

Diocesan Council Minutes

June 14th and June 15th

Diocesan Council met June 14 and June 15, 2024, at St. George's Episcopal Memorial Church in Bismarck, ND.

Members Present Friday Evening: Bishop Brian Thom, The Very Rev. Mark Strobel, John Baird, Robert Fox, Rachel Schmidt, Donna Pettit, Chancellor Leo Wilking, Rev Robert Hoekstra, JoAnn Keehn, Dr. Stephanie Garcia, Susan Lisok, Deacon Beth Lipp and Deacon John Anderson.

Following dinner, the meeting was opened with prayer by Deacon John Anderson. The group heard/read the Diocesan Land Acknowledgement and the Respectful Communication Guidelines.

Action Items

The Council reviewed the Action Items from the last meeting.

1. Acquire line of Credit from Bremer Bank – This is still an open item. Still to be worked out is Use of the line of credit and the people responsible for approving.
 - 1b. The Chancellor reported that the Standing Committee would not need to be involved in the acquisition of the line of credit.
2. Revisit Funds for Youth Missioner to be placed in reserve account (September)
3. Narrative of Endowment Funds – all are encouraged to continue to become familiar with the various funds. This item can be removed from action items.
4. Real Estate policy was found so this item may be removed from action items.
5. The review of a Real Estate Policy remains on the action items.
6. Bishop will continue to recruit for Property Management Advisory Committee & Real Estate Advisory group – Keep on action items (in process)
7. Steve Godfrey reported on the conversations with churches and leadership. One report received will receive additional written materials for July meeting.

Business Session

The minutes from the May 23, 2024, zoom meeting were presented. Motion was made, second to approve the minutes. Motion approved.

The Finance Committee report with figures through May 2023 were presented. The finance report was approved as presented.

The Council heard a report on the ongoing figures for the WoDakota Appeal with receipts currently over \$30,000.

The proceeds from the sale of St. Peter's Williston building were discussed. Robert Hoekstra moved to place \$50,000 of the proceeds in a diocesan reserve fund with the balance of \$700,000 to be invested in the DFMS Investments. Donna Pettit seconded. Motion Passed.

New Business Items

FYI on diocesan convention for October 20,21 in Jamestown. The Civic Center and Grace Church will be the two meeting places. These two places are within walking distance. The caterer will be Great Plates.

The group reviewed the current roster for council noting that there will be two positions to be filled, JoAnn Keehn and Brandi Watson. Two council members are eligible to serve another term but have not yet been asked. They are Dr. Stephanie Garcia and Tammy Enockson.

The group heard reports from the Diocesan Minister – Rev. Steve Godfrey and Reconciliation Committee – Dr. Stephanie Garcia.

The council recessed for the evening following a brief Evening Prayer led by Chaplain Anderson.

The Council reconvened June 15th, at 9:10 AM with prayer lead by Chaplain Anderson.

Members present were Bishop Brian Thom, The Very Rev. Mark Strobel, Jason Thoms, Rev. Steve Godfrey, John Baird, Robert Fox, Rachel Schmidt, Donna Pettit, Chancellor Leo Wilking, The Rev. Robert Hoekstra, Dr. Stephanie Garcia, Susan Lisok, Deacon Beth Lipp and Deacon John Anderson.

Diocesan Minister Steve Godfrey shared his findings from conversations with parishes and diocesan leaders concerning knowledge gained in the last three years of transition in the diocese. (insert Steve's document below)

Learning About 2021-2024 Transition

Preliminary Harvest, June 12, 2024

The Rev. Steve Godfrey
sgodfrey@ndepiscopal.org
515-450-9858

Background:

- **The Way of Love** (episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/)
 - Turn to Jesus
 - Learn Jesus's ways
 - Pray daily
 - Worship in community weekly
 - Bless the world around us
 - Go and partner with others to share good news
 - Rest & Renew

- **Ministry Focuses** for 2021-2024 transition time:
 - Administrative support to congregations and leaders
 - Communication and events that help strengthen leadership
 - Sundays & regular Eucharist celebrations
 - School for Ministry and teams in congregations
 - Youth & new generation of leadership
 - Reconciliation

Questions:

1. What can we learn about how the Spirit is calling the people of the Diocese to learn, pray, worship, bless, go, and rest?
2. How can reflection on the last three years and Jesus's priorities articulated in Scripture, help us inform our learning?
3. What have we learned about the role of each ministry focus?
4. What else have we learned that we may not have anticipated?
5. What have we learned about needs for bishop & staff?
6. What would it be helpful to note to strengthen the ministry of the Gospel in this part of God's creation going forward into this year's season of growth and the years ahead?

Preliminary Harvest from Conversations

May 12 to June 12, 2024

- Advent, Devils Lake
- St. Thomas, Fort Totten
- Gethsemane Cathedral
- St. George's, Bismarck
- several individual leaders

Hope, Community, Young people

- Feels hopeful: There is a new sense of hope & possibility
- Focus shifted from survival to faith community & participation
- We are growing again
 - in numbers
 - in sense of faith, family, community & fellowship
- Increased engagement
- Average age of membership and leadership is younger - many children now!
- Relearning the importance of coming together & offering faith community for young people to know how much God & the community love them
- The family feeling, welcome, acceptance, and inclusion is really important, especially
 - including children in worship participation and leadership
 - celebrating young people in events
- Young people are being supported, learning & taking leadership & older leaders are sharing
- Strong fellowship - share whole weeks w/ each other holistically
- We can't give up because there is too much need
- Church is important for nurturing growth
- Inspiring conventions lead to growth

