

REPORT OF THE SHARING MINISTRY TASK GROUP

Diocese of Fredericton

CELEBRATING GOD'S GRACE
†
RESPONDING TO GOD'S CHALLENGE

"For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, for which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."
(Ephesians 2:10)

Presented and Reviewed by Diocesan Synod

June 2009

Members of the Task Group

The Right Reverend Claude Miller, Bishop

Gerry McConaghy, Chair – Task Force on Budget Support

The Ven. Pat Drummond, Chair – Task Force on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes

The Rev. Chris Hayes, Parish of Richmond

Jennifer Lister-Brown, Parish of Campbellton

Ann Fairweather, Chair of the Synod Agenda Committee - Synod 2009

Jim Morell, Chairman

REPORT OF THE SHARING MINISTRY TASK GROUP

Introduction

Last fall the diocesan executive committee was mandated by diocesan council to establish the terms of reference for, and the membership of, the Sharing Ministry Task Group (the SMTG). Consistent with its terms of reference (see appendix), this report by the SMTG is based on what has emerged from:

- the reports of two diocesan task forces: the Task Force on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes and the Task Force on Budget Support, both of which were established by the Bishop and diocesan council at the request of the synod of 2007,
- the stewardship-based ‘planning study’, which was requested by diocesan council and completed last fall by two representatives of the national church, and
- the teachings of Bishop Edward Salmon of the Diocese of South Carolina, who visited our diocese last summer.

In preparing this report, the SMTG first asked itself: “Based on these reports and what Bishop Salmon has said, how should our current situation be described and what are our main challenges?” Then the group focused its attention on developing a set of clear recommendations for the consideration of synod delegates who will be making decisions about the very important issues and challenges that we face as we do God’s mission in our diocese and beyond.

First, Let Us Celebrate and Be Thankful

There is little doubt that many of our parishes and our diocese as a whole are, in different ways, struggling. Despite our challenges and adversities, we have much to celebrate and much for which to be thankful. We know that the Lord is watching over us, is directing us and has plans for us – plans that give us hope and will lead us to prosperity (Jeremiah 29:11). Many good and positive things which are happening across our diocese are a sign of that hope and God’s mission. Here are but a few of them:

A new spirit of unity and cooperation

- Building on the spirit of cooperation that began at Synod 2007, the regional meetings that were part of the rural and struggling parishes review have prompted greater inter-parish communication and cooperation. Our parishes are discovering that they are not alone in their difficulties, and there is a renewed sense of mutual caring and support.
- Many parishes and archdeaconries are coming together regularly to share ideas and explore ways to share ministry.

Growth in ministry

- We are increasing our support of homeless shelters, food banks, transition houses, soup kitchens, disabled people, nursing homes, refugee families and Christmas food/gift programs.
- We steadily and generously support Bishop McAllister School and the Rev. Paul Jeffries.
- Our collective support of PWRDF continues to be strong with \$275,000 contributed in the last four years alone.
- Several congregations have organized mission trips that have allowed people of all ages to share their time, talent and treasure with those in need.

- There are signs of growth and strength in youth ministry in many parishes – youth leaders are being hired, young people are engaged in God’s work and our youth are more active in Sunday services.
- Our diocesan youth programs and Christian Education are gaining strength as we offer leadership workshops and various other kinds of programs.
- Camps Medley and Brookwood are growing spiritually and numerically.
- Our Bishop confirms many young people every year, and the letters he receives from the confirmands show a very strong commitment to their faith.

New and improved church properties

- Various building projects are an encouraging sign of growth and unity. Over the past several years the overall value of such projects is estimated to be \$8-9 million.
- Particularly noteworthy is the recent opening of the Church of the Resurrection in the Parish of the Nerepis and St. John, a new home for the eight congregations (in four parishes) that became one in 2003
- Many congregations have constructed new buildings or undertaken major upgrades to what they have, and more are in the planning stages.
- Over \$1 million has been contributed for construction and renovation to Camps Medley and Brookwood.

7,000 worship on Sundays

- We rejoice that, collectively, about 7,000 New Brunswick Anglicans attend some 200 services of worship every Sunday to worship and praise God. Clergy and lay leaders in all corners of our province work hard to ensure that worship and parish ministry continues, despite economic and demographic realities and other challenges.

