

# Proposed Mission Strategy for the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

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*September 19, 2016*

## Our Vision

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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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

*Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine:  
Glory to God from generation to generation in the church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever.  
(Ephesians 3:20-21)*

## An Invitation

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This Mission Strategy is an invitation to all of our members and congregations to join in a conversation about our shared goals as Christians and Episcopalians in Eastern Massachusetts. Every community is different, and every congregation can adapt these strategies to match their particular gifts and needs. Every one of us has a part to take in living out our goals of transformation, relationship, justice, and reconciliation.

The nine goals of this Mission Strategy are intended both to reflect the ideas that the people of our diocese expressed in the listening process and to respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit. It also includes initial action steps, which represent starting places for our work together. The Mission Strategy Drafting Team recognizes that much work remains to create specific plans and clear measures of success. The team hopes that all members of our diocese—lay members, deacons, priests, and bishops—will continue to discern our shared mission through prayer, conversation, and experimentation in the days and years to come.

As specified in Canon 10, the Mission Strategy is designed to guide the use of our shared resources: the funds in our diocesan budget and the gifts and time of our diocesan staff. Changing an organization as large as our diocese will require wise and creative planning, as well as careful follow-through. To oversee this effort, the Bishops and Diocesan Council will name a seventeen-person Implementation Organizing Team in the fall of 2016.

The Implementation Organizing Team will create further opportunities for input and leadership as this process unfolds. The high level of engagement, honesty, and insight that has characterized the Mission Strategy listening and drafting processes gives us confidence that, with God's help, we can become a more transparent, connected, effective, and innovative community in Christ.

# Goals and Initial Actions

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As the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, we will embrace brave change by **reimagining our congregations** to better respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our time and place; **building our relationships** to unite as one body in Christ; and **engaging our world** to reconcile ourselves and all people to one another, and all of Creation to God.

## PREPARING THE WAY

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

*For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? (Luke 14:28)*

In order to be good stewards of the resources God has given us, we must begin by taking stock of our spiritual gifts, our partnerships, our programs and strategic ministries, and our budget, including the structure for parish assessments. Our commitment to this Mission Strategy will require changes in funding and in the responsibilities of diocesan staff that we will carry out both with compassion and appreciation for what has been done in the past and with a clear vision of the future we seek. We will also review the ways our governing bodies invite participation in leadership, make decisions, and communicate their work, so that all our members have opportunities to engage in decisions about the future of our diocese. Each team, committee, or governing body will work to ensure that its purpose and ways of working align with the goals of our diocese.

### **We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, commit to:**

- a) Establishing a clear structure and transparent process for regularly evaluating all programs and ministries that receive diocesan funding based on their contribution to the spiritual, relational, and practical goals of our diocesan Mission Strategy.
- b) Assessing the ways our current use of resources and governance structures support or impede the goals of our Mission Strategy, and making appropriate changes.

## REIMAGINING OUR CONGREGATIONS

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

*No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:15-16)*

Jesus calls us to proclaim the coming reign of God's love. We come together in Christian communities to experience that love more fully, healing our souls and transforming our lives. When we take the risk to tell our own faith stories and listen well to others, we renew our commitment to Christ, we invite people into a deeper relationship with God, and our congregations thrive. We are keenly aware that children, youth, and young adults have their own faith stories to share, and we strive to include their voices in this important work.

### **We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, commit to:**

- 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.
- b) Supporting all members of our diocese in cultivating the skills of evangelism, so that we can all learn to share more readily how God is working in our lives.

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

*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)*

We envision our diocese engaged in honest conversation about the challenges we face. The health of any one congregation matters to all of us as members together of one body in Christ. Each congregation gathers people with unique spiritual gifts and a distinctive call to live out their baptismal ministry in the church, in their homes and workplaces, and in service to their wider community. Many of our congregations struggle to hold on to the joy of that calling when faced with the challenges of sustaining participation, maintaining aging buildings, funding clergy and staff salaries, and supporting programs. We hope to see our congregations, whether they feel healthy or challenged, working openly to discern their roles as Christian communities in a changing world.

**We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, commit to:**

- a) Creating a public, transparent, representative body of our diocese to support all congregations through visioning and discernment.
- b) Designating a funding stream to assist congregations to engage brave change through creative models of leadership development, discipleship, and Christian community.
- c) Expanding opportunities for lay and clergy leaders to build connections with one another and to develop skills in spiritual formation, pastoral care, sound governance, financial stewardship, and building use, with attention to the needs of the nearly half of our congregations that employ part-time clergy.

