

Minutes of Diocesan Council Meeting | June 24, 2020 at 6 pm via Zoom

Present: Bishop Knisely, Ms. Sherry Bailey, Rev. Ed Beaudreau, Rev. Dennis Bucco, Mr. Jay Candon, Mr. Robert Fye, Mr. Joel Gardner, Mr. Scott Hovanec, Rev. Scott Lee, Rev. Johanna Marcure, Mr. Jim Segovis, Ms. Olive Swinski, and Rev. Jennifer Zogg.

Staff: Rev. Canon Dena Cleaver-Bartholomew and Mr. Dennis Burton.

Excused: Ms. Kim Cabral, Mr. Toby Field, Rev. Al Marcetti, Rev. William Locke, and Rev. Joyce Thorne.

Guest: Vice Chancellor for Human Resources, Neal McNamara.

Opening Devotion – Rev. Jennifer Zogg

Action Item

— Approval of HR Policy Handbook

The Bishop noted that the creation of the HR Policy was the cumulation of a three (3) year process. If adopted, the handbook will cover all diocesan staff on payroll. There was clarification regarding what constitutes overtime: as per the state of Rhode Island, overtime is to be paid when a non-exempt employee works more than forty (40) hours per week.

The following change to the HR Policy Handbook was made: On page 2 of the handbook, under Safe Church Training, the phrase ‘all required modules of’ was added so that the text now reads: All employees are required to complete *all required modules of* Safe Church Training as soon as possible after date of hire.

A motion that the HR Policy Handbook be adopted with the noted editorial change was moved, seconded, and unanimously approved by Council members.

The Minutes of the May Diocesan Council meeting were unanimously approved.

Bishop’s Time

— Follow up on Hallworth House Closing

The Bishop reported on the closing of Hallworth House and noted that the staff was naturally saddened by the news. Staff members expressed satisfaction with the severance pay. Families of patients have begun calling other facilities and staff members are actively being sought out by other facilities. Staff has expressed their commitment to stay at Hallworth House through the closing. It was reported that Hallworth House director Stephanie Igoe was interviewed by the media and all reports thus far had been positive. More news coverage is anticipated. It was noted that Hallworth House was the first facility of its kind to close in Rhode Island. There is concern that there will be a number of nursing facilities that close as a result of the COVID pandemic.

Moving forward there is much to do to close Hallworth House. Director Stephanie Igoe will continue to focus on the patients while a team surrounding her will work on closing the facility.

— Regathering for Worship

The Bishop reported that regathering plans are coming in. Of those which have come in, there are various levels of expressivity. Parishes are using the check list to develop their plans and they are thoughtfully and cautiously moving forward.

— Center for Reconciliation

The Bishop reported that the CfR is moving ahead and that they had recently held a vigil in response to current events. Through Thrivent, some from the Lutheran Church have expressed an interest in having the CfR work with their congregations, of which there are twenty-three, and they have indicated that they would fund that work.

— State of the Diocese

The Bishop reported that the Diocese is quiet, that there is a need to figure out what to do about vacations and that he will be in conversation with Canon Dena to figure out what to do about them. There was concern expressed about clergy burnout. It was noted that planned and unplanned transitions were in the works.

Reports

— Rev. Canon Dena Cleaver-Bartholomew offered highlights of her written report. She also offered additional information regarding clergy transitions noting that some were due to older clergy choosing to retire (citing COVID concerns) and others were because clergy are seeking positions elsewhere. It was noted that there are things to consider as older clergy choose to retire and concern was expressed about how to fill open part-time positions. Canon Dena also added that there were new ministries blossoming under COVID and more will be shared about those pleasant and unexpected ministries.

The Bishop added that the Commission of Ministry continues to do its work. Nancy Arnold will be ordained to the Vocational Diaconate and Eddy Lopez, formerly a Roman Catholic priest, has begun the process to become an Episcopal priest. The Bishop noted that Fr. Lopez, who is currently a member of St. Luke's in East Greenwich, would be an asset to the diocese as he is competent, Latino, and bi-cultural. It was also shared that there are an additional two (2) people interested in being ordained to the priesthood.

— Mr. Dennis Burton offered highlights of his written report. It was noted that conversation with Thrivent regarding a Line of Credit have gone very well and that Thrivent feels like a good fit; the meetings with Thrivent have been friendly,

thorough, and professional. It was also noted that work on the annual budget is ongoing and that the Commission on Finance is looking at how the apportionment payments will be determined. It is understood that churches need to know how apportionment will be calculated by October.

