

# Minutes of the Joint Meeting of Diocesan Council and Standing Committee

Yankee Pedlar, Holyoke, MA

January 9, 2016

## **Attendance:**

*The following Council members were present:*

*The Rt. Rev. Douglas J. Fisher, President*

*The Rev. Catherine Munz, Vice-President*

*The Rev. William Murray, Secretary*

*The Rev. Pamela J. Mott, Assistant Secretary*

*Ms. Karen Warren, Assistant Secretary*

*Mr. Wayne Gass, Treasurer*

*Mr. Steven Abdow, Assistant Treasurer*

*Pioneer Valley Corridor – The Reverends Derrick Fetz (early dismissal) and Heather Blais; Ms. Donna Christian, Mr. Steve Houghton*

*Berkshire Corridor – The Rev. Tom Damrosch and Mr. John Cheek*

*Worcester Corridor – The Reverends Jesse Abell and José Reyes; Ms. Joan Gilchrist and Mr. Dan Mylott*

*The Rev. Richard Simpson, Staff*

*Mr. Frank Minasian, Trustees Representative*

***Excused:*** *The Rev. Nancy Strong, Council Chaplain*

***The following members of Standing Committee were present until 2:45 p.m.:***

*The Reverends Catherine Munz, Derrick Fetz and Carolyn Jones; the Rt. Rev. Douglas Fisher; Ms. Lee Cheek, Ms. Nancy Lowry, Ms. Christina Loy; and Mr. Peter Kite.*

## **9:00 a.m. Gather / Welcome / Eucharist**

The Rt. Rev. Douglas Fisher welcomed Council and Standing Committee members to this gathering, and invited the Rev. Carolyn Jones to lead the group in singing *Seek Ye First*. Bishop Fisher celebrated Eucharist. He gave a sermon on the topic of leadership, and, in particular, on the qualities of flexibility, adaptability, and endurance—qualities possessed by fishermen. Bishop Fisher pointed out that fishermen go wherever the fish are. He stressed that the commitment we all have made to serve as leaders of the diocese includes a commitment to spend time in prayer.

## **10:10 a.m. Introductions / Getting Unstuck**

Canon Richard Simpson invited the group to introduce themselves, to include naming a gift that he/she contributes to this assembly of diocesan leaders. A great variety of gifts were named. Following introductions Canon Simpson showed a video called *A Girl's First Ski Jump*. Following the video, the group discussed their observations. Some observations included:

- *Fear, anxiety*
- *Inquiry of the anticipated experience*
- *The girl was not alone—she was supported by those around her; received encouragement*
- *Joy, fun*
- *Self-talk*
- *In overcoming fear, the end result can be good*
- *Some need to know in advance: what am I dealing with?*
- *She made a choice. She persevered, and was rewarded.*
- *She looked to the future*
- *Maybe change isn't a bad thing*
- *She trusted her mentors*
- *No one forced her to jump; no one pushed her*
- *A lot of preparation took place before this event*
- *New experience is often easier when we're young, before fear sets in*

Discussion continued, noting these points: *How do we cultivate risk-taking while anxiety exists? Will all the preparation carry us through? If we recognize the storm, then can we deal with it? Can we see the larger vision?*

### **11:00 a.m. Orientation to Responsibilities of Standing Committee and Council**

Canon Pam Mott offered a presentation on the responsibilities of providing spiritual leadership to the Diocese through the organization of both Standing Committee and Diocesan Council. She reviewed the responsibilities of each group, as well as the overlapping responsibilities (see **Appendix A 1-6**). Canon Mott noted that we are the body of Christ, we have different gifts and a variety of functions, but we are called to be the Church. Prayer and scripture are our foundation. We need to keep Standing Committee and Council in our prayers when we are at home as well as when we're meeting. Steeping ourselves in prayer and scripture will guide our leadership. As individuals, we need to let go of our own agendas. We are called to discern what the vision is. Consider what needs to be uprooted from the garden, to make room for new growth. As individuals we also need to be willing to serve on sub-committees of Standing Committee and Council—that is where the work is to be done. The work needs to be done with respect, compassion and kindness. In summary, Canon Mott stressed that our common work is to be utterly present to God and the work that we are called to do for the good of the Body of Christ. In reviewing the responsibilities of the Standing Committee concerning assets of the Episcopal Diocese of WMA, it was noted that our Diocese has a separate mechanism in place to approve the sale of properties. This mechanism is the Episcopal Missions of Western Massachusetts, known as EMWM, a separate entity from the Diocese. Canon Mott also emphasized that leadership skills utilized in Council and Standing Committee can be shared with vestries in each person's parish.

