

## DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL PLENARY SESSION

MAY 14, 2011

**Prayer** - Bill Flynn led the Council in Morning Prayer with music provided by Larry Hagan. Since the DPC session fell between Mother's and Father's Day we remembered our parents, living and deceased.

**Election of DPC Officers for the 2011 - 2013 Term** - Sally Millick, representing the nominating committee, presented the proposed slate of officers to Tina Dyer, DPC Executive Secretary, for her to conduct the election. There were no additional nominees presented from the floor. The slate was unanimously approved.

**Chairperson** - Margaret Lawrence, St. John, Liverpool

**Vice Chair** - Thomas Tynan, Saints John and Andrew, Binghamton

**Membership Chair** - Joseph Stanton, St. Peter, Rome

**Secretary** - Martha Group, St. Agatha, Canastota

Later in the morning the parish representatives met in regional groups to (s)elect 2 people to represent each region to serve on the Executive Committee. The following representatives were (s)electd:

### **East**

Werner Franz - St. Joseph/St. Patrick, Utica

Larry Hagan - Our Lady of Lourdes, Utica

### **North**

William Flynn - Christ Our Light, Pulaski

Kathleen Reindeer - Holy Trinity, Fulton

### **West**

Raymond Czachor - At Large Member

Mary Raugeau - Blessed Sacrament, Syracuse

### **South**

Charles Hunt - Most Holy Rosary, Maine

Barbara Turner - St. Joseph, Deposit

**Evangelization Toolbox** - Tina Dyer referenced the evangelization toolbox of *Best Practices* from across the diocese. Everyone attending the session was given two copies and asked to give one copy to his/her pastor.

**Sacred Heart Prayer Cards** - Dennis Owens, a Knight of the Order of Malta, has an affinity to the Sacred Heart. He purchased enough prayer cards for every family in the diocese to receive one. Each parish representative took enough cards for his/her parish.

Kathy Kreinheder led a panel discussion on programs available for troubled marriages and the diocesan annulment process. Panelists were: Father Timothy Elmer, Judicial Vicar for the Diocesan Tribunal Office, Claire Johnson from the Tribunal Office who acts as an Advocate for a person seeking an annulment, Mike and Andrea Buckley from the Good News Center/Providing hope for troubled marriages.

Mike and Andrea talked about Retrouvaille, a process for couples whose marriages are in trouble. They explained problems in their own marriage and the struggles connected with those problems. They stressed how difficult it is to “forgive and forget.” You try to forgive the wrong - but it is harder to forget the wrong done. At the end of their presentation they talked about the Third Option process offered by the Family Life Office.

Father Elmer and Claire responded to several questions about the annulment process, such as:

How much does an annulment cost?

What is involved in the annulment process?

How long does it take to get an annulment?

How does a divorce differ from an annulment?

Does a couple need to have a divorce before they can have an annulment?

What about children in an annulment process? Do they become illegitimate?

What happens if the other ex-spouse does not want to cooperate in the process?

Can a person who has not been through the annulment process act as a liturgical minister at Mass?

At the end of the panel Cindy Fallon, Blair and Karen Kahler offered reflections on the annulment process. The three of them all expressed how non-threatening the process was and how helpful everyone was along the way. From the secretary in the office to the Judicial Vicar, everyone was friendly and welcoming.

*(The entire panel discussion was video taped. If the lighting in the room, etc. is right, the Good News Center has offered to make a DVD for every parish in the diocese. Hopefully it will be available at the September DPC plenary session for every representative to take back to his/her parish)*

Following the panel Kathy engaged everyone in a discussion as to what was the most significant point they heard from the panel. Several mentioned that they didn't realize how easy it was to go through the process. Someone mentioned the cost - stating that people seeking an annulment are often at an age where they are raising a family and don't have \$500 for an annulment. The answer was that no one is ever refused because of the inability to pay. In some cases parishes will pay the cost. Often the parish will pay and then the person seeking the annulment will pay back the parish a little at a time. Bill Flynn mentioned that sometimes he is the first contact person for someone seeking an annulment and often the person will question why the cost is so high. Until this panel presentation Bill didn't realize that there could be up to 9 people from the Tribunal Office who work on annulments and the \$500 helps cover the cost of their salaries.

Margi Lawrence then led a large group discussion on the material from the March plenary session on funeral rites. She asked the reps what they did with the information and what the next step should be. Many responded that the information went back to their parish pastoral councils, was well received and it is hoped that the current diocesan guidelines will be updated and made available to pastors and parish funeral planners.

**Question and Answer Period** – Bishop Cunningham responded to questions collected from the DPC. Some of the questions and responses were:

**Q. Would you please comment on the recent outpouring of celebration over the death of Osama Bin Laden?**

R. I understand the emotion of the moment and that his death as a relief to a number of people, but I don't think we can rejoice over the death of an individual. Anyone who stands by the bedside of a dying person knows that this is the time when a person meets with his creator. I understand that

he did some pretty evil things, but I don't think that it should be a cause of celebration or rejoicing, if anything it should be a time of reflection and a time to renew our prayers for peace. It is a sobering moment. It is not a time for rejoicing.

