

New pastoral council advising Archbishop Lori meets for the first time

ELLICOTT CITY - A newly established Archdiocesan Pastoral Council met for the first time Sept. 14 for a formation retreat and orientation about the work of the archdiocese.

Eleven of the 13 members of the council participated in a morning reflection on "We Are Called," led by Susan Timoney, associate professor of pastoral practice and director of the Certificate in Pastoral Ministry at The Catholic University of America, in Washington.

They also got a briefing from archdiocesan staff members on the structure and pastoral priorities of the archdiocese - focusing on the goal to make missionary disciples promoted by Pope Francis and by Archbishop William E. Lori in his 2015 pastoral letter, "A Light Brightly Visible."

In laying out the vision for the pastoral council, Archbishop Lori noted the interest in the formation of the council and the demand for greater lay involvement in the leadership of the archdiocese.

"I think looking around this table it is clear that, thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit, we are moving in the right direction in response to those demands," he said. "I know our Church is suffering right now, most especially due to the recent scandals that have led so many faithful Catholics to - rightfully - question the authenticity of the church's leadership.

"It is heartening, and humbling, that you have all found it in your heart to step up during this time of crisis to trust the archdiocese, and I hope, to trust me, by believing that your service as a member of the lay pastoral council can help play a role in healing and leading the Archdiocese of Baltimore forward."

He said the church has experienced declines in vocations, Mass attendance and the

reception of the sacraments, although he noted that the archdiocese is welcoming 17 new men into seminary formation, the most in decades, and that the archdiocese now has 52 men in formation.

He acknowledged that decline in practice affects other religious institutions, and that trust in civil and governmental institutions is also at a low.

The archbishop said the presence of those who have agreed to serve on the council – one from every region in the archdiocese plus three at-large members – gives him hope. “Your experience ‘on the ground,’ your lived faith in the midst of the challenges of secularism, cynicism, materialism and every other worldly reality that everyday Catholics encounter, is truly remarkable. I anticipate that I will learn so much from you as we forge ahead on this journey together.”

In their application letters for the council, he said, many of the members emphasized the need to reach out to disaffected Catholics and those who have been “turned off” by the church.

While there are legitimate reasons for that disaffection, “there also exists a deep lack of encounter with the foundation of our faith – that is, the experience of the person of Jesus Christ. ... This is the essential work we must accomplish together – finding a way back to bringing the gift of the presence of Jesus to a world that is lost without him.”

He said he hopes the council will be led first and foremost by the Holy Spirit, although that usually doesn’t come with a clear road map.

“Through prayerful, collaborative and well-informed discernment, I hope we can work together to identify areas of focus and recommendations for action that will help me and all those who lead the archdiocese to determine what we’re doing right, what we’re doing wrong, and what we’re not doing that we need to be doing,” the archbishop said.

The council was briefed by Chancellor Diane Barr about its role within the context of other archdiocesan canonical councils and deliberative bodies.

“You’re not alone in giving the archbishop advice,” she told the members as she

highlighted some of the other clergy and lay councils in the archdiocese. “As the bishop responsible for the salvation of souls in his diocese, he has to have groups that consult with him.”

They also heard presentations on pastorate planning and evangelization; vocations; Hispanic ministry; an overview of the regional vicariate structure; the archdiocesan structure and major initiatives; and the archdiocese’s efforts to protect children and minors.

Stephanie Clancy, who represents North Baltimore County on the Council, said she is on fire for her faith, which motivated her to serve. “It’s brought me such joy and peace,” she said. “I want to do my part to help the archdiocese spread that joy and faith.” The parishioner of Nativity in Timonium wants to “provide support for the archbishop and leadership to have the pulse of the feelings of the laity. Especially now, the laity need to step up and take a bigger role.”

Citing the growth at Nativity over the past several years, Clancy said she hopes all parishes can experience similar growth in disciples.

Larry Simmons, a parishioner of New All Saints in Baltimore who represents the Harbor/Metro West region, said he is honored to serve on the council and appreciates the opportunity “to continue to strengthen my faith but also to share with the archbishop suggestions and issues that come from parishioners, and also share with them his thoughts and concerns.”

He served six years on his parish pastoral council and wants to take that experience to the next level. Having served for eight years in Baltimore County’s executive office, he sees the APC as another way to serve the community because the church offers services not just for parishes but also for the wider community.

Key issues he hopes the APC addresses are support for victims of crime, the needs of seniors, and healing regarding the scandals of the past.

He believes his service on the council will help him “learn from the other members of the council and possibly implement ideas at New All Saints and other parishes I visit.”

The first meeting of the council was held at the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City.

Parishioners can communicate with members of the council via the website, www.archbalt.org/apc, which also includes information about the council's responsibilities and its members.

Email Christopher Guntz at editor@CatholicReview.org

Members of the new Archdiocesan Pastoral Council:

EASTERN VICARIATE

East Baltimore County: Elaine McCubbin, Our Lady Queen of Peace, Middle River

North Baltimore County: Stephanie Clancy, Church of the Nativity, Timonium

West Baltimore County: Cynthia Clarke, Holy Family, Randallstown

Harford: Anita Cain, St Mark, Fallston

Anne Arundel: Sara Miller, St. Mary's, Annapolis

URBAN VICARIATE

Harbor/Metro West: Larry Simmons, New All Saints Church, Baltimore

Harbor/Metro East: Jesus Eusebio Perez, Sacred Heart of Jesus, Baltimore

WESTERN VICARIATE

Central: Richard Babbitt, St. John the Evangelist, Frederick

South Central: Consuelo Petro, St. John the Evangelist, Columbia

Western: Camilla Rawe, Divine Mercy Parish (St. Ann, Grantsville)

AT-LARGE

Young Adult Community Representative: Chelsea Baranoski, St. Jane Frances de Chantel, Pasadena

Latino Community Representative: Gloria Olivares, Sacred Heart, Glyndon

African American Community Representative: Alexander Wright, New All

Saints, Baltimore