- **Experience of new members**

- The Reverend Derrick Fetz, a new member to Diocesan Council, reflected on his experience so far. The Rev. Fetz related an experience at his parish when a Vestry meeting did not stay 'on task.' He emphasized that we all need to be aware, to keep each other on task, and avoid rehashing a subject that has already been decided. The Rev. Fetz has observed, in both Council and Standing Committee, a group of passionate people, working for the common good. He said it has been exciting to work with this group, and offered that it would be helpful for both groups to remind each other of our specific functions, and to always look to the Diocesan Mission. He also noted that there are changes annually in membership of both groups, and so re-visiting the 'norms' would be helpful to all. There are many exciting new ministries in the Diocese.
- The Reverend Heather Blais has served on Council for one year and has observed a new energy and vitality in the Diocese. She has observed many things to take back to her parish leadership. She has observed as well that the Bishop, staff, Council and Standing Committee lead by example. The Rev. Blais has felt the joy and vitality coming from Council, through the recognition of new ministries such as Fanning the Flames, and appreciates the encouragement to take risks. She has also noted there is not a lot of 'coddling.' When parishes are failing and ready to close, they are treated with tenderness and helped through their process; they are given a choice. She said this has been refreshing for her to observe. She has observed a certain pace within the Diocese and would like to encourage her own parish to pick up their pace.

### **12 Noon Lunch**

### **1:00 p.m. Numbers, statistics and trends**

Canon for Mission Resources Steve Abdo reviewed a document covering the ten-year history of our parishes, including average Sunday attendance (ASA), total Pledge and Plate offerings, and numbers of Pledging Household units per parish (see **Appendix B, 1-6**). He reviewed these stats by rank and by percentage change (see **Appendix C, 1-16**), noting that Plate and Pledge remained stable over a 10-year period despite decline in membership. We know that giving will begin to decline; therefore, we need to work at increasing our giving amounts. Following his review of these stats and trends, the question remains *What do they mean?* Canon Abdo remarked that some of the smaller churches are not necessarily in decline but show promising growth. He noted that St. John's, Ashfield, is a parish with low membership but healthy giving. We know that clerical transition usually has a significant impact on attendance and giving. Canon Abdo also noted some of the parishes who are having their last services, including Grace Church,

Dalton; St. Luke's, Springfield; and St. Martin's, Pittsfield. Canon Rich Simpson added that long-term stewardship is a problem and we need to create tools to help parishes present the topic of stewardship year-round.

Following his presentation, Canon Abdow invited observations and reactions to these trends and statistics. Some reactions included:

- *Young people are not coming to church*
- *How do we do the 'business' part of church?*
- *Consider other ways that people are giving? Gideon's Garden, for example*
- *Average 'weekly participation'*
- *How do you live out your faith?*
- *Consider alternate ways of paying a pledge: online pay, use of debit card, use cell phone*
- *Young people don't carry cash at all*
- *Use of technology is deeply embedded in our culture*
- *Consider a Vestry letter going out to encourage an increase in parishioners' giving*
- *Milford put cards in plate, for those who have paid already by check; gives something to 'put in plate'*
- *Have a focus area each month, use special envelopes included in pledge envelopes*
- *Need to articulate to parish that giving is part of our faith*
- *If pay by cell phone, we need to say it's okay to pull out cell phone in church*
- *We need to state how much we need—schools ask for money all the time*
- *Southwick: went deep into prayer; at end of year pledges were much increased*
- *Have a few people sit down with Bruce Rockwell on stewardship*
- *Ask parishioners to give a witness statement*

Canon Abdow suggested that perhaps a subcommittee on Stewardship would help, as there are many good ideas gathered here.