**Q. What do you as our Bishop see as the role of the laity in this current environment, and if you will, be specific to our Pastoral Care Area of eight faith communities and no resident full-time Priest? (We have a resident parochial vicar and two part time non-resident priests/administers.)**

R. We do the best we can to fulfill our needs with the people we have available. I would think that the people would do what they could to help the pastor. In that particular area there are changes taking place. We are doing our best to cover the parishes, but it is not an easy task. At the present time we have about eight or nine parishes that are open and posted for priests to apply. We had twelve priests retire this year over the age of 75. That creates a lot of vacancies. We have 20 priests currently active over the age of 75. I think that when the priest is not in the parish, people have to step up.

**Q. Is the Diocese considering placing deacons or religious as administrators of parishes?**

R. My experience with that is that people often feel alone or left out. I think it is much better if we have a priest who, when he is in charge of several parish communities, develops the staff so they can address the needs together. I think it's very important for them to work as a team. The big issue that most priests would appreciate is people coming forward to assist. But I think it's very important for people to work as a team.

**Q. The idea of diocesan guidelines for funerals was very positively received by the DPC. Is that something that you are considering?**

R. Yes, we are considering it because it is continuing to be discussed here, but there has been no specific recommendation. I know it is being discussed in areas of the diocese because I just received a letter the other day from a priest who was upset that the Bishop would be considering establishing guidelines. The priest wrote that the person giving the eulogy frequently knew the deceased better than the priest did. But I think it is a little bit of a misconception, there are many opportunities for people to speak at wakes, at the funeral reception or at the cemetery. What is becoming difficult is not only the length of the comments, but that some of the comments that are made at funeral liturgies might be great stories for the family to share, but that does not mean that they belong in the context of the funeral Mass. They can take place at another time. On the other hand, I am not inclined to pass rules that I can't enforce. It is difficult to enforce some of these things. Some priests may have different feelings about these things. I think we should come up with some guidelines. The guidelines that were sent out sometime ago may be updated. We all know that it is a sensitive time when a funeral takes place. People carry with them the memories of that funeral, the way they were treated, the attitude of the priest, the bereavement minister and the parish community. There is nothing more sensitive than that. We want to be sensitive to the people; we want to do what we can. I don't think that the guidelines mean that they are hard and fast rules. We have to have some flexibility.

**Q. How does the Diocese meet the sacramental needs of migrant workers in our area?**

R. In most cases the migrant workers are Hispanic, but not always. The outreach to migrant workers is through the Spanish apostolate in each of the four regions of the diocese. I know that in a number of cases the laity has been very helpful in helping us to reach out to the migrant workers. The Northern Region has the highest need in the diocese. In some cases the migrant workers are afraid to come together.

**Q. The concern is not only of the sexual abuse acts of priests, the concern is the cover-up. Do you think that a priest who murders would be turned into law enforcement? Why weren't abusers turned over to law enforcement?**

R. I think originally issues of abuse were thought to be a moral problem, a sin, and the remedy for moral problems was prayer, penance and counseling. The Church regularly referred people for counseling and help. Counseling assistance was also offered for victims. It is only in the last 25 years that psychology and psychiatry has helped us understand that abuse is an addiction. An addiction that not only takes place in priests and ministers, but it also takes place in families. It takes place in schools and other places. We now understand better the depth and the extent of the addictions and where there is one victim there may be more victims. It's also important to remember that very few of these victims came forward until the Boston Globe story of 2002. Some of those situations go back 30 years and it is difficult to know what exactly happened. I also can say that I worked in a Chancery office where many of those victims were not believed by their parents. Also, those parents who made us aware of what happened, did not want anyone else to know. At that time the Church was also trying to figuring out how to handle this problem and went forward with counseling and help and treatment and was also trying to help the parents. Right now we have a review board of lay people in the diocese. Every case that is judged to be credible is turned over to law enforcement. Every person who makes an accusation is told of their ability to refer this to law enforcement themselves. Anything that is judged to be credible is given to the Review Board and the appropriate authorities in the county where the alleged abuse took place. At all times when people bring this forward to us they are told of their rights to bring this to civil authorities. In all cases we try to provide counseling and help to anyone who has been the victim of abuse.

**Q. Would it be possible to have the diocesan 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration at the OnCenter rather than at the Cathedral? This would allow more people to attend.**

R. There is a real feeling that this celebration should take place in the Cathedral Church. It is a diocesan celebration and the Cathedral is our home church. As a diocesan family the Regional Vicars are planning regional celebrations at convenient times in the fall. There is a strong feeling that celebrations of this kind should take place in sacred space.

The meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m. and followed with lunch.

Respectfully submitted,

Ray Czachor  
Secretary