



The Forward

December 2009

Letter from the Bishop

Mission Strategy. Over the many seasons of our nearly 100 years of diocesan history, we have worked to be clear about a mission strategy. Circumstances have called for different strategies over these years. In this season of our life, we are developing a comprehensive mission strategy to address the Gospel in our particular context. I really am excited and hopeful about the possibilities for mission here, and, at the same time, I am aware of our particular challenges.

You might be asking, 'What does this mean for me and for my congregation?' In addition to a mission statement that we developed and refined based on input from clergy and lay leaders from all over the diocese, we were able to set some goals and priorities for the upcoming years.

First, we will invest in congregational leadership—both lay and ordained. This means assistance with clergy support with the goal of becoming self sustaining, professional lay leadership and curacies for congregations in a size transition, congregational redevelopment, and general leadership development.

Second, we will work to create a culture of evangelism in the various ways in which we are gifted to be evangelists. Evangelism looks different in our various contexts, but the fruit is similar—new disciples. We are not always good at being disciples who make disciples who make disciples, but we

can learn how. Expect to have opportunities to discern your spiritual gifts and deepen your discipleship. The Episcopal Church has so much to offer those seeking a transformational relationship with Christ. We can learn to bring others—to be good evangelists.



Finally, we will begin to think strategically about planting new churches. Our most recent successful church plant was St. Stephen's, Fairview in the 1960s. There are new places where God might be calling us to serve.

The development of a mission strategy and a planning process will allow us to make the best decisions we can about our future mission. As you know, our resources are limited, and we have a responsibility to exercise good stewardship.

Our decisions will continue to be based on our common discernment in light of our mission strategy.

I invite you to engage in our mission. This mission strategy calls for active engagement. Mission cannot be 'done for us.' Together, though, we can partner for mission and growth. How this affects you and your congregation depends entirely on your willingness to engage in this mission as you are particularly gifted.

God is calling us to grow and thrive in the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania.

Blessings,

+ Sean

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Mission Statement of the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania:

One Church of miraculous expectation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ equipping transformational leaders for transformational ministry through our missionary outposts—our congregations

Diocesan Mission Strategy adapted from a presentation by the Rev. Adam Trambley

After spending a couple of years talking and listening to people around the diocese, Bishop Sean has put together a mission strategy which outlines the next steps forward in allowing transformational ministries to thrive in our diocese by developing transformational leaders in the outposts our diocese has to do mission, which are our local congregations. The diocese's broad mission strategy includes three components: investing in leadership, planting new congregations, and creating a culture of evangelism.

The first component of the mission strategy is investing in clergy and lay professional leaders. Bringing the right leaders into congregations is one of the best ways to help transformational ministry develop. Good leaders can help develop a congregation's ministry and bad leaders can keep a congregation stuck. Investing in leaders means looking at congregations at crucial points in their lives and helping them receive the leadership they need to stop a decline, to intentionally increase membership to a sustainable level, or to take advantage of some other opportunity that has strategic potential for our one diocese, but which an individual congregation wouldn't be able to achieve on its own. One example is a congregation with a number of strengths that has lost enough members to no longer be able to afford a full-time priest. A little bit of diocesan money to complete a package for a more entrepreneurial priest with skills and energy around church growth might allow that congregation to grow and become self-sufficient again, whereas doing nothing is a sure recipe for significant long-term decline. More interesting, though, might be situations where the right lay professional, consultant or funded project can allow a congregation to develop new programs that make a difference in their lives and the lives of those they serve in important ways.

The second component of the strategy involves planting new congregations. This region has areas that are doing well but do not have an Episcopal church. More importantly, all the church growth literature says that the best way to attract new people is in a new church plant. New churches also help revitalize existing churches on a number of levels, not the least of which is by providing new ideas and imagination to an existing institution. The bishop has designated this as the second component of our strategy because planting a new church can take close to five years of prayer, planning and preparation.

The third component is to create a culture of evangelism. What the creation of this culture means practically is still being worked out, but the important idea is that we are going to move from being a church that is primarily concerned with ourselves to one that is actively looking outwards for how we can spread the gospel and meet the needs of those outside our doors. This point was heard clearly in the focus groups we held two years ago when we were trying to create a mission strategy. The strongest focus we heard was outreach and evangelism, and we will be finding practical ways of implementing those through this component.



Our mission strategy and, hopefully, all our diocesan life will be characterized by four principles. Any particular plan or program not incorporating these four pieces is likely to fail. The first is excellence. Our entire diocese needs to carry out our ministries at the highest level of quality. We can't expect people to join us in ministry if the way we do things is more mediocre than when they go to work, or to school, or to the movies. A brilliant idea done in a shoddy way is unlikely to transform anyone's life. The second principle is accountability. We won't have consistent excellence if we aren't required to check in with each other on occasion and give a report of our results. All of our work affects one

another, so we are responsible to each other for what we do. Third, we need stewardship and financial responsibility. We have an abundance of resources – millions of dollars. We are not poor, but we need to use all of our resources, diocesan and parochial, wisely in ways that shepherd them for the long term. Finally, we want sustainability, which means that at the end of a season of work, we should be able to harvest more than we have planted. Sustainability can apply to all of our resources of time, energy, and money. If a program is draining resources in ways that don't develop more leaders, more mature Christians, more participation, more income or more of something that we need, than we might be called to do something else where we are able to be more fruitful. We need to be planting our seeds in enough good soil to reap the needed harvest.

