**Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes**

**March 19, 2020**

**Present:** Bishop Rob Hirschfeld, Gloria Gallant (staff), Joyce Johnson (Seacoast), Gail Avery (staff), Terry Knowles (Trustees), Benge Ambrogi (staff), Zachary Harmon (Southern), Valerie Benoit (Western), Richard Davenport (Western), Teresa Gocha (Northern), Margaret Porter (Moderator/Secretary), Chris Porter (Finance Committee)

The Bishop called the meeting to order at 4.05, and opened our devotions Litany in time of Coronavirus. Council members shared their name, congregation, convocation. New council members were welcomed: Kathryn Johnson of Church of the Good Shepherd, Nashua (Southern), and ValerieBenoit of Epiphany, Newport (Western) was elected to her own term after filling in. December meeting minutes were approved with technical change re: SDG’s to .07% giving.

**Mission Resources Fair Share Adjustments 2020** *Bill Petersen*

Bill reported that the adjustment meeting for 2020 was a spirit filled day, with worship, conversation and prayer in addition to the congregations’ presentations and deliberations. He reviewed the chart sent to Council beforehand. Zach asked if parishes are engaging and wrestling with how to grow, who they are, what it is to be church, or are they unsure how to change and develop. Faith, Merrimack and Holy Cross, Weare, continue in a holding pattern and need prayers, but are receiving staff support and both are making hard choices. Woodsville also struggles, making difficult choices—to replace a beloved organ with an accessible restroom, and there are clergy pay issues. Weare is hoping for a partnership. Merrimack will probably look radically different. The report and recommendations were approved by the Council as presented.

**Q4 financial reports** *Gloria Gallant*

Gloria walked Council through variances in fourth quarter and reviewed the balance sheet. The finance office is monitoring excess cash and moving it as appropriate, to make sure we are hitting targets, as well as tracking DAF balances and accounts. There were questions about whether unused grants would be restored, and why Youth and Young Adult grants were underspent. Benge explained the Our Kids grant process, and other grants. We lost funds from Van Otterloo and replaced with diocesan funds, so actually stepped up our internal Our Kids funding. The Youth and Young adult grants were created before Benge came on. We haven’t had a mechanism to spend those funds—they weren’t allocated to a particular commission. Instead of grants, there was support for individuals to attend conferences. This has been fixed for 2020. Joyce asked if we are considering using funds for kids to attend camp. That has been part of Our Kids, and Barbara C. Harris does scholarships. Because of COVID-19, probably no camp in early summer.

Reed noted that the balance sheet showed a large drop in checking, cash reserves, and DAF. The reason is that some Fair Share checks came early in January, no later. We brought on a missioner for Franklin, and a Dean for our School or Ministry, which had impact on the checking account. As for Diocesan Advance Fund, there were loans to Sanbornville and elsewhere, and withdrawal was made from investments to provide those funds. Per our cash reserve policty, funds are moved from an account with lots of cash into investments, so some of the monies were moved to the investment line. These are real variances, but not abnormal or concerning. Gail said that Our Kids ended 2019 with a $10,000 surplus, we didn’t fund Big Brother/Big Sister in North Country. Benge explained committee and commissions don’t award grants unless they meet criteria, Gail added that requirements are intentionality, discussion, lots of hard work. The Bishop shared that defunding Big Brother/Big Sister was a hard decision because of the need, but there was ineffective leadership and danger of our money being squandered. Tim Brooks spent a lot of his own credibility and trust and got lots of Bigs to mentor the Littles, but the organization totally dropped the ball. The NH Charitable Foundation provided a grant and coaching to get them on track, make them functional. We did fund a North Country youth hockey program, and the Bishop saw them in action.

**Report of the Bishop**

Due to coronavirus/COVID-19, the world is in a time of upheaval, fear, and uncertainty. Workshop is suspended. Meetings are held by Zoom. Maintaining social distance is a a means of expressing God’s love and our love for one another, although it is not the way we normally express love for each other. We are unlikely to celebrate Easter in person, in our churches. In this critical time, scientists, medical experts, caregivers, and civil authorities encourage us to stay home. “Spacious Solidarity” with one another is happening.

How does God’s mission have a church in these circumstances? The church will discover how to reconfigure and reinvent itself—God and the Holy Spirit are reshaping and reforming the church. We won’t come out of this unchanged, we’ll be transformed, but stronger.

Adding to heartbreaking times, there are dire financial consequences. Little Blessings Day Care at Christ Church closed, and funds a large part of their operating budget. Chip Robinson, vicar in the Seacoast, thanked the Bishop and Benge for conversation. The diocese has provided Fair Share compassion, relieving payments for three months. Maine empowered their new bishop to make F.S. decisions. Here, it is through mutual discernment. Among clergy and lay leaders, there is clear strain. All are working harder, having meetings, praying for one another, showing up. We must also find balance and center ourselves.

As for worship, each congregation does it’s best to offer prayers online. Kate Harmon Siberine of Grace, Concord and Franklin offers morning prayer, 9.30. At 5, Derek Scalia does Compline, St. Stephen’s, Pittsfield has midday prayer, all on Facebook. This shows our adaptiveness. On Sundays the Bishop will offer Liturgy of the Word but doesn’t want to 9nterfere with what the local congregation is doing. Teresa reminded us to be aware of the huge digital divide, not just North Country—it can be age-related, finance related, lots don’t have smart phones. We’ll have to get more creative to deal with people not tied in with technology.

**Letter from Hank Junkin re: Convocations and Convention**

Convention makes decisions, votes resolutions, leaves it to Council, between Conventions, and to Convocations, our regional geographical associations. This is a time to enter into a conversation, to ask questions about how we are doing regionally? What are the functions of the convocation, regional ministries? Gail wondered how convocations might work in furthering the work of resolutions we have approved at Convention. Speaking as a co-convener, Reed finds the role unclear, though Hank points out the authority of the convocation. The clergy from larger churches don’t attend, the smaller convocations don’t come because of the time. It’s already non-functional. Teresa said Northern meets 4 times a year. The presentation of diocesan resolutions, budget, is really useful conversation.

A Re-Imagining Convocation group, which would consider the convocations and structure, was formed. Members include Teresa, Valerie, Margaret, Benge, Zach, Reed, Richard, Zach, Kathy, Joyce, with Hank and Judith (Constitution and Canons perspective and implications) as consultants.

We closed with the on p. 461 of the BCP and adjourned at approximate 5.35 PM

**Next meeting: Thursday, June 11, 4-6 PM**

*Respectfully submitted,*

Margaret Porter