

# The Nicodemus Project

TRANSFORMING OUR CHURCH

January 11, 2010

## **Introduction – Understanding the Urgency and Importance of ‘Transformational Change’**

Nicodemus came to Jesus searching for answers (see John 3:1-10). What Jesus told Nicodemus led him to a life-changing decision. Last June 2009 delegates came to diocesan synod with many questions and concerns, and they were searching for a new way forward. Concluding a two-year-long process, delegates approved a series of motions intended to allow God to transform us into the stronger, healthier and growing church that he calls us to become. The transformational change initiative that was called for is now being undertaken across the diocese. Because it will be transformational and life-changing for our church, it is being called ‘The Nicodemus Project.’

As we embark on it together our Diocesan Council believes that it is important there be a common understanding of what this ‘transformational change’ means and why it is both urgent and important to our long-term health and well-being. Based on the analysis of parish statistics, last year’s archdeaconry discussions, the recommendations of our two synod-created task force reports, the strong support for change by Synod 2009 and the stewardship-based teachings of South Carolina Bishop Edward Salmon, Diocesan Council feels God is asking us to change, and to make spiritual, numerical and financial growth a shared priority. Without a renewed emphasis on change and growth, the future for many parishes will be very bleak. Council believes that the long-term health and strength of the Anglican Church in New Brunswick is dependent on our collective willingness to go through a period of **transformational change**, which is defined as: “a **fundamental shift in institutional and organizational culture, resulting from an intentional decision to develop and implement new strategies and processes. To be effective such changes have to be deep, widely supported and implemented over an extended period of time.**” Transformational change is deeper and more far-reaching than incremental change, and takes place over a longer period of time.

Whatever changes we make in our various ministries, our budgets and our organizational life together, priority has to be given to things that contribute to our capacity to **‘proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the making of disciples’** (our mission) and to become **‘a diocese of, healthy, mission-focusws, welcoming and growing parishes’** (our vision). **To reach those two goals, we need to collectively concentrate on spiritual, numerical and financial growth over the next several years.**

Diocesan Council also believes that enduring transformational change must begin with individual Anglicans and parishes. If we are to grow in our understanding of the Gospel and in our ability to proclaim it, and if our parishes are to become stronger and healthier – then **individuals and parishes have to assume the greatest responsibility for action and change.** The Council believes its role, and that of the Bishop and diocesan staff, is to provide overall direction and guidance, to support and provide resources to the parishes, and to monitor progress. In other words, our organizational change will be both ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’. The Council also believes that, while there is one “plan” for the Diocese, there has to be sufficient flexibility in it to allow congregations, parishes and archdeaconries to decide how best to implement diocesan-wide priorities and changes as set by the Council.

Throughout this process, open and honest communication will be especially important. Because organizational changes are often difficult and because individuals will have differing views, Diocesan Council affirms the importance of all Anglicans adhering to a high level of ‘relational hygiene’ as we communicate and work with one another.

## The Plan for Implementing Synod Resolutions Regarding Change

Diocesan Synod 2009 asked that the Bishop and Diocesan Council set priorities and develop an action plan to implement the recommendations by the task forces on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes and Budget Support. To that end, the **Council has agreed that the following five areas will be its priorities and the priorities of the whole diocese for at least the next two years, until Synod 2011, and that we collectively dedicate ourselves to the successful implementation of them as generally outlined below:**

### 1. We Will Re-learn What it Means to be Christian and Anglican

- For the purpose of providing a firm foundation for the renewal of our church, we will undertake the delivery at the parish or archdeaconry level of a strong, Gospel-based learning program focused on what it means to be Christian and Anglican
- To help and support the parishes, we will find - or develop - and make available teaching and learning resources for use by parish priests and lay leaders in parish-based learning programs, and in so doing we will try not to 'reinvent the wheel' – rather we will use existing programs and resources wherever possible (eg Alpha, Emmaus, traditional Anglican formation processes, Willow Creek network course, Natural Church Development material, Rick Warren's 40 Days of Purpose, layreader training material, etc.)
- We will incorporate in this learning program the 'Rule of Life' (BCP p.555) and a presentation to wardens in November 2008 by Archdeacon Geoffrey Hall
- We will have a program ready, in pilot or full form, for implementation between January and Easter 2010 (eg for use in a Bible Study, a Lenten Study or as a sermon series)
- We will look at offering this program both locally and regionally and ask the implementers to provide an evaluation after it has been offered
- We will delegate responsibility for this learning program to the Spiritual Development Team of the Council

### 2. We Will Prepare Our Leaders for a Different Future

- We will hold the first annual 'Diocesan Leadership and Learning Workshop' in the spring of 2010 with a focus on 'transformational change in the Diocese of Fredericton'
- It will be designed to help both clergy and lay leaders, preferably in 'parish teams' deal with such challenges as: understanding why transformational change is needed, what specific things are most likely to help parishes grow spiritually, numerically and financially, what steps can be taken to maximize the chance of a successful change processes, how to generate in a congregation an openness to change and a willingness to do things differently, how to deal with resistance, how to change from 'maintenance' to 'mission' mode, how to maximize the talents of clergy, wardens and vestries in a shared leadership context, and how to reach our young people.
- Those designing the learning weekend will be asked to first define exactly **what** changes are needed and why, what outcomes are expected and what obstacles might get in the way and should be removed
- Those designing the learning weekend will be asked to determine whether it is better to offer the program provincially or regionally, and to ensure that quality resource people are used - people with experience in transformational change in the local church
- We will delegate responsibility for this learning program to the Episcopal Team of the Council

