**Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes**

**June 11, 2020**

**Present: Bishop, Margaret Porter, Chris Porter, Valerie Benoit, Emily Drake, Kelly Sundberg-Seaman, Joyce Johnson, Kathryn Johnson, Chip Robinson, Gloria Gallant, Gail Avery, Benge Ambrogi, Barbara Buckely, Reed Loy, Bill Peterson, Zac Harmon, Teresa Gocha, Alan McRae,**

The Bishop called the meeting to order at 4.05, opening our devotions with a prayer of thanks for diversity of races and culture. Members shared their name, congregation, and convocation. The Bishop started off a round-robin check-in with the full group, describing his weekly “Coronatide” gathering with diocesan clergy via Zoom, acknowledging occasionally difficult and awkward conversations. Another peak and rise in COVID-19 infections could be ahead with #BLM and other gatherings. The church has spirit of curiosity, compassion, and courage as we move forward.

**Bishop’s Staff Reports**

Gail reported that our commissions haven’t missed a beat, especially Our Kids. Aware that COVID-19 would result in food insecurities, they have provided grants to congregations to help out. The Reconciliation Commission will be going full gear in the area of highlighting racial disparity, in the hope of bringing about change. In the area of Transition ministry, curacies are being filled as well as a part-time priest-in-charge in Walpole—all symbolic of new life.

Kelly stated that her congregation’s relationship with Holderness is deepening, and will hopefully turn outward into the community. The School for Ministry a moving target, and now faced with the need to train people for a church that’s emerging. It will provide all-remote learning, and will have to be built as it’s flying.

Gloria has been going into the office on a regular basis to take care of financial matters, and she doesn’t write the checks from home. The diocesan audit is underway, with exchange of documents. She’s pleased to see the resourcefulness around the diocesan, and the way people are coming up with solutions—trying new things, seeing how it feels. Personal areas of growth, using Zoom.

**Bishop’s Time**

When meeting with clergy and lay pastoral leaders of diocese every Thursday, he is receiving questions about potential re-gathering. Governor allows churches to open, with a 20-point checklist, and stay-at-home orders will expire on Monday. We want to get back, have communion, but in NH we havne’t yet experienced a sustained 2-week period of virus decline. According to previous protocols, we aren’t in what used to be called Phase 1. .Do we re-open as cases increase? We flattened a curve, but that means it’s a plateau. The diocese has issued guidance, available via the COVID link on our website. No church is required to re-open. We are providing opportunities for outdoor services, and guidelines will be updated. This will be a very slow, very incremental process, beginning with small gatherings, masks, physical distancing, sanitizing. No wine, until further notice. Each congregation needs to do their due diligence to meet all the protocols before they can consider re-opening. It’s going to take time. This will be here for a while. It’s not too early to begin thinking about how we are going to have Christmas, because this will be with us into 2021.

The Bishop is astounded and deeply grateful for online worship—it is community, our churches are open, there is a new integrity to worshiping online. I suspect we will continue to do online worship, even when some people feel safe, until we are post-vaccine and no infections. This year we will hold an online Zoom diocesan convention. There will be updates and more information about how to vote resolutions. Most or all dioceses are moving towards this. We can have worship the evening before, Friday Nov. 13. The convention business will take place on the 14th. Bishop Shannon McVean-Brown of VT is our guest preacher.

**Financial Report**

Benge hasn’t undertaken the formal survey of congregational finances yet, but is having lots of conversations with churches around the state, and they are doing ok. People have stepped up their giving, and congregations have received CARES Act assistance. The diocese provided Fair Share relief. This enables them to make ends meet. We expect the shoe to drop in the back half of the year, in early third or fourth quarter, when government money runs out and the diocese is more limited in what it can do to assist. At the end of this month, Q2, a survey will go to churches asking about components of Line A income, to find out where they are on June 30. The responses will help us plan, we can compare to our historical data from prior years and the first part of 2020.

Hard budget work for 2021 is delayed until we have a better idea of resources. Our 2020 new initiatives are going well: Bishop’s Curates, clergy coaching fund, School for Ministry start-up, and we hope to keep those going. We used to base our budget two years in arrears, on past data, before we based fair share assessment to conditions closer in time—from April of the prior year. Other Province 1 dioceses aren’t so lucky.

In March we gave congregation up to two months of fair share relief, take it if you need it, and are grateful for the thoughtfulness that congregations have shown in making that decision. We approved about $228,000 of available relief, and so far have provided $140,000—there’s still money available if needed. Part of that is March money, and we had unused money from 2020 fair share budget. We’ll start a process for congregations that might need adjustment for the rest of the year, we’ll post a small application on the website. We are encouraging congregations to do financial projections—aware that expected auxiliary income from thrift shops, parking, use of space, craft fairs, fundraisers have been lost. We are trying to keep staffs intact.

Congress passed a law to make those Payroll Protection Plans more useable, which should help congregations. We should have our draft 2021 diocesan budget for the September meeting, and present at fall convocation meetings after that—Zoom gives us more flexibility on timing and scheduling.

**Other Business**

Zac moved acceptance of March 2020 meeting minutes, Chris seconded, and the motion passed.

Margaret will set up a Zoom meeting for the Convocation Committee, which will decide on a convener, and Benge will serve as staff liaison.

The diocese is encouraging clergy to take their summer vacations. They can partner with neighboring congregations doing online services, or encourage members to “attend” Sunday worship at the Washington National Cathedral.

Next meeting: Thursday, September 10, 2020 via Zoom

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/94469459054>

 Meeting ID: 944 6945 9054

One tap mobile

+19292056099,,94469459054# US (New York)

*Respectfully submitted,*

Margaret Porter