage therapists who are faithful to the Magisterium. This list should be available for referrals through the Family Life Office and parishes.

Following the presentation comment forms were distributed to solicit written feedback from APC members. Comments and questions included the following:

- Marriage Preparation Programs should include discussion of domestic violence.
- Baptismal Preparation programs should include Marriage Enrichment.

- The cost of celebrating Marriage in parishes should be regulated to ensure access for the poor.
- Cardinal Sean noted that the sense of satisfaction derived from being a parent seems to have declined. Church-going people have more children than non-church-goers.
- It will be difficult to interest engaged couples in a 16-hour marriage preparation program.
- What percent of Catholics marry non-Catholics? Recommend a special program for interfaith or re-marrying couples.
- Recommend more training in Marriage Preparation and annulments for seminarians.

What does the Cardinal need to hear?

One representative noted a problem in a parish he had visited. A new pastor wanted to begin a Neo-Catechumen program in his parish but the Parish Pastoral Council, established by the former pastor, was not open to this idea.

Some people thought that they were still not receiving email from the Archdiocese. Father Erikson explained that Archdiocesan emails were no longer being sent exclusively by him, but directly from Terry Donilon, Nancy Allen and other Chancery personnel.

There was a question about the Church's policy on excommunicating Catholic politicians who supported legislation not in line with Catholic beliefs. Cardinal Sean explained the Pope's term "Eucharistic continuity" stating that significant sin disqualifies a person from reception of the Eucharist, but if a person presents for communion, it is not denied.

A council member commented that the Zero Tolerance policy did not seem fair to priests, that they were removed from ministry immediately when an accusation was made. The Archdiocesan procedure was clarified. A priest is placed on administrative leave while a preliminary investigation is conducted. This includes a review committee contacting victims, the family of the accused, psychologists and legal counsel and then making a recommendation to the bishop. The evidence is presented to judges at a canonical trial. It was noted that the Church has neither subpoena power nor investigative officers.

Cardinal Sean was thanked for attending the Women's and Men's Conferences in March.

Someone stated that several years ago, St. John the Evangelist Parish started a parish planning process which resulted in a very vital and effective parish organization. Since then the parish has been thriving.

Sister Eileen Burns, SND announced that she was resigning from the APC because of taking on another role in her community. She thanked everyone saying that working with the APC had been a wonderful experience for her. This was followed by much applause and well-wishing for Sister Eileen.

A representative praised Cardinal Sean for his handling of the sale of Chancery property remarking that it went over much better than the closing of Presentation School a few years ago.

Closing Remarks

Cardinal Sean described the new Pastoral Center in Braintree as right off the highway, with more parking and more space enabling all the Chancery offices to be located together. St. John's Seminary will remain on the Brighton campus. The \$65,000,000 proceeds from the sale of the Brighton property will pay off a \$35,000,000 debt owed to the Knights of Columbus and bring the diocese closer to financial health. The priests' retirement fund is still too low and there is yet a \$15,000,000 operating deficit.

The Cardinal said he looked forward to ordaining seven new priests the following Saturday and that he hoped the upcoming vote on the Marriage Amendment in the state legislature would allow the citizens of Massachusetts to decide that marriage should be only between a man and a woman.

Father Erikson informed the council that the summaries of the two committee reports given tonight could be shared with others, but not the actual printed reports.

Sister Marian expressed thanks for the work of the new APC recording secretary, Suzanne Robotham. She also asked for nominations to fill a new vacancy on the Steering Committee.

Cardinal Sean ended the meeting with prayer at 8:55PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne Robotham
Recording Secretary