Small Rural Church Task Force Meeting – March 15, 2022

By Zoom

**Present:** Ann Barthrop - St. Luke's, Westcliffe; The Rev. Wendy Huber – St. Peters of the Valley, Basalt: Nancy Kinney - St. John the Baptist, Breckenridge; Lisa Morton – St. George’s, Leadville; The Rev. Kaye Piper, Deacon - St. John's, Granby; Katherine Richardson - St. John’s, New Castle; Douglas Saxton - All Saint’s, Battlement Mesa; Michelle Stone - St. Stephen's, Monte Vista.

**Convener:**  The Rev. Canon Alex Dyer, Missional Advancement & Congregational Vitality.

Not attending: The Rev. Michael Fay – Retired

Our agenda (per Alex):

I.  Introductions

II.  The scope of the work

III.  Discern chairperson(s) for this work

IV. Timeline and plan future meetings

1. Introductions
   1. Alex expressed his belief in small churches and the need to find new and better ways to serve them. He subsequently stated there is no hidden agenda to close our small rural churches.
   2. Each Task Force member then shared something about their congregational involvement and why they wanted to serve on this Task Force. Excerpts: **Wendy** (Basalt) began her ministry as a bi-vocational priest; small churches are her passion and she encourages clergy to consider this ministry. **Ann** (Westcliffe) said “rural is in our hearts.” She has served 30 years as a Lay Eucharist Minister (LEM) and her church received approval for her to distribute communion from reserved sacrament. **Michelle** (Alamosa/Monte Vista) has 40 years of history in the “Valley,” where multiple partnerships have been tried. She’s a licensed lay reader and is the SW Region administrator. **Nancy** (Missioner for the NW Region) is a member of St. John’s, Breck and was a member of St. Mark’s when she lived in Craig some time ago. **Doug** (Battlement Mesa) is an LPL (Lay Pastoral Leader) and serves on the Bishop’s Committee. His congregation is one in a 3-way partnership. **Katherine** (New Castle) is the Bishop’s Warden and is excited about her congregation’s use of LPLs. **Kaye** (Granby) is a deacon and has lived in Grand County for 12 years.
2. Scope of the Work
   1. The Task Force will (ideally) produce a report to Diocesan Convention in October 2022.
   2. Our term of service is expected to be 4 – 6 months.
   3. At minimum, anticipated we will examine the following:
      1. Establish where we are now
      2. Inventory processes now in place to serve small rural congregations:
         1. LPLs – functioning differently across the diocese, may not be supported enough
         2. What other models are in place or possible?
      3. State situation of churches that are small and rural
         1. The national average (assumed the mean) Episcopal Church has 70 persons on a Sunday (Average Sunday Attendance or ASA).
         2. We should examine multiple years (not just 2021) of data regarding attendance, membership, etc.
         3. The office of the bishop will assist in gathering data, information we need about congregations
      4. Figure out needed support for clergy and laity in small rural congregations
         1. Training programs for priests and deacons, i.e., Iona
      5. Recommend structures for small rural churches
         1. Governance and accountability measures
         2. By-laws for mission churches (developed but may not be adaptable)
      6. How to go about our work
         1. Gather data
         2. Listening sessions with laity, LPLs, clergy
         3. Contacting other dioceses for ideas, models
         4. Review previous reports, assessments
      7. How do we define “small” and/or “rural” church?
         1. “No cell service”
         2. “A congregation/town 50 miles from another”
         3. Family/Pastoral/Program church models may be helpful to answer the size question (**Alex** will provide summary from *Sizing up a Congregation* or other resources)
      8. What theology of small church ministry should guide our common work?
      9. Limitations:
         1. The canons (governing documents) of the diocese may pose limits but change is possible.
3. Discern Chairperson
   1. **Doug Saxton** and **Wendy Huber** are considering serving as co-chairs. To be decided first thing at our next meeting.
4. Timeline and future meetings
   1. Our next meeting is **April 6 at 5:30 pm**.

Submitted by Nancy Kinney