**Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes**

**October 8, 2020**

**Via Zoom**

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

The meeting opened at 4:03with prayer.

**Bishop’s Time**

The Bishop expressed gratitude for the Short Term Covid Response Team, meeting frequent, and the Long Term group. He praised Chip’s leadership of the busy Short Term team. The focus of a two-day clergy retreat was preaching and leading in this pandemic time. The bishop leads a weekly Bible study on Tuesday and a Thursday clergy gathering with check-in. Churches are taking care and carrying through in consultation and communication with the diocese. Our state has virus hot spots near the border, other areas are all right. People are being aware and attentive. Discussions are ongoing about how our clergy and people will respond and show up if the election result is contested, and spills over into displeasure and anger that lead to civil unrest. The Bishop is thankful for the strengthening between our Episcopal schools and the diocese.

**Jan-June 2020 Financial Report**

Gloria began her presentation with the balance sheet for the first six months of this year. She noted increase in the operating checking account, due to proceeds from PPP loans, and the cash reserves temporarily invested in Diocesan Investment Fund. The Diocesan Advance Fund receives loan payments and payoffs at the start of the year, followed by a three-month suspension of principal and interest payments during Covid. There will be a transfer from the cash account at the end of the year. Fair Share giving is a little lower for 2020, though collections good late in 2019 early 2020. Benge said there is a bill in Congress that would waive repayment for PPP loans under $150,000, but hadn’t passed due to political gridlock in Washington. Under Profit and Loss, Mission Resources didn’t use all their budget. The new Covid 19 Fair Share Relief reflects those churches who requested the relief—not all did. There was no activity in registration fees due to Covid. Our Kids Commission is using their funds for relief in this pandemic time. The variance in the Diocesan Communication line is due to increased activity during Covid and an expanded newsletter. The Diocesan Convention deposit to the Bank of NH Stage can be used in 2021 if we’re able to hold an in-person Convention. In summary, Gloria reported that despite the impact of Covid and expected expenses for the second half of the year, we are still in pretty solid financial position

Questions: Was there an offset in our 2021 draft budget to reflect that deposit left with BNH Stage for next Convention? No.

**2021 Compensation Framework**

Benge explained that our Human Resources Committee handle the former “grid.” Now it is simplified and narrowed to two types of congregations, A and B, with a broad range of compensation within each. Every year we increase cash compensation, insurance, pension, etc. Cash compensation is typically based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) nationally, and on the Northeast Index. This year there hasn’t been a lot of inflation, so the HR committee decided to leave cash compensation fixed. If there is a change in future, the 2022 framework will reflect it. Health insurance went up 5.5%. COLA allowances are built into framework every year. The HR committee working on clergy/lay parity in pay and salary, and will deliver their findings for the December Council meeting, or early next year. Chip moved acceptance of the 2021 framework as presented, Teresa seconded. There was no discussion and the framework was approved.

**Diocesan Short-Term Team**

Chip reported on the group’s activity and the types of gathering and building use requests received to date. The group is focused on the guidance from the HHS, the CDC, and our neighboring dioceses. The new CDC announcement on the airborne spread of the virus beyond six feet, and not only by droplets, causes concern about enclosed spaces. This raises questions the adequacy of ventilation systems in our older church buildings, number and type of windows, space/size ratios to congregation, side or central aisles, number of entrances and exits. The group will try and provide guidance for worshiping communities and groups that use our buildings. A subgroup is developing a document that will include standards and metrics for determining local community spread and test positivity rates, based on the latest numbers. Two pieces of info: there is a rapid rise in test positivity rate in NH, from 0.8 last week to 4.7 today. Cases per 100,000 are up in the 9s in the southern part of the state. We therefore need to put on the brakes, discourage churches from in-person gathering until there’s a change. The document will include a checklist to assist congregations in planning and for the team to check their plans. When a congregation requests guidance, it is assigned a liaison. Churches are presenting good documentation with their plans, thoughtful and thorough.

*Question:* What’s the guidance around those that are open, having services? Very few are doing so. Some that were hoping to have put plans on hold with rise in numbers. *Comment*: Our Kids Commission is looking at how to support broader broadband, also the elderly in the North Country have connectivity issues.

**Diocesan Long-Range Committee**

Kelly reminded the council that the charge is very different for this group, so it isn’t working at the same fast pace as the other. It is starting by reaching an understanding of the lived experience of church in these days. Two fruitful areas emerged from the first meeting, 1. An initial project to understand what are those things we need to take with us no matter what, those non-negotiables about our life about a community of people who love Jesus in this place and time, 2. the representation of the Cecile Brenner rose, a dramatically vigorous climber that needs to be tended and pruned and supported.

**Request for Council Support, Resolution #1**

This resolution, originally #2, proposes the merger of Holy Spirit, Plymouth, and St. Mark’s Ashland, and admission to the union as a mission church. It frames this process as one of reconciliation, collaboration, and cooperation, and the members are living into that vision. The canonical and resolution committee and bylaws issues have been resolved and they are ready to carry out God’s mission. Zac made the motion for Council to be a named supporter of the resolution, Valerie seconded. During discussion, the Bishop shared that it has been a long, arduous, bumpy road for these congregations. On every step of their journey they received support and enthusiasm from our Trustees and Holderness School, which has welcomed them onto the campus as they explore refreshing and updating its Chapel of the Holy Cross to accommodate worship. It is large enough for a congregation, the faculty, and students. When the congregation is able to use that space for winter months perhaps, it will have no expenses for maintenance, roof, heating, etc.—all will be borne by the school. St. Mark’s may become the summer chapel. Sherrill Hall would be an outreach center for Ashland. And there can be small office downtown in Plymouth as well. Eight years ago, all of this was inconceivable. The new name of the mission will be announced at Diocesan Convention. The Council voted unanimously to support the resolution.

**United Campus Ministry**

Benge presented the funding request. United Campus Ministry, which we have funded for years, as has other churches and denominations, hired a new director. The pandemic has challenged them, with the university shutdown, but the ministry kept going during this time. Sandi Albom succeeded Kelly as Episcopal chaplain. Marcia Morris is the campus chaplain.

Alan moved approval of the request for $5500 in funding. Chris seconded. There was no further discussion, and the motion carried.

**Other Business**

Kathy moved approval of September minutes, which were approved as written.

Next meeting December 10, 4-6, via Zoom.

After closing prayers from the Bishop, the meeting adjourned.

*Respectfully submitted,*

Margaret Porter, Moderator/Secretary of Council

December Meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/95949807575?pwd=cFRDWDVBa2ZtcERxUjlOTi9DYk03QT09>

Meeting ID: 959 4980 7575

Passcode: 477069