

TASK FORCE ON CLERGY FORMATION IN SMALL CONGREGATIONS

MINUTES OF MEETING

NOVEMBER 19 TO 21, 2015

LINTHICUM HEIGHTS, MD

The Task Force on Clergy Formation in Small Congregations met at the Maritime Institute in Linthicum Heights, MD from November 19, 2015 to November 21, 2015.

These Minutes do not present the proceedings of the Task Force in chronological order, but present topic areas that were covered over the three days of meetings.

Because each member of the Task Force has a different given name, subsequent to the initial listing of members present, only the first names of members are used in the substance of the Minutes.

Call to Order; Introductions

The Task Force meeting was called to order by the Chair, The Rev. Dr. Susanna Singer at 10:30 am on November 19, 2015.

Other members present were: The Rt. Rev. Scott Benhase; The Rev. Robin Biffle; Ms. Ruth Frey; The Rev. Deacon Maureen-Elizabeth Hagen; The Rev. Canon Gregory Jacobs; The Rev. Trawin Malone; Canon Thomas O'Brien; The Rev. Merry Chan; Ms. Mary Parmer; Ms. Demi Prentiss; The Rev. Brad Purdom; The Rt. Rev. Alan Scarfe; and The Ven. Paul Sneve.

The Rt. Rev. Rob Skirving, a recent appointee to the Task Force, was unable to attend the Meeting.

Susanna introduced herself, and she and each of the other members provided their background information and described the aspects of the work of the Task Force which excite them most.

Sessions of the Task Force Meeting

The Task Force met on the following days and times:

November 19, 2015 from 10:30 AM to 12:00 NOON
November 19, 2015 from 1:30 PM to 5:30 PM
November 20, 2015 from 10:30 AM to 12:00 NOON
November 20, 2015 from 1:30 PM to 4:45 PM
November 20, 2015 from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM
November 21, 2015 from 8:30 AM to 10:30 AM

All meetings of the Task Force were opened and closed with a prayer.

"Ground Rules" for Members in Meetings

1. Be present, be prepared, be on time

2. Listen with the ear of your heart; assume good intentions
3. Honor personal confidentiality; speak for yourself; use social media mindfully
4. Practice mindful speech – no crosstalk; “I” statements; honor silence; invite all to speak
5. Pray constantly for the work of the Task Force and for each other

Presentations by Representatives of the General Convention Office

Lori Ionnitiu explained some of the practical aspects of the Task Force’s meetings, including: all the meetings are “open” meetings (unless the Task Force goes into Executive Session for a specific purpose); all materials relating to the business of the Task Force should be posted on the Extranet; the Task Force will have two additional face-to-face meetings and may schedule Adobe Connect meetings as necessary; special training will be given for the Adobe Connect meetings (Brad volunteered to take this training and be our “Adobe Wizard”); Adobe Connect and teleconference meetings are not recorded, but their minutes are posted on the Extranet and on the GCO website; face-to-face meetings usually include an evening meeting, a full day of meetings and a morning meeting; all travel is to be arranged through A&I Travel; travel expense reports are to be submitted to the GCO within two weeks of being incurred; all original receipts should be submitted and should be pasted on a sheet of paper; tips are reimbursable, as are mileage and parking expenses; if a person drives to a meeting, the cost of driving may not exceed the lowest available airfare for the same trip.

Twila Rios and Marian Conboy presented information on Reporting Requirements for the Task Force as follows: dates for meetings need to be cleared with the GCO and fixed at least 60 days prior to the meeting; agendas for each meeting must be delivered to the GCO and posted on the Extranet at least 30 days prior to the meeting; minutes of the meeting should be posted on the Extranet promptly after meetings, and a given period – usually two weeks – will be given to members to comment on the minutes, after which the minutes will be deemed approved; the Secretary should send the final minutes to the GCO for posting on the GCO website; instructions regarding the 2018 Blue Book Report and resolution writing guidelines will be posted on the GCO website not later than May 2017; final submissions for the Blue Book are due by December 1, 2017; and the Secretary is directed to keep track of changes in the membership of the Task Force because these changes must be noted in the Blue Book Report.

Iris Martinez described the operation of the Extranet and its use by members of the Task Force.

Election of Officers

Susanna advised that she had been appointed by the Presiding Officers to serve as the Convener and Chair of the Task Force. She suggested Demi as Vice-Chair and Tom as Secretary and asked if there were any other nominations for those positions. There were no other nominations, and the Officers were elected unanimously.

