

New presbyteral council meets

A consultative body of priests known as the presbyteral council has been formed to serve as a key advisory group to Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien. The 36-member council, required by the Code of Canon Law, is composed of 17 elected members, 15 appointed members and four ex officio members.

The council's first meeting was held Jan. 17 at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland, with Archbishop O'Brien serving as chair of the council. Father J. Bruce Jarboe, pastor of Holy Trinity in Glen Burnie, was elected vice chair, and Monsignor Arthur Valenzano, pastor of St. John in Westminster, was elected secretary.

"We act as an advisory body to the archbishop with regard to assisting to his responsibility of the governance of the archdiocese, with a focus on priestly life and general issues of pastoral ministry in the archdiocese," said Father Jarboe, noting that the initial council meeting lasted more than three hours and included discussions between the archbishop and council members.

"My sense is that the council members are eager to be of whatever assistance we can to the archbishop," he said. "It's clear that the archbishop sees the council as an important, collegial body that will provide him advice and perspective."

According to a Jan. 21 archdiocesan news release, Archbishop O'Brien briefed council members about his visits to more than 100 parishes of the eastern and urban vicariates. He encouraged parish participation in several upcoming events including the March for Life and Catholic Schools Week.

The archbishop also asked the council for an assessment of the effectiveness of pastoral life directors in the archdiocese. A discussion followed on how parishioners respond to pastoral life directors and how the introduction of pastoral life directors has affected vocations and sacramental life in the parishes.

According to the release, the archbishop asked that a group of pastors and bishops re-visit 'The Hope that Lies Before Us,' a report generated two years ago by a committee of local priests and laity established to review local and national data concerning the anticipated reduction in the number of archdiocesan priests available

for parish ministry.

During the council meeting, Sean Caine, archdiocesan communications director, reported on two legislative issues of concern to the church: same-sex marriage and the statute of limitations on lawsuits for monetary damages in decades-old sexual abuse cases.

Mr. Caine told council members it is unclear who will sponsor a bill in the Senate legalizing same-sex marriage and civil unions following the unexpected death of the bill's lead sponsor. He noted that no such measure has been introduced in the House of Delegates.

Mr. Caine also reported that a bill that would amend the Maryland constitution to protect marriage is expected to be introduced soon and that the Maryland Catholic Conference would support it.

Regarding the statute of limitations on civil suits for money in decades-old abuse cases, Mr. Caine told the council that legislation to temporarily suspend the statute of limitations was expected to be introduced but that no such legislation had yet been filed. Mr. Caine thanked pastors for informing parishioners and legislators about the potential negative impact such legislation would have on parishes, schools and other church ministries.

Michelly Merrick, director of the Division of Human Resources for the archdiocese, briefed the council on recommendations for salary increases for archdiocesan teachers for the 2008-09 school year, and presented highlights of a multi-year proposal on teacher salaries that would take effect in the fall of 2008.

Father Gerard Francik, archdiocesan vocations director, presented the archdiocese's policy currently in use for recruiting seminarians from other countries. The council also discussed the need for pastoral outreach to new immigrants.

The presbyteral council will meet five times annually, according to Monsignor Robert J. Jaskot, chancellor and a member of the council.