Communication & Administration

- Diocesan communications and Jess's work in that area have helped people to feel connected to other members and congregations of the diocese
- It might help to have a daily devotion with contributions by clergy & other diocesan leaders or at least link to Forward Day by Day or other reflections
- The *Prairie* is very helpful & more people need to get it
- Social media is helping people stay together
- Intentional leadership check-in has been great for knowing what's going on around the diocese
- Zoom works better if we know each other already
- Still need database & filing system

Leadership

- Local agency is important - congregations and diocese
 - e.g., they got to pick diocesan minister
- People have learned to appreciate leadership despite feelings about identities
- Solid diocesan staff is essential
- Need unifying person who knows what everyone is doing & provides support; hands-on is important
- Need leadership from bishop
- Need resident bishop to support team development, etc.
- It's hard to have diocesan sacramentalists; better to develop teams w/ local presbyters
- Focus needs to be on team & leadership development & formation
- We need more trained leaders in congregations
- School for Ministry should stay focused on things like the preaching workshop & licensing local leadership
- New people are engaging leadership & formation
 - (e.g. preaching workshop)
- Muddled leadership in the past, especially re sharing ministry, local ordination, etc.
- Bishop Tom's focus was helpful
- The staff is overstretched

Sustainability

- Shrinking numbers *and* vibrant & healthy
- We are strong-willed, but maintaining Diocese of ND may not be realistic/sustainable
- Maybe need to think again about merging with another diocese
- There's a lot of work to run a diocese
- Not enough people to fill all the diocesan committees
- There are still a lot of divisions
- Energy needs to be focused
- Focus needs to be on young people
- New expressions are needed
- Sunday daytime may not always work for gathering
- Need to provide gifts discernment, formation & licensing to develop & support ministry teams in all congregations
- We have to share
- Collaboration with other dioceses is hard due to geographic realities & pressures on other dioceses
- Ecumenical collaboration, e.g. ELCA, is hard because of differences in expectations
 - "Deacon's mass" is hard limitation compared to ELCA, PCUSA, etc., where more people can lead sacraments

Scheduled conversations:

- St. Peter's, Walhalla, June 16 & July 21
- St. Peter's, Williston, June 23 & July 28
- St. John's, Dickinson, June 30
- St. John's, Moorhead, July 7
- All Saints, Minot, July 10
- St. Michael & All Angels, Cartwright, July 14

The Council discussed various items brought up in the report. The two items mostly discussed were Diocesan staff and Timing of the Episcopate. Everyone at council was asked for their input.

Robert Hoekstra moved that we begin the search process for a full-time resident Bishop Diocesan. Jason Thoms seconded. A motion was then made to amend the first motion by adding “with a goal to have the Bishop Diocesan elected or installed by December 2025.

Bishop Brian called the vote on the amendment, and it was unanimously approved. Then the vote for the motion as amended was also approved unanimously.

Bishop Brian said that some pre-steps will be put into motion

1. The Finance Committee will need to report at the July meeting about funding availability for FT Bishop and a Diocesan minister.
2. The Standing Committee will have the responsibility to form the search committee for the next bishop.
3. Bishop Brian will report back to Council at the September 21, 22 meeting on Bishop Ousley’s next steps.

Bishop’s Report

Bishop Thom continues with his congregational visits as scheduled.

Each congregation will be asked to provide their full membership lists to enable better communication utilizing the Prairie and the Sheaf.

Council meeting frequency was discussed. Bishop Brian will present a proposal at our September meeting.

Discussion of voting eligibility of canonically resident clergy. To change this may require a canonical change. Bishop Brian will present a proposal at our July meeting.

Real Estate Policy

Chancellor Leo Wilking gave a report on what he has determined so far. A comprehensive Real Estate Policy could include sales, repair, capital improvements, incumbrances, and leases. The scope may also include loans and grants for purchases or improvements. He is contacting other rural dioceses to learn about their policies. He will bring additional information to our September meeting.

Discussion concerning the Bakken Fund possible uses. The council was informed that Building Improvements (window and insulation issues) are needed at St. Sylvan’s, Dunseith.

A motion was made by Leo Wilking to authorize the Bishop to allocate funds for the St. Sylvan improvements from either the Bakken Fund or another fund as appropriate. Robert seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Budgeting for 2025 and 2026

The Finance Committee will be asked to prepare a preliminary 2 year budget keeping in mind that the Diocesan Share will move to 16% in 2025 and 15% in 2026. Also to keep in mind Bishop Search and other personnel matters that will need to be addressed with the Diocesan Ministers departure.

Action Items

1. Acquire Line of Credit from Bremer Bank
 - a. Finance Committee will identify the procedure after signing the line of credit such as what this line of credit will be used for and who are the people responsible for approving its use etc.
2. Revisit funds for Youth Missioner position to put into reserve account (by September).
3. Review of the Real Estate Policy as researched by Leo Wilking. (September)
4. Bishop will continue to recruit for the Property Management Advisory Group & the Real Estate Advisory Group.
5. Steve Godfrey will give a written report concerning his final conversations with churches and leadership. (July)
6. Diocesan Staff will determine time to announce Bishop Diocesan search process
7. Bishop Brian will bring recommendation for Council Meeting frequency. (September)
8. Bishop Brian will bring recommendation for a possible canonical change for voting privileges of canonically resident clergy. (September)

Respectfully submitted by

Deacon Beth Lipp