

Archdiocesan Pastoral Council
March 11, 2010
Minutes

Opening Remarks

Sr. Marian Batho opened the meeting at 6:30PM. Cardinal Sean described his recent trip to Haiti as a member of the USSCB commission assessing the needs of the people following the earthquake. He attended the memorial Mass celebrated for those killed in the disaster, including the Archbishop of Haiti. Approximately 60,000 people are now living in tent cities set up by Catholic Relief Services and other aid organizations. CRS has raised \$80 million for Haiti; \$2 million has been contributed by churches in Boston. Since Boston has the third largest population of Haitians in the U.S., many local parishes and schools have active relationships with parishes and schools on the island.

Report on the Marriage Preparation Program

In the spring of 2007, the Archdiocesan Committee on Marriage recommended a revision of the Pre-Cana programs as part of its final report. Since then, Kari Colella, Mary Finnegan and an implementation team have developed a new marriage prep program entitled “Transformed in Love”. The program seeks to catechize engaged couples and help them develop the fundamental skills for building healthy marriages. In a warm, welcoming environment, the team leaders highlight the differences between natural marriage and sacramental marriage. ‘Witness couples’ offer strong testimony to the benefits of lifelong relationships based on truth, respect and love. The program includes a ‘teaching Mass’ that many participants rate as one of the best parts of the two-day program. Kari mentioned the emphasis on skills development and the witness-based catechesis as the distinguishing qualities of “Transformed in Love”.

Surveys of pilot participants indicate a strong positive response to the program as well as renewed interest (76%) in their Catholic faith. After attending the program, about half of the couples who were cohabiting decide to be abstinent until their wedding. Fr. Erikson commented that although some older priests refuse to work with cohabiting couples, the Church needs to work with people “where they are”.

An APC member expressed concern about *Casti Connubii*, the 1930 encyclical that promoted virginity and celibacy as superior to married life. Cardinal Sean stated that the Church indeed recognizes marriage as an effective path of sanctification. Another council member emphasized the importance of remote marriage preparation and the need to teach even young children about sacramental marriage. The Cardinal replied that the Archdiocese is already doing this through both the Catholic Schools Office and the Office for the New Evangelization of Youth and Young Adults.

The Daughters of St. Paul will be producing a guide soon for program leaders as well as other materials for the program. A training program for priests, deacons and parish Marriage Prep teams will be offered this summer. Kari invited APC members to be advocates of the new program and to pray for its success. Members are also welcome to serve as volunteers.

Public Disclosure Project

Fr. John Connolly, Special Assistant to the Cardinal, directs the Public Disclosure Project, also known as ‘Healing the Church of Boston’. Other contributors to the project who attended the meeting included Barbara Thorp and two attorneys from Ropes and Gray, Tom Hannigan and Kelly

Lynch. Fr. John explained that this project is conducting the necessary research to compile an accurate list of Archdiocesan priests involved in sexual misconduct with minors. Specifically, this effort is in response to requests from the survivor community, the Bishops' Accountability Group and other advocacy organizations but hopefully it will also promote pastoral healing and the rebuilding of trust in the Church of Boston. Twenty-seven other U.S. dioceses have already released the names of priests known to be credibly accused.

No one can change what happened in the past, but Fr. Connolly says the Archdiocese is committed to doing what is right now and in the future. Presently, any new allegations of clerical sexual misconduct involving minors results in the immediate removal of the accused priest from ministry. The Archdiocese must report the alleged incident to the local law enforcement agency, making this public information. The Archdiocese also makes a public disclosure when a priest is convicted (criminally or canonically) or, if the claims against him are dropped, when he returns to ministry.

Several groups need to be consulted before the list of names is released: the survivors, accused priests who are living, and the families of the accused priests. Regional meetings will be held for priests and parish personnel to prepare them for questions from the public following the announcement. Additionally, key religion reporters will be given the opportunity to ask questions so that their reporting on the release of names will be accurate. Fr. Connolly mentioned that Cardinal Sean had tried to counsel the bishops in Ireland and at the Vatican last December with the hope that they would not repeat the mistakes made here. It does not seem they were able to assimilate his advice.

There will be five categories for disclosure:

1. Priests credibly accused, cases concluded canonically or criminally;
2. Cases concluded by voluntary laicization (priest appeals to Vatican for release from vows);
3. Deceased priests, credibly accused;
4. Publicly accused priests (living or deceased), case still in progress; and
5. Deceased priests, publicly accused, cases incomplete (cannot be verified).

APC members raised the following questions and Fr. Connolly responded.

- What is the status of Cardinal Law? Cardinal Law is now 78 and holds a position typical for a retired cardinal.
- What is being done for priests who have been wrongly accused? There is a public announcement when these priests return to ministry and usually their parishioners, and former parishioners, are very supportive of them. However, healing takes a long time for these men; many feel a shadow follows them forever.
- Some old parishioners will never believe accusations made against their priest. Is the public disclosure project worth hurting these people? It is better that older parishioners have a *difficult* time with these disclosures rather than a *dishonest* time.
- When will the disclosure be made? It's likely that disclosure will happen in June, however the Presbyteral Council has not yet heard this report and their feedback is important.
- How many names will be on the list of credibly accused priests? 155 names will appear, of

which 40 may be new names.

- Will there be names on the list of priests who are in religious orders? The answer is no because the members of religious orders are not accountable to the Cardinal, therefore he is not responsible for investigating allegations against them.
- Why not delay the release the names until after the Year of the Priest? The Archdiocese needs to do what is right and for the right reason. This will be difficult, but in the end, it may be the better way.
- Will there be testimony by victims as part of the announcement? Many formats have been considered. There will be an introduction by the Cardinal followed by stories from survivors and their counselors and perhaps from a few accused and guilty priests.
- Is this going to be the end of this problem? The protection of children is now an ongoing priority in the Archdiocese but accusations from victims of clergy abuse may continue for a long time. Not all victims are ready to come forward now. For example, if an abuser was a friend of the victim's now elderly parents, that victim may wait until their parents are gone.

A council member suggested finding a new name for this project, because "Healing the Church of Boston" puts the focus on the Church, rather than on the victims where it really belongs.

Cardinal Sean said the most controversial aspect of this disclosure is releasing the names of deceased priests who have been accused. The Church has played the role of both prosecutor and defender in these cases. If the abuser is deceased, the investigation requires a preponderance of evidence confirming very serious complaints and all the facts must be in concordance. Fact finding is difficult because the Archdiocese lacks the authority to subpoena witnesses or conduct trials.

Closing Remarks

Cardinal Sean thanked Fr. Connolly and his team for their work on this difficult issue. Then he gave an update on recent Archdiocesan events. The Lenten program, 'The Light is On for You', is going well. The Women's Catholic Conference, held at the Cathedral this year, was a big success and the Men's Conference is coming up on April 18th. Preparations are already underway for next year's 'Catholics Come Home' program. A welcome result of the Arise program is the outreach to many inactive Catholics and also the development of new lay leadership in parishes.

The Cardinal mentioned his ongoing meetings with parish and vicariate leaders throughout the Archdiocese to discuss the pastoral priorities presented by Fr. David Couturier at the January APC meeting. Evangelization is a top priority. Encouraging Catholics to speak about their faith to others and inviting them to learn more about Catholicism will be a challenge, particularly for Catholics accustomed to being 'religious consumers'.

Cardinal Sean ended the meeting with prayer at 9:05PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne Robotham
Recording Secretary