

Report of the Board of Missions to the 228<sup>th</sup> Annual Diocesan Convention  
March 2012

During 2011 the Board of Missions continued to make liaison visits to mission congregations in the Diocese. These visits make it possible for the Board members to hear from colleagues first-hand, regarding the vitality and viability of missions. Every member of the Board puts forward positive observations about the places they visit, even when the circumstances of a congregation are diminished.

In March, following Convention, the Board of Missions hosted an evening in which representatives from the consolidated missions in Magnolia and Collingswood, and the Episcopal Community of Cumberland County: Trinity, Vineland and St. Andrew's, Bridgton formed a panel, and answered questions from the Board about their new forms of ministry. This was an inspiring evening. It is clear that the Holy Spirit is working through these clergy and congregations to equip ministry in places where resources are stretched thin.

The good news about Christ Church, Magnolia was demonstrated on December 10<sup>th</sup>, with the dedication of the new church building. That day was both culmination and commencement. It was the end of a building process that preserved old pews and windows and gave them a place in a completely up-to-code and accessible building. As Bishop Cuncell said in his homily, "...you even gave up the red carpeting!" It was also the "beginning" of what has been prayed about and lived into by two congregations, who recognized that new life involves walking together for Jesus in the world.

The good news about the Episcopal Community of Cumberland County is that clergy sharing has been accepted as a way of bringing about viability. This journey continues to evolve, and as resources change, so does the relationship. What is remarkable about ECCC is the will of the members of the two churches to engage in the process. Without this consciousness and attention to each others' needs, both churches would be distressed. The leadership of these two congregations have also gone "on the road" to share their learnings with other congregations looking for opportunities to strengthen the church's presence in small places.

During 2011 several missions were closed: Trinity, South Vineland, St. Luke's, Westville, and Grace, Elizabeth. It is clear that remediation of property issues would have been beyond the capacity of the Diocese to respond in all three places, and also that congregations were not vital, in the case of the former two, and not quite Episcopal in the case of the last.

As Chair of the Board of Missions I have made visits to several congregations which applied for, and received, grants from Diocesan Council at the recommendation of the Loan & Grant Committee. I thank the Reverend Frank Hubbard for his tenacity in visiting missions, and his committee members, who travel long distances to have a "look see" at rectories that are damaged by hurricanes, churches that need new roofs, parish halls flooded, to name just a few of the incidents that our mission congregations faced during 2011. When the Board of Missions makes a recommendation, and L&G concurs, a recommendation is made to Council, that is quite often the difference between missions continuing or closing.

The Board continued to use its template to generate data that could be used in the evaluation of congregations requesting financial assistance from the Diocese during 2012. The Fall funding cycle brought the Board of Missions a total of eight requests. The Board eventually recommended assistance to twelve congregations in support of the following categories:

**FULFILLING MISSION:** Most of the funding recommended by the BOM has attached to vicar salary packages, where churches are making a real effort to engage with their communities providing space and ministry that will life up the lives of those around them.

**CHANGE AGENCY:** The Board further recommended that Council give priority to funding for those congregations which are actively pursuing change, whether this means exploring shared ministry options or for programs that provide community outreach.

**CONTINUING EPISCOPAL PRESENCE:** The Board noted that sometimes a congregation is the only alternative to Roman Catholic or Evangelical (big box) churches in the area. There may be an effort to preserve that presence when ministry is ongoing or can be encouraged by support from the Diocese.

The Board of Missions is trying to put itself on a more strategic footing, so that it can be proactive in supporting changes in alignment of mission congregations, or where a recommendation to pay the property/liability insurance for a mission may leverage more ministry for the sake of the Gospel.

I would like to note here the sacrificial spirit of St Barnabas-by-the-Bay in Villas. They received a bequest during 2011, and decided NOT to ask for mission assistance in 2012, because they felt that "other congregations might benefit" if they did not ask for funding. Such generosity of spirit and understanding of the stewardship of resources is laudable. God bless you and "Thank You."

My thanks also to Canon Debra Clarke who continues to assist me, to the Holy Women of the Diocese: Ann Notte, Mary Ann Rhoads, and Sarah Paige, for their support of the Board of Missions, and to Canon Cecilia Alvarez for walking the walk with congregations in transition. God Bless you and "Thank You." My thanks to Canon Lee Powers, who, having gone over the wall, takes with him a great deal of the memory of the Diocese of New Jersey. Lee, I hope you'll still answer your email in cases of emergency. Thanks also to Canon Phyllis Jones and to the Bishop for their continued assistance.

To all the members of the Board of Missions, elected by convocations and appointed from Council. Your partnership is a great grace as we seek to serve the Diocese of New Jersey. "Thank You" and God bless you. To the people of The Episcopal Church of St Raphael the Archangel in Brick, "Thank You" for your continuing support. God bless you.

Faithfully yours,

The Reverend Gretchen D. Zimmerman  
Chair