Mandate of the Task Force

The Task Force considered 2015 Resolution A045 and focused particularly on the directing verbs in the Resolution – “explore” and “report back with a plan.”

The Task Force discussed the appropriate manner in which to fulfill the direction of General Convention and concluded that “explore” should be understood as broadly as possible so that the Task Force will be able to present a practical, complete, multifaceted, flexible, collaborative and workable plan on formation of clergy and lay persons to General Convention 2018. The plan is expected to emphasize principles that are critical to effective formation, and will present models and frameworks for effective formation of different orders.

The Task Force concluded that its exploration should include: (1) the formation of priests, deacons and lay persons; (2) ways in which formation is currently occurring for priests, deacons and lay persons, and the strengths and weaknesses of each of these modes of formation; (3) whether there are best practices for the formation of each of the orders and recommendations that might be made to improve the formation processes; (4) the need to recognize that cultural differences among congregations in The Episcopal Church require different modes of formation for each of the orders; and (5) whether there are better ways to pay for the formation of clergy and lay persons.

The President of the House of Deputies, The Rev. Gay Jennings, joined the meeting during this discussion and urged the Task Force to take the broadest possible understanding of its mandate and to be bold in its recommendations.

The Task Force noted that the plan developed in response to the Resolution will have to identify those who will implement the plan and the manner in which the plan and its component parts will be funded.

Identification of Persons, Groups, Charisms, and Processes

Susanna asked each of the members of the Task Force to identify (1) persons whom they know who are likely to be helpful in assisting the Task Force in its work by providing information of otherwise; (2) groups and entities that are engaged in formation and which should be contacted to learn more about their work and the strengths of their programs; (3) particular gifts each member personally has which are likely to be helpful to the work of the Task Force; (4) processes which are likely to assist the Task Force in its work; and (5) locations and places throughout The Episcopal Church with which Task Force members are deeply familiar.

Members of the Task Force wrote their responses on “flip chart” paper, and Susanna will keep them for future reference.

“Getting to Why”

The 5-minute version of the TED Talk “Getting to Why” by Simon Sinek was played for the Task Force, and each member of the Task Force discussed why the work of the Task Force is important.

Tasks Undertaken

Susanna – compile the questions developed by the group into a format suitable for interviewing each of the various groups and individuals described below

All Members – when interviews have been completed (of congregational leaders, other leaders and individuals), send notes back to Tom, organized according to the question list. Even if not all the questions were used, please try to keep to the overall format so we can gather consistent data.

Alan – obtain names of vital small congregations from Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook

Mary – obtain names of vital small congregations from Gathering of Leaders data

Scott – obtain names of vital small congregations from Holy Cow Consulting

Alan, Ruth and Greg – once names of vital small congregations have been obtained, winnow the list down to around 30, representative of geographic and other diversity, and conduct interviews with the clergy and one key lay leader. At the end of the interviews, ask for names of persons who have joined The Episcopal Church, and who were previously unchurched

Brad and Trawin – take the names of recent joiners and interview them

Susanna, Mary and Demi – Complete a Pilot Questionnaire for bishops, Canons to the Ordinary, Transition Officers and Commission on Ministry Chairs. Test the pilot version with Alan, Scott and Rob, and make adjustments as necessary.

Alan, Rob and Scott -- encourage other Bishops to do Questionnaire in Spring 2016, around the time of the HOB meeting.

Susanna -- send the questionnaire to the other groups for completion in Spring 2016.

Robin – compile a list of local formation programs (based on an initial list supplied by Maureen), and interview key personnel at the Iona Initiative, Kemper School of Ministry and the Dioceses of Minnesota and Nevada (which use non-accredited courses of CDSP for forming deacons and local priests)

Maureen and Merry – Interview the DFMS Missioners

Brad – obtain the most recent statistical data on The Episcopal Church from Kirk Hadaway

Maureen – Create an open Facebook page for the Task Force

Susanna – confer with Michael Barlowe regarding future funding of the Task Force

Susanna – confer with Patrick Haizel regarding dates for in-person meetings in 2016 and 2017

Trawin – review the websites of the 11 Episcopal Seminaries (Mission Statements and Course Offerings) to determine the manner in which each seminary describes itself

All Members – conduct individual interviews of the individuals listed below

All Members – visit (more than once) a small congregation, many of which feel beleaguered or a small congregation that uses a different language in its worship

