Reframing Mission: An Action-Research Intervention into a Mainline Judicatory

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REFRAMING MISSION:
AN ACTION-RESEARCH INTERVENTION
INTO A MAINLINE JUDICATORY

by

DWIGHT J. ZSCHEILE

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ABSTRACT

Reframing Mission:  
An Action-Research Intervention into a Mainline Judicatory

by

Dwight J. Zscheile

A system-wide, action-research intervention into a mainline church judicatory sought to empower its members to respond to the adaptive challenges facing them through reframing their understanding of mission in light of their changing context and theological tradition, and through actively discerning the leading of the Holy Spirit. Recognizing that the problems facing mainline denominational systems in 21st century America require attention to foundational questions of identity and purpose in a post-Christendom era, this study utilized a multi-layered, participatory process that encouraged grass-roots transformation.

Over the course of one year, approximately 2,000 members of a diocese of the Episcopal Church participated in a mission strategy process that included baseline and follow-up surveys, congregational visits, the development of a theological position paper on mission, and the creation and formal endorsement of new identity and purpose statements, mission and ministry priorities, and an organizational redesign. The renewed missional identity that emerged in the process focused on the theme of communion, integrating the sending emphasis characteristic of the western conception of the Trinity and missional ecclesiology, with the social emphasis of the eastern view of the Trinity and koinonia ecclesiology. A vision for the organizational redesign of the judicatory utilizing network theory was also developed.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to express my gratitude to my co-learners and co-laborers in this project, especially the members of the Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy Steering Committee. Over many hours of conversation, prayer, and toil, we experienced together the fellowship, or communion, that is the Spirit’s work in our midst.

I am grateful to the bishop of this diocese for taking the risk of supporting a process that surfaced so many uncomfortable realities and reached into the very foundations to call for change.

I give thanks for the leadership, encouragement, and wisdom of my dissertation committee members, Dr. Patrick Keifert and Dr. Gary Simpson, for consistently challenging me to go deeper in my theological analysis and guiding me toward so many key resources.

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Finally, to my wife Blair and my son Luke, who patiently released me to do this work and supportively accompanied me along the way, I am more than grateful. Their love for the church and its mission has been an inspiration.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT..............................................................................................................i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.........................................................................................ii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS......................................................................................v
LIST OF TABLES....................................................................................................vii

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................1
   A New Apostolic Era..........................................................................................1
   Research Question ............................................................................................3
   American Mainline Protestantism and Its Mission at the Start of the 21st Century 4
   The Episcopal Story ..........................................................................................11
   Ecumenical Missiological Developments in the Later 20th Century ............21
   The Renewal of Trinitarian Ecclesiology ......................................................25
   Foundations for a New Approach .....................................................................37

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF SYSTEM ..............38
   Geography .......................................................................................................38
   History ............................................................................................................40
   Previous Planning Efforts ................................................................................51

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ......................................................................66
   The Need for a New Approach ......................................................................66
   Research Design ..............................................................................................77
   Ethical Considerations ....................................................................................89
   Conclusion .........................................................................................................90

4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH, PART I ................................................91
   A Time of Transition and Preparation: Summer 2006 ..............................91
   Baseline Assessment .......................................................................................95
   The 2006 Diocesan Convention: Public Launch of the Process ............128

5. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH, PART II .............................................131
   The Work of the Congregational Discernment Action Teams ...............131
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

2.1 Founding Dates of Currently Active Congregations in the Judicatory .............45
2.2 Founding Dates of Currently Active Congregations by Urban Growth Period.....46
2.3 Baptized Members, 1940-2004 .........................................................48
2.4 National Episcopal Church Membership, 1930-2004 .................................49
2.5 Number of Baptisms in the Judicatory, 1940-2004 .................................50
2.6 Number of Confirmations in the Judicatory, 1940-2004 ..............................50
3.1 Process Design and Timeline ............................................................82
3.2 Data Triangulation to Define an Emerging Identity and Purpose .................83
4.1 Roxburgh and Romanuk’s Leadership Zones ........................................93
4.2 Ministry Talents and Spiritual Gifts .....................................................110
4.3 Perceived Confidence to Proclaim the Good News ................................111
4.4 Perceived Current and Ideal Relationship between Congregations and Diocese...113
4.5 Hopefulness about the Future of the Episcopal Church in [This State] ........117
7.1 Mean of Agreement for Follow-Up Survey Question 1 .......................199
7.2 Mean of Agreement for Follow-Up Survey Question 2 .......................200
7.3 Mean of Agreement for Follow-Up Survey Question 3 .......................201
7.4 Resonance of Identity, Purpose, and Mission and Ministry Priorities ..........203
7.5 Mean of Agreement for Follow-Up Survey Question 9 .......................204
7.6 Vitality Comparison for the Diocese, 2006 and 2007 .............................205
7.7 Vitality Comparison for Respondents’ Congregations, 2006 and 2007 ..........206
7.8 Vitality Comparison for the Denomination, 2006 and 2007 .....................207
7.9 Hopefulness Comparison for the Diocese, 2006 and 2007 .......................208
7.10 Potential Obstacles to the Implementation of the Plan .......................210
# LIST OF TABLES

4.1 Individual Clergy Responses to What Would Be Lost ........................................97
4.2 Clergy “This I Believe” Themes ........................................................................99
4.3 Frequency of Mission Activities in Past Year ..................................................109
4.4 Importance of Mission Goals ...........................................................................112
4.5 Perceived Vitality, 2006 ..................................................................................114
4.6 Perceived Mission Challenges ........................................................................115
4.7 Sources of Hope about the Future of the Episcopal Church in [This State] .......117
4.8 What Would Be Lost If the Episcopal Church in [This State] Disappeared? ......118
4.9 Free-Answer Comments about the Greatest Challenge and Future Mission of the Episcopal Church in [This State] .................................................................119
7.1 Follow-Up Survey Open-Ended Comments on What Gives Hope for Diocese ....208
7.2 Potential Obstacles to Successful Implementation Write-In Comments ..........210
7.3 What Made the BCMS Process As Successful As It Was? ...............................211
7.4 How Could the BCMS Process Have Been Improved? .................................212
7.5 Final Open-Ended Comment Themes ..............................................................213
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The church judicatory system was stuck. Long-simmering tensions between the congregations and the central leadership had boiled over into open revolt. A succession of attempts to remedy forty years of decline had only made the crisis worse, reducing expectations and hopes. Now the bishop’s good-faith efforts to move forward in mission were being met with stiff resistance by key constituencies operating out of their own vision and commitments. Mistrust was widespread, mutual, and deep. The church’s horizon of hope was shrinking. Meanwhile, the world around them was continuing to undergo dramatic cultural and demographic change. Where was God in all this? Was there any reason to believe this system was important to God’s future? What was its value to God’s mission in this time and place?

A New Apostolic Era

These symptoms of a judicatory system in crisis are not uncommon within the mainline denominations in the United States today. The 21st century represents a new era for these churches. Since the 1960s, mainline denominations have lost members while their position and influence within American culture have receded. This is a time of upheaval and change as churches struggle with questions of identity and purpose in a
post-Christendom\textsuperscript{1} world: *Who is God calling us to be in this new, unsettling time? What does God want us to do?* The erosion of the church’s Christendom role stirs anxiety and confusion, leading some to try desperately to recover it, while others recognize the futility of doing so and instead ask deeper theological questions about the nature and purpose of the church and its mission. Past paradigms of mission have in many places lost their energy and momentum, and the outlines of new paradigms are just emerging.\textsuperscript{2}

What does the church’s mission have to do with God and God’s mission? How can we know? These are not easy questions to answer.

One of the principal challenges facing mainline church leaders today is coming to agreement through a conversation of discernment and discovery about how they can understand and participate in God’s mission in their changing contexts. While one way of being and doing church may have been appropriate for a previous era, when the church’s context changes significantly, the church must discern afresh what God is calling it to be and do. There is a temptation for many leaders to resort to quick-fix strategies. But deep spiritual, theological, and organizational work is required in order to address the foundational issues and move forward into God’s future. This dissertation is a system study of one judicatory’s pilgrimage into that work and subsequent movement from a place of crisis and despair to greater clarity, unity, and hope.

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\textsuperscript{1} Even though religion was officially disestablished in the United States following the American Revolution, the Christian church assumed a functional centrality and dominance within American culture that has steadily eroded since the middle of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. See Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 47-76.

Research Question

How can a mainline judicatory in systemic decline reframe its understanding of mission for a new apostolic era, taking seriously its changed context, innovating from within and beyond its theological heritage, and discerning God’s leading in its midst? In order to answer this question, this study sought collaboratively: 1) to discover the effect of a particular action-research process upon a judicatory system; 2) to unearth and define perspectives that yield new insights into the role of mainline churches in God’s mission in 21st century America; and 3) to effect change within a system in crisis that liberates and empowers its members for a more vital and fruitful future.

