

Mission Strategy Implementation Organizing Team Report and Recommendations

For the 232nd annual Diocesan Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
November 4, 2017

An Overview of our Mission Strategy *(Adopted November 5, 2016)*

We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, are living members of the body of Jesus Christ. As Jesus gathered his disciples, took bread and blessed it, and then offered his body for us in order to bring reconciliation, forgiveness and healing, so may we offer ourselves in Christ's name.

Embracing Brave Change

*Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.
Let all that you do be done in love. (I Corinthians 16:13-14)*

God is calling to us to look ahead and to embrace brave change. As fewer people turn to the church as a source of solace and strength, more than ever we yearn to know and be known by God and one another. In a world plagued by grievous conflict, injustice and poverty, God gives us the courage to be agents of reconciliation, justice and abundance. There will be difficult choices for us as followers of Jesus. It is only through ongoing, prayerful discernment together that we will find a path to a faithful future.

Reimagining our Congregations

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:19)

With God's help, we can support our congregations as they reimagine the shape of discipleship in 21st-century Massachusetts. We believe in the power of Christian community to transform lives through God's grace, a promise that sustains us even as we adapt to meet the needs of a changing world. We will deepen our relationship with God and increase our capacity to speak of our faith. Rooted in a living tradition, we will joyfully and courageously invite all people to worship our Creator, to share the reconciling love of Christ and to participate in the work of the Holy Spirit.

Building our Relationships

From Christ the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped... promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:16)

With God's help, we will address painful divisions within our diocese, that we might serve the world worthily as one body in Christ. Blessed by the manifold charisms of all of our diverse members and congregations, we will strengthen the bonding ligaments between individuals, congregations and diocesan bodies. Honoring the contributions of every generation and working across differences to build each other up in love, we will share our varied gifts with one another and our world.

Engaging our World

Just as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me. (Matthew 25:40)

With God's help, we will continue to engage our world, working alongside our neighbors to share Christ's love through word and action. We will act as agents of God's compassion to those in need. We will work to reconcile ourselves and all people to one another, and all of creation to God, seeking justice and committing ourselves to the stewardship of our planet.

An Overview of the Work of the Implementation Organizing Team

Last year, Convention approved our Mission Strategy, an ambitious multi-year vision that addresses how we, the people of the Diocese of Massachusetts, can embrace brave change as we reimagine our congregations, build our relationships, and engage our world. In the year since, we have begun to prepare the way.

The “Phase IV Team” has sought to turn the aspirations of the Mission Strategy into action: asking the question, what can be implemented now and what needs organizing in the near future. This document outlines our work in 2017 and provides recommendations for carrying that work forward into 2018 and beyond.

It quickly became clear that the most critical challenge of our Mission Strategy is the hard work of cultural change: how to strengthen our relationships across our Diocese, so that together, we may do more in mission than we could ever do alone. The heart of our work is providing individuals and congregations with opportunities to share their gifts, to learn from one another, and to work together. Given this responsibility, our focus has been in three areas:



Recommended Action 1:

Launch an Indaba-style process to enable relationship building across congregations.

In 2018-19, we will pair participating worshipping communities together; within these pairs, small groups will gather and share their perspectives with one another several times over the course of the year. Our team has elected to use the term “Indaba” for the process we will design to help build these important relationships. While unfamiliar to some, the term has been used widely across the Anglican Communion to describe the intentional conversations that have deepened understandings in a variety of contexts; it honors the southern African culture from which it arises.

Already, our team has studied the Indaba experience in other regions and contacted expert consultants to help us design our program. We have identified a February 2018 date for an introductory conference. Our team will reach out to Deanery co-conveners to invite a representative from each Deanery to take part in the retreat, in order to ensure a wide range of voices and perspectives. Participants at the retreat will design the process, and make recommendations for involving larger numbers of people from all around our diocese to participate.



