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Lay group calls for return of Archdiocesan Pastoral Council

Eloisa Perez-Lozano | Feb. 12, 2013

The Council of the Baptized, a 21-member panel of Catholics looking to represent Catholic laity in the St. Paul-Minneapolis archdiocese, is calling for the re-establishment of an elected Archdiocesan Pastoral Council.

The council would consist of laity, clergy and hierarchy and its purpose would be to ?facilitate communication among all baptized Catholics and to consult in pastoral planning to better serve the mission of the Church,? says a press release from the organization dated Jan. 18.

According to a position paper the council released Jan. 17, the archdiocese had a pastoral council with elected lay representatives from about 1967 until the late 1990s, when it was renamed the ?Archbishop?s Pastoral Advisory Council,? with members appointed by pastors. The activity of the council waned until it ceased to meet in about 2005, the position paper says.

Karin Grosscup, spokeswoman for the Council of the Baptized, told *NCR* of the hopes the group has for the archdiocesan council.

?As Vatican II points out, the Spirit works through all of us and it?s really important to get information from lived experience in people?s lives about what the church is saying, how do we understand that ? and how do we participate fully in our church,? she said.

The Council of the Baptized sent copies of its position paper and proposal to Archbishop John Nienstedt in mid-January and Nienstedt responded to them in a letter dated Feb. 1, Grosscup told *NCR*.

In the letter, Nienstedt stated that the archdiocesan strategic plan published in 2010 calls for re-establishing the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council and ?planning has been in place this past year? for its reconstitution. Nienstedt also wrote, ?You seem unaware of the regular ways in which I receive counsel from Catholic lay men and women? and mentioned various committees and forums with which he meets regularly, such as the finance council and Catholic schools commission.

Nienstedt and the Council of the Baptized have had a stormy relationship since the council was formed in 2011. He has referred to the organization?s planning as ?an affront to the hierarchal ordering of the church? and has asked the group to drop ?Catholic? from its name.

Though a pastoral council has existed previously, the Council of the Baptized is proposing a new version of it. The pastoral council that the lay group envisions would include elements such as:

- An elected membership of lay men and women ?diverse as to ethnicity, geography, theologies, and sexual orientation?;
- Open agendas to which all members can submit items;
- Representation from other consultative bodies ?to ensure coherence in Archdiocesan pastoral planning?;

- Opening all meetings to observers for the sake of transparency.

To support the re-establishment idea, the Council of the Baptized drew on Scripture and practices of the early church, documents of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent papal documents, the Code of Canon Law, and contemporary best management practice theories.

The Council of the Baptized was inaugurated a year ago, having evolved from the Catholic Coalition for Church Reform. Its primary goal is to allow members of the Catholic laity to present and discuss their concerns regarding the mission of the Catholic church, according to information on its website. The group has an email list of about 1,500 people who receive information about the Council of the Baptized as well as the Catholic Coalition for Church Reform.

The council has published a second position paper, ?People?s Participation in Selection of Bishops.? This document argues for the idea that Catholic laity should have input in choosing church leaders.

According to the paper, the papal nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, has said that he is willing ?to receive recommendations from any lay Catholic at any time regarding the nomination of a bishop to a diocese or archdiocese.?

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