All Members – create a “group” in their computer address book so that members can communicate with all other members (when the communication is not one that needs to be preserved in The Episcopal Church Archives)

All Members – be watchful for materials and resources that may be helpful to the work of the Task Force, and post these materials and resources to the Extranet

Individual Interviewers and Persons to be Interviewed

Scott – Kathy Caimano, Russ Crabtree (Holy Cow Consulting), Bob Gallagher

Robin – Julia Gatta, Melissa Skelton

Trawin – Israel Galindo, Tom Brackett

Merry – Bayani Rico, Denise Obando

Alan – Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, Alan Shin, Steve Bauman

Tom – Bronwyn Skov, John Roberto

Ruth – Fredrica Harris Thompsett, Ellan Wondra

Maureen – Don Compier, Katharine Jefferts Schori

Paul – Richard Leggett, Martin Brokenleg, Robert Two Bulls

Brad – Leif Kerwald, Roger Ferlo

Demi – Bud Holland, Eric Law

Susanna – Alan Roxburgh, Mark Richardson, Julia McCray Goldsmith

Gregory – Stephanie Spellers, Dwight Zscheile

Organizations whose work the Task Force will monitor

Living Stones – Susanna will attend its annual meeting in February 2016

Maureen – Association for Episcopal Deacons

Merry – Chinese Convocation of Leaders

Maureen and Tom – Forma

Interviews should be conducted whenever possible at these meetings, using the questions provided.

Some Observations Made During the Meeting

Brad – Small Congregations are not “sick large congregations”

Susanna – We must create and mobilize a “coalition of the willing”

Susanna – The Plan must include full partnerships with dioceses

Trawin – Seminaries form seminarians; congregations form clergy

Greg – The Task Force has prophetic role to play

Greg – We need to move away from “one size fits all” formation

Demi – The charisms of clergy need to be more than scholarship

Demi – Clergy should be formed as entrepreneurs

Susanna – Inequity among congregations and dioceses regarding formation is a Justice Issue

Robin – Not all persons in The Episcopal Church have equal access to Holy Orders

Demi – The role of the Task Force is not about “fixing” small congregations

Susanna – The “evidence” in the Report needs to include compelling “stories” of formation programs that are working effectively

Robin – We should consider applying for a grant from the Roanridge Trust to support our work

Susanna – We should consider proposing an independent endowment for persons in small congregations to obtain formation wherever they choose

Maureen – We need to determine how “Living Stones” can be more successful

Maureen – The Plan needs to recommend available, low-cost programs that of good quality particularly for rural areas and for persons with different cultural contexts

Brad – The Plan should describe the kinds of support needed for recently ordained persons

Susanna – Except for CDSP, seminaries do not require courses in Christian Formation

Trawin – All Christian Formation programs need different “entry points” for persons who are at different stages of their Christian Formation

Tom – The benefits to Christian Educators of the Forma listserve are significant

Merry – “We chat” is a useful way to share sermons

Alan – Expressed concern that some clergy overlook the broad skills of their congregants

Developing the Questions for Interviews

The Task Force was divided into five groups to develop questions so that members of the Task Force can determine (1) the best practices used by seminaries, diocesan schools and others engaged in formation; (2) how quality control can be integrated into the formation process; (3) what support (financial and otherwise) is needed to improve formation; (4) what is “competency” for each of the orders and in varying contexts; and (5) methods to determine if persons are called to ordained or other ministries and the manner in which these determinations are now made.

The sub-groups submitted their questions to Tom and Susanna. Susanna will restructure the questions to form a basis for members of the Task Force to use in interviewing persons engaged in formation.

The Task Force will review the questions and provide comments on them on the Extranet.

Bloom’s Taxonomy

Ruth introduced the Task Force to Bloom’s Taxonomy – a hierarchy of learning and applying knowledge. A link to it is: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>

Other Interim Bodies with which the Task Force may Collaborate

The Standing Commission on Structure, Governance, Constitution and Canons

House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church

Task Force on Church Leadership and Compensation

Future Meetings of the Task Force

Late February/Early March 2016 -- Adobe Connect – Review progress to date

Late April/Early May 2016 – Adobe Connect – Further Progress Report

Late October/Early November 2016 – In Person – Review assembled data; assign Plan drafting teams

April 2017 – Adobe Connect – Review first draft of Report; discuss changes needed

Late October/Early November 2017 – Finalize drafting Report to General Convention; develop strategies to for approval and implementation of the proposed plan by General Convention and other bodies

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas G. O'Brien III
Secretary