**Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes**

**January 14, 2021**

**Via Zoom**

**Present: Bishop Rob, Margaret Porter, Chip Robinson, Reed Loy, Joyce Johnson, Valerie Benoit, Christ Porter, Teresa Gocha, Gail Avery, Barbara Buckley, Gloria Gallant, Alan McRae, Benge Ambrogi, Zac Harmon, Bill Petersen, Kathy Olson**

The meeting started at 4.02 P.M., the Bishop opening with prayer. There was no formal agenda, the purpose of the meeting was to communicate and share updates from the Covid response teams. Acceptance of December meeting minutes was moved by Zac, seconded Reed and Teresa.

**Bishop’s Reflections**

Because the meeting took place between Epiphany and an upcoming presidential Inauguration, and in the aftermath of violence in Washington, the Bishop acknowledged that much was weighing on our hearts, and on the people in our congregations.

The diocese continues to discourage indoor worship, and some congregations are able to provide forms of outdoor worship. In today’s churchwide conversation about COVID, only one diocese reported approving indoor worship. But our churches are very much open, prayer is happening. Many are utilizing A Sacred Meal for Dispersed Community, the Bishop leads it from the Diocesan House chapel. St. Christopher’s, Hampstead building a shed for Zac to celebrate communion at their parking lot services, with the musician inside the sanctuary alone, playing and singing. People can tune in from their cars, and sing along. They bring their own bread, no wine, and, according to Zac, honking is discouraged. The diocese is figuring out how to handle upcoming ordinations and confirmations.

**Short-term COVID Response Team**

Chip reported that the FAQ document is completed, and after formatting the document will be sent to clergy and added to the website. It is based on questions received, and as more come in it can be updated.

Terry referenced Governor Sununu’s announcement that on January January 26th, anyone aged 65 or over can sign up to receive the vaccination. The Bishop pointed out that New Hampshire clergy have 1A status, near the top of the list, along with frontline responders. A number of ours have been able to register and get vaccinated. There is some ethical ambivalence among those who don’t feel they have great vulnerability as others. They are advised to follow airport discipline: if you get on the plane when you’re called, it makes everything go better. Some hiccups in the process, cancelled appointments.

**Long-term Team**

Kelly shared that the next meeting will be in February, postponed from Inauguration Day, which needs to be a time of prayer and witness. In discerning the soul of the diocese, the group will determine how to do something, not just talk about it, and feels a need to produce results in a timely fashion. How do we—the diocese—act intentionally and use our resources to support our cohesion? What belongs in local expression, in the churches? The Bishop remarked that he had never experienced a diocese of such cohesion as we experience it now. Another question to consider: What is the function or desire for diocesan worship? We are able to come together with services from the chapel, if clergy need a Sunday off.

As part of the long-term discussion, he brought up the social rending taking place, as manifest in the riot in the U.S. Capitol. He shared information about the organization derived from the line in Lincoln’s 2nd inaugural address, when he was striving to bring unity to the nation. Better Angels was taken, so it became Braver Angel. Its vocation is akin to what David Brooks calls the “weaving” or re-weaving of social fabrics. They identify conservative/libeal/red/blue regions and invite people to form relationships on the other side of the chasm. This week they offered a webinar out of a sense of urgency—several Council members participated—and it included people from across the country who self-identify as red or blue and represented different religious traditions. It’s an effort to see one another as children of God. The Reconciliation Commission invited Bishop Mark (retired of New Jersey, living in Jaffrey) and local Braver Angels representative, so we can bring this into our churches and partner with others. Braver Angels is the secular version of the Anglican Communion, following *via media*—not as a compromise, but the middle way as means of comprehension and holding together in diverging viewpoints. Gail added that the conversations were amazing and really powerful, and the attendees numbered 4000-5000. The question raised was: What are you, me, we going to do to hold America together? Benge had three different conversations with people on different side or perspectives. There is a web link, and he recommends the point at about the one-hour mark, concerning a divided congregation.

The Bishop feels our diocese has the capacity to hold these conversations. How will the church respond in coming days, after a second impeachment of the president, the threat of violence in state capitals around the inauguration. What is the role of clergy in this time in terms of public witness? If there are counter protests, how are we safe and not stupid. This was discussed at the clergy Zoom gathering today.

Comments: Joyce pointed out that it’s important to acknowledge we’re not just observers, we have a role to stand up. Zac referred to the tension in *via media.* Not being silo-ed, reaching out, while also making sure that those in vulnerable or targeted populations—race, religion, LGBTQ—still feel protected and safe and supported, and know we are standing with them. Barbara stated that as a teacher she walks a tightrope, judging when and how not to be political while also truth-telling and pointing to examples of people who haven’t been accountable and have negatively impacted the world we live in. Teresa recommended Desmond Tutu’s book. Reed referenced an article in Sojourners magazine about loving your enemy—first you have to know who they are, these enemies of the cross of Christ, to pray for them, which becomes sacrificial and leads us to be other-oriented.

The Bishop quoted prayers for social justice from the BCP. “Help us fearlessly contend against evil and make no peace with oppression.” “Break down the walls that separate us, unite us in bonds of love.” Two different spirits in these collects, both for social justice. Can we love someone we are also punishing, bringing to justice?

Bishop closed with prayer of St, Francis.

*Respectfully submitted,*

Margaret Porter, Moderator/Secretary

**Next meeting:** Feb 11, 2021 04:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/98755883460?pwd=eDRXRHlGVFUxSGhVU2cxRVYyUkd0QT09>

Meeting ID: 987 5588 3460

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