



**DIOCESE OF SCRANTON
PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2023**

Fr. Evanko called council to order at 3:03 pm.

- Roll Call was taken. *Present:* Bishop Bambera; Monsignors Quinn and Van Loon; Fathers Shantillo, Polednak, Albert, Bechtel, Bryant, DeCelles, Edwards, Evanko, Fox, Kuhar, Kutch, McCreary, McDougall, Miller, Pisaneschi, Quinnan, Ricciardi, Tudgay and Wasnock. *Excused:* Fathers Czachor, Doris, Glenn, Jeffrey and Polmounter. *Absent:* Fr. Beck.
- Prayer Intentions: Bishop Bambera, on the 40th anniversary of his priestly ordination; the United States during the election; the Middle East; our parishes going through modification; Rabbi Kaplan; the souls in purgatory; for wisdom.
- Fr. Tudgay led Daytime Prayer.

Minutes from the October 10, 2023 Meeting were approved.

1) Convocation

Fr. Evanko asked for feedback on the convocation. Council members said they appreciated the shared wisdom offered by the panels, both this year and last. One asked if the panels could be more structured. Comments on Rhonda were very positive, despite points of disagreement with her ideas, such as a lack of attention to religious and lay vocations. She was engaging; she gave us “homework” that we could act on immediately; her ideas were adaptable to local needs; laypeople are taking her seriously and were energized by the follow-up seminar.

Possible future topics include the issue of a plurality of ecclesiologies, raised by Rhonda’s talk; a post-conciliar refresher on the theology of holy orders, perhaps with reference to Bishop Toups’ book; learning from other theological traditions; topics emerging from the Synod on Synodality; evangelization and culture.

Some priests voiced concern about Skytop costs, especially for parishes with two or more priests, though by the end of convocation, most seemed to think it was worth it. The bishop is open to cost-saving options, though 2024 is locked in.

2) Clergy Survey

Fr. Polednak shared results from the personnel board's clergy survey. Satisfaction was high; no response was less than six out of ten, while most (52) were between 8 and 10. A majority (34) also reported feeling overwhelmed "occasionally". During discussion, one commenter said he appreciated being asked, "How happy am I?"; another liked the idea of a survey at convocation; another suggested using a 5- or 7-point scale for questions like, "How often do I feel overwhelmed?"

3) Outdoor Wedding Policy

Msgr. Quinn presented the policies of different dioceses on weddings outside of a church and a draft application for ours. Given its initial success, Baltimore has renewed its policy for three years. In Pennsylvania, three dioceses prohibit weddings outside of churches, while four permit it, within certain guidelines. In discussion, some members of council seemed hopeful that a change in policy could offer us an opportunity to be flexible and draw alienated couples back to the Church. Concerns were expressed about the types of venues permitted, whether a solemn wedding could take place there, the added time required for application and increased burden on the Tribunal, the limitations on availability of priests and deacons to witness these weddings, the inconvenience of having a short list of permitted venues, and whether such a policy could backfire and put the Church in the position of having to say "no" yet again. The bishop is open to pursuing this to the next step, but he would like to know what the presbyterate and the diaconate think about it. Everyone should be on the same page if a policy change is to be effective. The idea of a survey of our priests and deacons was proposed.

4) Best Practices for Cemeteries

Fr. Miller raised the question of best practices for parish cemeteries. Cemeteries are often a drain on parish finances, but some are moneymakers, while others are run by independent associations. The question of establishing written policies to aid in cemetery management was raised. The bishop proposed that we ask Kevin Beck to come in and talk to us about good cemetery management principles.

5) Bishop Update

The bishop commented on the recently revised blueprints. He expects the Episcopal Council to rubber-stamp most of them. A few will likely need to be adjusted in light of recent developments affecting three currently active priests. He intended to talk to the deans about these adjustments in the weeks to come.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 19, 2024.

The meeting concluded with Evening Prayer led by Fr. Kuhar at 4:49 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Fr. Mark DeCelles