This system-wide, action-research intervention represented an opportunity to discover how a mainline church system’s own members can be equipped to diagnose their situation, develop faithful solutions, and begin to live into God’s preferred future through a multi-layered process grounded in grass-roots participation and discernment. The content developed along the way yields, as well, an emerging missiological vision of potential benefit to other church systems.

The particular system being studied, a diocese of the Episcopal Church, reflects the hallmark signs of a mainline judicatory in crisis. As will be described in detail below, this diocese has struggled for decades—with largely disappointing results—to adapt to its changing context, leaving a legacy of disappointment, mistrust, division, and fear. The Episcopal Church as a whole has not only shrunk drastically in relative membership and influence within American religious life over the past forty years\(^3\)—it is also currently

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\(^3\) From 1940 to 2000, the Episcopal Church’s percentage of adherents per 1,000 church members in the United States decreased 51%. See Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 246.
torn by internal conflict. Against the backdrop of a crisis of Anglican identity, the question of faithfully and fruitfully reframing Episcopal mission in the United States for the 21st century is an urgent one.

Today’s Northern American church context may be termed “a new apostolic era.” It is new because the cultural changes underway touch centuries-old assumptions about the church’s relationship to society, calling for fundamental reappraisals. It is apostolic because the church finds itself in a position relative to the surrounding culture that more closely resembles the era of the first-century apostles than it does the settled patterns of Christendom out of which the mainline churches emerged. It is an era because the significant paradigm shifts taking place mark a new period of uncertainty and discontinuous change—a major reorientation, not just a temporary disruption. A new apostolic era is a frightening and exciting time in which to live. It holds great loss and great uncertainty, but also great promise for a renewed faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Triune God.

American Mainline Protestantism and Its Mission at the Start of the 21st Century

From their founding during the colonial era to the 1960s, the mainline churches in America rested upon deeply Christendom assumptions. They based their identity largely upon an establishmentarian mission of sanctifying the social order, even after they were formally disestablished following the American Revolution. Over the past fifty years, this role of the mainline churches has increasingly eroded amidst declining membership and influence, the collapse of functional Christendom, and the rise of postmodernism. Within

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4 The term “Northern American” is increasingly being used to describe the United States and Canada, versus “North American,” which includes Mexico.
this larger mainline American story, Anglicanism is the tradition perhaps most deeply invested in an establishmentarian mission. Its story, present challenges, and uncertain future offer a provocative glimpse of both the difficulties and promise of re-contextualizing American mainline Protestantism in the 21st century.

For the New England pilgrims, America was founded as a better, purer Christendom than was possible in Europe. John Winthrop’s sermon on the Arabella as it crossed the Atlantic, in which he spoke of building a “city upon a hill” that would be truly reformed in its church and social life, captures the American Puritan ethos of exceptionalism. Other colonists came with less exalted motives, seeking commercial gain or simply a place that would tolerate greater religious and social pluralism than England or Europe. Yet the sense that America was a land of extraordinary promise, in which humanity would be free of the chains of history—and to some extent, of sin itself—became deeply embedded within the American consciousness. Ephraim Radner, in The Fate of Communion, calls this the “Children of Cain” motif—that somehow in the unspoiled wilderness of America, humanity could reinvent itself without original sin. The United States seal, novus ordo seclorum (a new order of the ages), reflects this optimism.

The colonial enterprise out of which the United States emerged reflects the logic not only of Christendom, but also of modernity. Mission was understood in the colonial period primarily as the geographical expansion of Christendom and western civilization.

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This was undertaken through the deliberate use of instrumental means—strategies and techniques. Being a good Christian was more or less equal with good citizenship. In America, the Enlightenment deeply shaped the founding documents of American independence and the principles of the United States government, which stress individual autonomy, self-determination, and Locke’s conception of the church as a voluntary society.7

As Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney chart in their 1987 book *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future*, there have been three phases of the disestablishment of the church in the United States.8 The first was the formal disestablishment of the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches in the years following Independence. The second was the shift from an overwhelmingly Protestant cultural imagination to the Protestant-Catholic-Jew society identified by Will Herberg in the 1950s.9 This reflects the massive surge in 19th century immigration from non-Protestant countries. The final phase is the one Roof and McKinney document in the second half of the 20th century toward greater religious pluralism following a more open immigration policy beginning in the 1960s, the rise of greater secularism, and increased adherence to non-western religions.

Milton Coalter, John Mulder, and Louis Weeks describe what they call the “thinning of the ecosystem for faith” in *Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream*  

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Protestantism. They cite the loss of Sabbath observance, family devotions, widespread Sunday school participation, and faith-based family camps, alongside the diminished visibility of parochial schools, hospitals, and social service organizations, as contributors to mainline decline. In The Restructuring of American Religion (1989), Robert Wuthnow traces the increasing complexity and polarization of the American religious landscape. One dimension of this is the rise and fall of the Baby Boomer generation, which lifted mainline church membership to its highs in the 1950s and early 1960s, then rapidly erased those gains as boomers left the church in droves, returning only in fewer numbers. Another facet is the emergence of non-traditional religious paths such as New Age religions and the hyper-individualism that Robert Bellah documents in Habits of the Heart in his famous case of “Sheilaism.” Americans began increasingly to choose their own spiritual journey with little regard to denominational loyalty and family history, switching in and out of churches depending on where they felt their needs could best be met, or abandoning organized religion altogether.

Wuthnow also explores the splintering of mainline Protestant and mainstream evangelical denominations into polarized liberal and conservative factions. Both operate out of deep functional Christendom and modernist assumptions. For the liberals, this has been expressed since the 1960s primarily in an activist approach to mission. With its


13 Wuthnow, Restructuring, 132ff.
roots in the postmillennialism and realized eschatology of the Social Gospel, this approach seeks to establish justice and peace in American social, political, and economic life through prophetic critique and reform of society. The public dimension of the gospel is stressed, often with little attention to the personal. The assumption is that the church is positioned to reform society and has the responsibility to do so.

On the conservative side, there are two basic responses. As Martin Marty argues in *Righteous Empire*, evangelical Protestantism shifted its sense of mission in the early 20th century from moral reform of society to a conversionist emphasis on getting people to heaven as it adopted an increasingly premillennial vision. Sidney Ahlstrom points out that the loss of Prohibition marked the end of evangelical Protestant momentum for large-scale moral crusades. However, the rise of the Religious Right in the 1970s and 80s reflects a renewed attempt to reclaim American political and social life from the new post-Christian pluralism. In this case, the gospel’s public dimension is either neutered (as in the conversionist approach) or the effort is focused on retrieving a lost sense of Christian identity for the nation.

During this period of transition from the 1960s to the present, American mainline churches have steadily lost members, both in absolute and relative terms. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark argue in *The Churching of America: 1776-2005* that this decline of what they term “religious market share” is correlated with accommodation to society and

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16 Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 904.
a loss of spiritual vigor and commitment.\textsuperscript{17} Their thesis is that as churches proceed through a process of secularization and adaptation to worldly norms, they lose their distinctiveness and appeal. They use as an example Methodism, which began as a grassroots renewal movement and then went upscale, both in its members’ social location and in the education requirements for its clergy. The higher the Methodist church rose in social location, the more it continued to decline in relative influence and adherence. Finke and Stark point to the resurgent Pentecostal and charismatic churches in America today as examples of thriving other-worldly churches on exponential growth curves.

In his essay, “The Christian Congregation as Religious Community,” Langdon Gilkey probes this theme with regard to the accommodationism of liberal Protestant denominations.\textsuperscript{18} He suggests that liberal churches “bet on” the modern vision of a society secure in its ability to control its destiny, comfortable in its material possessions, and secular in its outlook. This vision was only plausible, Gilkey observes, to a narrow middle- to upper-middle class milieu. Amidst the economic upheavals and uncertainties of today’s globalized economy, it is becoming increasingly untenable. What liberal Protestantism lacks, says Gilkey, is an experience of the transcendent, the holy, the sacred Other. Gilkey suggests that growing conservative churches grasp the uncertainty, ambiguity, and anxiety present in our world and speak more directly to it through spiritual experiences of redemption and transcendence.

In 1961, Episcopal priest Gibson Winter published \textit{The Suburban Captivity of the Churches}, a prophetic indictment of mainline denominations’ retreat from American

\textsuperscript{17} Finke and Stark, \textit{Churching}.

cities into isolated, insular suburban enclaves. Winter’s description of the phenomenon of the “organizational church” remains prescient today. As churches moved out of their urban neighborhood contexts and catered to an automobile-based constituency, their missional engagement with their contexts shifted. The new focus was on activities, programs, and committees within the church’s own life—not on engagement with the realities of the changing metropolis. Thus the mainline churches became voluntary service organizations that took people out of the world rather than equipping them to engage the world with the gospel. In an essay in The Church between Gospel and Culture George Hunsberger quotes Donald Posterski’s formulation that the American church has done the seemingly impossible—created Christians who are of, but not in, the world.

