

Mission Strategy Report to Convention

Introduction

This report accompanies the resolution to adopt the Proposed Mission Strategy submitted to the 231st Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. Prepared by the Phase III Mission Strategy Team, this report describes the purpose of the Proposed Mission Strategy and provides background on the process of developing the strategy. The Phase III team has gratefully incorporated material from early reports of the Phase I Listening Design Team and the Phase II Listening Process Team.

Why Do This? And Why Now?

In the spring of 2015, the Diocesan Council and our bishops responded to the direction in Canon 10 of our diocese's Constitution and Canons, which states in part that:

The Diocese allocates financial and other resources to provide support for Diocesan and congregational mission. The purpose of a Diocesan Mission Strategy and budget is to provide for the allocation of resources by the Convention, Diocesan Council and the Bishop.

The Bishop and Diocesan Council shall prepare the Diocesan Mission Strategy for approval of the Convention. The Diocesan Mission Strategy shall identify and prioritize all Diocesan programmatic and administrative activities in sufficient detail to guide the allocation of resources by the Convention, Diocesan Council and the Bishop...[T]he Diocesan Mission Strategy shall be reviewed, amended, and approved by Convention at least once every three years.

Because the last Mission Strategy was adopted by Convention in November 2012, the diocese's mission priorities were due for review at Convention in 2015. However, as we welcomed the arrival of a new bishop for our diocese, the 2014 Convention voted to delay by one year the review of our Mission Strategy from 2015 to 2016. Last year's Diocesan Convention inaugurated a process of listening and discernment to create a new Mission Strategy for 2016-2019. This process provided many opportunities for everyone in our diocese to join together with our bishops, the Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates and the Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris, to help chart the next course for our diocese.

The work of developing a new Mission Strategy has so far been divided into four phases, beginning in the spring of 2015. They are:

Phase I	May to November 2015	Design a listening process for gathering thoughts from across our diocese about what should be part of a new Mission Strategy.
Phase II	December 2015 to May 2016	Engage in a process of listening to members across our diocese about their hopes and dreams for our diocese and a new Mission Strategy.
Phase III	May 2016 to September 2016	Draft a Proposed Mission Strategy to bring before Convention.
Phase IV	November 2016 to November 2017	Should Convention adopt the Proposed Mission Strategy, organize working teams and participatory processes to implement the goals, including work with the budget process to reflect Mission Strategy goals and activities in the 2018 budget.

Phase I: Designing a Listening Process

This Proposed Mission Strategy is the culmination of almost 18 months of listening and prayerful discernment about what God is calling us to at this time in eastern Massachusetts. The discernment began in May of 2015, when the Bishop and Diocesan Council named seven representatives from the Council and our larger diocese to the Phase I Mission Strategy Listening Process Design Team. That team was charged with designing a process that would invite everyone to share thoughts about what’s working in our diocese, what we could change, what needs we see in our communities, and what new dreams we have. During the summer of 2015, the team created a brief profile of our diocese’s current ministries and the changing demographics in Eastern Massachusetts as a starting point for conversations, and carefully developed a process for listening to as many voices in our diocese as possible.

The listening process was formally introduced to our Diocesan Convention in November 2015. The team also prepared audio-visual and other materials to explain the listening process and encourage participation.

Phase II: Carrying out the Listening Process

In order to broaden participation and manage the listening sessions, the Bishop and Council added three additional members to the team, and named a chair for the Phase II Listening Process. The team invited additional listeners from around our diocese to assist in conducting the listening sessions.

In January and February 2016, the Listening Process Team held seven open listening sessions in Andover, Barnstable, Beverly Farms, Boston, Natick, New Bedford, and Taunton. Eleven focused listening sessions were scheduled for communities whose voices might not easily be heard in the open sessions. These included youth, young adults, historically black congregations, clergy of color, Haitian-South Sudanese congregations, immigrant congregations, Chinese-speaking and Spanish-speaking/Latino congregations, retired clergy, the community of the MANNA ministry with homeless persons at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston, the diocesan staff, and members of Diocesan Council and Standing Committee. Additionally, an online and toll-free, call-in phone survey allowed individuals to respond to questions at their own pace and on their own schedule. The team asked people not to send in individual comments or reports, but encouraged them to complete a survey or come to a Listening Session to collaborate and share in conversation about the life within our diocese.

The results of these sessions and the surveys were transcribed, collated, coded for themes, and categorized into those themes. The Phase II team then created and circulated an Initial Report in April 2016. The team held four feedback sessions from April 10 to April 23 to present its initial findings and invite further conversation about what was heard during the Listening Process. The results of the feedback sessions were incorporated into a Revised Report, which was published in May.

Phase III: Drafting a Proposed Mission Strategy

In late May, a group of sixteen Episcopalians from the Diocese of Massachusetts began gathering to think and pray together about the future of our diocese. Our bishops and Diocesan Council chose the members of this Mission Strategy Drafting Team to reflect the diverse gifts and backgrounds of our diocese. The bishops also named two co-chairs to organize the work of the team. Both Bishop Gates and Bishop Harris participated fully in the work of the team.