## **BUILDING OUR RELATIONSHIPS**

### **4. Initiate new relationships across our diocese.**

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.  
(Isaiah 43:1b)*

God promises that each of us is known by name. The heart of church is the experience of knowing and being known, deepening our relationships with God and one another. As Christians we are called to share this gift, constantly expanding the circle of those we claim as our neighbors and our friends.

#### **We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, commit to:**

- a) Developing opportunities for teams from congregations to visit other congregations, sharing worship and learning about one another.
- b) Creating time and space for building relationships at all diocesan-wide events.

### **5. Support stronger collaborations among congregations.**

*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)*

Our diocese is already enriched by a variety of collaborations: mission hubs; urban/suburban partnerships; gatherings of congregations with similar interests, such as leadership in small churches or engagement in global mission; and other shared ministries. We have seen the power and joy that come from working together, trusting not in our own self-reliance but in the God who calls us to be one body of Christ.

#### **We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, commit to:**

- a) Initiating new partnerships and strengthening existing collaborations with other Episcopal congregations, ecumenical and interfaith partners, and community organizations.
- b) Connecting and equipping networks of lay people, clergy, and diocesan staff members who share a passion for particular forms of service and public advocacy (such as feeding the hungry, supporting veterans, caring for elders, ending sex trafficking, eradicating gun violence, or responding to addiction and substance abuse).

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

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:18-20)*

In order to carry out our mission as a diocese, we must address any inequities of resources or access that can divide us. In particular, we hope to address the disconnection felt by many of our members who live outside Boston and its suburbs, so that we can work in grateful harmony as one diocese.

**We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, commit to:**

- a) Creating opportunities for diocesan staff members to be present in congregations and ministries around our diocese and to gather with lay leaders and clergy in order to share and learn best practices, develop closer partnerships, and know all of our communities.
- b) Inviting members from all regions of our diocese to engage in leadership roles in all diocesan project teams and governing bodies.
- c) Ensuring that meetings and training opportunities are accessible to members from all regions of our diocese.



**7. Fulfill the Gospel command to love one another, particularly across difference.**  
*Let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.*  
*(Ephesians 4:25)*

Christ calls us to heal a hurting world. We begin this work by reaching across the lines that divide us, welcoming the stranger and allowing ourselves to be welcomed by those we do not know. In these honest and loving encounters, we create greater justice and freedom for all. We are committed to responding as a diocese to the oppression that tears at the fabric of our nation and our world. We hope to honor the experiences of all those whose gifts have not been fully acknowledged and appreciated in the church and in the world, such as women; lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender people; people of color; and people with disabilities. We need a deeper and more inclusive conversation about racism and other forms of oppression, and we need to move beyond conversation to visible action to help create the beloved community of Christ.

**We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, commit to:**

- a) Working to respond to Jesus' call to fully include all persons in the life of the church.
- b) Entering into a large-scale, authentic, and committed conversation about racism and other forms of oppression with the support of effective facilitators and training programs, in order to move us further into the essential work of racial justice and reconciliation.
- c) Investing in ministries with communities of color and immigrant communities, drawing upon their unique strengths and supporting their health.

## ENGAGING OUR WORLD

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

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39)*

With a basis in mutual trust, our ministries can transform everyone who takes part in them. We recognize that all people come to God with brokenness and need, and all people are called to use their God-given talents to serve the world. Our mission efforts must always begin with strong relationships that break down divisions. Following the example of our deacons, we will work to bring the world to the church and the church to the world.

#### **We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, commit to:**

- a) Working together to help all of our congregations to engage more deeply with their neighbors and local communities.
- b) Further strengthening our relationships with neighbors around the world through partnerships in global mission.

### **9. Strengthen our relationship with our Earth and our commitment to caring for Creation.**

*Ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. ...In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being. (Job 12:7-8,10)*

God created all things and called humanity to live in harmony with them. We are called to join God in repairing a broken covenant with our Earth, creating a more sustainable life for ourselves, for our future generations, and for all life.

#### **We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, commit to:**

- a) Continuing to foster a meaningful long-term conversation about caring for Creation in order to inspire all our members and congregations to be more faithful stewards of our physical world, reduce carbon emissions, respond to the effects of climate change, and advocate for sound climate policy.
- b) Designating a funding stream to support congregations that initiate or continue significant efforts in their local contexts to restore Creation and respond to the moral crisis of climate change.

## **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.