The best single word to encapsulate the predicament of mainline churches in America is perhaps accommodation. The establishmentarian assumptions carried over from European state churches, once transplanted into the fertile ground of America, with its optimism and commitment to the Enlightenment myth of progress, fed a sense of a divinely-sanctioned national mission. For much of their history, the mainline churches in America have found their identity primarily in supporting the ideals of American democracy and culture, rather than maintaining a critical engagement with that culture. George Hunsberger, Craig Van Gelder, and other authors develop this argument about the over-assimilated posture of the church in Northern America at length in The Church

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between Gospel and Culture. What is required, in their view, is a fresh missionary engagement with American culture.  

The Episcopal Story

Within this larger narrative of American mainline religion, Anglicanism evidences some of the worst accommodationist tendencies, as well as some of the most promising opportunities for postmodern mission. Anglicanism began in America in 1607 with the first service of Holy Communion led by Robert Hunt at the Jamestown Colony in Virginia. Virginia and the mid-Atlantic colonies, together with parts of New York, became the base for the established Church of England prior to the American Revolution. The Anglican church was also strong in South Carolina and had a significant presence in New England during the colonial period as an alternative to Congregationalism.

As an established church, the colonial Church of England carried over the same basic Christendom assumptions of geographic domain and overlapping civil and religious authority as pertained across the Atlantic. However, due to the absence of bishops in colonial America, the large geography of most parishes, the relative paucity of clergy, and the distance from the mother church, Anglicanism took on a unique form in America. Laity held much greater power in the governance and leadership of the church than in England, particularly through enhanced vestries, or congregational governing boards. By many accounts, during the colonial period, the spiritual vitality and discipleship of both

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21 Hunsberger and Van Gelder, *Church between Gospel and Culture*.

Anglican clergy and laity were uneven in America. Colonial Anglicanism tended toward a this-worldly, rationalist, Deistic faith that affirmed the present social order. It was controlled primarily by the large landowners and struggled to appeal to the middle and lower classes, many of whom were drawn to the burgeoning Methodist and Baptist churches in the 18th century.

Anglicanism in America faced a deep crisis at the Revolution, both in its embodiment of English rule and in its monarchical polity. Led by William White, a Philadelphia priest and chaplain to the Continental Congress, who published *The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered* (1782), Anglican leaders developed a synthesis of Anglican polity and American representative democracy that remains largely in place today. The new Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States would henceforth come to see its combination of reformed/evangelical faith, apostolic order, and democratic governance as a winning formula of national and international benefit.

In the wake of the Revolutionary War, the new Episcopal Church went through a period of decline that exposed one of its lingering weaknesses—the inconsistent depth of discipleship among its members. Heroic reformers such as William Mead, inspired by an evangelical ethos, planted and resuscitated churches in the early 19th century. Yet the crisis of identity of a mildly-tempered, rationalistic, establishmentarian church was not

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limited to America alone. In the 1830s, the Oxford Movement began in England, retrieving Catholic ritual and attempting to reground the church’s identity from simply being the English national church to a more apostolic basis, expressed in the historic episcopate and Patristic theology. The ensuing wars between the Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic parties, both in the Church of England and in the Episcopal Church, led to a decided neglect of ecclesiology within Anglicanism, as Stephen Sykes observes in *The Integrity of Anglicanism.*26 Exactly how the Anglican church understood its identity and mission became a recurrent question that remains alive today.

The Episcopal Church has tended to perpetuate the establishmentarian mission articulated by Richard Hooker in the 16th century—that the church’s purpose is “to put a Christian stamp on the character and activities of a nation and its people.”27 This was recapitulated by the influential Latitudinarian theologian F.D. Maurice in the 19th century, who said the church exists to “purify and elevate the mind of a nation.”28 Maurice and his successors sought to integrate modernity with classical Anglicanism by stressing the doctrine of the Incarnation as a progressive unfolding of the divine within human history, conflating Enlightenment ideas of progress with the reign of God. As William Sachs points out in *The Transformation of Anglicanism,* the legacy of this Liberal Catholic party has come to dominate the Episcopal Church today.29 Against the Evangelical party, with its Reformed stress on human sin and redemption in Christ, or the

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28 Ibid.

Anglo-Catholic party, which emphasized apostolic succession and ritual, the Liberal Catholics sought a middle ground with modern western culture and largely affirmed it in the process.

In 19th century America, as the mainline churches began to organize mission societies for evangelism and mission work across the expanding western frontier, the Episcopal Church made a unique move. Under the influence of Charles McIlvaine, an evangelical bishop, the Episcopal Church organized itself as a denomination with the name “Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society” in 1835. McIlvaine argued that every member of the church was a missionary. While this impulse was never deeply capitalized upon historically, it remains a promising seed for a missional ecclesiology for the Episcopal Church.

The Episcopal Church’s self-confidence in integrating the best of Protestant and Catholic pieties with American democracy came to shape the dominant mission motif from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries: the “national church” ideal. William Augustus Muhlenberg first articulated this concept in his 1853 “memorial” (resolution) to the General Convention, in which he proposed that the Episcopal Church could serve a unifying purpose within American life. Muhlenberg was cognizant, however, of the challenge of class elitism, wondering whether the Episcopal Church could in fact reach the masses. William Reed Huntington, the evangelical-catholic rector of Grace Church in New York City, developed the national church idea further in his writings and proposal.

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for Christian unity, the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, which posits four bases for ecumenical agreement: Scripture, the creeds, the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, and the historic episcopate.33

While “missionary bishops” had been authorized in 1835 to plant dioceses across the frontier and overseas,34 the Episcopal Church’s international mission really didn’t pick up much steam until the early 20th century, at the height of American expansionism. In Fling out the Banner, Ian Douglas observes how deeply establishmentarian the mission activity of the Episcopal Church remained. According to Douglas, the Episcopal Church sought to disseminate “good hospitals, good schools, and right-ordered worship.”35 The first formal overseas mission destination was Greece, chosen because, as a Christian nation, the strictly humanitarian nature of the missionary work would be clear. The Episcopal Church has generally been hesitant to construe mission in terms of verbal proclamation or conversion, focusing instead on benevolence, promotion of American democracy, or economic development.

Behind this is not only an establishmentarian missiology (promotion of American culture and democracy abroad), but also a patronage or benefactor approach.36 Episcopalians are assumed to be dispensers of money and expertise to the less fortunate. The benefactor stance contrasts with the radical identification with others that we find in

33 Episcopal Church, The Book of Common Prayer (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation and Seabury Press, 1979), 876-78.

34 Prichard, Short History, 128.

35 Douglas, Banner, 139.

Philippians 2, as well as Jesus’ injunction to the disciples in Luke 22:25-6: “But he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather, the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.” The benefactor remains in a position of power and prestige, giving out of excess. Jesus both embodies and calls his followers to a deeper reversal of roles, in which higher social and economic status is relinquished for the sake of the other.

The Episcopal Church has generally not embraced such a radical stance, preferring instead to maintain a benefactor posture. It has continued to hold a rather exalted self-understanding within American life, as expressed in the building of the Washington National Cathedral (1907-90), standing high on Mount St. Alban over the capital. It would be hard to imagine any other denomination building such an edifice in Washington and calling it the national cathedral.

This national church ideal and benefactor approach to mission came under deep challenge during the late 1960s, when the church sought to respond to the urban crisis. Presiding Bishop John Hines, a liberal, proposed the creation of a special fund through which denominational money would be channeled to grass-roots organizations in the cities. The General Convention Special Program, launched in 1968, caused a major backlash from the grass roots as millions of dollars were given to organizations with no connection to the church, and, sometimes, no Christian affiliation at all. Denominational funding dropped drastically, and the national staff, which had swelled in the preceding decades, was cut in half in 1970.37

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Moreover, the patronage model was increasingly challenged by churches within the Anglican Communion. The Communion as an organization was to a large degree a product of American initiative and funding. Yet in 1963, global Anglican representatives critiqued the patronage model in *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence*, calling for greater mutuality in mission. As Douglas notes, key Episcopal leaders resisted this shift toward interdependence.38

The national church ideal has crumbled even further in the last few decades, as the Episcopal Church steadily relinquishes its sense of centrality and acquires the posture of a niche church. From 1965-2005, membership has dropped by over a million members, or 31%, and it continues to decline.39 Over the last thirty years, the ideals of democratic equality seem to have been introverted from the national life or global mission to the inner life of the church itself. The greatest focus of energy and source of conflict has been the ordination of women (1970s) and the affirmation and ordination of homosexuals (1970s-present). It is as if the Episcopal Church has recognized that it no longer has the capacity (if it ever did) to sanctify the nation, but it can work out the full implication of its democratic ideals within its own denominational life. The theme of democracy—a central and conflicted value in the diocese that is the subject of this study—will be unpacked further in subsequent chapters.