The team began by carefully considering the Revised Report from the Listening Process, which summarized the primary ideas and insights shared by over 750 members of our diocese from 120 congregations through the seven open and eleven focused listening sessions, over 325 online and phone survey responses, and four feedback sessions. Some key themes that emerged included:

- A desire to respect and support local congregations as they respond to the challenges of a changing world.
- A yearning for greater inclusion, connection and collaboration in our diocesan life.
- A commitment to justice and service in our local, national, global, and ecological communities.

The team also engaged in further research and reflection about several common points of discussion in the listening process, including:

- The theological grounding of mission.
- The meaning of Christian identity.

- The changing demographics of our area.
- The relevance of the Church in our times.
- Available models for building relationships, promoting effective evangelism, sustaining organizations, and transforming congregations.

The team prayed, shared personal stories, participated in anti-oppression training, and gathered almost weekly for meetings with lively discussions and respectful disagreements.

After two intense months of prayer and conversation, the team offered to our diocese a Draft Mission Strategy. The team gathered feedback from over eighty people who attended six forums around our diocese along with over forty responses to online and phone surveys, and made revisions to reflect the ideas and concerns of the people of our diocese.

The revised Draft Mission Strategy was presented to Diocesan Council. In September, Diocesan Council further revised the document and has submitted it to Convention as the Proposed Mission Strategy.

Phase IV: Implementing Our New Mission Strategy Together

The Proposed Mission Strategy is now being brought forth to Diocesan Convention for approval in November. If adopted, the Mission Strategy will guide our shared work as a diocese for at least three years. In 2019, we will have the opportunity to renew this strategy, revise it, or create an entirely new strategy. Because of the broad participation and depth of discussion in this process, the Phase III team has worked to propose a Mission Strategy that could guide our path into the future beyond three years, even as we learn and adapt along the way.

The Proposed Mission Strategy reflects the hopes for the future heard from around our diocese, and it calls for initial actions to set us on the path toward realizing those dreams. Many questions remain, including how we are going to do this work together and how we will find the resources to do it. It will take time, thoughtful conversation, and prayerful discernment for us to transform the life of our diocese.

Therefore, at its September meeting, Diocesan Council also adopted a charter for the Phase IV Implementation Organizing Team, which will coordinate the work of living into a new Mission Strategy as determined by Convention. This team will consist of seventeen members total. The Council will name six members and the bishops will name six members. In addition to these twelve, the two Bishops, the Diocesan Treasurer, the Canon to the Ordinary, and the Canon for Congregations will serve as *ex officio* members of the team. The bishops will designate two of the twelve regular members as co-chairs.

The Implementation Organizing Team will be responsible for:

1. Overseeing appropriate planning and implementation work for all aspects of the new Mission Strategy. Much of the actual planning and implementation work is expected to be done by specialized project/program teams, rather than the Phase IV team itself.
2. Reporting monthly to Diocesan Council about plans and progress.
3. Communicating with our diocese at large about what is happening with the Mission Strategy.
4. Working with the budget process to help develop a 2018 budget that fairly reflects the Mission Strategy priorities.
5. Reporting to Convention in 2017 about progress so far, including assessments of progress on the major parts of the Mission Strategy.
6. Expending the funds in the 2017 Mission Strategy budget line.

The Implementation Organizing Team shall serve through Convention 2017. The expectation for the team is that it will be responsible for determining priorities, creating timelines for implementation, regularly communicating progress across our diocese, aligning staff and 2018 budgets with the Mission Strategy, and recommending to Council a plan to carry implementation forward into 2018 and beyond. The Implementation Organizing Team will be accountable to the Diocesan Council and will regularly provide updates to Council on the team's process and progress.

Our Diocesan Council and Bishops expect the Phase IV team to create frequent opportunities for input and feedback so that all members of our diocese are invited to share in the work of implementation.

For More Information

Documents from all phases of the Mission Strategy process are available online at <http://www.diomass.org/new-mission-strategy>. The Phase IV Implementation Organizing Team will continue to update that page as we as a diocese begin to live into our new Mission Strategy.

Changes from the Draft Mission Strategy to the Proposed Mission Strategy

We appreciate the care that many of our members took in reading and responding to the Draft Mission Strategy. Based on the comments we received at forums and through online and phone surveys, the Phase III team and Diocesan Council made several significant changes for the Proposed Mission Strategy. We have summarized the changes here:

Our Vision

Reimagining Our Congregations

- Emphasized the importance of Christian community.
- Clarified that congregations will be leading the work of reimagining themselves.

Building Our Relationships

- Removed language that could reinforce age stereotypes.

Engaging Our World

- Chose a broader definition of justice.

An Invitation

- Moved the description of the Mission Strategy drafting process to our Report to Convention.
- Focused in this section on the opportunities for members of the diocese to be part of implementing this strategy.

Goals and Initial Actions

- Renamed this section from “Our Recommendations” to “Goals and Initial Actions” to clarify that this document has two intentions: to name broad, long-term goals for our diocese, and to propose initial actions as next steps for working together on those goals.
- Added the statement “**We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, commit to:**” in every section to emphasize that, if adopted by Diocesan Convention, these goals will belong to the members of our diocese.