### **2:00 p.m. How do we best do our work together?**

Bishop Fisher asked members of Council and Standing Committee to reflect on the trial of meeting together as we have this year, and invited observations of what was beneficial or difficult on meeting this way. Some observations were:

- *Consent agenda was good – able to review the work ahead of the meeting and be prepared*
- *Having presentations of various ministries throughout the Diocese was good*
- *Chaplain's time, reflection time, useful and beneficial*
- *Having more people offered more ideas*
- *Some members of Standing Committee felt they were an 'afterthought' coming into a Council meeting that was already in progress; SC meeting was rushed through because it was late in the day*
- *A large group is difficult to manage*
- *Initially, meeting together caused some confusion between the two groups, particularly when it came to topics that needed a vote*
- *Today's meeting felt right--having common time first, then separate time*
- *Can we begin meeting together on topic of leadership development, not specific to either group; then separate into meeting with our own group?*
- *Meet together first: have worship, prayer and topic of leadership as joint meeting; then separate seems favorable*
- *Bishop Fisher, Cat Munz and Derrick, members of both committees, would have to choose which to attend*
- *Is it a problem having people serve on both groups?*
- *Suggestion: Bishop Fisher can do 'Bishop's time' with SC and then attend Council meeting*
- *There were misunderstandings in the early joint meetings, that SC was coming to Council to lend their voices; having SC at the end did feel rushed*
- *Beginning an SC meeting in the late evening does not feel good*
- *Suggestion: could we return to 2:00 p.m. start time? Could joint meeting be no more than 2 hours? Brief business meetings following our time together*
- *Consider why do we do what we do, and how do we best do it?*
- *Suggestion: Can Bishop do his report first; then bring in Missioners for presentation? This would be good to learn Bishop Fisher's vision and see the ministries in action; create advocates to share the vision*
- *Can we come together quarterly as a group?*

### **Our Work Together / Diocese of Connecticut Model:**

Bishop Fisher reported that Canon Abdow has visited the CT Diocese to experience how they do business. Canons Mott and Simpson will also be attending CT's meetings in the future. The Bishop shared that the Diocese of Connecticut brings together the Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, Commission on Ministry, and Trustees for quarterly meetings on Saturdays. The group has an educational component in the morning, followed by prayer, Eucharist and bible study. They share their 'elevator speeches' and have lunch together at noon. Following this, each group meets separately in the afternoon to discuss business. In this way, they share their mission and vision. The decisions they make in the business meetings, then, flow from their shared mission. In between the quarterly Saturday meetings, the individual groups meet together as is necessary. Bishop Fisher stated we may begin this meeting format but delay it until 2017 as the newly elected members have not been made aware of a 4-Saturday commitment. This meeting model would make it easier to share information and would also include intentional relationship building. This year the SC and Council will come together on Thursdays, and evaluate the model. Question arose—can Commission on Ministry do a Saturday? It would benefit the Standing Committee, on making decisions, to meet with the COM.

Consensus is that we will meet together for the next meeting, March 31, 2016. We will have prayer together and a ministry presentation, followed by separate business meetings. Meeting will take place in the Kendrick Room at the Cathedral, at 2:00 p.m.