An inquiry was made as to how many churches are keeping up with their apportionment payments. It was reported that all churches are paying – except those parishes who had requested deferment of their payments at the beginning of the pandemic. It was noted that it was anticipated that a decline in apportionment income would begin to show up next year.

— Mr. Jay Candon reported that the Diocese was in good shape and that the 2020 apportionment budget was slightly ahead.

Additional Action Items

The following three (3) motions received from the Commission on Ministry were unanimously approved by Diocesan Council.

Diocesan Resource Fund (DRF) Grant Requests

1. St. Paul's, Pawtucket

A motion was made to recommend to Diocesan Council that a grant from the Diocesan Resource Fund to St. Paul's, Pawtucket in the amount of \$10,000 be approved.

2. St. Matthew's, Jamestown

A motion was made to recommend to Diocesan Council that a grant from the Diocesan Resource Fund to St. Matthew's, Jamestown in the amount of \$15,000 be approved.

3. Diocesan Resource Fund (DRF) General

A motion was made to recommend to Diocesan Council that \$50,000 be taken from the principal of the Diocesan Resource Fund and made available for grants in 2020, with the understanding that this money will be used to fund grants for maintenance and safety issues at churches.

The following two (2) grant requests received from the Congregation Development Committee were moved, seconded, and approved with two abstentions.

1. That St Paul's Episcopal Church Pawtucket RI receive a \$5,000.00 CDC grant to repair a structural failure in two (2) sets of bathrooms used in a section of their building which supports their Homeless Shelter and Daycare mission.
2. That Trinity Episcopal Church, North Scituate, RI receive a \$3,000.00 CDC grant to support the relocation and reconstruction of Trinity's Food Closet and Thrift Store.

Discussion

There was discussion regarding how the diocese could support parishes now and into the future.

1. The diocese could provide a centralized payroll service for all parish staff (clergy and lay) to take the burden of payroll off parishes.

The real-life implications of doing payroll incorrectly has been and continues to be a source of frustration for both clergy and lay volunteers in our parishes. Centralized payroll at the diocesan level would take the burden off small and medium size parishes. Although achieving savings may not be possible, it is believed centralized payroll service would prove to be reliable and reduce the risk of experiencing complicated payroll issues.

A Task Force, consisting of Rev. Jennifer Zogg, Mr. Dennis Burton, and Mr. Joel Gardner (St. Luke's, East Greenwich), was formed to look at payroll services and make a presentation to Council in six (6) to eight (8) weeks. In addition to exploring options, among the questions the Task Force will seek to answer are:

1. What are the *pros* and *cons* of a centralized payroll service?
2. Should participation be mandatory or optional for parishes?
3. Who pays for the service? The diocese as a return for apportionment dollars? Parishes? Or a combination of both?

The Task Force will reach out to the Diocese of Western Massachusetts and the Diocese of Maine, both of whom have moved to a centralized payroll system.

2. Now that the COVID 19 grant and loan requests are settling down, and the Commission on Finance has mandated that grants and loans be made to parishes to address safety issues, the Grants and Loans Committee is looking for guidance as to what the committee should examine when considering grants and loans. In other words, as parishes begin to regather, what would be considered safety issues? Would health safety (PPE and cleaning supplies) be considered a safety issue or does the Commission on Finance mean to address structural safety issues?

Commission on Finance members present at the meeting offered clarification: The additional \$50,000 is meant to address maintenance and structural issues.

3. Audio/Visual Requests – With large discrepancies between grant requests for audio/video equipment to help with live-streaming services now being submitted (one for \$5,000 and another for \$25,000), there was conversation regarding how the diocese would support parishes as they work towards upgrading current systems or installing new systems to best meet the needs and challenges of online worship.

The Bishop noted that continuing with online worship is an adaptive change which needs to be figured out as live streaming is part of evangelism. It was noted that a sub-committee in communications is currently being formed to present options for technology packages to parishes.

After thoughtful conversation, it was decided that the Congregational Development Committee will be charged with figuring out the details of how parishes meet these new technological challenges and the Commission on Finance will begin to have conversations about funding the needed changes and upgrades.

It was further decided that, Ms. Olive Swinski will invite the Bishop to the next Congregation Development Committee at which time the Bishop will request that the committee explore and develop audio/visual options for parishes.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:40 pm.