

**CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD  
DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES  
JULY 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2022**

The first meeting of the discernment committee of the Church of the Good Shepherd was held on Tuesday, July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Discernment committee members present: Cindy Cobb, Amy Eschelbach, Felicia Martineau, Philip Moros, Marjorie Strong, and Linda Webster. Also, present Cindy Willis, Minute Taker.

The meeting was opened at 5:50 PM by Phil Moros with Felicia Martineau reading the discernment prayer.

Phil Moros started by saying that Linda Webster and he are co-chairing the committee. He said the first meeting is about the mechanism and the process and hopefully get into a little bit of the substance. The meeting will stop at 7:30.

**Why are we meeting?**

Phil Moros started by saying that we are meeting because we have to. There are three or four criteria in discernment document that if any apply, you have to meet. There was discussion about what “haven’t called a priest in three years” meant – does it refer to not having a priest for three years or does it refer to being stable/stagnant because the hard work of calling a priest hasn’t been done in the past three years. There was a question if all churches in Vermont were doing this. The consensus was that all churches are doing this. This is a good opportunity to look at what we are doing. We are encouraged to look at new models to enhance viability as we are constantly facing the changes in the world. Linda Webster shared that Bishop Shannon was talking about being stuck in traditions and staying there. We need to look at ourselves and embrace what is out there. Bishop Shannon talked about the great level of un-churched in the country. Felicia Martineau said that we probably can’t continue the way we are going. We need to figure out where we go. Churches are not viable the way we are so where do we go from here. Marjorie Strong said churches are not viable in the traditional way - we may have to really think outside the box. She liked that we were looking at our mission and trying to match our mission with what we are doing. Mission may be a fruitful area of growth. Phil Moros said we need to come up with other opportunities.

**What are we looking to accomplish?**

There are three possible answers to the question “What is God calling us to do next?”: revitalize church, restructure church or find a new church. The three models are: 1. Revitalize/constellation which is where we share church leadership/clergy/resources with another church but maintain separate identities; 2. Restructure/merge which is coming together and sharing resources – one or other or both churches giving up their church. Restructure’s goal is full-time clergy as a minimum -in Good Shepherd’s case within five years how do we get to a point where we can have fulltime clergy available which may be shared with somebody. It was questioned whether

sharing was really just a part-time person. It was clarified that meant we would have clergy available full-time, and vestries may come together for a stronger identity. This increases resources pool. It also gives priests a full-time job versus part-time priest with another job. Costs for the priest could be shared and activities could be shared. We are lucky that this has been **given** to us to do versus being **told** what we will do – like the Catholic model. We are fortunate to have the resources of the diocese to help us. A question would be if there is a full-time priest shared by two church what does that do to Sundays – two services? Or is there a chance to develop local ministries for doing our own service? Maybe using deacons, lay ministries and being more flexible. In the coming together and sharing resources community mission where there is no physical building (house churching) is another model. You are still under the diocese and have shared resources. 3. Find a new church. We don't think that is our choice. Things that push in that direction do not apply to us.

### **How do we accomplish this?**

PRAYFUL DISCERNMENT! We start by asking critical questions like: is there something that is unsustainable about the building? An outline of those areas is provided. Phil put areas at the end of agenda and categories will be assigned to each of us. There was discussion about the areas. May need to rework mission statement based on what we come up with. It is critical that we be open and honest in the process. Identify strength, weaknesses, and barriers – like calling a priest. We haven't called priest in ten years and think things have changed. Learn from the experiences in our church's history – try not to replicate some of the experiences. When did Good Shepherd stop being a mission church? 1960's? Look to the future and access new possibilities. We have to do that. This is an introduction – we need to get deeper into these tasks.

### **Timeframe**

The plan is to be developed and approved by end of 2022 (we have just started the seventh month of 2022). The goal is to submit in October 2022 to allow time for any revisions. This process coincidences with ongoing discussion on next steps at the point of Earl's retirement. Nice to do this – Earl's retirement anticipated in 3-5 years. Between priests we mostly did supply priests and ran it ourselves which was good experience for us. That is learning from our church history. We needed to sit down and think about who we are and what we want to do with church.

