

Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 10, 2022 4 PM
Via Zoom

Present: Bishop Rob, Margaret Porter, Bengé Ambrogi, Chris Porter, Joyce Johnson, Sue Poulin, Gloria Gallant, Tina Pickering, Kelly Sundberg-Seaman, Barbara Buckley, Kathy Boss, Vickie Haines, Gregory Andersson, Shelley Kesselman, Alanna VanAntwerpen, Teresa Gocha. *Guest from Mission Resources Committee:* Wayne Trombly

The Bishop opened the meeting at 4:04 p.m. Following an opening prayer against war, new members from Western and Southern Convocations there were welcomed.

Bishop's Time

Covid. As a diocese we have done well, even though some congregations have been challenged by the digital divide. We've held together in the past two years, with credit to God's love working through the ministers of the Gospel and the laity. We have motivation from the Holy Spirit to serve those in need, suffering upheaval and trauma—Afghanistan, Ukraine. We are tired and unsure. There has been some increased attendance and participation but long-term decline in those ways we used to measure the church, i.e. ASA. We have to make decisions about our resources and how we govern ourselves.

Diocesan Purpose Statement. It needed to be broad enough not to tell us what to do, but at times of confusion can answer the questions "Why are we doing what we do?" ***Our purpose is to claim the power of God's love in our life—in our worship, learning and service—as we share the love and joy of Jesus Christ with others.*** Staff chose to share with Council, to see if it resonates, then broadcast through social media, websites, congregations.

Q: How was "claim" chosen over "celebrate"? *A:* Sometimes we have to be in the business of reclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ from those who have claimed it ways that aren't loving. It's about God, it's about Jesus, we're not just a social service agency with hymns. *Comment:* I love "claim" as an action word. Not flat. Not to live in fear. It reflects us, how we continue to lean into whatever God is calling us to do, and the Bishop's initiatives. Represents who we are today, who we want to live into being. *Comment:* Love this, in a time when we don't seem to have agency in anything, it's a call to action that says we have agency, we're working in community. Gives us marching orders. It's up to us to make the changes we need, do it through God's love. *Comment:* Love it, after going through fair share hearings, instead of focusing on Covid, finances, ASAs, we were focusing on God, that's what will get us through. *Comment:* Love it. Incorporates spirit of Great Commandment and Great Commission without directly quoting either one, leaves room for every community in the diocese to embody it in its own way. *Comment:* I like it a lot. *Comment (Benge):* At the wardens and treasurers meeting, a new warden asked about metrics, wanting to know how well we're doing. Need to know what we're trying to measure. Worship, learning, and service: we can look at those three things and ask how is the power of God in each one? *Comment (Alanna):* This is a guidepost for metrics, and works as a Praxis circle, involvement of faith and action, worship leading to learning, leading to service: reflection, contemplation, action.

Covid guidance update. Advice to pastoral leaders in congregations and to clergy: if following CDC guidance and risk level is medium or low, can unmask worshipers with less risk. Three counties are at high risk (Rockingham, Strafford, Grafton); the rest are at medium. Communion in one kind is recommended. But not everyone is without risk (immunocompromised) so it's not a time for recklessness, but easing into in-person worship unmasked. Thanks to everyone for resilience, wisdom, steadfastness. None of us is unchanged by this experience.

Convocations. Importance of convocation will only increase as we go through this time together. What if we made our gatherings smaller? Example: A "Sunapee Deanery" of New London, Newport, Claremont, Walpole, Keene, Hanover, that region's seasonal chapels. In smaller configurations, energy would be released by proximity. A "Monadnock Convocation" of Peterborough, Keene, Walpole, Dublin, Marlborough. More cohesion, closeness, energy. We will revisit this.

Transitions

Canon to the Ordinary Tina Pickering presented challenges and hopeful news. Trying new things because old systems might not be working for us as well as they did. Matchmaking used to happen at the Transition Ministry Conference, but recently close to 100 parishes presented openings but only five clergy people were presented. ECONH

has six churches seeking lead clergy, two to four looking for associates or curates. Covid delayed retirements. About 50% or more churches are led by part-time clergy. Many openings, few candidates. We are promoting our openings through national church tools, on our website, in emails. Housing is an issue, costs have gone up. Also, everyone wants a young and energetic clergy person but might not have a young, energetic congregation. And an experienced clergy person is at the top of the pay scale.