Spiritual growth and learning

- Our parishes continue to offer a variety of Christian learning programs. Alpha is popular and some use The Purpose Driven Church materials. Vacation Bible schools, home study groups, prayer groups, new Sunday School initiatives and weekly Bible study groups are deepening our faith and commitment.

Bishop Salmon’s visit was a blessing

- Last August Bishop Edward Salmon accepted our Bishop’s invitation to share his experiences in leading a renewal movement in the Diocese of South Carolina. He left no doubt that the church has to look at systemic change as it confronts today’s realities and challenges. His teaching on the spiritual importance of stewardship was particularly well-received.

Still ... We Must Face The Challenges Before Us

Despite these and many other good things that are happening, the Anglican Church in New Brunswick is slowly losing strength and health. Many of us are discouraged and worried about the future. The stewardship-based planning study went so far as to say that we are “mired in a complex set of problems that is now at such a crisis point that a planned intervention is absolutely essential to the diocese’s sustainability.”

While parts of that statement could be challenged, the reports we have before us clearly indicate that our church is at a very a low point. Yes, we know the Anglican Church in New Brunswick will survive, but many of us worry about what we will look like in 10 or 20 years. People are asking themselves: Will we be strong and healthy enough to maintain a presence in

our rural communities? Will our mission and outreach ministry be strong? How many people will sit in our pews and how many children will attend our Sunday Schools? How many church buildings will we have? Will I be buried from the church I've attended my whole life?

Overall, the reports point to the need for systemic change – they say that unless we take immediate steps aimed at growth, we will continue our unavoidable decline. Spiritual, numerical and financial growth has to be our focus. As we look forward, we need to be strategic in our thinking and deliberate in our actions, at both the parish and diocesan levels. It is obvious that, without a deliberate decision in favour of changes that make a difference, Anglican ministry in many parts of our diocese will reach the point where it is simply no longer sustainable.

In times of difficulty it is quite natural to put personal and local needs first, and to think in the short-term. Many rightly argue that God is in control and we are not; and that we need to pray for God's guidance as we strive to become stronger and healthier. Further, it can be argued that it is impossible for anyone to predict what we will look like or what will happen in five or ten years. While these points are valid, it could also be argued that our problems and the downward trend lines that were identified in the reports are a message to us from God. Could He be telling us that we need to take action, and that these reports are pointing us in the right direction?

The report of the Task Force on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes identifies some undeniable and worrisome 10-year trends across the diocese:

- average Sunday attendance is decreasing
- the total number of families and individuals in our parishes is decreasing
- the total number of identifiable givers is decreasing
- even though fewer people are giving more, our offerings are not enough to keep up with operational expenses, so we are becoming more reliant on fund-raising and trust fund income just to pay the day-to-day bills
- total expenditures on clergy stipends and allowances is decreasing because we have fewer priests – in fact, about 30 (just under 1/3) of our 84 parishes are not currently generating enough income to have their own full-time priest
- annually, on average, there are more funerals than baptisms and more baptisms than confirmations

Changing provincial demographics, among other reasons, has contributed to declining attendance. New Brunswick's total population is staying even or declining slightly, but our rural communities are definitely shrinking. Community life – including church life – is being affected. The number of young people in N.B. has been declining steadily since the 1960's because, first, our birth rate is less than one third of what it was 40 years ago when our Sunday Schools were overflowing; and second, there has been a steady increase in the number of young New Brunswickers who leave our province. Finally, as we know only too well, fewer people are attending church on a regular basis.

These trends – in our church statistics and in provincial demographics – tell us that ministry in many communities and churches will not be sustainable much longer unless we begin to do things differently.

What is the likelihood that we will increase our numbers or that our people can or will give more? Those are difficult questions to answer. Stewardship education would certainly encourage increased giving, but in our diocese we have traditionally tended to shy away from any serious discussion of 'stewardship'. Even though Jesus spoke often about money and wealth, Sharing Ministry Task Group

we usually don't. Our clergy seem reluctant to preach and teach it – and many of our people have made it clear they would rather not hear about it. On the numerical growth side, while there are exceptions, we don't have a tradition of seeking and generously welcoming new people into our congregations.

Our parishes and our diocese are both struggling with budgets. Both report that, after meeting normal expenses, there are insufficient dollars for the true ministry and mission of the church. It is important to note that the Bishop and diocesan council are aware of the financial stresses that parish leaders feel. For the past four years parish contributions to the diocese have been frozen at 2006 levels. This has allowed parishes to retain a larger portion of their income. Of course, this has affected diocesan ministry, programs and services. The recommendations of the Task Force on Budget Support address this issue and, if accepted, will require us to put a much greater emphasis on stewardship.

