

**Archdiocesan Pastoral Council**  
**January 8, 2009**  
**Minutes**

Sr. Marian Batho opened the meeting at 6:35PM. She congratulated Sharon Moore and Thong Phamduy, APC members who were recipients of the 2008 Cheverus medals. Cardinal Sean awarded the medals at the closing Mass of the Archdiocesan Bi-Centennial Year in recognition of their service to the Church. Thong's wife, Dietu, also received a Cheverus medal.

Newly appointed (or reappointed) APC members include Sr. Mary Binnom, Kevin M. Casey, Ellen Connell, Kevin Delehanty, Jane Devlin, Sharon Moore, Rev. Leonard O'Malley, Philip Moran, Rev. Frank Silva, Kevin Smith, Jean Ulysse, and David Vise.

Sr. Marian announced that the APC Steering Committee needs two more members. The Steering Committee monitors the pulse of the APC and helps plan the agenda for its meetings. Nomination forms were made available.

**Opening Remarks**

Cardinal Sean reported that the Archdiocesan Bi-Centennial Year concluded with a celebratory Mass in the Cathedral of the Holy Cross on November 23. He was proud to award the Cheverus medal to sixty-seven Catholics during this Mass in recognition of their service to the Church. He spoke appreciatively of the Boston Public Library exhibit on the history of the Archdiocese that also honored the two-hundred year Catholic presence in Boston. The Arise Together in Christ program, another bi-centennial initiative, continues to bring together over thirty thousand people in small faith sharing groups to study Scripture throughout the Archdiocese.

The long-awaited new Archdiocesan website ([www.bostoncatholic.org](http://www.bostoncatholic.org)) will hopefully be launched later this month. Eucharistic Adoration is taking place every afternoon in the Bethany Chapel at the Pastoral Center. Local merchants will be asked to publicize the noontime Mass at the Chapel and the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be available on Thursdays. Many parish groups have been using the Pastoral Center for evening meetings.

Next, Cardinal Sean commended the work of tonight's speaker, Fr. Bryan Hehir. Fr. Hehir has mentored discussions with the Presbyteral Council and the Cabinet about the pastoral consequences of the deteriorating economic situation and how the Church can best respond to the needs of the times.

**Pastoral Care in Our Troubled Economy**

Fr. Bryan Hehir spoke about the current recession caused by the failures of our financial institutions and their regulators. How should the Church respond? How deep, sharp and broad is our awareness of the situation? Already our Catholic social service agencies have seen a rising demand for assistance. St. Mary's Center for Women is at maximum capacity. On the parish level, the resources of the St. Vincent de Paul societies are strained. Except for these societies, most parishes are not focused on economic needs.

Fr. Hehir views the problem through four different lenses. The first is food and hunger. The Boston Red Cross has provided meals to 23,000 more people this past year than in 2007-2008.

The need peaks during the end of the third week of the month through the month's end. Some former donors are now among those in need. Senior citizens are especially affected. Between September and December 2008, 7350 new households have come to the food pantries of the Boston Catholic Charities; 704 of them had to be turned away. Fortunately, many parishes are contributing to their local food pantries.

The second and third lenses focus on housing and homelessness. A writer for the Washington Post recently described how the problems of hunger, housing and healthcare are linked. The high cost of housing reduces the budget for food; inadequate nutrition leads to more health issues. Current statistics report 2,200 homeless families in Massachusetts. Foreclosures are up 72%, 1300 of them in Boston. This year the state asked the Archdiocese if it had any available buildings (convents, rectories) that might be used for housing on an emergency basis. Catholic Charities recently assisted 165 families with rent and heating oil. 5,175 requests were not able to be met.

The fourth lens looks at unemployment. Massachusetts is slightly better off than the rest of the U.S. in this regard although 533 jobs were lost here in December. Putnam had a big layoff last fall; Fidelity laid off 1300 workers just before Christmas. 17% of the unemployment claims in November were from former clerical personnel. Massachusetts is running a \$1.4 billion deficit and has cut \$1 billion from its budget. Another round of cuts will be coming in the near future. Fr. Hehir recalled Pope John Paul II's encyclical on the Dignity of Work that described work as not only a way to make a living, but as also providing a sense of self-worth and meaning.

50% of the Catholic Charities budget comes from state and federal grants. Happily, it was able to raise enough money this year to fund its budget. However, those of us in the parishes cannot be spectators! He reminded us that, as members of the Church, our mission includes performing spiritual and corporeal works of mercy as well as preaching the gospel and celebrating the Eucharist.

Following Fr. Hehir's report, concerns were raised about support for those devastated by job loss and concern that many people would be forced to take their children out of Catholic schools. A final commenter pointed out that the recession presents an opportunity for all of us to trust in God and give alms out of our own needed resources.

### **Catholic Education and the 2010 Initiative**

Dr. Mary Grassa-O'Neill became the Superintendent of Catholic Schools in Boston just six months ago. She herself attended Catholic schools in Boston. She stated that "a Catholic education is a gift that lasts a lifetime". Her goals for the Archdiocesan schools include academic excellence, nurturing faith formation and Catholic identity, and the viability and vitality of the schools. The 135 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese already perform 50% better than the national median, outperforming Boston public and charter schools. Graduation rates in our Catholic high schools are 98-99% compared with 72-74% in local public schools and 50% or lower in the inner city schools.

