

Board of Missions  
Report to the 229<sup>th</sup> Annual Diocesan Convention

Immediately following Diocesan Convention last year, I went through the Convention materials published by the CFO, regarding total budgets reported by congregations. I selected all congregations which had incomes UNDER \$150,000, in order to better understand the levels at which many of our congregations function. That list was further broken down into three groups: those with reported incomes under \$50,000, those with incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and those with incomes between \$100,000 and \$150,000. The cut-off of \$150,000 was entirely arbitrary, but it reflects my experience of ministry in small congregations. Over nearly three decades of ordained ministry I have formed a working hypothesis as follows: congregations with incomes under \$150,000 cannot afford full-time resident clergy. My selection based on total reported incomes yielded a list of nearly half the congregations of the diocese, NOT including the eight or so seasonal chapels. That is roughly twice the number of congregations currently categorized as “missions.”

Throughout the year this information has been looked at by the Board of Missions, the working group on Vitality and Viability convened by Canon Sosnowski, by the Fair Share Committee and Diocesan Council. The Fair Share Committee further opined that the \$150,000 figure was probably low considering the cost of living in the Mid-Atlantic/larger New York/Philadelphia Metropolitan area. What this means is that over half the congregations of the diocese are what I describe as “at risk” congregations. Many thoughtful persons have participated in conversations about how to address the economic realities of congregational life. The economy is what it is, and will be what it will be. What it means is that in many places there is no resident priest, and that presents the diocese with a spiritual reality that cannot be remedied by the exclusive use of supply clergy, whether long-term or a Sunday at a time, in congregations with diminished circumstances.

For the Board of Missions, this has meant looking carefully at all congregations committed to our purview, and asking the difficult questions about where the continued financial support of the diocese can best be utilized, with what we hope are faithful outcomes. The Board labors to exercise good stewardship when it makes recommendations to Council, based on the spiritual as well as economic realities we encounter in mission congregations. We recommended to Council for 2012 that several smaller administrative grants be awarded, which made it possible to pay insurance premiums for two congregations, and to subsidize one congregation with a vicar’s health insurance, when those premiums increased. The Board also recommended a grant to provide seed money for two congregations to engage in conversations about a clergy sharing covenant. These grants enhanced the ministry in several small places. The balance of recommended grants go primarily to sustain vicars’ salaries.

For 2013, the Board of Missions recommended continued payment of insurance, and recommended a matching grant for a mission that is trying to grow, and which will, hopefully, be able to call a part-time priest. A grant was reinstated to a mission that had foregone assistance and used a bequest in 2012. All nine of the recommended grants will be used by mission congregations to support their resident clergy.

Over the past year, the Board has labored with less than a full complement of members elected by their Convocations. As of the December 2012 meeting, we believe that we now have representatives from all Convocations, both clergy and lay, from missions as well as parishes. This is important, because it means that more missions can be visited by their Board of Missions liaison. We ask BOM members to

establish a relationship with their congregation(s), in order to better inform the Board about a particular mission's vitality and viability. Most Board members have had the experience of a skeptical or suspicious response on the part of congregants, whose first question is, "Have you come to close us?" Given the above referenced realities, BOM members do understand. We are working to overcome such fears with relationships that are personal, i.e., the BOM liaison, and accessible, in order to get current information, and be able to develop a fuller picture of the varied ministries in which the mission congregations of the diocese engage. The BOM liaisons also serve as point persons for mission congregations, receiving questions and trying to pass those along, so that answers or other kinds of support can be relayed back to the mission in question.

As always, I thank the members of the Board for their service. Your contribution of time and talent is essential to the work we attempt in behalf of the Diocese of New Jersey. Thanks to our administrative staff at "808." Thanks most especially to the Reverend Canon Debra Mattern Clarke, whose portfolio as Youth Director is already full, and yet she makes time to provide support to the Board and be staff where there otherwise would be none. My thanks to the Bishop for his continued faithfulness in pouring out the love of God upon the Diocese of New Jersey.

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." 1 Cor. 3:6

Knowing how painful growth can be, he has not hesitated to engage in the hard task of watering us, sometimes with his tears, and pruning us, so that we can grow. To God be the Glory.

The Reverend Gretchen D. Zimmerman  
Chair, Board of Missions