**Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes**

**September 10, 2020**

**Present: Bishop Rob Hirschfeld, Margaret Porter, Gloria Gallant, Chip Robinson, Valerie Benoit, Kathryn Olson, Chris Porter, Zac Harmon, Emily Drake, Teresa Gocha, Alan McRae, Gail Avery, Joyce Johnson, Barbara Buckley, Tina Pickering, Benge Ambrogi, Kelly Sundberg-Seaman, Reed Loy, Terry Knowles**

**The Bishop opened the meeting with prayer at 4.05 PM**

**Bishop’s Time**

**Bishop Rob began by noting that the coronavirus pandemic takes place in a time of racial injustices and awareness of social pressures, and calls us to mutual accountability. As a result, we are renewing our identity as disciples, as learners. Council will probably be meeting more often. Following the example of the White Mountain School, with he has decided to form two groups to carry out necessary discernment for preparation, mostly populated by members of Council:**

***Short term committee:* This group is narrowly charged with overseeing and examining the protocols by which we return to worship, with the understanding that we cannot eliminate all risk. Some are at risk until there is a vaccine. But prudently, adhering to certain clear protocols, we will consider how we will allow congregations to resume in-person worship, to the extent that they feel called to do. Parishes, but not missions, have had permission under current guidance, but from abundant caution have been reluctant. The time horizon is about 60 to 90 days, meeting every couple of weeks. After the work concludes, people might be needed to participate in the other. Members: Chip Robinson (convener, Seacoast), Valerie Benoit (Western), Barbara Buckley (Northern), Emily Drake (Lakes), Teresa Gocha (Northern), Terry Knowles** (Central, Trustees), **Steve McDow**(Central), **Kathryn Olson (Southern), Bishop Rob, Margaret Porter (Council Liaison)**

***Long term committee:* This group won’t meet quite as frequently right away. They will ask and address broader questions, i.e. “What is the church to which we are being called, what is the church we are being shaped to become?” As we moved to the post-pandemic time, we have introduced into our common life practices that we might wish to keep. And we might be ready to let go of some practices that we adhered to in the past. Some of these questions used to be forbidden. Nine months ago, we would not have considered online worship. And now initial conversations are taking place among the three bishops in Northern New Enlgand: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont. Does it make sense to have three separate bishops, dioceses? In any event, there’s openness to deeper collaboration, sharing of ministries, education, and formation. We already share Title IV. We could collaborate on advocacy, creation care, etc. The long-term committee could be involved in these explorations. Members:** Kelly Sundberg-Seaman (convener, Lakes), Benge Ambrogi (Staff Liaison),

Joan Bigwood (Seacoast), Zac Harmon (Southern), Joyce Johnson (Seacoast), Reed Loy (Central), Alan McRae (Central), Bishop Rob, Margaret Porter (Council Liaison)

**2021 Draft Budget Presentation**

Benge Ambrogi began by pointing out that this is not a “skinny budget” but a “let’s continue moving forward prudently” budget. A summer survey of congregations’ income indicates that finances holding up reasonably well. Some less well, others better than expected. Congregational giving is solid and support of diocese is solid. Not all congregations took advantage of the two months fair share forgiveness, few requests for shortfall fair share relief. The 2021 draft budget supports programs at the same level at during the current year.

*Revenue.* The fair share percentage will remain at 15%. There are few changes in endowment income. For 2021, cash reserves are zeroed out and moved elsewhere in 2021 by request of the Finance Committee but remain available if needed. There’s a big increase in North Country ministry, from its restricted money market fund—we have more to spend, and more people to spend it on.

*Expense.* The assessment due to The Episcopal Church is slightly reduced. We have increased support of the New Hampshire Council of Churches, restoring it after previous cuts. Province 1 funding is flat. Mission Resources is level-funded for Fair Share Adjustment at $25,000, and their mission grants fund remains at $70,000. The communications budget is higher, and this year we had so much going on with the pandemic that 2020 expense is higher. Dave will change from half-time to .3 time. The Bishop’s Curates line is reduced because Kate Siberine is now expensed as staff. The School for Formation now in session, has larger expense. Kelly is now half-time. She has received a Roanridge Foundation grant of $16,000 to spend in 2021 for lay formation. Clergy coaching is successful, at least 6 people have taken advantage of it. Reconciliation is level-funded. The budget reflects hopes for an in-person Diocesan Convention in 2020. We are dramatically underspending this year. Staff salaries are the same but those receiving health care receive an increase. We are putting more money into the episcopal transition fund. Alan McRae asked questions about Finance Committee membership, budget creation process, and approval, expressing discomfort about the late distribution of the budget draft. Zac appreciated that the budget is not in austerity mode. Teresa moved that the Council endorse the draft 2021 budget as presented, for printing in the Pre-Convention Journal. Emily seconded. During discussion, Reed noted that last year the new initiatives were addressed more fully. Benge replied that at convention the first fruits of these efforts will be named. And the budget narrative will appear in the journal. A majority of Council voted in favor, with one voting not in favor.