### **Structure**

The Canon for Mission Vitality has been notified. If we have questions, we can contact the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee (DCDC) for clarification. Canon for Missional Vitality is Susan Ohlidal who knows us well - served as deacon for a while. We will provide regular communications between congregation and vestry – need to report to vestry and keep congregation updated. Phil tried to be clear about communication in the presentation he gave the congregational. Earl was asked to send this agenda to everyone in the congregation. We don't expect them to come to meeting but they need to know “this is what we are talking about”, “this is what we are thinking about”, “this is what you should be thinking about” and if you have any input, let us know. Marjorie Strong will set up tab on website for discernment process and

post everything there as another area to get information. What is the best process to get input? Do we do after service or a separate night? Put information on regular program on where to find everything and committee names should you want to ask something or offer anything – the more access points the better. As we do research on different questions, we can take a few minutes to share that information. Use “Chimp” mail to send emails separately.

### **Legal/Policy Awareness**

These are informational items. The diocese owns the church and rectory- we can't sell anything. Anything that is decided, needs the diocese approval – both formal and informal. We can't do things on our own. We can come up with ideas, but they may not be approved. We can contact committee with ideas to see if we can proceed. Merging doesn't necessarily mean closing this church and going somewhere else. Our attendance is good, but it is older. We do have some younger people but now a days it is very different with children – the culture is different now and hard to make time for church with children. We are getting people from different backgrounds.

### **Life Cycle**

Where are we in the life cycle of a congregation? Thoughts on where we are included being “stable” but going back and forth between healthy and stagnant. We have been continuing to look at ourselves to revitalize. There is a lot going on in this church which should cause people to come here. Hopefully we can stay here but still integrate with other churches. An important consideration is winter travel and not wanting to drive good distances. Our congregation members come from all over – not just Barre. Other churches' members have similar feelings of attachment to their churches as we do. The other model is constellation where it doesn't mean they have to come here or us go there – we can work it out. As far as attending church, Zoom is a fixture going forward, definitely. We need to upgrade Zoom. We need to be more introspective and ask ourselves – what are we here for?, why do we come on Sunday?, and how are we going to sustain ourselves?. The question about when as congregation did you feel like you were coming together generated thoughts of lots of people makes it feel like we are together. There is a realization that our numbers are coming down. What happened? Aging and younger families don't come in. Environment is very different: blue laws kept stores closed so went to church; more people are working now a days; before many women didn't work and Sunday was day to see people as outlet for them – now outlets are people you work with; not as much need for intergenerational group; it is thought that all brands of Christianity are one in the same and Christianity has a very bad name because of right wing evangelists (maybe we can get message out that we don't hate you for being black, gay, trans, etc – we love you); priests get 45 minutes per week while the internet is 24x7; VIA is out saying we are group that is religious that is helping to make your life better – involved in legislature and at state level-gets it out there; need to educate community of who we are; in a lot of other churches you don't have to think which is what people want but Earl doesn't tell us what to think – he is not playing church; we still have hard wooden pews and they are bolted to the floor so no flexibility; working against Vermont's culture; aging population in Barre and Vermont; we make people think; perception that we are

a privileged church for the elite; we are comfortable in our community and how do we invite people into our community (we welcome x-Catholics!)

Phil Moros wrapped up meeting by saying it was a good meeting with a few good points. How do we work on defining ourselves – look at ourselves and decide what we are. Food ministry is helping people but it's narrow and limiting in a way and doesn't promote the church. Congregation is small and food ministry is labor intensive.

Investigative Assignments:

Marjorie Strong will look at demographics

Felicia Martineau will look into physical plant.

Cindy Cobb will look into community, and how we can get them involved in it.

Linda Webster shared that in the Summary, Chapter 3 is done in worksheet style so it has what the questions would be. Amy Eschelbach will take a look at mission statement. Phil Moros will look at financials and people resources. Group will look at resources for shared ministry which may not be just Episcopal churches.