The SMTG believes it would be counter-productive to spend valuable time and energy analyzing the past or trying to assign 'blame'. While our situation is difficult there are things that we can address. We need to look to the future, look to God and trust that the Holy Spirit, who has been leading us to this point, will continue to do so. As we look forward and as we make decisions about our future, it is important to focus on what God wants and expects of us, as individuals and as the church, and less on what we, ourselves, want or prefer.

Motions for Consideration by Synod 2009

In setting up the SMTG, diocesan council wanted to be sure that the commonly held and most important parts of the three reports, together with what Bishop Salmon advocated, would be presented to Synod 2009 in clear language, and that the most important recommendations would be the focus of synod's discussions.

The SMTG has concluded that the reports and recommendations of the Task Force on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes and the Task Force on Budget Support are based on the same foundational values and principles, and are leading us in the right direction. The SMTG therefore avoided the temptation to create a series of new or newly worded recommendations from the two reports. The SMTG felt that both reports are solid and that it is time for us to turn our attention to acceptance and implementation.

Taken as a group, the SMTG believes that motions below start our diocese on a path of systemic change that will, over several years, help ensure the strength and health of our shared ministry and mission and its long-term sustainability in communities all across the diocese and beyond.

An explanatory note: The SMTG sees three of the following five motions as "enabling motions." The word "affirm" was deliberately chosen to indicate "general agreement with and commitment to" what is proposed by the motion. "Affirmed" is used because it conveys a sense of acceptance – an acknowledgement that the recommendations of the two synod-requested task force reports are moving us in the right direction. The motions also propose that synod hand over responsibility for implementation of the motions to the Bishop and Diocesan Council, which is "the synod between synods". Enabling motions of this nature are consistent with the direction-setting role that synod plays and are confidently made with the knowledge that (a.) the two task forces involved clergy and lay people from across a wide spectrum of the diocese, (b.) compromises in points of view and priority setting have already been achieved, and (c.) the reports are reflective of what our people have said.

Motion 1

That this Synod affirm, and refer to the Bishop and Diocesan Council for implementation, the report and recommendations of the Task Force on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes.

Motion 2

That this Synod affirm, and refer to the Bishop and Diocesan Council for implementation, the report and recommendations of the Task Force on Budget Support, including its values and principles.

Motion 3

That this Synod affirm the need for a parish-based stewardship education initiative across the diocese, and refer this initiative to the Bishop and Diocesan Council for implementation.

Motion 4

That this Synod send a memorial to General Synod requesting that the national church investigate the adoption of the 10-10-10 giving and sharing model as the standard for the Anglican Church of Canada.

Motion 5

That this Synod request that the Bishop and Diocesan Council establish a task group to assess the value and the effectiveness of current diocesan governance structures and processes, with a view to improving administrative efficiency and reducing costs.

Conclusion

If our parishes and our diocese are to return to a position of health and strength, we will have to make some challenging decisions. As we look ahead to a better future, the SMTG thought it would be helpful to have a common and shared vision - a clear picture - of what that better future might look like. It is felt that such a picture, painted in words and with a strong commitment to pursue it, could give us direction and hope. It could also draw us together as parishes and the diocese – all of us focused on what God is calling us to be and to do God’s mission to this world.

The vision statement below may be challenging but it is achievable. The SMTG believes it is a fair reflection of what was said by Anglicans across the diocese during the broad consultations that were undertaken these past two years. It brings together in one statement the hopes and aspirations expressed by the people of the diocese, the main themes and ideas of the two task force reports and the stewardship-based planning study conducted by representatives of the national church, and many of the excellent points in Bishop Salmon’s teachings. Please note that it does not describe us as we are now. Rather, it is offered as a vision of what we could be, as individuals and as the church, with God’s help.

What our Vision means
COULD OUR ANGLICAN CHURCH BE MORE LIKE THIS?

Individually and as parishes, **we are doing our utmost to live up to God's expectation that we love Him, love our neighbours and make disciples.** We are Christ-centred as we daily live out our faith according to Biblical standards and Christ's teachings – focused not on what we want, but on what God calls us to be and to do. **We know what it means to be Anglican.** We understand our rich traditions and strive to use them to strengthen faith in a hurting world and a modern culture. On a personal basis **we follow the Rule of Life** (page 555 BCP), we pay special attention to daily prayer and scripture reading, and we support the mission/outreach ministry of our church. In our parishes we are taught these things and encouraged to live them in daily life.