A Moment of Challenge and Crisis in the Episcopal Church

Since the 1970s, authors representing a variety of perspectives have identified a crisis within Anglicanism over questions of identity, leadership, and mission. Stephen

38 Ibid., 253.

Sykes began the discussion in 1978 in *The Integrity of Anglicanism* with his exploration of Anglicanism’s theological cohesiveness (or lack thereof)—in what he termed “the crisis of Anglican comprehensiveness.”40 This has been followed by vigorous critiques of secularization and modernist accommodation within the Anglican church by such authors as Alister McGrath, Ephraim Radner, and Philip Turner.41 Timothy Sedgwick and Philip Turner named a “crisis in moral teaching in the Episcopal Church” in 1992.42 In a probing historical overview, William Sachs traced Anglicanism’s engagement with modernity in *The Transformation of Anglicanism* in 1993, which concludes with chapters on “The Crisis of Church and Culture” and “The Search for the Authentic Church.”43 Many of these authors point to Anglicanism’s uncertain identity in a post-Christendom world, where the establishmentarian ethos and mission that once characterized Anglicanism are no longer appropriate, and where the church has been slow to adapt and redefine itself. In November 2007, the Episcopal Church House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church issued a report that explicitly acknowledged the looming question of identity: “We cannot be leaders within our Church nor in the global community if we are unsure who we are or where God is calling us to go.”44


43 Sachs, *The Transformation of Anglicanism: From State Church to Global Communion*.

44 House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church, “Interim Report,” (The Episcopal Church, November 2007).
An extensive study of attitudes and perceptions among the Episcopal Church’s membership in the 1990s by the Episcopal Church Foundation uncovered a striking shift away from institutional loyalty and identity with denominational and diocesan (judicatory) structures in favor of congregations. While it parallels a wider cultural trend within denominations in the United States, this represents a dramatic erosion of the “national church ideal.” While the study found significant signs of vitality at the local (congregational) level, it argued that the diocesan and denominational hierarchies were facing a major crisis. Moreover, a more recent study by the Episcopal Church Foundation on the state of leadership among Episcopalians discovered confusion, conflicts in expectations, and a lack of an operative theology of leadership.

The crisis in Anglicanism reached a new level with the 2003 consecration of an openly-gay bishop in the Episcopal Church, which was accompanied by a heated reaction from the global Anglican Communion. The Communion’s formal response, articulated in *The Windsor Report*, frames the challenges facing Anglicanism in terms of a *koinonia*, or communion, ecclesiology as an overarching metaphor for the life of the church, as well as

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47 See Douglas, *Fling out the Banner!: The National Church Ideal and the Foreign Mission of the Episcopal Church*.

suggesting that the centralized structures of the Communion be strengthened. The global controversy remains ongoing at the time of this writing.

Amidst this era of change, challenge, and crisis on multiple levels, there have been two primary missiological responses. The first, represented by Claude Payne (former bishop of Texas) and Hamilton Beazley in their book *Reclaiming the Great Commission*, is an evangelical recommitment to the Great Commission, expressed primarily in terms of fresh methods and strategies for evangelism and reorganization. The second, evidenced by *Waging Reconciliation*, a collection of essays from a mission conference held by the House of Bishops shortly after September 11, 2001, tends to focus on issues of social concern within the context of globalization. This response is epitomized by the endorsement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals as the highest-profile mission priority at the 2006 General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

What is either lacking from or underdeveloped in these approaches is a missional ecclesiology, rooted in the Triune God, that addresses deeply the church’s changed social and cultural context while asserting a primary role for local congregations in mission. How does the church’s shifting environment impact the ongoing identity, life, and practices of congregations and their members? Moreover, there is little attention to how

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the laity of the local church can be engaged as frontline missionaries as they re-envision together the church’s life and purpose in their changing communities in light of God’s mission and embody communion in the world. How can the Episcopal Church live into the promise inherent in being the “Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society”?  

Ecumenical Missiological Developments in the Later 20th Century  

As David Bosch argues in *Transforming Mission*, the history of Christian mission has involved a series of paradigm shifts. From the rise of the modern missions movement in the late 18th century through the publication of *Missional Church* by the Gospel and Our Culture Network in 1998, a major paradigm shift took place in understanding the relationship between mission and the church. This shift may be described as a movement from “church with a mission” to “missional church,” in which mission went from being seen as an activity or program of the church, typically done by specialists across foreign borders, to God’s action and the very essence of the identity of local congregations, carried out through their regular members in their daily life and work. At the center of this shift was a re-grounding of the theological basis for mission in the doctrine of the Trinity.

During the age of colonial missions, the role of congregations in mission was often eclipsed by that of para-church missionary societies and specialist missionaries operating across foreign borders. Congregations typically played, at best, an indirect role in mission through their prayers and financial support. In light of the *missio Dei*—the

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52 In the words of David Bosch, laypeople “are the operational basis from which the *missio Dei* proceeds.” Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 472.

53 Ibid., 181-89.

Triune God’s mission in all creation—and in today’s dynamic, post-Christendom, post-colonial American context, the centrality of congregations to God’s mission is being reclaimed.55 This era of profound change in the church’s relationship to its surrounding culture calls for a critical redefinition of the identity and purpose of congregations.

The eclipse of congregations from mission was a historical product of Christendom, particularly the period following Charlemagne’s crowning as Holy Roman Emperor in 800, in which the geographic territory of Europe was divided up into parishes, each with its settled flock shepherded by a local pastor. As Patrick Keifert observes in *We Are Here Now*, the purpose of the church in this period was ostensibly to maintain western civilization.56 Congregations operated in a “spiritual firehouse” model, in which the church’s importance for most people was found at major life transitions or emergencies.57 Mission was an activity of the church undertaken primarily to expand Christendom’s geographic boundaries and plant more churches (plantatio ecclesiae). Local congregation members had little direct involvement in such activities. During the rise of the modern missions movement, this basic paradigm remained intact.58

This model of mission came under increasing pressure by the mid-twentieth century through the disintegration of the western colonial system and the erosion of faith in European and American societies amidst growing secularization. Moreover, the churches planted in the majority world during the colonial era began to come of age and


challenge the western cultural presuppositions in which the gospel had come cloaked. The question of the gospel’s relationship with culture began to loom on the global missiological agenda, as it became clear that “Christianization” could not be identified with mere diffusion of western civilization.

The theological basis for mission undertook a Copernican revolution subsequent to the 1952 Willingen meeting of the International Missionary Council in the *missio Dei* concept: the idea that mission begins with the very inner-Trinitarian movement of the Triune God, and the church’s mission is a *participation* in that sending movement. 59 This paradigm shift held major implications for understanding the role of congregations in mission. If mission was no longer conceived primarily as an activity of the church across foreign borders undertaken by specialists in obedience to the Great Commission, but rather a much wider movement of God in history, with the *world* as the horizon, merely getting more people into church was insufficient. As Karl Barth wryly reminds us, John 3:16 does not say, “For God so loved the *Christians*…” but “For God so loved the *world*….” 60 A primarily *inward* orientation for congregations betrays God’s concern for the world.

If mission is fundamentally the creative, redemptive, and consummating activity of the Triune God in the world, then mission also takes place *everywhere*. If, as the international mission conferences in the second half of the 20th century came to affirm,

59 Ibid., 389-93.
mission is “in all six continents,” local context matters, and congregations have particular purposes in their communities in light of God’s mission. Over the past few decades, a variety of theologians and sociologists have fruitfully contended for the centrality of local congregations in mission and their impact upon their communities.

It was Lesslie Newbigin in The Gospel in a Pluralist Society (1989) who seminally argued for congregations as “God’s embassy” in a particular place and recognized that congregations serve as a “hermeneutic of the gospel”—the lens through which the world views the good news embodied in concrete form in their local context. Newbigin’s inheritors in the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) define congregations as signs, instruments, witnesses, agents, and foretastes of the reign of God in Missional Church (1998). Behind both Newbigin’s work and that of the GOCN is a vivid awareness of the post-Christendom situation of the church in the West.

Building upon developments in missiology since the 1938 Tambaran meeting of the International Missionary Council, Charles Van Engen asserts that local congregations are “God’s missionary people” in his book by that title (1991). This missional ecclesiology operates from one of the major ecclesiological emphases in the latter half of the 20th century—construing the church as the people of God. The roots of this ecclesiology lie in one of the primary clusters of biblical images for the church identified

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61 This was affirmed at the 1963 International Missionary Council conference in Mexico City. See James A. Scherer, Gospel, Church, and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 109.


