

THE ARCHDIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL
of the
Archdiocese of Boston

Thursday 20 January 2005

**Bishop Peterson Hall Meeting Room,
Saint John's Seminary, Brighton**

5:30 PM **Evening Prayer – Chapel**
followed by
Dinner – Meeting Room

a-g-e-n-d-a

- I -** Presentation on RENEW International
... Present: Msgr. Thomas A. Kleissler (President), Mr. Michael Brough (Director), and Rev. John Sassani & Mrs. MaryAnn McLaughlin (RCAB Office of Spiritual Development)
- II -** Small-Group Sharing
- A)** Should we welcome RENEW Int'l to the Archdiocese?
If so, what would you see as a reasonable time-line?
If not, do you recommend an alternative type of renewal for the Church of Boston? 15 min - TRUST
- B)** During the final stage of the Archdiocesan Reconfiguration, "Rebuild My Church," – and beyond – what do you see as the single most important priority on the Archdiocesan level and on the parish level? 15 min
- Succinct group reports back to the full group
- III -** Announcements
- IV -** Closing Remarks & Prayer – Archbishop Seán

Meetings for 2005 are scheduled (subject to change) for
Thursday 3 March 2005
Thursday 12 May 2005
Thursday 22 September 2005
Thursday 10 November 2005

Unless notified otherwise, all meetings will be held at Bishop Peterson Hall,
beginning with Evening Prayer & Dinner at 5:30 PM.

**Minutes of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council's
January 20, 2005 Meeting**

The Archdiocesan Pastoral Council (the "APC" or the "Council") held its first official meeting on Thursday, January 20, 2005, at Peterson Hall on the grounds of St. John's Seminary. The customary Liturgy of the Hours evening prayer service was led by Archbishop Seán. A list of APC members and materials from Renew International ("Renew") were distributed to all. Following dinner, the meeting was called to order by Rev. Arthur Coyle, Ex-officio member of the APC and Moderator of the Presbyteral Council. He provided a brief overview of the evening's agenda before turning the meeting over to the Archbishop who explained why Renew had been invited to address both the APC and, earlier in the day, the Presbyteral Council.

Stating that the Archdiocese will be celebrating its 200th anniversary in 2008, the Archbishop expressed his desire that a program of a spiritual nature be instituted in preparation for this Bicentennial. He mentioned that he had experience with Renew, both in his early days as a pastor in Washington, D.C., and later, as a bishop in Fall River. Among the points recommending the program is the fact that it is offered in many different languages. The Archbishop explained, however, that before inviting Renew to the Archdiocese, he needed the recommendations of the APC and the Presbyteral Council.

In his introductory remarks, Archbishop Seán also told the group that a Committee has been assembled to prepare for the Bicentennial celebration and that a member of the APC will be asked to serve on that Committee. He then introduced Rev. John Sassani, Director of the Office of Spiritual Development, who provided a brief overview of the four encounters between the Boston Archdiocese and Renew. Father explained that seven or eight parishes were so eager to be in the program that they had already forged ahead with it. He also stated that when the Archbishop and others met to consider a way to renew the Archdiocese, Renew came to the top of the list.

The meeting was then turned over to Msgr. Thomas A. Kleissler, President of Renew, who gave a lengthy presentation on the organization, ably assisted by Mr. Michael Brough, Executive Director, both of whom had traveled from New Jersey to spend the entire day in Boston. The following were the key points of their talk:

- They fully understand that this is a difficult time in the history of the Church of Boston and do not pretend to experience its pain, but they come with a message of hope in the risen Lord.
- A decision as to whether to invite Renew to Boston was not expected that evening, but rather, would hopefully be made sometime in the future at a large meeting of priests and people.
- Renew is a program of spiritual formation, which creates a climate whereby participants open the Scriptures and share their faith with others. Over a three-year period, Renew leaders work closely with the laypeople in a parish setting.
- The following three steps comprise the program: (1) a Parish Retreat which has individuals, parishes, the homebound, and religious all across the diocese praying. The Retreat is delivered by lay people who give talks witnessing to God's presence in their lives; (2) over five six-week periods occurring in the autumn and during Lent, parishioners meet once a week for 90 minutes

to discuss the following five themes: God a Community of Love, Conversion, Reaching Out, Reconciliation, and Renewing for the 21st Century.

- Leadership teams would be established in each participating parish.
- Various workshops would also be offered, including a retreat for priests; one for those who are working in offices and agencies of the Archdiocese; and three special events focusing on evangelization, ecumenism, and justice.
- Ongoing pastoral support is provided by Renew's staff in New Jersey, so that if a parish needs help, it will receive it.
- Participants purchase their own materials for \$2.50 per booklet.
- The program is presented at a very low cost to a diocese, with deferred payment an option.
- The earliest date when the program could be implemented in Boston would be October 2006.

The presentation was followed by a question and answer period.

Archbishop Seán expressed his gratitude to the Renew's representatives for their presence.

Fr. Coyle then asked the APC members to break into small groups of five to seven people to discuss the following two topics: (1) Should the Archdiocese welcome Renew International here? If so, what would be a reasonable timeline? If not, what alternative would members recommend?; and (2) During the final stage of Archdiocesan Reconfiguration, what is perceived as the single most important priority going forward on the Archdiocesan and parish level? Each group was asked to appoint a spokesperson who would report back by providing a succinct summary of the discussions.

The following were the results reported (The answer to each question is contained in a paragraph.):

Group One: Recommended that Renew be invited and that the program start as soon as possible. Among the favorable factors cited was the program's reasonable cost.