Preparing the Way

1. Undertake an open and thorough review of our gifts, resources, and programs.

- Added “including the structure for parish assessments” to indicate that our diocesan sources of income will be reviewed alongside our diocesan expenses.
- Added a fuller description of how we will assess our governance structures as well as including assessing our current use of resources.

Reimagining Our Congregations

2. Share the Word of God and our own faith stories with greater confidence.

- Added language in the purpose statement of this goal to reflect the desire for more spiritual development and the importance of children and youth.
- Added Initial Action 2(a): “Inviting all members of our diocese to deepen our relationships with Jesus and strengthen our formation as disciples so that we can live our faith in the world.”

3. Address the fact of numerical decline boldly and creatively.

- Revised and expanded the purpose statement to emphasize that every congregation has its own gifts, call, and role to play in the life of our diocese.
- Mentioned the challenge of sustaining participation in the face of declining numbers and engagement.
- Clarified the purpose of the funding stream in Initial Action 3(b).

Building Our Relationships

4. Initiate new relationships across our diocese.

- Made Initial Action 4(a) more open-ended, so that the work of building relationships would not be limited to a single program or model.

5. Support stronger collaborations among congregations.

- Removed the language about diocesan staff from Initial Action 5(a) in order to include more approaches to supporting collaborations. Also added ecumenical and interfaith organizations as potential partners in this work.
- Moved Initial Action 5(b) from Goal 8 to Goal 5, because it seems to fit better as an example of collaboration.

6. Incorporate regions outside of Boston more fully in the life of our diocese

- Revised Initial Action 6(a) to emphasize the importance of relationships, and to clarify that lay leaders, clergy, and diocesan staff members are equal partners who all have something to share and something to learn.
- Added Initial Action 6(b), “Inviting members from all regions of our diocese to engage in leadership roles in all diocesan project teams and governing bodies.”

7. Fulfill the Gospel command to love one another, particularly across difference.

- Moved this Goal from “Engaging Our World” to “Building Our Relationships” to acknowledge the reality of racism and other forms of oppression within our life as a church and our need for reconciliation among our own members.
- Added Initial Action 7(a), “Working to respond to Jesus’ call to fully include all persons in the life of the Church.”
- Revised the purpose statement to reflect a broader desire for inclusion and concern for all forms of oppression, alongside the particular focus on racial reconciliation in Initial Action 7(b).

8. Deepen our relationships with our neighbors in order to work side-by-side for a more just and peaceful world.

- Revised the purpose statement to further emphasize mutual relationships as the foundation of our engagement in our neighborhoods and in the world.
- Removed the reference to “training programs” in Initial Action 8(a) to allow more approaches to implementing this goal.
- Added Initial Action 8(b), “Further strengthening our relationships with neighbors around the world through partnerships in global mission” to reflect our diocese’s commitment to international mission.

9. Strengthen our relationship with our Earth and our commitment to care for Creation.

- Revised both Initial Actions 9(a) and 9(b) to deepen the moral and theological context for our stewardship of Creation and to create opportunities for new efforts rather than renewing existing programs.
- Changed the phrase “Creation Care” to “caring for Creation” to allow a broader view of what can be done that goes beyond ideas associated with particular existing programs.

Thanks

The Mission Strategy process has been made possible by many, many people around our diocese. We would like to thank the hundreds of our members who have participated in the process in listening sessions, online and phone surveys, feedback sessions, and forums.

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St. John’s Church, Arlington
All Saints’ Church, Attleboro
St. Andrew’s Church, Ayer
St. Mary’s Church, Barnstable
St. John’s Church, Beverly Farms
Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Boston
Emmanuel Church, Boston
MANNA Community, Boston
St. Cyprian’s Church, Boston (Roxbury)
Trinity Church, Boston
Trinity Church, Canton
St. Christopher’s Church, Chatham
St. Luke’s / San Lucas, Chelsea
St. Paul’s Church, Dedham
Grace Church, Everett
St. Barnabas Church, Falmouth
Grace Church, Lawrence
Church of Our Redeemer, Lexington

St. Paul’s Church, Lynnfield
Grace Church, Medford
Trinity Church, Melrose
Church of Our Saviour, Middleborough
St. Paul’s Church, Natick
Grace Church, New Bedford
Christ Church, Quincy
St. Thomas’s Church, Taunton
Trinity Church, Topsfield
Grace Church, Salem
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Mr. Clark Warner, St. Bartholomew's Church, Cambridge

Thanks be to God!

A Prayer for Our Diocese and the Mission Strategy Process

Lord Jesus Christ, we come before you as a people of God,
seeking to join your transforming work in the world.
Open our eyes to see the movement of your Spirit.
Open our minds to imagine new possibilities.
Open our ears to hear the voices of all your children.
Open our mouths to speak with honesty and love.
Open our hands to share all that we have.
Open our hearts to receive all that we need.
Thank you, Lord, for calling us
as your disciples and friends.
Give us courage to follow where you lead. Amen.