64 Charles Edward van Engen, God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991).
by Paul Minear in his study of *Images of the Church in the New Testament*.\(^{65}\) It was developed further by Hans Küng in *The Church* and affirmed by Vatican II.\(^{66}\) Shifting from a Christendom-era *institutional* ecclesiology to a stress on the *people of God* puts congregation members at the forefront of mission in their daily spheres of influence.

Craig Van Gelder develops this missional ecclesiology in *The Essence of the Church* (2000), in which he emphasizes another major ecclesiological theme of the 20\(^{th}\) century—the church as *community of the Holy Spirit*.\(^{67}\) This pneumatological approach, echoing another of Küng’s themes in *The Church*, recasts the congregation’s identity within the wider Trinitarian activity of salvation history, in which the Spirit animates and guides the church in its witness to the reign of God. It is under the leadership of the Spirit that local congregations discover their participation in God’s mission in the *now and not yet* of God’s in-breaking reign.\(^{68}\)

**The Renewal of Trinitarian Ecclesiology**

In developing his missiology for western culture, Newbigin articulated a Trinitarian logic based in God’s sending movement. This *sending* conception, as expressed in *The Open Secret*,\(^ {69}\) is consistent with the western logic of the Trinity and builds upon earlier work done by Karl Barth. Over the past few decades, there has been a

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\(^{67}\) Van Gelder, *Essence*.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 132-40.

recovery of the eastern social view of the Trinity that complements this western sending emphasis. Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox theologians have made contributions to a new Trinitarian renaissance that opens up fresh horizons for understanding the church’s identity and mission in a post-Christendom, global church.

Karl Barth’s attention to the acts of God in history, through which God’s Triune character is revealed, set off a fresh appreciation for the doctrine of the Trinity as a way of speaking not only about God in se, but also God pro nobis—within salvation history. Karl Rahner phrased this most famously in his 1970 book The Trinity in what has become known as Rahner’s Rule: “The ‘imminent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity and the ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘imminent’ Trinity.” The doctrine of the Trinity had been neglected for centuries in western theology through the legacy of the Reformers’ rejection of scholastic speculation on God’s life apart from ours. Kant’s subsequent restriction of religion to “within the limits of reason alone” also eclipsed the Trinity from theological reflection. Barth and Rahner now offered dynamic possibilities for new relevance by reclaiming the doctrine of the Trinity as descriptive of the God we know in history.

The generation following Barth and Rahner, which includes Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Robert W. Jenson, took their cue from this new appreciation of the Trinity in light of God’s historical and narrative unfolding. While much previous

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70 For an overview of recent developments in trinitarian theology, see Stanley J. Grenz, Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

71 Barth, Church Dogmatics.


western theology tended to view the Trinity as above history, these thinkers developed a sense of the Trinity as the end, or culmination of history. Such a recovery of eschatology has significant mission implications, for the Trinity can be seen, to use Ted Peters’ phrase, as “the world’s future.” All of creation is being drawn into the life of God as an eschatological promise. The church then has a pivotal role to play in witnessing to and embodying that future.

Moltmann critiqued Barth, however, for perpetuating the tendencies of western theology, since Augustine, to see God as absolute subject. In Moltmann’s view, Barth’s stress on God as an all-powerful single subject acting in sovereign freedom smacks of modalism and lacks a Trinitarian view of personhood. Moltmann also critiques the western tradition for construing God as supreme substance, the prime example of this being Aquinas. Both of these views have significant detrimental implications for human community, in Moltmann’s eyes. God as all-powerful sovereign subject can too easily lead to monarchical, authoritarian power in the church and human society. As Gary Simpson has observed, it also has major mission implications, undergirding the tendency of colonial missions to objectify others and exploit them rather than recognize the integrity of their personhood and culture.

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76 Ibid., 10-12.

Moltmann finds inspiration for his social doctrine of the Trinity in the Cappadocians. He recognizes the radical philosophical move the Cappadocians made by identifying being with relational personhood. For Moltmann, the Trinity is a community of equals united in their *perichoresis*, or mutual indwelling. Against the aloof, impassible God of classical theism, Moltmann asserts the participation of all three persons of the Trinity in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. In fact, Moltmann’s work in *Crucified God* is closely linked to *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, as he develops a cruciform theology of the Trinity. “The cross is at the center of the Trinity,” he says.78

Such a cruciform, social Trinity bears significant promise for a post-colonial missiology. In this sense, the phrase “mission in Christ’s way”79 refers not merely to our moral emulation of Jesus’ non-violent, non-coercive ministry. It speaks more deeply to a relational, communal, collaborative being with others that involves mutual sharing. As Simpson points out, Dietrich Bonhoeffer criticized Barth for his view of God’s freedom as sovereign agency and instead asserted in *The Cost of Discipleship* that “God is a God who bears.”80 Bearing becomes a way of understanding our relationship to one another in mission, in which power is not merely relinquished, but emptied into the other in a process of bearing others’ burdens. Moltmann talks about this as freedom for one

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80 Gary M. Simpson, “'God Is a God Who Bears': Bonhoeffer for a Flat World,” *Word & World* 26, no. 4 (Fall 2006).
another, contrasting it with the freedom of lordship, or freedom from others. The doctrine of the Trinity gives us an imagination for relations of solidarity, mutual sharing, and an other-oriented self-giving that are vital for the renewal of mission in the wake of the Enlightenment.

Wolfhart Pannenberg similarly stresses the narrative character of God’s revelation as Trinity and a relational conception of personhood. While not as egalitarian as Moltmann, Pannenberg nevertheless sees the Trinity’s other-oriented relationality as key to understanding human community and the church. For Pannenberg, the church is a “messianic fellowship” in which the Holy Spirit lifts us above our individuality into new relations of personhood with God and one other. Drawing from physics, Pannenberg suggests the concept of a “field” to comprehend the interrelated, dynamic, open life of the Trinity.

Robert Jenson also places deep emphasis on the Trinitarian narrative and concepts of relational personhood. Jenson prefers the term “identity” to “person” as he seeks to maintain a sense of God’s unified will amidst the uniqueness of the three persons of the Trinity. Jenson modifies the classic western definition of person (from Boethius) as an individual entity endowed with intellect in a more dialogical, communicative, relational direction: a person is one with whom others can converse, whom they can address. This

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83 Ibid., II.130.

84 Ibid., I.383.


86 Ibid., 117.
dialogical concept of personhood sets up a conversational model of the Trinity: “the relations of origin that constitute the three are then taken as relations of address and response, of mutual converse.”87 For Jenson, humans are invited into this conversation, which is open, polyphonic, and capacious.

All three of these thinkers want to overcome the deistic legacy of a God detached and closed off from the world. To do so opens the way for recognizing God as an acting subject in the midst of the world, fosters a sense of the integrity of creation as infused with the energy and presence of God, and overcomes the dualisms of matter and spirit which still haunt Christianity from its Greek philosophical roots.

One of the major gifts these three theologians have given the church in their redevelopment of the Trinity is a sense of God’s movement in history to lead creation to its fulfillment in the power of the Holy Spirit.88 The question for mission then becomes, “What is God up to in the world?” This question should not be asked apart from the church, as tended to happen during the era of secularization in mission in the 1960s.89

Rather, this question must be asked within the church as a primary question of discernment in mission. It cannot be answered simply by referring back to the institution of the church and commandments given by Jesus, as has often been the case historically in the West. It cannot be answered through uncritical affirmation of world-historical processes in the present, as took place in modern liberalism. Rather, it must integrate past, present and future through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

87 Ibid., 119.

88 “God and only God is the creature’s future. God the Spirit is God’s own future and so draws to and into the triune converse those for whom the Trinity makes room.” Jenson, Systematic Theology, vol. 2, 26.

89 See Bosch, Transforming Mission, 381-89.
In *Unbaptized God*, Jenson points out how difficult a time the western church has had in balancing church as institution with church as community of the Spirit.\(^9^0\) This is in part because of our tendency in the West to see the church primarily in terms of the past, rather than the future toward which the Spirit is drawing us. He argues that we should celebrate Pentecost as a feast on par with Easter and Christmas. There is a significant insight here for mission and leadership, namely the importance of ongoing, communal, scripture-based, prayerful discernment of gifts and vocation, both for individual Christians and for congregations and other bodies of Christian community. It is not simply a matter of replicating some program, strategy, or technique that may have worked elsewhere or previously; the church as an *event* of the Holy Spirit must seek to be led by the Spirit on a daily basis, with all the flexibility and responsiveness implied therein.

