



Archdiocesan Pastoral Council meeting
Saturday, March 1 at Holy Family in Randallstown
Meeting notes

Present: Archbishop William E. Lori, Mr. James Conway, Mr. Andrew Likoudis, Mrs. Elaine McCubbin, Mrs. Uju Okwesili, Mr. Emory Plitt, Mrs. Lee Anne Santiago, Mr. Larry Simmons and Mr. Alexander Wright.

Excused: Mr. Michael Chorabik Jr., Ms. Agnes Nepomuceno, Ms. Consuelo Petro and Ms. Annalynne Reddington.

Guests: Mr. Kenn deMoll, Mrs. Stacy Golden and Ms. Yvonne Wenger.

Archbishop Lori called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. He offered a greeting and read a Gospel reading from Luke 6:39-45. He then led the group in prayer.

He asked for the group to approve the meeting notes from the June 17 meeting, and the notes were approved.

Topics Addressed

I. Family-based faith formation

Archbishop Lori welcomed Mrs. Stacy Golden, director of the Archdiocese's Office of Family, Youth and Young Adult Ministry. He said the Archdiocese has been studying ways to evangelize to young people, especially recognizing the challenge presented when parents do not go to Church, don't pray with their children and expressions and practice of faith in the home is minimal.

Mrs. Golden said the Church wants to support parents to be the primary catechist and educator for their children. Under the family faith formation model, the Archdiocese centers catechetical programs on the family. The dimensions of the formation model include the Eucharist, formal catechesis, community building, meaningful service and prayer and liturgy. She said the goal is to move away from a "classroom mentality" and bring formation around the dinner table.

The Archdiocese has been using this formation model for two years, and Mrs. Golden said her office is studying how it is working to include examining its impact on Mass attendance and ministry engagement.

Discussion with Members

Mrs. McCubbin asked what the process is for the Office of Family, Youth and Young Adult Ministry to support the parishes and adapt to the changing religious education. She mentioned that her parish, Our Lady Queen of Peace, is experiencing growth, including among Nigerian and Filipino Catholics. Mrs. Golden said her office stays in constant contact with parishes as they implement the family formation model and the Emmaus Teams in the Office of Parish Renewal support parishes in various, ongoing ways. Mrs. Golden said that the intention is for parishes to begin establishing relationships with families from the beginning when the parents marry and support the entire family as the children grow up in the Church, find strong youth ministries and move through Sacramental encounters with Christ.

Mrs. Okwesili said the family experience is impacted by culture and economics, something Mrs. Golden said the formation model is designed to respect.

Mr. Plitt said the approach makes a lot of sense to ensure young people stay engaged. He asked how the Archdiocese guides parishes to ascertain the readiness of children for the formation stages. He also asked if the Archdiocese extends the formation model to the children in Catholic schools. Mrs. Golden said that the entire plan is designed to create openness for the Holy Spirit to work and meet children and parents where they are. The Office of Family, Youth and Young Adult Ministry engages regularly with the Department of Catholic Schools to build a bridge between the parishes and the families enrolled in the schools. The goal, she said, is “intentional friendship” and community building. Archbishop Lori noted that the formation involving the Sacraments is always done through the parishes where families are registered, not the schools.

Mr. Likoudis noted an encouraging trend reported in the New York Times in February that found the decline among people in the U.S. identifying as Christian has stopped. Archbishop Lori said he hopes the trend holds and said, no matter what, the Church has significant evangelization goals. The Archbishop said the faithful must be grief stricken over Catholics who have left the Church and must work zealously to bring others to know Christ.

Ms. Santiago said her parish prays for more children to come to Church and she mentioned the link between young people and their grandparents. Archbishop Lori noted the powerful opportunity to engage with multiple generations. He noted the trouble technology has presented to the culture, and how faith formation can add protection and resiliency for children and families.

The Archbishop said the faithful should always extend an invitation to others to return or join the Church. “You ought to come,” he said, is a tool of evangelism.

Mr. Conway said for families to come back or stay engaged with parishes, parish leaders must create the “sanctuary of the Church,” making it a place where everyone feels safe and feels as though their Church family loves and supports them.

II. Confirmation pilots

Archbishop Lori welcomed Mr. Kenn deMoll, the director formation and innovation at St. John in Westminster, to join Mrs. Golden to provide information on the Confirmation pilots. St. John and St. Patrick in Havre de Grace were the site of two pilots where the age of Confirmation was lowered to 9. This is intended to address the increasingly young age of disaffiliation.

Mrs. Golden said the age of Confirmation will be lowered in parishes throughout the Archdiocese in three waves, phasing in all parishes over three years. Confirmation has become the Sacrament of maturity that young people treat as graduation from their faith formation. Typically, parishes see significant parental involvement in Sacramental preparation for First Holy Communion and Reconciliation but not for Confirmation.

One element to the change with the age of Confirmation is to limit the number of educational sessions to six to eight with ongoing engagement in youth ministry for sustained formation.

Mr. deMoll offered an overview of the Confirmation pilot at St. John that includes an intentional focus on involving parents. Creating the pilot involved a “design thinking” approach. DeMoll said the parish team centered their efforts on ways to help both parents and kids grow spiritually. They created a “Fire Fellowship” to gather the families, playing games together and sharing meals. The kids and parents separated for part of the formation, during which time, for example, the parents took a discipleship personality quiz to identify a list of attributions in their children. They then picked from a list of formation activities that could be engaging for their child. Parents were invited to share their personal testimony with their children and explain, “This is why we go to Mass.” The children were asked to discover a moment God spoke to them through a tactile experience, such as making Baptismal fonts.

Mr. deMoll emphasized that the Sacramental prep was not about going to a class, as the experience had been for some in the past.

Discussion with Members

Mr. Conway said the process described sounds like a wonderful way to engage young people and their parents. He asked what was next for all parish communities. Mrs. Golden said her office is creating a “lab” to listen to young people to find out why youth ministry hasn’t been successful in some parish communities. The goal is to listen to young people and empower them.

Mrs. McCubbin said she was very impressed by the model and feels hopeful.

Mr. Wright asked if 9-year-olds today appear to be more ready than for Confirmation children of the same age decades ago. Both the Archbishop and Mrs. Golden noted that throughout the history of the Church, the age of Confirmation has changed, and generations of children were Confirmed around age 9 in the recent past.

III. Closing prayer

Archbishop Lori offered closing remarks, including inviting the Council members to look for the next installment of his pastoral letter, “Light Brightly Visible 3.0” that will be published on Ash Wednesday.

Additionally, the Archbishop said much is being reported regarding our immigrant brothers and sisters, and there is a lot of fear among many in our Church family. As Christians, our mission as described to us in the Gospel of Matthew is to welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ who are strangers. While the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops recognizes and supports a country’s right to regulate borders and control immigration, policies and practices must be carried out with justice and mercy that also honor the right of all humans to migrate and sustain their lives and the lives of their families.

He led the group in prayer and the meeting concluded.