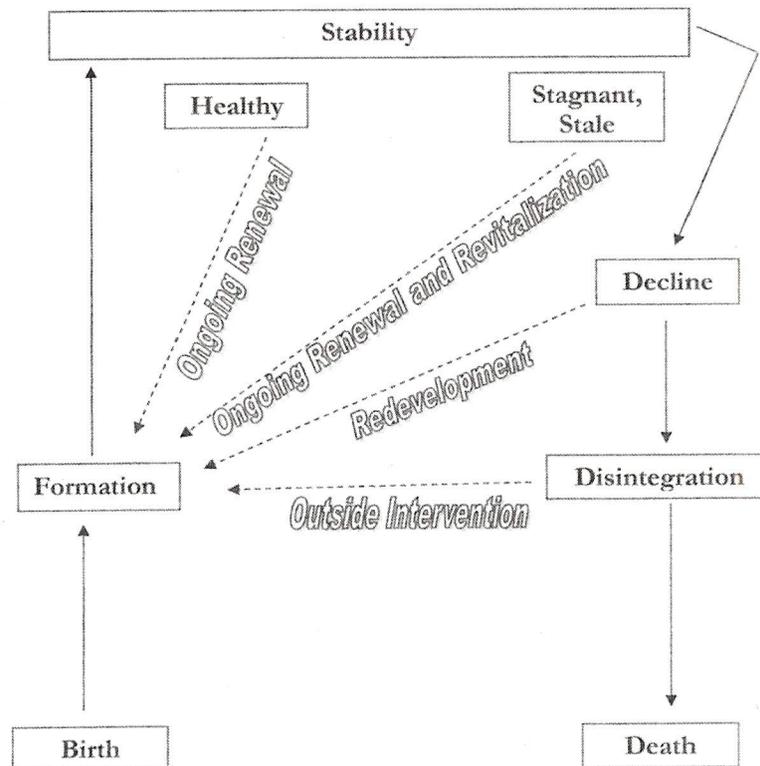
Next meeting will be Tuesday July 26<sup>th</sup> of July at 5:30PM.

Meeting concluded at 7:15 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cindy Willis

## Definitions and Descriptions of the Various Stages of the Congregational Life Cycle



**Birth:** A founder or founders, an idea, a dream.

**Formation:** Identity. Who are we as a faith community? What are we here for? Who is our neighbor, and how are we related to our neighbor?

**Stability:** Fruitful and sustainable ministry, institutionally and spiritually. A time when the elements of organizational life fit together (money, vision for ministry, property, people), This can be a **place of health** or can tip into feeling **stagnant or stale**, with growth stalling and new opportunities being ignored. This stagnant or stale stage can sometimes be experienced as a membership plateau followed by declining numbers.

### Healthy Stability and Ongoing Renewal

Healthy stable congregations stay healthy either through leadership that instinctively raises and acts on formation-related questions in the overall congregation or through processes that continue to renew the entire congregation or important parts of the congregation that need attention. Some leaders organically recognize and act on areas in a congregation that need improvement; some leaders/congregations have in place processes that scan the life of the congregation, listen for and act on areas that need

improvement. These congregations engage the formation questions, seeking to understand their life in light of God's mission and kingdom.

### **Stale, Stagnant Stability and Renewal/Revitalization**

When stability becomes stale and stagnant, a congregation and its leadership will need to look at formation questions in a more focused way: Who are we (identity)? What are we here for (purpose)? Who is our neighbor (context)? These are typically system-wide work and actions that when done skillfully also introduce and teach the congregation language and models or frameworks that help to focus the discussion. Sometimes the self-study before the calling of a new priest-in-charge/vicar/rector can be the context within which at least some of this work is done.

**Decline:** Numbers fall off, energy declines, fear and blame in the system, confusion, focus on small things rather than central issues.

### **Decline and Redevelopment**

The further down the path a congregation goes in declining numbers, finances, energy and flexibility, the more costly it becomes for a congregation to engage the formation questions that have the potential to activate what it will take to return to stability. Redevelopment is a possibility when serious declines have occurred in a congregation, but significant effort will be needed to increase the likelihood that redevelopment efforts will bear fruit. Often third-party help or a dramatic change in leadership is needed to face the situation, to let go of old patterns of doing things and to face into what will be needed to turn things around.

**Disintegration:** Conflict, hopelessness, feeling stuck, internal leaders unable to affect change.

### **Disintegration and Outside Intervention**

When disintegration begins and things begin to fall apart, conflict or paralysis can set in. At this point a diocese will often intervene, taking charge of the decisions in that there is no internal capacity to do what may be needed.

**Death:** The end of life, the total and permanent cessation of all the vital functions of an organization.

## Questions for Discussion

Look at the definitions and descriptions of the various stages of the congregational life cycle above:

- Tell a story about the "birth" of your congregation? Identify places of stability in the past and current life of your congregation, what key elements were/are present? What did stability look and feel like?

- Where do you believe the congregation currently is on the life cycle? Share your reasons for placing your mark where you did.
- Describe past times of renewal/revitalization/redevelopment in your congregation. How did you experience those times?
- Discuss the challenges that hinder renewal/revitalization/redevelopment from happening in your place.
- What are the tensions in your congregation that take up energy and focus that could be spent on ministry with our community?