### **Bishop's Report**

Bishop Fisher asked for continued prayers for our Presiding Bishop, the Most Reverend Michael Curry. Bishop Fisher also reported that *Fanning the Flames* is going well on many fronts. The Rev. José Reyes' work at All Saints' Church in Worcester is going well—he is working with children and youth ministries and developing new relationships with the community. Bishop Fisher also noted that Ms. Robin Carlo is developing three different levels on involvement on the issue of gun violence: 1) prayer, 2) prayer and education, and 3) prayer, education and action. The Bishop noted that the Bishop's Choir is also doing well. He reported that in June 2017 the Bishops of New England will be participating in a canoe trip down the Connecticut River. It will be a 12-day trip, and they will stop along the way for prayer services. This has not been advertised yet. Bishop Fisher also reported that the Presiding Bishop will be in our Diocese in September 2017 to help celebrate and commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Episcopal service held in Springfield. While here the Presiding Bishop will attend the Bishop's Clergy Day. Bishop Fisher also reported that the Veterans' Ministry is very meaningful as it includes an important social time for our veterans to be with other people. A new program of the COM, *Loving the Questions* will begin in a couple of weeks. Twenty-four people are signed up to participate. This program encourages all the baptized to seek their call to ministry.

Before breaking into our separate meetings, Canon Abdow reported to both groups that 100% of our Assessment for Common Ministry has been collected by the end of 2015. Our Diocese is blessed to have this commitment.

### **Adjournment of Joint Meeting of Standing Committee and Council**

There being no further business for Standing Committee and Council the meeting was adjourned at 2:45p.m.

### **2:45 p.m. Meeting of the Episcopal Missions of Western Massachusetts called to order** (See separate Minutes)

### **2:50 p.m. Meeting of Council Call to Order**

Meeting of Diocesan Council was called to order at 2:50 p.m. by Council Secretary the Rev. William Murray.

**Attendance:** as listed above with the exception of the Rev. Derrick Fetz' 1:00 p.m. dismissal.

### **Approve Minutes**

There being no corrections, it was Moved, Seconded, and **VOTED** to accept the Minutes of the November 19, 2015 conference call meeting of Council.

### **Real Estate Updates**

Canon Steve Abdow reported we currently have four vacant properties and expect there will be more in 2016. He met with the Budget and Financial Planning Committee (BFPC) and they have recommended hiring a consultant/contractor on a retainer basis to do some of the work surrounding the property management and marketing. The consultant's fee would be paid for from the funds of the Episcopal Missions of Western Massachusetts (EMWM). Of late, Canon Abdow reported that up to 25% of his time is being spent on church closings. The consultant, Mr. Frank Streeter, has already worked with us on the negotiations of the Leominster property. He has also worked for the Diocese of Massachusetts on similar issues. He is familiar with this work and with Episcopal polity. Mr. Streeter's fee is estimated to be between \$1500 and \$2000 per month. Following discussion, Motion was made and Seconded, and it was **VOTED** to accept the recommendation of the BFPC and affirm the hiring of Frank Streeter as a consultant to manage and market our vacant properties. We expect that the Leominster property will be closing next week. An update on church closings and Diocesan Real Estate as of December is appended to these minutes (**Appendix D, 1-2**). The sale of the Otis property may be coming up soon, which EMWM would need to approve.

### **Financial Statements of the Administrative Offices of the Diocese through October 31, 2015**

For financial reports please see **Appendix E, 1-11**, attached to the original minutes of this meeting.

### **Correspondence**

Assistant Secretary Karen Warren reported receiving two letters. Ascentria Care Alliance sent a thank you letter for our support and the gift of \$867.00 to assist in providing services for new Americans in Massachusetts. A letter was also received from Mr. John Farquharson, retired member of Diocesan Staff, who thanked Council for the increase in his annual pension. Council Secretary William Murray also reported receiving a thank you letter from Bishop Daniel Sarfo, the Archbishop and Primate of the Church of the Province of West Africa, in response to our Courtesy Resolution letter.

### **Adjournment of Council meeting**

There being no further business for Council the meeting was adjourned at 3:00p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen D. Warren, Assistant Secretary of Council  
The Rev. William 'Mac' Murray, Secretary of Council

### **Future dates of the Diocesan Council (all meetings held in the Kendrick Room, Christ Church Cathedral unless otherwise specified:**

- March 31, 2016 (note: 2:00 p.m. start time)
- May 19, 2016, 2:00 p.m.
- September 29, 2016, 2:00 p.m.
- Saturday, November 19, 2016, TBD
- Saturday, February 11, 2017, TBD
- Saturday, April 29, 2017, TBD