We are focused, as our diocesan vision statement says, on having parishes that are stronger, healthier, more welcoming and growing. **We understand that spiritual, numerical and financial growth are essential if our parishes are to remain viable and able to maintain a strong presence in our communities.** We are convinced of the need for, and the benefits of, a **shared approach to ministry.** Our clergy and parish leaders actively communicate and cooperate with others from nearby parishes. As a diocese we are financially **supportive of risk-taking parishes** that want to grow. We are also supportive of processes that help parishes wishing to pursue amalgamation, either with nearby Anglican parishes or with congregations of other denominations. We recognize that, for some, this may be the best or only way for them to maintain worship and ministry in their communities.

Our people understand that all that we are and have are gifts from God. Through various means, including strong preaching, **we are being taught about, and are more accepting of, the Biblical standards related to stewardship,** including 'first fruits' giving and tithing. As a result, in our weekly tithes and offerings we are more generous than at present. Every year more and more of our people are tithing (i.e. giving the first 10% of their income back to God), or at least giving proportionally, in their weekly offerings. As individuals, as parishes and as a diocese, **we are committed to, and actively working toward, the 10-10-10 principle of giving and sharing** that has been so successful in South Carolina. This has produced a significant increase in the amount of money available for parish operations and local level ministry. It also means that diocesan and national church ministry, programs and services can continue to be more fully supported. Increasingly our leaders and our people are dedicating more time and money to ministry and mission (and less to administration and property).

As a diocese and as parishes we are unified and inter-dependent – **parishes willingly contribute to the ministry of the diocese and diocesan leaders are actively supporting our parishes,** especially those that are struggling. **We recognize the importance of shared leadership.** Our leaders, both clergy and lay, are supported, educated and well-prepared to lead us through a period of change focused on growth. We know that **transparency and open communication is important.** We respect the principles of "relational hygiene" and "speaking the truth in love" that were recommended to us by Bishop Salmon.

As parishes and as a diocese **we are looking for ways to be better stewards of God's gifts to us of time, talent and treasure.** By choice and because of economic realities, **we want our organizational structures and processes to be relevant to today's realities and to contribute meaningfully to the ministry and work of the church.**

Appendix 1

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Sharing Ministry Task Group

Brief Description and Mandate

The Task Group, charged by the Diocesan Executive Committee, as delegated by the Diocesan Council in September 2008, will work with the Council, the General Synod Consultant Team and other groups to coordinate and implement the significant current initiatives of the Synod and the Diocese of Fredericton including: Task Force on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes; Task Force on Diocesan Budget Support; Partnership with General Synod - DC051109-18 (2007 Shared Ministry Plan, 2008 Planning Study, 2009 Stewardship and Congregational Development Plan); Potentially transforming teaching of Bishop Edward Salmon from August 2008

The Task Group will:

1. Co-ordinate the integrated thinking resulting in a single set of recommendations to the June 2009 Synod;
2. Assist the Bishop to guide the Diocese in its planning and communication approaching that Synod;
3. Monitor implementation of both current directions and the recommendations resulting from that meeting of the Synod.

On-going Responsibilities and Reporting

- Accountable and reporting directly to the Bishop and the Diocesan Council through the Diocesan Executive Committee
- Meetings as necessary as called by the Chair, to guide the planning and implementation processes required.

Membership

- Sharing Ministry Task Group Chair
 - The Bishop of Fredericton
 - Chair of the Task Force on Rural and/or Struggling Parish (from Synod 2007)
 - Chair of the Task Force on Support of the Diocesan Budget (from Synod 2007)
 - Chair of the 2009 Synod Agenda Committee
 - One cleric and one lay person appointed by the Chair and Bishop
- Ex-officio/advisory
- Secretary of the Synod
 - Treasurer of the Synod
 - General Synod Development Consultants (G. Jackson and R. Waller)

The Group will add resource persons or members as necessary to the tasks.

Budget

Meeting expenses as needed.

Sub-groups and Other Links

Strategic task forces and groups as named above, Diocesan Executive Committee, Diocesan Council (specifically the teams of Diocesan Council positioned to support implementation of particular recommendations)

December 11, 2008