

Discernment Team Minutes Church of the Good Shepherd October 11, 2022

Those in attendance: Phil Moros, Cindy Cobb, Felicia Martineau, Amy Eschelbach, Marjorie Strong, and Linda Webster

The meeting started at 5:30 pm with the Prayer of Discernment being read by the group. Linda Webster agreed to be scribe given the excused absence of Cindy Willis.

Focus this evening was on compilation of feedback provided by all parishioners in order to start developing a proposed plan for the future of Good Shepherd.

Follow-Up of Individual Parishioners who were Unable to Attend Previous Meetings

- Linda reported on her individual follow-up contacts with Alban Richie, Tom Charbonneau, and Rick Fiddock. Notes of such were reviewed and are an attachment to these minutes. Linda noted Tom's enthusiasm to be involved in leading an area of our plan once we reach the point of implementation.
- Cindy reported on her conversation with Sue Lyons who emphasized a desire to maintain sustainability of Good Shepherd but would understand if merger or constellation was needed. Cindy has two other individuals that she hopes to be able to contact.
- Amy reported on her individual follow-up with Reesie Dobrick. Reesie talked of concerns regarding receiving emails from some religious group that had a very negative tone & guilt focus. Reesie definitely agreed with Good Shepherd needing to educate the community regarding who we are, noting we welcome all folks and dispelling any concerns that we operate like many extremist religious groups in our country. Being mission-led is a good way to demonstrate our focus in helping the community. Reesie also thought the idea of having childcare during church services would be very helpful.
- Felicia reported on her outreach with Gail Cummings who felt she would not have anything to contribute to our plan since she was not a member of the church. She has attended periodically in the past.
- Phil attempted outreach with two congregants, but they were not available. He will continue to reach out and update the status of such at the next meeting.

Structure for Our Plan

- Phil had shared with the group a proposed structure that Linda Webster had developed as a starting point for our plan. Linda provided more detail regarding the model to see if the group understood focus of each section and why it was important.
- The model included:
 - Review of Process – Outlining what our methodology has been to arrive at the conclusions from the discernment process
 - Goal(s) – An over-arching statement of what we want to accomplish & why
 - Timeframe – When we hope to have completed our goal
 - Steps to be Taken – Delineating tasks to be accomplished in order to achieve our goal

- Evaluation of Progress – Points at which we will evaluate our progress and how we will measure it
 - Communication of Process – How we will continue to update the congregation, Diocese, and Vestry regarding our process /progress and by what means we will communicate with them
 - Anticipated Support Needed from the Diocese – Itemizing any areas where we anticipate help will be needed from the Diocese in order to accomplish our goal so they can be advised at the start, noting that unforeseen things could still come up as the process evolves.
 - Note: When implementing steps, evaluation, and communication, a person from the committee, congregation, or Vestry will be designated as the leader responsible for monitoring & completing each sector to ensure the task is accomplished according to the identified timelines. This person will report back to the committee should there be any questions, concerns, or adjustments which need to be addressed.
- The Discernment Committee felt this model was a good format to follow to structure our plan. Marjorie Strong brought examples of models utilized by the Vermont Arts Council and Vermont Historical Society. Many of the items were similar to this general model. Marjorie will send her examples out to the group so we can compare and determine if we want to make any changes to the structure listed above. In particular, the sample documents had an excellent chart format for the evaluation component.
 - Linda Webster had started an outline of the Process section to capture all of our steps thus far. The group will review and see if any additions or revisions need to be made. This section is also helpful in demonstrating the depth of our investment in this discernment process. A Draft of the outline is attached to these minutes.
 - For starters, the group felt the main focus for our goal was congregational growth, maintaining part-time clergy until we could increase congregant capacity to accommodate a ¾ to full-time clergy. Steps would look at what was needed for future sustainability & strengthened mission vitality. Timeframe was an estimate of 5 to 8 years. It was also noted that we would explore the federal regulation which supports forgiveness of student loans for a priest coming to serve in a rural community for a designated period of time. This could facilitate the process of securing a priest and subsequently may shorten the timeframe.
 - The group started to review a list of common themes that emerged from the various meetings and conversations with parishioners per the congregation meeting notes. Decision was to break the Steps section into two areas – one section for sustainability and another for mission vitality.
 - The following broad categories for Sustainability were determined with beginning thoughts about task options as discussed by parishioners:
 - Growth
 - Offer opportunities that address family needs to promote growth of a younger population (partnering with community resources to offer pre-school, childcare, after school programing, vacation Bible School, etc. at the church per rental of space)