Most of the Catholic schools are in the inner cities. They set high expectations, are competitive, safe and orderly. As part of their Catholic identity, the schools emphasize high moral values, faith formation, spiritual development, integrity, honesty and seriousness of purpose. Poor students receive the same education as the rich. Some of the schools have endowments; others

struggle. Some have waiting lists; one has only 77 students. Declining enrollments reflect demographic changes, the economy and lack of financial resources.

She explained that Cardinal Sean is committed to a strong network of Catholic schools and has found some extraordinary benefactors who have stepped up as significant partners in the Campaign 2010 for Catholic Schools. Forty schools were identified “at risk”. After meetings with pastors, parents and principals, the Campaign developed plans for partnering and regionalizing the schools. Brockton Trinity Catholic merged three schools, undertook building renovation, upgraded the curriculum with programs for music, gifted and talented students and has seen rising scores and enrollment. In Dorchester, seven schools were closed and five buildings transformed into the new Pope John Paul Academy. A major renovation is planned for the last Catholic school remaining in Gloucester. Enrollment there is up 50% even before renovations have begun. The high schools are also developing partner relationships with some of the nearby Catholic and private colleges and universities.

A commenter mentioned that the last remaining Catholic school in Salem was being closed and no one has come there to speak with the teachers. Dr. Grassa-O’Neill responded that she has spoken to the parents at the school, but has not yet been able to meet with the teachers. Those teachers will be on the priority-hiring list at the other Archdiocesan schools. Dr. Grassa-O’Neill spoke with the principals from eight schools neighboring another school to be closed in order to set up a network of nearby schools willing to take the displaced students. An open house was sponsored for the parents to learn about the possible options so that no student was “lost”. Catholic school enrollment in the Archdiocese is approximately 45,000 students at this time. The city of Boston is in the process of closing twelve schools which will affect 55,000 students.

A question was asked about the professional development available to Catholic school teachers. Dr. Grassa-O’Neill answered that professional development opportunities were being expanded through arrangements with several area colleges. She added that 25 new principals were hired this year and each one has an experienced mentor to contact for professional support. In addition, there are six staff members in the Catholic Schools Office to assist with budgeting and enrollment projections.

### **Update on the Clergy Benefit Trust**

Mr. Joe D’Arrigo first reported to the APC in September 2008. This fund finances the retirement and disability of priests in the Archdiocese as well as the medical claims for active and retired clergy. Each parish is assessed for the healthcare needs of priests, in addition to the Christmas and Easter collections, which go to the fund. This typically raises approximately \$5.2 million each year. However, \$8 -10 million is actually what is needed and, at present, the fund is running a \$10 million deficit. This has resulted primarily from the increased cost for retired and disabled clergy. 407 priests in the Archdiocese are now over 65; there are only 200 priests under the age of 45. In the past, the trust has paid all nursing home costs and has not used Medicare A and B. This will change. Later in January, an outside board of trustees will be named and an auditing firm will be studying the operation of the fund since 1973 to learn what can be improved. A third collection to supplement the fund is scheduled for June 2009. Suggestions for increasing donations are welcome! A Priest Appreciation Dinner on October 16<sup>th</sup> will honor the priests celebrating significant anniversaries of their service to the Archdiocese.

### **What Do I Need to Hear?**

An APC member asked if the Pastoral Center could be used for Confirmation retreats. He was advised to contact Kevin Kiley about this. A request was made that the Archdiocese address the problem that 50% of parishes do not have a functional Pastoral Parish Council. Another member suggested that the encouraging statistics quoted by the Cardinal at the Closing Mass of the Bi-Centennial Year be publicized. The Cardinal agreed and said that his homily that day is posted on his blog. Someone asked about the time frame for the pastoral planning efforts described in the May 2007 report given by the Pastoral Planning Committee. Cardinal Sean reported that things were on hold during the search for a new director of the Pastoral Planning Office. One representative commended Cardinal Sean's leadership, which has brought the Church in Boston to a much better place than it was in four years ago when he joined the APC. He also praised the excellent and diverse programming of Boston Catholic TV.

A member whose three children attend Catholic schools noted that he has seen significant improvements in the schools. Another member thanked Cardinal Sean for his support of Catholics from Viet Nam. There are now eight Vietnamese Catholic communities.

### **Closing Remarks**

Fr. Richard Erikson announced that seminarians are now receiving training in the business aspects of running a parish. Workshops are also being offered to those already ordained.

Cardinal Sean expressed his hope to hire directors for the Pastoral Planning Office and the Office of Faith Formation and Evangelization in the near future. The annual Pro-Life March will take place in Washington, D.C. later in January. Several busses of supporters will be there from Boston. The Catholic Appeal for 2008 is close to reaching its goal. Cardinal Sean appreciated Fr. Hehir's presentation tonight highlighting the needs resulting from the economic downturn and encouraging parishes to help as much as possible. The Catholic schools he called "a great treasure" including the two Christo Rey schools in the Archdiocese where students attend class four days per week and work one day a week. Fr. John Foley, S.J., who began the Christo Rey schools, was recently honored with the Presidential Award. The Cardinal is concerned about the religious education of children who attend public schools, among whom there is a high rate of religious illiteracy. He hopes to eventually open more Catholic schools in the suburbs. He is grateful to the many good people who have come forward to help the Catholic schools in Boston. Thanks to the generosity of alumni, tuition at Cathedral High School has been kept at \$2000/yr. He promised to address the problem of parishes without Parish Pastoral Councils promptly.

Cardinal Sean closed the meeting with prayer at 9:15PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne Robotham  
Recording Secretary