The generation of Trinitarian theologians following Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Jenson have further developed lines of their thinking in creative directions. The Roman Catholic Latin American liberation theologian Leonardo Boff draws heavily upon Moltmann’s egalitarian, social understanding of the Trinity to develop an inspirational prototype for human society.\(^9^1\) Boff sees the free mutuality that characterizes the persons of the Trinity as indicative of how human community in all its diversity should be organized. This application of the doctrine of the Trinity to the concrete historical circumstances of the world’s suffering poor represents a fruitful missiological impulse,


grounded in grass-roots movements such as the Base Ecclesial Communities.\textsuperscript{92} As Moltmann and others have argued, there are serious implications in how we envision God for how we envision human community and the church.

Boff’s missiological contribution is limited, however, by his focus on the Trinity as example to be emulated. His application of the term “utopia” (literally “no-place”) to the Trinity reveals the difficulty in closing the gap between the Trinity as perfect community and the realities of power and sin in human community. Without Moltmann’s nuanced theology of the cross or a strong sense of the Trinity’s active agency in the world, Boff leaves the reader with little hope that his utopian vision will come to fruition.

Another Roman Catholic theologian, Catherine LaCugna, offers one of the most sweeping and cogent historical arguments for the relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity to human life in \textit{God for Us}.\textsuperscript{93} Tracing how the Trinity as a doctrine shifted from an understanding of how God is \textit{for us} (\textit{oikonomia}) to how God is \textit{in God’s self} (\textit{theologia}), LaCugna stresses the soteriological character of Trinitarian theology. LaCugna takes Rahner’s Rule to its limit, challenging the validity of making any distinctions at all between the “imminent” and “economic” Trinity. For LaCugna, “Trinitarian life is also our life.”\textsuperscript{94} Echoing Moltmann, she says “The truth about God and ourselves is that we were meant to exist as persons in communion in a common household, living as persons from and for others.”\textsuperscript{95} Drawing insights from feminist theology, LaCugna makes a

\textsuperscript{92} See Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission}, 473.


\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 383.
substantial case for re-patterning human life in society and the church along Trinitarian lines. Proposing an eschatological horizon of doxological communion, LaCugna underscores the *exitus-reditus* pattern of salvation history, a movement away from and then back into the life of God. While some may not see the need to go as far as LaCugna does in erasing the imminent Trinity altogether, her stress on the soteriological character of Trinitarian communion is a valuable dimension for missiology.

Pannenberg’s student John D. Zizioulas, metropolitan bishop of Pergamon and one of Orthodoxy’s leading theologians today, has made a major contribution to Trinitarian ecclesiology on several fronts. First, being steeped in the eastern theological tradition but also fully conversant with the western, Zizioulas contrasts the thoroughgoing individualism of the West, going back to Augustine and Boethius, with the social personhood of Orthodoxy, rooted in the Cappadocians.96 It is in his treatment of the Cappadocians that Zizioulas finds inspiration for a Trinitarian ecclesiology of communion and otherness. In *Being as Communion* and *Communion and Otherness*, both collections of essays, Zizioulas understands the concept of communion (*koinonia*) ontologically—as constitutive of God’s own life, our life with God, and our life with one another. For him, *to be* is to be *in communion*, in relationship with others who are irreducibly different.97

The category of otherness is an important one in a variety of fields of thought today, in light of postmodernism and the post-colonial legacy. Zizioulas insists that

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heterogeneity is built into creation by God as good, and difference need not lead to division. Unlike many secular postmodern theories of difference in which everything breaks down into atomistic relativism, Zizioulas’ theology both affirms the irreducible otherness of every person and creature but also finds in the Trinity a vision for the reconciliation and integration of diverse others into a larger pattern of communion and love. Zizioulas also reads the Chalcedonian Christology, in which Christ’s two natures exist “without division” and “without confusion,” as a key framing for otherness and unity in the life of the church.

Zizioulas’ ecclesiology is highly Eucharistic, as it is in the Eucharist principally that we taste the communion in the midst of our otherness that is our eschatological destiny. In accordance with Orthodox tradition, for Zizioulas the Eucharist is a future-oriented, pneumatological event, as well as one of remembrance and faithfulness to the past. For Zizioulas, the validity of the Eucharist is based in part upon the catholicity of its participants—that is, the extent to which the gathered assembly reflects the full diversity of people in a given place. This understanding, which goes deeply against the grain of common American practice, represents a call to a genuinely multicultural church amidst our fragmented postmodern age. It is worth reflecting upon carefully as a vision for how our practices as church (particularly our public worship) can embody eschatological realities to which we are called to witness.

98 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 3.

99 Ibid., 37, 261.

100 Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 143-69.

These various threads of Trinitarian theology, while contradicting each other in some places and drawing from different sources and assumptions, nonetheless begin to fill out a picture for how the church might understand its mission in the 21st century.

First, *communion* (or *koinonia*) as an overarching concept for who God is and who we are created to be in God’s image suggests that the church’s mission is, at some basic level, to witness to this reality. That is, the church is called to live into the communion of the Triune God in its life and practices—not just its sacraments and worship, but also its fellowship, its way of serving others, its public presence, its means of discernment, its relationality, its going forth to proclaim the good news. This means diversity-in-unity, the hard work of being reconciled by the cross in the power of the Spirit across identity lines of difference, so that identity in Christ becomes paramount. Since communion is non-coercive, it means witnessing in vulnerability. Communion is not a static Platonic reality, but rather a dynamic phenomenon rooted in the God of history. The church’s participation in communion is not merely representative, but rather an *incarnational embodiment* in the power of the Spirit. Communion is eschatological, so the church’s mission is to point *forward* to the future, as much as it points back.102

What do these Trinitarian insights mean for leadership in the church?103 First, moving from a monistic to a Trinitarian view of God calls for reassessing the solitary, monarchical understandings of leadership so common in favor of communal, collaborative, and distributive models based upon unique gifts and callings. The church is

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102 “The church, we have said, exists as anticipation. What she anticipates is inclusion in the triune communion.” Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 222.

103 For a fuller discussion, see Dwight Zscheile, "The Trinity, Leadership and Power," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2007).
still dominated by the imperial legacy of Christendom, in which territory was governed by monarchical chaplain clergy and bishops/judicatory leaders. Living deeply into covenant leadership communities of mutuality and partnership is a promising and challenging prospect for emerging postmodern leaders today.

Second, the task of such communities of leaders is in turn to cultivate communities characterized by communion—otherness rather than homogeneity, cruciform vulnerability and mutual bearing, collaboration, openness, and an orientation toward the world in all its otherness. The Trinity gives us a vision for ekstatic (other-oriented), creative, loving community. We fool ourselves if we think we can simply conjure this up on our own. Rather, humbly seeking the active agency of the Spirit of God in our midst is critical. Our expectations for such Christian communities must take into consideration our abiding sinfulness (both individually, communally, and institutionally) and develop practices of self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation. Communion is an eschatological reality that we do not possess; it possesses us. We must seek the reign of God; we do not own it.

A Trinitarian ecclesiology also suggests that the church is a community of mutual conversation. Visioning and planning within such communities cannot be dictatorial activities, where the leader (or set of leaders) goes up to the mountaintop alone. Rather, leaders must cultivate communities of discernment at the grass-roots level characterized by mutuality and partnership\(^\text{104}\)/themes we will revisit in greater detail below. The leaders’ role is to design and steward such processes, and then serve as sensemaking

leaders in helping the community interpret God’s call and its context in light of the biblical narrative.  

**Foundations for a New Approach**

These theological and historical insights bring us to a new starting place for engaging mission and ecclesiology in the United States in the early 21st century. They point toward fresh understandings of God in which God’s triune identity has powerful implications for our life together in the church and world. They invite understandings of the church as a called and sent community whose identity lies in God’s life and mission. They call forth an imagination for the work of mission itself centered in God’s communion and reign, with an eschatological horizon. They suggest changing paradigms for organization and leadership in the church. The action-research intervention that is the subject of this study engages each of these dimensions. Before we can explore that story in detail, it is critical to understand more clearly the system itself, its history, and its situation at the inception of the intervention.

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CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF THE SYSTEM

Geography

The judicatory system that is the subject of this study is an Episcopal diocese located in the central United States comprised of slightly more than 100 congregations. Its expansive geographical territory includes one major metropolitan area, a few much smaller urban areas, and vast stretches of rural terrain—much of it farmland, some of it wilderness, with areas that have seen extensive mining and logging over the past century. It is a territory that has seen dramatic changes since the Episcopal Church began here approximately 150 years ago.

These changes have involved successive waves of immigration into lands long occupied by Native peoples. The story of Native Americans within the history of this judicatory is a poignant one with ongoing mission implications. It will appear at key moments in the narrative to follow. With immigration came the conversion of much of the territory into farmland. In the past several decades, following a pattern that has taken place across much of America, those small family farms have been steadily consolidated into large corporate farms, and the rural population has diminished while the metropolitan population has grown exponentially.