Would like to see the Archdiocese and its parishes encourage their congregations to return to spirituality on all levels. Spiritual renewal is a source of health. People need to remember the power of prayer and to see that Jesus is working through us.

Group Two: Expressed some hesitancy with respect to Renew. Felt that the program might be met with cynicism. People might perceive it as a means of looking too quickly to the future without reviewing the past. See Renew, if enacted, as only one component of the necessary renewal. Bringing people together at the parish level to share experiences might be problematic at this time of flux when many in the Archdiocese are trying to find a new parish. A chance to regroup might be needed first.

The two Archdiocesan issues to be addressed are Communication and Trust between the hierarchy and the parishioners. Throughout the closing process, parishioners never had an opportunity to meet with their Bishop and tell him their sorrows and anger. Increased collaboration is essential.

Group Three: Recommended that Renew be enacted. Felt that it could serve a current need in parishes. How the program is presented to parishes will be of great importance. It should be recommended, not mandated. Attention should be paid to how to implement it in terms of logistics.

Again reestablishing Trust of the parishioners in the hierarchy was seen as the key issue. When trust has been misplaced, it is important to communicate. Parishioners now receive their information from the media more often than from the Church.

Group Four: Unanimously recommended that Renew be invited and initiated as soon as possible, especially based on testimony of one of the group members who had a positive personal experience with Renew twenty years ago. Suggested looking into implementing Renew on a Cluster level, rather than parish by parish, given the unrest caused by Reconfiguration. Recommended Renew be careful not to take roles away from other existing Archdiocesan groups with similar goals, such as Cursillo or AIM. Given cynicism levels, Archdiocese should encourage, not mandate the program.

Once again, the chief issue is to restore Trust. As corollaries to that, Communication, Connectivity and Openness are all needed. Someone from the Archdiocese should be available to provide pastoral counseling for those suffering from Reconfiguration-related problems; they should not be referred to PR people as has been the case.

Group Five: Recommended that Renew be invited. Found it more practical than other programs. Were more comfortable about it because someone from the Spiritual Development office had said they'd recommend it. Need to look at how we invite people to participate. As Catholics, we don't have good evangelizing skills.

The chief issue is to restore Trust. Communication needs to improve. The Church should minister to the spiritual needs of people and their faith development.

Group Six: Was strongly in favor of Renew because it would give people something positive to focus on. One member of the group is already in the Renew program and spoke favorably of it. Believe that it has a good chance of succeeding. They liked the components of personal spirituality deepened by bonding with the parish community. Not sure that re-bonding with the Archdiocese would be possible.

Rebuild the idea of Trust. One of the quickest ways to disrupt a meeting now is to say "The Archdiocese of Boston wants us to..." Bonding works in parishes, but not on Archdiocesan level. We now have small congregational units all over the Archdiocese.

Father Coyle then addressed the group, reminding all present to submit a contact information sheet and to complete the form recommending members to the Steering Committee and to the post of APC secretary. He expressed the hope that the Steering Committee would be able to meet within the next couple of weeks. One of its first tasks will be to look at the physical configuration of the meeting room to see if a better arrangement might be possible.

Archbishop Seán then expressed his gratitude to the APC members for their willingness to serve and provide their input. He stated that currently Renew has much to recommend it. Other programs have been considered, but most people seem to favor Renew. He likes the fact that it is in six-week segments, short spans that make it easier for people to make a commitment to it. He shared with the APC a story of his parish when he was first ordained. A number of refugees from Central America were in the parish and one of the first things he did was to institute a program where those newly married were invited to attend a Bible study held in private homes. The faith sharing and common prayer transformed people. Even non-churchgoers felt comfortable meeting in the homes and formed friendships that led them to become active in their parishes. He went on to state that the small-group dynamics of faith-sharing is a good way to evangelize. The Archbishop believes that if such a program were instituted in the parishes, within a couple of years, they would be transformed.

Noting the contradictory advice provided by the different groups as to the timing of Renew (don't rush in versus we need this as soon as possible), the Archbishop stated that there is no quick fix, but there is a need to make a decision in a timely fashion and to prepare the leaders in the parishes. If not Renew, then we need something else. He believes that this might be a good way to have everyone participate in a common effort and could help unify all of us. If initiated, Renew would be launched around the Bicentennial.

Continuing his remarks, Archbishop Seán stated that he is anxious to get the Steering Committee up and running, so that he will have the benefit of their input as to the agenda. He also informed us that the visitation process will begin within the next few weeks. Over a three-year period, he and the other bishops will visit the leadership of parishes, their Pastoral Councils and Finance Councils throughout the Archdiocese. Stating that in the past, visitations entailed self-studies, arduous and time-consuming tasks, he expressed his hope that these visitations would be streamlined by a simpler format, so that instead of being few and far between, they would take place more often. He hoped that as a result of the visitations, best practices could be learned and shared with the APC, the Presbyteral Council, and other parishes.

Archbishop Seán added that as Catholic people we need to pray for vocations and explained that he had written a pastoral letter on vocations soon to be printed in "The Pilot." During this Eucharistic year, he asked that we consider that we are a eucharistic community in need of priestly vocations. He requests that each parish pray for vocations and establish a vocation committee to identify potential candidates to the priesthood.

In his concluding remarks, he suggested two strategic planning initiatives: an expansion of the Finance Committee and a study of all Archdiocesan Catholic schools to plan for the future, to strengthen them, and amalgamate them where needed.

The Archbishop ended the meeting with a prayer for our community, for peace in the world and for the Archdiocese.

The meeting was adjourned promptly at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carole Anne Scott, Recorder