### **3. We Will Help Our Struggling Parishes**

- We will support the Bishop and archdeacons as they encourage and guide **every parish to undertake by June 2010 a self-assessment process that leads to an action plan aimed at making the necessary changes in order to become a more ‘healthy, mission-focused, welcoming and growing’ congregations**
- We will encourage parishes to use the ‘[10 Marks of a Healthy Parish](#),’ as developed by the Task Force on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes, as one of the tools to help with the self-assessment process
- We will ask the Parish Support and Development Team to recruit and train a group of volunteer facilitators who are willing to help and guide individual parishes through the self-assessment process
- We will ask the Parish Support and Development Team to use the recommendations of the Task Force on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes in developing terms of reference for a new Congregational Development Fund and ensure it is established as soon as possible
- We will ask the Parish Support and Development Team to consider the idea of a Bishop’s letter to every Anglican in the diocese seeking financial support for the CDF
- We will ask that formalized “Archdeaconry Ministry Plans” be developed in each of our seven archdeaconries, based on a template to be established by the Bishop and his Counsel; such plans to include, among many other things, the parishes’ collective and expressed need for resources and support
- We will ask that these Archdeaconry Ministry Plans be completed by December 2010.
- We will ask territorial archdeacons to utilize Greater Chapter gatherings to inform parish clergy and lay leaders about the need for Archdeaconry Ministry Plans, to sow the seeds of transformational change, to identify the common priorities of the parishes of the archdeaconry, to provide a ‘safe space’ for discussing difficult issues and to encourage among the parishes a culture of mutual support and shared ministry
- We will ask the Stewardship Team of the Council to ensure that the Diocesan Stewardship Conference be appropriately followed up and all parishes encouraged to use Bishop Salmon’s ideas (and the audio-visual material) in formulating their own approach to stewardship and the development of a parish stewardship plan

### **4. We Will Evaluate the Effectiveness of Our Governance, Structures and Processes**

- We will form a special [Evaluation Task Force](#) whose mandate was approved by Synod 2009: ‘to assess the value and effectiveness of current diocesan governance, structures and processes, with a view to improving administrative efficiency and reducing costs’
- We will ask that the vision of the diocese be uppermost in the task force’s thinking: i.e. that we become a diocese of ‘healthy, mission-focused, welcoming and growing parishes’
- We will ask that this task force: (a.) undertake a full review of current ministries, processes, programs, governance and infrastructure usage with a view to assessing their effectiveness and efficiency in supporting parish ministry, (b.) carry out extensive consultations with parish representatives in each archdeaconry to ensure positive communication of information and a healthy exchange of ideas, (c.) report regularly to Diocesan Council on progress being made, and (d.) formally present its final report no later than the March 2011 meeting of Council so that it can be dealt with by Synod that same year
- We will ask the Finance Committee to ensure the [2010 Shared Ministry Budget](#) contains sufficient resources to allow the task force to carry out its mandate

## 5. We Will Make Transformational Change Happen

- We will task the Administration Team of Diocesan Council with primary responsibility for the leadership and coordination of The Nicodemus Project as we go through this transformational change process
- We, the Council, will assume these roles: big picture oversight, setting the mission and vision, stewarding and providing resources for various change initiatives, delegating responsibility for action to Diocesan Council teams, and monitoring progress and measuring results at both the parish and diocesan levels
- We will ‘speak with one voice’ and be clear on our ‘main messages’ after each meeting so that we can better lead the diocese through the coming transformational change process
- We will give high priority at every regular meeting to monitoring progress – devoting up to 90 minutes per meeting to receiving information from and giving suggestions/direction to those charged with leadership and implementation
- We will ask the Administration Team to work with the Communications Committee to develop a new and comprehensive communications strategy to support The Nicodemus Project – one that celebrates our successes, and takes full advantage of technology as well as traditional forms of communication; one that encourages open, two-way communication between/among parish and diocesan leaders; and one that identifies **what** our ‘main messages’ are, **how** they can be best communicated and **to whom**
- We will ask the Finance Committee to ensure that Diocesan Council’s transformational change priorities be given adequate financial support in the [2010 Shared Ministry Budget](#)
- We will ask Diocesan Council teams tasked with initiating action on one of our initiatives to prepare a two-year plan and consider how its efforts are contributing to change and growth.
  
- We will look to our archdeaconries and our parishes to help us answer the question: “Should our diocese employ a congregational development officer to work with (a.) the action teams - doing their leg work and (b) parish clergy and lay leaders – informing and supporting them in the change process?”
- We will ask the Administration Team to help us answer important questions related to measuring growth across the whole diocese – for example: ‘what are the best measures of our strength and health?’, ‘what data/information should we gather?’ ‘where/how will we get that data?’, ‘is it reliable?’, ‘who will gather and analyze it?’, ‘do we want to set targets for ourselves?’, ‘who is accountable for results?’ and so on.

## Conclusion

While the Bishop and Diocesan Council have important roles to play, the Council is clearly stating that the most important changes being called for in this plan must take place at the parish and congregational level. The issues and the difficult questions we face will require all of us to ask ‘what does God expect of us as his church?’ If we are prepared to open our hearts and minds and focus on his will for us, Jesus will guide and direct us just as he did Nicodemus.

[Report of the Rural and Struggling Parishes Task Force \(June 2009\)](#)

[Report of the Budget Support Task Force \(June 2009\)](#)

[Diocese of Fredericton Planning Study \(January 2009\)](#)

[Report of the Sharing Ministry Task Group \(June 2009\)](#)