New waves of immigration have also arrived in the past few decades, changing the complexion of the region. These immigrants—largely from Africa, Asia, and Latin America—have settled across the territory, with the largest concentrations in the major
metropolitan area. Since the previous generations of immigrants tended to come predominantly from northern Europe in the 19th century, the presence of these new faces from the Global South is enriching and diversifying the population. It brings new opportunities and challenges, however, to which the judicatory to date has generally been slow to respond.

Over the years, a distinct dynamic has evolved within the judicatory between the metropolitan churches and those in the wider state. The great majority of the mid- to large-size congregations are located in the metropolitan area.\(^1\) In fact, in the whole of the northern area of the judicatory, there is now only one full-time priest. Economic disparities tend to correlate between the metropolitan and non-metropolitan churches, with the vast majority of diocesan financial assessments deriving from the wealthier metropolitan churches. On top of this are the cultural differences between urban, suburban, and rural areas in America.

One of the deep fault lines of mistrust and division in the judicatory that this intervention contended with at every step of the way was the geographical metro/wider-state dynamic. In the culture and behavior of the judicatory, this dynamic tends to be framed in categories of center (metro) and margin (wider state), with corresponding power differentials and resentments. Reframing this dynamic would be a key challenge for the process.

\(^1\) Congregational size in this system tends toward the smaller end of the scale. There are only a handful of congregations with average Sunday attendance above 300. “Mid-size” could be defined as 150-250 in average Sunday attendance, and “large” as anything above 250.
History

Bishops

In the 19th century, the Episcopal Church’s expansion across the western frontier was led by missionary bishops funded and sent from the East Coast. The 1835 General Convention authorized such bishops with the premise that their apostolic role was to initiate the church’s presence, rather than serve as the culmination of congregations already organized. Bishop George Washington Doane of New Jersey declared then that a missionary bishop “is a bishop sent forth by the Church, not sought for of the Church; going before to organize the Church, not waiting till the Church has partially been organized. . . .”2

The founding of this particular diocese followed that pattern, with a vigorous, visionary first bishop who professed a remarkably holistic view of mission. His pioneering courage and spirit reflected the hardiness of the area’s residents at the time. While influenced by the missionary fervor of the evangelical movement, the first bishop also sought to foster unity during an era of partisanship between high and low church camps within the Episcopal Church. He cast a vision of a missionary church that sought both to win souls and to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and serve the poor.

One of the initial populations this founding bishop focused on was the Native community, performing his first baptisms within it and eventually ordaining the first Native American priest in the Episcopal Church. Coming from an elite East Coast background, this bishop used his privilege to advocate for Natives caught up in conflicts with the white population and government. At the same time, his attitudes reflected many

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of the benefactor assumptions prevalent among whites toward Native Americans. The
judicatory’s subsequent ministry with the Native community remains a major mission
priority (encompassing approximately 20% of a recent judicatory budget). Yet the legacy
of patronage is a complicated one, and in many respects Native Episcopalians remain on
the margin of this system.

Within the memory of the diocese, the first bishop’s leadership is both an
inspiring and overshadowing presence. His use of his power and privilege on behalf of
disadvantaged peoples is credited as an inspiration for social advocacy—a strong mission
value to this day. His aggressive planting of churches (some 300 within the forty-two
years of his episcopate, though many subsequently failed) tends to receive less attention.
His indefatigable energy and hopefulness have made him seem almost superhuman
against the backdrop of the judicatory’s subsequent decline.

The organizational scholar Lawrence Miller’s work offers a helpful frame for
understanding this first bishop and the bishops who followed in light of the judicatory’s
organizational lifecycle. In Barbarians to Bureaucrats, Miller identifies six stages of
leadership as organizations rise and decline: the prophet, focused on inspiration and
innovation; the barbarian, focused on crisis and conquest; the builder and explorer,
focused on specialization and expansion; the administrator, focused on systems,
structure, and security; the bureaucrat, who maintains a tight grip of control; and finally
the aristocrat, who reigns over a period of alienation and eventual revolution.3 An
organization’s life peaks between the builder/explorer and administrator phases and

declines into the bureaucrat and aristocrat phases until a new prophet emerges to begin the cycle over.

The first bishop of this judicatory is a remarkable combination of prophet, barbarian, and builder/explorer in one person. Because his tenure was so long, he was able to span the growth curve through these successive stages. He was followed by a high churchman whose attention centered on strengthening the institution. Rather than plant additional churches, he sought to develop infrastructure and policies. Conforming largely to the administrator archetype, the judicatory had already shifted from mission to maintenance in the second bishop’s tenure.

In many respects, the lifecycle of the judicatory peaked toward the close of the first bishop’s tenure and has been in a mode of retrenchment ever since—a period of a hundred years. The third bishop sought to consolidate, reevaluate, and revitalize the diocese by further centralization of administrative and program activities in a diocesan office. His tenure coincided with the rise of the modern corporate denomination, patterned after industrial corporations and reflecting the assumptions of Weberian bureaucracy.\(^4\) It was during this period that the national Episcopal Church went through a period of denominational centralization and institutionalization.\(^5\)

The consolidation continued under the fourth bishop, who oversaw the reintegration of a second diocese that had been created some years earlier when the vast distances of the original area proved a challenge to travel and communication. The population growth that had been expected in that region never materialized in the face of


depopulation of the farming communities and increasing urbanization. The fifth bishop responded by seeking to establish resident priests in rural areas and licensed lay readers under his control (called “bishop’s men”). This clericalization and focus on control may be interpreted as a further working out of the bureaucrat phase. At the same time, the immediate post-World War II era brought the numerical peak of membership, baptisms, and confirmations for the system as the Baby Boom flourished.

The turning point came in 1965, as the era of institutional confidence crested and was replaced by the upheavals of the Civil Rights movement, student protests, and a new focus on social advocacy. The Episcopal Church stopped growing. Under the fifth and sixth bishops, the corporate pattern of judicatory life continued, with committees and commissions proliferating. During this period, the bifurcation of mission into competing emphases on evangelism and social justice was institutionalized. What was once a “Department of Missions” became separate departments of “Evangelism” and “Social Relations,” which tended to compete for funds and attention. In the 1970s, as many Episcopal clergy left active ministry to pursue secular vocations, a cloud was seen to hang over the institution. Optimism rebounded slightly later in the 1970s as renewal currents like Cursillo and the Liturgical Movement swept through. Church-sponsored educational and social service institutions were enhanced as a means of mission, but the decline in membership continued.

While recent bishops have tended to cast themselves in prophetic terms with regard to their stances on social issues, they have generally perpetuated the bureaucratic paradigm of leadership that has held sway over the judicatory for some time. The current bishop has repeatedly referred to the first bishop’s actions on behalf of Native Americans
as core identity markers for what it means to lead this diocese. The recent interpretations of this legacy include the full inclusion of women in the life of the church and its ministry and the ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions—something allowed by the bishop in the diocesan cathedral. These expressions of reaching out to disenfranchised groups can be interpreted, on the one hand, as a faithful working-out of ministry values of the early period. At the same time, the assumptions of patronage and the benefactor approach to ministry that characterized the first bishop’s approach remain present, as we will see below.

As the membership and number of churches has shrunk, the judicatory has maintained and even expanded its corporate institutional footprint with the bureaucracy, increasingly using regulations and policies to seek control. Resources have continued to be drained from congregations to support this infrastructure, with the perception among many at the grass roots that nothing is being given in return—a theme heard repeatedly during the intervention. These are ominous signs of the aristocratic phase of organizational life, when the system begins to rise up against its leaders. It is such impatience, frustration, and revolt that precipitated this intervention.

Congregations

The great majority of existing congregations in the judicatory were planted during the first fifty years, primarily during the tenure of the first bishop. This fact has significant structural implications for the mission of the diocese.
Figure 2.1: Founding Dates of Currently Active Congregations in the Judicatory

The location of the judicatory’s congregations tends to reflect the population and demographic realities of the first fifty years, up to a century ago. That means many dispersed rural congregations and a concentration of urban congregations, but very few churches in the metropolitan area’s rapidly-growing suburbs since the 1950s. When grouped according to phases of urban growth, the difference is striking.
Within the large metropolitan area, the judicatory’s congregations tend to be neighborhood churches clustered within walking distance along what were once streetcar lines. They have little, if any, parking. In the massive waves of suburban and exurban growth from 1970 to the present, only a handful of congregations were started. The result is a geography in which there are no Episcopal churches and very few Episcopalians in huge swaths of the metropolitan region.⁶

Moreover, many of the attempts at planting congregations in the suburban metropolitan areas failed. One of the causes of the mistrust of the bishop and his office uncovered in the intervention was the pattern of aborted church starts—seven since the 1950s. Often, these failures were attributed to poor choice of clergy leadership by the

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⁶ Such a map was created using the church directories of the metropolitan congregations. Zip codes of members were mapped in terms of concentration, and congregational locations pinpointed. Predictably, the largest portion of members tended to cluster in areas with the most churches.
bishop, as well as the structural impediments of excessive debt loads with which the struggling new congregations were saddled. For many of the members of the judicatory, all too aware of the rapid growth in these suburban areas and the successful planting of congregations by other denominational judicatories, the bitterness of the Episcopal Church’s inability to gain a foothold lingers. Overall, eleven metropolitan congregations (including suburban) have been closed since 1990.