- Visit the Unitarian Universalist Church in Montpelier and the Baptist Church in Websterville who have had great success with growth by family programming and see what we can learn from them
 - Expand our definition of community by reaching beyond Barre to nearby communities that don't have an Episcopal Church (Berlin, Orange, Plainfield, etc.) & support each town to find ways of Beloved Community together through their connection at Good Shepherd.
 - Upgrade the quality of our Zoom system so it is more user friendly to new and current congregants
 - Establish a regular system of greeters for Sunday services as well as other programs held at the church to foster a friendly, welcoming tone
 - Emphasize more holy/feast days with special programming & educate to the beauty of our spiritual traditions and images. Hold services like Blessing of Pets that would be visible to the community like we do on Good Friday.
 - Support older parishioners who have indicated a strong legacy with the church and desire to be responsible in building a younger congregation to ensure the well-being of Good Shepherd going forward. We need to mobilize this investment to enhance congregational energy & breadth of leadership.
- Clergy
 - Research opportunities for federal student loan forgiveness to facilitate securing a full-time clergy as a professional serving a rural, non-profit community entity for a designated amount of time
 - Complete financial projections & research the process for securing full time clergy
 - Have the current clergy in place train the incoming priest with overlap of 3-4 months to both assist the incoming priest with the transition as well as help develop the congregation's confidence in the incoming priest.
 - Upgrade the Rectory to be a point of attraction to an incoming priest
 - Assess the option of having Linda Moore continue with us when Rev. Kooperkamp retires, giving her time to gain experience with the Diocese and Good Shepherd in the interim
- Communication with Community
 - Strengthen our website to communicate more about who we are & what we offer, emphasizing a family focus
 - Clarify our values as a church to dispel any concerns that we might be part of the negative extremist religious segment in our country
 - Emphasize message that "All are welcome" & eliminate an image of the Episcopal Church as elitist
 - Conduct Community Service Days to actively meet an identified need in our community
 - Increase church visibility & hospitality by holding some regularly scheduled events like concerts, movie nights, church suppers, bake sales, pie days, seasonal events, etc. to promote a good connection to Good Shepherd
 - Use our new organ to offer organ lessons for children and adults

- Increased Lay Leadership
 - Call a parishioner to be our Deacon
 - Engage members of the congregation to take on specific areas of leadership within the church, emphasizing a stronger sense of ownership.
 - Increase number of acolytes. Rick will provide training
 - Utilize Diocesan opportunities for education & spiritual formation of Lay Leaders to strengthen leadership skills
 - Establish training program for church volunteers re: mission projects, coffee hour, etc.
 - Develop a brochure of programs offered at Good Shepherd, list of contacts, etc. that can be given to people new to the church – also include this on the website so the community can be aware as well
 - Have a participant on the Diocesan Committee for Congregational Development & Spiritual Formation to keep us apprised of new opportunities
 - Increase opportunities for fellowship activities to strengthen parishioner connections, i.e., luncheons, craft groups, holiday gifts for charity, etc. to reduce isolation & engender a sense of belonging & leadership in the parish
 - Join forces with other nearby Episcopal churches for shared spiritual formation programming

- Expanding Church Revenue
 - Explore solar power, heat pumps, increased insulation, weatherization grants, etc. to decrease costs – and demonstrate we are a good role model in creation care for our community
 - Increase rental of our church space
 - Strengthen parishioner education regarding stewardship

- Categories for Mission Vitality include:
 - Continue current mission projects, noting the following tasks:
 - Breakfasts for the homeless & food-insecure twice a week through Enough Ministries
 - Lunches for the homeless & food-insecure ----- times a week through Enough Ministries
 - Dinner meal for The Good Samaritan Haven once a month
 - Worship service & lunch for residents of The Hilltop (temporary housing for the homeless) once a month
 - Support Vermont Interfaith Action’s housing initiatives for the homeless & affordable housing overall, lobbying action for Proposition 2 Constitutional revision to eliminate all exceptions regarding slavery, and other matters of social justice overall.
 - Participation on the Creative Housing Solutions Task Force to address greater opportunities of housing for the homeless in the Barre area.
 - Support of those parishioners participating in activities which promote charitable giving to community programs in need such as Rock City Choral Group whose proceeds go to various designated charities, Restorative Justice program for those transitioning from prison, Camp Agape for children of

- incarcerated parents, and Pet Food Pantry which provides food for dogs & cats of the homeless.
- Continue support of the Barre Heritage Festival by offering free ice cream for participants during the annual community celebration
 - Develop New Mission opportunities, noting the following possible tasks:
 - Establish breakfast opportunities for the homeless directly at Good Shepherd when it is safe to do so per COVID & Flu rate data.
 - Establish Connections for Change program for those who are addressing addiction issues.
 - Initiate Service Days in the Community aimed at special needs of identified populations, i.e., yard care for seniors & homebound, help with Habitat for Humanity program, painting of homes for the homeless, upkeep needs at the Haven, etc.
 - Explore creation care programs and opportunities to worship at Mission Farm.
 - Conduct periodic plate offerings for Episcopal Relief Fund & various local charities, highlighted on related spiritual Feast Days.
 - Develop outreach to parishioners who are homebound or otherwise unable to attend church
 - Partner with community resources to provide program for parishioners who might need assistance dealing with hardships from the pandemic
 - Join forces with other nearby Episcopal churches for joint mission projects
 - This information is the first rough draft of a plan proposal. It will be sent to the committee members for review, revisions, additions, etc. and reworked at our next meeting, October 25, 2022. Other follow-up meetings were scheduled for November 7 and November 22 at 5:30 pm. We hope to present a final draft to the congregation on Sunday, December 4, 2022. Once the goal, timeframe, & steps are solidified, we will start to draft the Evaluation and Communication Sections along with possible help needed from the Diocese. Right now, we have identified two items where we would need Diocesan support: educational support of lay leaders and research on forgiveness of student loans for a priest coming to serve a rural non-profit entity.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Webster