



**DIOCESE OF SCRANTON
PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING
MINUTES
TUESDAY, AUGUST 1, 2023**

Msgr Van Loon called the council to order via Zoom around 3 pm.

- Roll Call was taken. *Present:* Bishop Bambera; Monsignors Quinn and Van Loon; Fathers Shantillo, Polednak, Albert, Bryant, DeCelles, Evanko, Glenn, Kuhar, McCreary, McDougall, Miller, Pisaneschi, Polmounter, Quinnan, Ricciardi, Tudgay, Wasnock. *Excused:* Fathers Bechtel, Beck, Czachor, Doris, Edwards, Fox, Jeffrey, Kutch.
- Prayer Intentions: Fr. Tom Cappelloni; Fr. Bryant's mother; Fr. Kuhar's uncle; another priest's aunt Laurie.
- Msgr. Van Loon opened the meeting with a prayer.

Minutes from the May 23, 2023 meeting were approved.

I. Clergy Disability Benefits: Mr. James Burke

Mr. Burke presented a proposal to augment clergy disability benefits. The diocese already offers disability insurance to lay employees. Responding to recent inquiries, the diocese asked its carrier, Mutual of Omaha, if clergy could be enrolled, and they said yes. Priests who meet the criteria would receive a short-term disability benefit of 70% of salary for up to 20 weeks, followed by a 60% long-term benefit for up to 5 years. The carrier also helps those with longer-term needs transition to social security disability. The cost, \$300 per priest per year, is small compared to the 50% disability benefit that the parish or the diocese would otherwise pay out of pocket. Comments indicated that the council received the proposal favorably.

II. Parish Modifications: Rev. Jeffrey Tudgay

a) South Scranton

Fr. Tudgay presented three proposals for parish modifications. The first question concerned the proposed suppression and merger of two South Scranton parishes, St. John Neumann and St. Paul of the Cross, into a single parish. The parishes were linked in 2021 under Msgr. Quinn and have since been cooperating in shared ministry. Both have suffered large drops in active parishioners as well as financial strains and significant deferred maintenance. Fr. Kuhar detailed the consultative process that began in February 2022, while Msgr. Quinn was pastor. It involved several meetings with a joint council (dubbed the Vision 2030 team) as well as town hall meetings and written communications. After much listening and a discussion of parish consolidation and church closure, Fr. Kuhar announced at a meeting on June 5, 2023, that he would formally request that the bishop consolidate the parishes on November 26; the question of closing a church would be decided through a separate process.

Questions from council addressed the designation of Nativity Church as a secondary worship site and demographic facts about the parishes' Hispanic parishioners. All nineteen voting members in attendance concurred with the proposed merger.

b) Wilkes-Barre

Council next addressed a proposal to modify St. Nicholas Parish from a personal to a territorial parish and to suppress Our Lady of Fatima Parish into St. Nicholas. Fr. Tudgay noted that Our Lady of Fatima, linked to St. Nick's on July 20, 2021, owes around \$1.7 million, on top of demographic challenges and deferred maintenance. Discussions on these and other data, with and without diocesan representatives present, generated different ideas about how to move forward. In consultation with the parishes, Fr. Verespy has requested consolidation on October 7, 2023, under the title St. Nicholas-St. Mary's. He noted that although few would ever have imagined the suppression of St. Mary's, it is hard to argue with facts and figures. St. Nicholas, meanwhile, benefits from the vitality of the Hispanic community; 75% of its confirmands this year were Hispanic. Many parishioners have

resigned to the facts, and some view a merger with optimism: “stronger together.” After a brief discussion, the council unanimously concurred with the proposed modification and suppression.

c) Eynon

St. Mary Vilna Church has been linked with St. Mary of Czestochowa for decades. It was closed in 2001 when it was deemed unsafe for occupancy due to the presence of toxic mold. Its interior floor has since collapsed. The church is beyond repair. Fr. Glenn, the pastor, and his council favor relegation of the church to profane but not sordid use. It will probably be demolished. Council concurred with the relegation.

III. Bishop Update

Bishop Bambera affirmed that Vision 2030 will not be an easy process. Churches like Nativity and St. Mary’s have illustrious histories and have produced many vocations. Yet the number of priests continues to diminish, even with the aid of many foreign clergy. It is not easy to care for multiple church communities. Thankfully there is hope, optimism, and growth in some parishes. We will have to look at keeping some churches open as parish membership remains steady. But we will have to address many others. The bishop concluded by thanking the clergy for our hard work under difficult circumstances, and wishing us respite before the end of the summer.

Bishop Bambera concluded the meeting with blessings at 4:17 pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 12, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,
Fr. Mark DeCelles