**Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, Oct 19, 2023 4:30 PM**

**Via Zoom**

**Present:** Bishop Rob Hirschfeld, Margaret Porter, Reed Loy, Emily Drake, Chris Porter, Sue Poulin, Richard Davenport, Terry Knowles, Shelley Kesselman, Lauren Tennett, Joyce Johnson, Tina Pickering, Kathy Boss, Alannah van Antwerpen, Benge Ambrogi, Bill Petersen, (Sarah Ambrogi)

Bishop Rob opened the meeting with prayer and offered a reflection on the current turmoil in the Middle East. We can be mindful Jesus’s loving arms on the Cross, that all humanity saved by the loving embrace.

**Bishop’s Time**

The Bishop announced that the offering taken at Diocesan Convention will go to the American Friends of the Diocese of Jerusalem, which is a sponsor of Ahli Ahrab hospital which was bombed.

In New Hampshire there is Good News in addition to the hard things we face. The Bishop will soon ordain Joe Rose to the transitional diaconate at St. Andrew’s, New London; Fred Chisholm to the priesthood at the Congregation Church in Walpole (he serves St. John’s), and Aaron Jenkyn to the priesthood at St. John’s, Portsmouth, where she has been called as Associate Rector. Many have been coming to the Bishop seeking ordination as preachers, deacons, or lay catechists.

**Mission Resources Committee Update *Reed Loy***

The committee is allocated money from the annual diocesan budget for mission grants. The committee also oversees our fair share adjustment process, through which congregations request assistance paying fair share. There is still $30,000 of mission grant money remaining. Recent grants include: a Claremont community organizer, youth ministry at St. Christopher’s, Hampstead, and St. Mark’s Groveton’s senior gathering space—which has a fourfold boost in attendance. During 2023 up to $2500 per congregation was available as a special energy assistance grant to relieve the rise in fuel prices, and there will be follow-up to recipients. Nancy Harding of MRC attended the Treasurers and Wardens meeting last week and explained the available MRC grants. Kate Harmond Siberine has brought forth a plan for accessibility grants with a template for best practices and audit of spaces, with roll-out planned for December 1st and grants to be available in late 2023 and during 2024.

**Convocation Feedback to budget & resolutions**

A lot of support from Central Convocation (Reed). Important to emphasize this is about making a plan for a plan. (Benge). Our purpose in this effort isn’t virtue signaling (Bishop). Concern about canonical change on term limits for officers, people saying if this passes, I have to resign (Benge). Need to educate people about that, leaders need to enforce it (Sue). Had conversation with colleague in Lakes, long serving competent and beloved Treasurer. Expect a few places where it will be quite challenging for clergy and for vestries (Bill). In North Country, land of hereditary wardens and treasurers, everyone needs to have a protegee, it softens the impact of “time is up, move along. Necessary to establish mentor and mentee relationships within a congregation (Richard).

**Compensation and Benefits Manual Update *Sarah Ambrogi***

*First section:* This is now more substantive, giving depth to the intentions, in order to encourage financial growth and flexibility. Raises in salary are not automatic, they are subject to discussion, with possible merit increases above what manual calls for. Although our framework a useful tool, it doesn’t prevent annual increases from exceeding what the framework adjustment is. When performance doesn’t meet expectations, it’s necessary to make clear what clergy are meant to do: congregations should provide a review of annual performance. Seems more like the corporate environment yet gives flavor to the vestry and clergy in relationship. Lay employees, the content is parallel but simpler. Congregations would provide a written position description, clarifying duties and expectations.

*Second section:* FMLA/Family Leave insurance. We can now provide a policy for paid family leave for all employees, due to a 2022 General Convention resolution. Premiums are comparable to workers’ compensation, being based on what that employee is paid.

*Third section.* For both clergy and laypersons, a Consumer Directed Health Plan and Health Savings Account are available. To calculate the 90% match that churches provide, there is recommended health savings account funding.

(Benge: for a plan with HSA, it’s recommended that the congregation fund it as if they had taken a PPO plan). Amount will be specified each year when rates for coming year are published. Can figure out lowest cost health plan. Via the CDHP, the idea is to fund the HSA higher at start, as money is built into it, over time recommended funding will go down. For lay employees, health insurance is chosen from the diocesan options offered. (Clergy are not able to access it elsewhere, i.e. open market.)

*Fourth section:* Administrative changes.

**Questions/comments:**

Sue: The review process, how is it done? Benge: We haven’t established how these reviews happen and how they fit in with the Mutual Ministry Review. (Sue volunteered to help, her vestry has been asking for MMR. Tina: This is an ongoing question in NH and ME—a combined group could have that conversation. Sarah: Along the way, HR committee had conversations with Dio ME people. Here in NH, the proposed language this conversation is intended to be between vestry and clergy. Not broad-based, not the whole congregation. It’s specific to the employment relationship, relating to how compensation framework is used.

Bishop: Although the language about merit increases sounds new, it reflects renewed interest in accountability, a “tending to relationship between vestry and cleric.” But it’s not really new. Doesn’t it reflect language in every Letter of Agreement we have? There is call for an MMR, an evaluation. Tina: Expressed appreciation for Sarah’s distinction between MMR as a broad process with clergy and congregation, and it’s definitely in the LOA. In that relationship there’s a place for conversation around communication, boundaries, follow through. There’s definitely some overlap with MMR, but clergy can be uncomfortable with MMR as a salary review. Benge: Council decides on substantive changes to this, so today we need a motion to approve the changes, some or all.

Bishop: The presentation is the motion. Benge moved, Sue seconded. There was more discussion.

Sarah: HSA can be self-funded. With a family, could get used. Benge: important thing: these plans are more economical for church and subscriber. Part of what we try to do is to get to a place where more affordable for congregations. Hoping CDHP premiums don’t rise as fast as PPO plans. We want people to adopt a plan, so we fund HSA well. At the Church Pension Group conference, stated health costs depend on what options are given. Might be better to strike that sentence for now, maybe down the road we’ll have a better understanding of these accounts. Sarah moved that the sentence be stricken, Joyce seconded.

Other points made: Desire for clear guidelines for these evaluations because people don’t have expertise in this. There needs to be consistency and clarity, following of best practices for performance evaluation. Lots of church people have never evaluated an employee or personnel, there needs to be training, not just readding. The Episcopal Diocese of TX has clergy performance review form. May be some models out there. The words “performance review” are not helpful in church. We aren’t employees of church, we are “called.” To use a corporate model could create unhealthy environments. We’ve not done the MMR, couldn’t get on calendar.

Benge proposed approving the family leave insurance and lowest cost health plan with improved changes, including the first paragraph of each section. Churches generally only give cost of living increase. We can talk down the road about the performance conversation. The Bishop acknowledged anxiety about the language, that performance evaluation, setting criteria for goals, could sour an inhospitable situation in an already inhospitable relationship sour.

Sarah moved taking Section 1 off the table, and for simplicity and clarity to approve 2, 3, 4, and Kathy second the motion passed.

**Compensation Framework *Benge Ambrogi***

Benge presented the updated framework, which adjusts the living to 3.1 %, based on Northeast Consumer Price Index (CPI) July to July. Terry moved acceptance, Kathy seconded, there was no discussion and the motion passed.

**Other Business**

All information on Diocesan Convention is on the website. Direct any questions to Kathy Traynor.

Shelley moved acceptance of the September 2023 meeting minutes, Emily seconded, the motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:21 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,*

Margaret Porter