Hopeful news from the Camp Allen, national Office of Transition Ministry/Transition Ministry Conference—many churches find that part-time is sufficient, they are thriving without fulltime clergy. Partnerships are explored between congregations, with Lutheran churches, relying on laypersons with ministry vocations, and we have our School for Ministry. Guidance, coaching, and support is being offered to those in transition.

Comment: In 20-something years in part time ministry, the healthiest congregation I ever served never had a fulltime priest. We do have to be careful how we define what part-time is. *Comment:* With an aging population, a person paid part-time salary is usually not starting out. Will a part-time person be able to afford to live in NH, comfortably enough to enjoy their life? *Comment:* Methodist friends have itinerant pastor serving three rural churches. Each a separate individual congregation in rural areas, but doesn't preach at each one, sometimes the special service is in the big church, and a different one is the location for a yard sale or formation event. A lot of women coming into priesthood, as hard for us to be part time or have two jobs. *Comment (Tina):* Vermont uses the word "constellations" for two or three. *Comment (Bishop):* People do come here realizing their pension fund isn't going to be taxed. We have a large share of retired clergy not canonically resident. We are about to have five retired bishops here.

Fair Share Adjustment Recommendations & Budget Adjustment Request

Wayne Twombly, MRC Interim Chair (while Bill Petersen on sabbatical) circulated the report with recommendations prior to the meeting. The applicant congregations come together, share their stories (which are difficult), revealing some inertia and despair in places. Listening to others in the same situation of concern, they find hope and a way of discerning a path. The committee spends prayerful discernment time. Sue moved acceptance of the recommendations, Gregory seconded, there was no discussion, and the motion carried with one abstention from an affected clergy person.

2021 Year-end Financial Report

Gloria Gallant, Director of Finance, presented the comparison of 2021 to 2020, based on Quick Books, explaining changes—where we over-forecast, where there is activity and areas of growth. Benge Ambrogi, Chief Financial Officer, explained that during the pandemic monies were moved from reserves into the checking account. Due to a good stock market year, the finances benefitted. The theme of the Profit & Loss: we projected a deficit and had a surplus, largely because it was more difficult to spend during the pandemic. Less programming, no travel, no in-person events.

Community Engagement & Digital Mission

Alanna van Antwerpen, Chair of Community Engagement and Digital Missioner, provided an overview of commission activities. The commission chairs will be coming together to discuss intersectionality in their work and educating on advocacy and communicating and grant processes, and each chair will take the findings back to the commission.

Reconciliation Commission will provide more Sacred Ground groups on reconciliation and reparations. At the end of last year, the commission, with Earth Care Commission, supported the documentary Swimming Upstream on the restoration of the Great Bay. YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iszQ07r0gRY>. The City of Durham voted to remove a dam, and the video might have helped in that effort. The Prison Concerns subcommittee will host a two-part conversation on Restorative Justice (March 29, April 5). Earth Care Commission has spring and summer events planned: three-part series on creation care and the spirituality of creation (late April into May), two online and one in-person gathering at Church of the Woods. The Our Kids Commission is determining their granting process for this year—more info to come—but there is a focus on education equity and legislation issues at the State House (school vouchers, curriculum legislation) and is collaborating with Reaching Higher NH and a school funding interest group. Lots of ongoing community partnership building.

Other Business

Joyce moved approval of January 2022 meeting minutes, Barbara seconded, and the motion passed.

Should future meetings be in-person (where?), on Zoom, hybrid? There was consensus that virtual meetings saved travel time and fossil fuels and were more convenient.

Diocesan Convention, November. Business meeting on Friday via Zoom. In-person gathering on Saturday at the Capital Center for the Arts, Concord, with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry.

A placeholder July meeting was scheduled for the 21st (after General Convention, before Lambeth), if necessary.

Next meeting date: Thursday, May 12, 2022 @ 4 PM

Agenda items: Recommendation on hiring audit company, presentation of 2020 Diocesan Financial Audit

Concluding Prayers were taken from *Daily Prayer for All Seasons*.

Sue moved adjournment, Kathy seconded, the motion carried.

2022 Meeting Dates:

June 9, ~~July 14 General Convention~~, July 21, Sept 8, Oct 13, ~~Nov no meeting after Diocesan Convention~~, Dec 8 (dates might be adjusted if necessary)