**Convocation Adventurers Subcommittee Timeline & Report**

Reed Loy shared his feeling that this was the “best team I’ve ever been part of.” The group met over five or six weeks, asking questions about convocations and the diverse experiences of geography and practice. Hank Junkin’s letter last winter was the catalyst for discussion. The goal was to be specific about how congregations and convocations can be more accountable to resolutions we pass at convention, and share energy about what they’re doing in response. Instead of attempting systemic change or a resolution to change the canons, the group developed a timeline, and documents to help convocations function as more meaningful bodies and better understand and carry out their role. Council will receive a final report, and there will be a rubric to help conveners create their annual report to Convention, with a focus on accountability. Clergy participation is low in some convocations, we need to make it more integral to being the Body of Christ. Margaret hopes this info can be sent to co-conveners as they schedule upcoming pre-convention meetings. The Bishop would like the Adventurers to report to convention.

**Transitions, Reconciliation, Community Engagement**

Gail Avery reported that three Bishop’s curates were called over the summer: Peggy Schnack (St. Paul’s, Concord), Kathy Boss (All Saints, Littleton), and Greg Baker (Church of the Good Shepherd, Nashua). Duncan Hilton is now priest-in-charge in Walpole. He’s bi-vocational, working with people with disabilities in conjunction with VT. St. George’s, Durham will soon be in active search, and Gail will present them at the next Transition conference. As interim at Trinity/Prince of Peace in Claremont, Susan Eibner will be a ¾ time interim for several years. In Laconia, Janet Lombardo is serving as interim to St. James’s and Good Shepherd Lutheran in their building, as they remain separate congregations that do things together.

The commissions have continued their great work during Covid, Our Kids gave $500 grants to clergy discretionary accounts to bridge the feeding gap caused by Covid, and funded a $12,000 grant for the Youth Art Enrichment Initiative, a mix of virtual and in-person participation. Reconciliation Commission does continuing work in the area of reparations and anti-racism. Zac presented the draft resolution, the Commission’s response to Covid inequities, the Presiding Bishop’s vision of the Beloved Community, ongoing racial injustice. James McKim participated in the work. The resolution is a stepping stone, a call to study, reflect, educate with resources. Council can take an active role, along with convocations. Barbara pointed out that these opportunities extend to schools and kids, and Gail confirmed that new curate Peggy Schnack could be a contact for Our Kids. The Bishop commended all the schools—White Mountain, Holderness, St. Paul’s, for their diversity officers and conversations and witness. We’ve never had a presentation from any of our schools at convention. Maybe in the future. Reed requested a change to the resolution’s accountability section, to state that the congregations, schools, communities will report. Teresa reminded us that congregations need concrete information, to fully understand what is meant by reparations, that it isn’t about writing checks to people. Without opposition, Council agreed to endorse the resolution, with edits.

**Ministry Development/Formation**

Tina Pickering shared that the Commission on Ministry is very busy right now, with a robust group of people in discernment and formation. We have six persons in early stages, three postulants, three candidates, three transitional deacons. So we’re looking at between 6 and 8 upcoming ordinations. A number of them are serving in ministry, well integrated into the church, and have a vision for where they’re headed. There’s excitement about School for Ministry, though it won’t be appropriate for all our postulants. Two are in seminary, and six will participate in the school.

Kelly reported that the gathering and building process has been ongoing this summer. She holds a Wednesday evening Compline service, has open office hours as needed. Three members of the cohort already hold advanced theology degrees or have long experience in ministry in other denominations. They are being formed to understand what it means to be a priest in the Diocese of New Hampshire. Another three are in ministry but their process will take three years in a curriculum similar to an M. Div. program, and they will have continuity with their ongoing ministry. She requested prayers for all these students and their ministries as the school launches in Zoom.

The Lay Discernment program will begin by asking such questions as what are called to, or called to care for. They could be co-workers, children, neighbors, those in hospital, the homeless, their own church’s member. Information sessions begin this fall, followed by a half-day retreat in January. Discernment is being done in collaboration with Province 1 and Bexley-Seabury. These efforts will inform development of the future lay formation program at our School for Ministry.

Renewal Works has been a major effort, a number of churches went through the first process and are at work on formation plans, figuring out what’s next. The diocese is trying to develop version for smaller churches. Linnae Peterson formation network coordinator, is working with Province 1. We in a pandemic and have to learn to manage behind

screens. There’s no shortage of resources, and we need to help people come together. The Diocese of Massachusetts invited us to be part of their youth formation process.

Tina is also working with the Liturgy Committee, reviewing worship across the diocese and related formation needs connected to it, possible lay ministry training for a house church initiative. Reconciliation Commission and Our Kids are aligned with these efforts. There can be liturgy to support people going back to school this month—one of the crosscurrents between Community Engagement, Liturgy, and Formation.

**Other Business**

Benge explained that our campus ministry funds are typically approved for distribution in December. St. George’s, Durham, submits a request twice a year. Terry moved that Council allocate half of their annual budget, Chip seconded, and the motion carried.

Kathryn moved to accept the June meeting minutes, Teresa seconded, and the motion carried.

**Next meeting:** Thursday, October 8, 2020 via Zoom. We will receive initial reports from the short-term and long-term committees.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/92138288944?pwd=V0ZHNEhYN2RiUktxc1ZwSFZac2VaQT09>

Meeting ID: 921 3828 8944

Passcode: 519316

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,92138288944# US (Chicago)

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 921 3828 8944

The meeting concluded with a prayer by the Bishop at approximately 6.10 PM

*Respectfully submitted,*

Margaret Porter, Moderator/Secretary of Council