So, this is the strategy, which is good. The important question, of course, is, "How can we fund it?" First, a number of cuts were already made in the diocesan office at the beginning of this episcopate to have as many funds freed up for mission as possible. Still, especially given the financial crisis, money is tight and tradeoffs are necessary.

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Diocesan Mission Strategy cont.

The primary place where funding can be found to further our mission strategy is in the St. Barnabus and Velma Moore funds. Currently, these funds provide outreach grants to congregations, and have done so for a number of years. We should note, however, that when the outreach grants began, they were meant to be seed money for up to three years that would help a congregation develop a program to make a difference in the lives of those in their community. During those three funded years, the assumption was that the program would have transformed the lives of those participating, both in the parish and in the community, and that financial and other resources could be found on a local level and the program would become sustainable. Given the original guidelines, programs that were found not to be sustainable would have ended after three years. Two things didn't happen. First, not enough congregations developed programs, so the funds had plenty of money to keep giving grants. Second, the way the funds were used were never evaluated to see if they were accomplishing their initial intent. The result was that many good programs were supported, with no real expectation of sustainability or even of transformational ministry. Certainly people were helped and good, loving work has been done, but

nobody has been challenged to support their good work themselves if they felt it was an essential ministry of their congregation.

For these reasons, the Diocesan Council has re-designated the St. Barnabus and Velma Moore funds, from a source of outreach grants to a fund that will support our mission strategy, including investing in clergy and planting new congregations. The existing grants will be phased out over the next year, and another, smaller diocesan fund will be made available for some outreach needs. In this way, some outreach programming can still be supported, but with an eye towards emergency needs and sustainable programs.

While difficult decisions have been made and will continue to have to be made, the creation of the mission strategy is an important step forward for our diocese. The practical application of this mission strategy has already begun, as can be read about in the article "Implementing the Mission Strategy" found at the bottom of this page.

Implementing the Mission Strategy

After reading about the new mission strategy, you may be wondering how it will be implemented and what it will look like in action. Two congregations of the diocese have already begun to find out. St. Mark's and Church of the Holy Spirit, both in Erie, have been slated for redevelopment under the new strategy.

A part of the new strategy is that there will be a difference in the types of resources given to parishes and to missions from the diocese. It is important going forward for everyone to understand that congregations that are missions are not a lower form of church than those that are parishes; however, parishes need one type of resource and missions another. After taking an honest look at what type of resources they would need to go forward, both St. Mark's and Holy Spirit undertook the courageous action to petition the convention to become missions under the new canons and were granted that status.

The first component of the mission strategy is leadership, and both congregations will be taking on tasks that addresses that. Holy Spirit, under the leadership of the Rev. Richard Elberfeld and with the assistance of the Diocesan Church Center, will be taking time to explore who they are as a congregation. By better understanding who they are, what gifts they have, and what type of ministry they are called to, the people of Holy Spirit will have a clearer idea of what type of leadership, both clergy and lay, that they will need to move forward.

St. Mark's will begin their work in the new year under the leadership of the Rev. Don Baxter, who will serve as an interim for eighteen months. The congregation will also be joined by a part time lay professional, Caryn Franz, who will be serving as a program coordinator. The clergy and lay leadership of St. Mark's will begin important work in visioning for their future, as well as other areas such as evangelism in the community around them, stewardship, and other interim tasks. The hope is that, after working with Fr. Baxter for the interim period and making important steps during that time, St. Mark's would be assisted by the diocese to call a full time vicar to help them grow further and to reach the goal of being self-sustaining for the long haul.

Watch in the *Forward* for updates on these churches and on others as the diocese moves forward with its new mission strategy.

Recommended Reading

The following books are suggested reading to help you further explore the ideas behind the mission strategy and how your congregations may live that strategy out.

Reclaiming the Great Commission



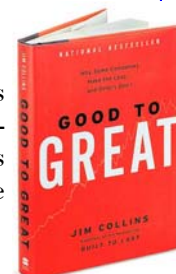
Bishop Claude E. Payne
Houston, Texas

***Reclaiming the Great Commission* by the Rt. Rev. Claude Payne**

Bishop Payne, the former bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, wrote *Reclaiming the Great Commission* to set forth a model of “restoring missionary power to twenty-first century denominations and congregations”. The model was implemented by the Diocese of Texas with tremendous success. The book and the model helps denominational dioceses and congregations to capitalize on the strengths that they have., rather than trying to turn them into something that they’re not.

***Good to Great* by Jim Collins**

Good to Great is a study of companies that went from having anywhere from okay to mediocre results and leapt to greatness for a sustained period of time. It compares those companies with similar companies that did not make the same leap. The principles they found that the “good to great” companies shared are explored in the book. Though the study was on companies in the for profit world, the same principles can be applied with success in the non-profit world.



Thank You for Donations to Transient Ministry by Deacon John Juchter



A total of 151 pieces of toiletries, plus one gross of toothbrushes and one gross of combs, were collected at the 99th Diocesan Convention and they have been shipped to Jack's Place Transient Ministry at the base where USAF Chaplain Mark Juchter is located. My thanks to all for collecting these items and supporting this ministry in Southwest Asia.

Diocesan Church Center Closed for Holidays

The Diocesan Church Center will be closed from December 24 until January 3rd. The office will re-open on January 4th.

Bishop Sean's Visitation Schedule December 2009

December 6th - Emmanuel, Emporium

December 13th - Epiphany, Grove City

December 20th - Grace, Lake City



Epiphany, Grove City

If you have news, story ideas, or pictures that you would like to share with the diocese, please contact Vanessa at the Diocesan Church Center at 814-456-4203 or at vbutler@dionwpa.org.