Recommended Action 2:

Implement a tool to share the stories of our parish life and ministry resources more richly —and “beyond the numbers.”

From the season of listening, the Phase IV team heard a deep need for us to better describe our communities’ gifts and resources for ministry, in order to strengthen our capacity to directly connect people and congregations in collaborative mission. We recommend implementing the Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD) asset-mapping tool, already in use in many dioceses across the country. We will call our own, diocesan version “Mission Match.” And, we recommend an intentional, phased roll-out of this tool across our own diocese. We will support congregations during an introduction to the tool and share stories of the ways in which congregations across The Episcopal Church have benefitted greatly from it use.

So far, we have approached the leadership of the Cape and Islands Deanery and begun the roll-out with several parishes there. In 2018, we hope to complete all parish profiles in the Cape and Islands deanery, so that our parishes there can begin to lead us in learning how this resource helps us collaborate with one another more effectively. Then, we will intentionally engage one of our other deaneries, as well. In 2019, we hope to expand to many congregations throughout our diocese.



Recommended Action 3: Continue discernment towards an organizational structure that will more effectively balance centralized and regional support to parishes and other worshipping communities.

The Phase IV team believes that worshipping communities in our diocese need to create deeper connections with one another and engage in healthy cultural change, in order to adapt and thrive. Our past year's research leads us to believe that a more regionalized model of organizational support may be more helpful than the current one in achieving these goals. In addition to engaging in conversations across our diocese and with other dioceses, we had multiple opportunities to work with our own bishops.

We believe that the new diocesan staff structure, which includes three Regional Canons deployed in the northern/western, central, and southern portions of our diocese, advances this process of engendering further energy, support, resources and relationship to regions. We recommend continued engagement across our diocese and the larger church, to help assess what work best resides in diocesan offices, in parishes, and/or in some structural location in between.

Recommended Mission Strategy Committee Charter for 2018

In addition to recommending that our diocese carry forward, the three initiatives outlined above, our team also recommends an ongoing committee structure, in order to continue our work into the next phases:

The Mission Strategy Implementation Organizing Team believes that the ongoing work of Mission Strategy requires a dedicated Committee of Diocesan Council, ensuring that the momentum of this work continues and that Mission Strategy remains a core focus in our diocese.

Therefore, the team recommends the formation of a Mission Strategy Committee, reporting to the Diocesan Council, that owns the following responsibilities:

1. Overseeing the working teams tasked with organizing the implementation of specific aspects of Mission Strategy, including:
 - A. Overseeing the launch of the Indaba-style relationship-building process as outlined in Recommended Action 1
 - B. Leading the phased roll-out of the ERD mapping tool in our Diocese as outlined in Recommended Action 2
 - C. Continuing the work of discerning a more regionalized structure for the diocese as outlined in Recommended Action 3
 - D. Advancing the following two areas of Mission Strategy, forming additional working teams, or coordinating the efforts of existing groups:
 - a. Coordinating and highlighting the ongoing work towards a large-scale conversation on race.
 - b. Creating a plan to build upon and upgrade our resources for supporting Christian formation, ministries for youth and all generations.
2. Managing the timeline and arc of the work of these teams, recommending when the work of a team is finished, and when new working teams should be launched to address new areas of Mission Strategy.
3. Communicating the progress of Mission Strategy implementation to Diocesan Council and, more broadly, to our whole diocese.

Our team has sent our recommendations to Diocesan Council for populating and maintaining this Committee. We look with hope and excitement to join with God, you, and our whole diocese as we continue in our mission of embracing brave change: to reimagine our congregations, build our relationships, and engage our world.

Some helpful links

1. The overview of our whole diocesan Mission Strategy process:
www.diomass.org/our-mission/mission-strategy-process
2. Continuing Indaba:
www.continuingindaba.org
3. The Asset Map of Episcopal Relief and Development:
www.episcopalassetmap.org
4. The Asset Map of the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee:
www.transformwtn.org