Membership Trends

One of the remarkable realities confronted when the intervention process began was the system’s own reluctance to track its membership trends. While records had been kept and published in reports at each diocesan convention, they were never put into comprehensive database form until this intervention. One of the first things necessary was to create such a database, using Microsoft Access and contract data entry and database workers. Unfortunately, some of the records were spotty, and the only extant copies of the convention reports from several years were missing. Nonetheless, the trend lines are striking.

The number of baptized members swelled to a peak in 1964, then fell in 2004 to just above its pre-World War II levels. However during this period, the overall population of the state increased over 335%. While the non-metropolitan membership remained fairly stable from 1940-2000, declining only gradually, a huge shift was taking place in the state’s demographics. From 1940 to 2000, the percentage of the state’s population

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concentrated in the metropolitan area grew from 37% to 70%. While the state’s population tripled and shifted into the metropolitan counties, the Episcopal Church failed to keep up and actually declined.

Figure 2.3: Baptized Members, 1940-2004

When compared with the national membership trends for the Episcopal Church, however, this diocese is not unusual. Denominational trends from 1930-2004 show a surge in the two decades following World War II and then a dramatic falling off in the late 1960s and 70s, with a steady decline through the end of the century.

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8 Ibid., A-5.
The trend lines for baptisms and confirmations in the diocese are even starker. Baptisms peaked in the post-World War II years and then fell precipitously. Confirmations similarly reached their height in 1965 and then fell 87% to their 2004 level.

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Figure 2.5: Number of Baptisms in the Judicatory, 1940-2004

Figure 2.6: Number of Confirmations in the Judicatory, 1940-2004
In recent years, the one trend line that has gone the other direction is giving. Total plate and pledge income to the congregations in the diocese increased by 60% from 1996-2006, while baptized membership declined during this period by 22% and average Sunday attendance by 13%. The fact that fewer and fewer people are giving more money is a sign of trends that cannot be sustained.

**Previous Planning Efforts**

Given these trend lines, it is no surprise that the judicatory attempted a series of strategic mission planning efforts over the past several decades. The history of these efforts offers a fascinating glimpse into the culture of the system and how deeply problematic it was leading into this intervention. These planning efforts in large part failed—some spectacularly, others modestly—due to deep systemic issues, while contributing further to the mistrust, anxiety, frustration, and tensions within the judicatory.¹⁰

The story begins in the 1950s, when judicatory-level planning for mission was informal and sporadic. The pattern was for existing congregations to initiate the planting of new congregations. The diocese would become a partner at some point along the way, but there was no apparent overall coordination of efforts. This approach prevailed into the 1980s, when a major diocesan capital campaign was launched with a $7 million goal ($1 million of that sum was to be set aside for new congregations). The lack of focus that had characterized the diocese’s approach to mission strategy was cited as a major factor in the campaign’s failure: only $500,000 was raised. A subsequent group formed to develop a

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¹⁰ Members of the Bishop’s Commission on Metro Mission Strategy (BCMMS) interviewed longtime diocesan leaders and searched through the archives to uncover this history.
mission strategy was given instead the task of formulating the diocesan budget, which took its focus off mission for several years. Also in the 1980s, demographic material was purchased by the diocese but underutilized because local congregations were never trained in its use.

A visioning process in the early 1990s timed with a transition in the episcopate yielded the following vision:

To reach out in love to every human being in the name of Jesus; and to celebrate God’s presence in all creation. Three-year focus for 1994-96: Take up in love the challenge of discovering and celebrating the diversities we find among us—diversities of culture, theology, gender, sexual orientation, and congregational size—so that these diversities may strengthen us all, and so that our life together may witness to the presence of Christ’s Spirit.

Six action steps were defined for this plan, but the diocesan budget was never reordered around them as priorities, and only modest progress was made.

Under the tenure of the new (and current) bishop, another mission planning process was launched in the mid-1990s. The plan was intended to serve as the basis for a new capital campaign. Its focus was tactical and strategic, centered on three areas: 1) assisting “vital” small congregations (under 125 in average Sunday attendance) in outreach; 2) helping other congregations with potential to take the risk of large-scale growth; and 3) planting at least one large (500+ on a Sunday) congregation from scratch. The consultant who led the fundraising effort was a Baptist, and the central theological theme was Great Commission obedience. A goal of $10 million was set to fund the plan. Yet the anticipated large gifts never materialized, clergy were hesitant to turn over names of prospective donors, and churches were reluctant to participate. The Great Commission theological basis failed to gain much traction. After several years, the campaign was
quietly terminated, having barely covered its own expenses. The disillusionment was widespread and deep.

The following year, several of the bishop’s staff members resigned en masse, fostering an atmosphere of “extreme tension throughout the diocese,” as reported by system members researching the history. There were also transitions in leadership at some of the few new suburban church starts, which struggled with large mortgages and loss of momentum. The sense of crisis grew, prompting the bishop to postpone his sabbatical and call for a new process of discernment.

This time, the discernment was to take place on a regional basis, with local leaders voting for priority areas to be funded from the judicatory budget. The expectation was set that the outcome of the discernment process would actually determine the funding priorities of the system. Yet the process stumbled and was publicly challenged from the floor of the diocesan convention. The resulting budget priority areas were funded only incrementally at first before program monies were almost completely cut after a shortfall in revenue. The vision articulated at the end of this process (“Listen, Proclaim, Serve, Celebrate!”) appears to have been driven primarily by the diocesan communications office, as a way of formulating a new marketing tagline. It was seen by many to be only tangentially connected to the discernment that was to have taken place at the grass roots.

Not long afterward, when the bishop proposed selling the diocesan office building and using several million dollars in proceeds from this sale and the sale of a couple of failed suburban church plant facilities to renovate and redevelop a historic downtown church which was on the brink of closure, the grass roots revolt broke into the open. In an
“angry, polarized” meeting in which “people with the least stake in the decision were carrying the decision” (in the words of one participant), local clergy challenged the bishop and diocesan governance on this decision and called for a larger mission plan to be created. That plan was to become the Bishop’s Commission on Metro Mission Strategy (BCMMS), the immediate precursor to the Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS) intervention that is the subject of this study.

Looking back over this history of planning efforts, members of the BCMMS identified several recurrent themes. The first is a longstanding pattern of internal competition between congregations, each other, and the judicatory structure. Relationships between local clergy, between the bishop and the clergy, between laity and the clergy, and between laity and the bishop and his staff were full of mistrust, poor communication, and hostility. Second, there has been a consistent lack of coherence and focus in the system’s view of mission. Third, grass-roots members of the system have generally not been directly engaged in mission planning or discernment, and the one time they were, nothing material really emerged from it. Fourth, there was a deep-seated lack of execution, follow-through, accountability, and evaluation. There is no evidence that any of the major failures were reflected upon by the system to learn from mistakes made. One participant in the plan that failed spectacularly in the 1990s remarked that the plan “continues to be championed by an untrustworthy system incapable of self-regulation and self-analysis.” Institutional memory seems short and sporadic. Mixed messages have been given by a system unwilling to own its failures, preferring instead to sweep them under the rug and move on—only to repeat them a few years later.
One priest with several decades of experience in the diocese wrote a report a few years ago about the subject of church growth within it entitled “Entering the Kingdom of Anxiety”—a title that captures the prevailing mood. Each of these various dimensions of dysfunction identified above has significant theological and spiritual implications which will be explored further below as the narrative of the intervention unfolds. Clearly the state of the system in 2005 as the BCMMS process was launched seemed anything but auspicious for effective mission. Yet it is precisely such moments of crisis that often present the best chances for significant change.

The Bishop’s Commission on Metro Mission Strategy Process

The BCMMS intervention began with a narrow scope—the major metropolitan area in the diocese—and a strategic planning methodology developed by an outside consultant.\(^{11}\) It was to be led by a planning committee of between 10-12 persons chosen for their gifts and abilities. An initial phase (August-October 2005) was to tackle questions of identity and purpose, followed by research into historical and current trends (November 2005-March 2006). These two phases were to feed into the development of a new vision for mission, to be tested at a stakeholder’s meeting in May 2006. The remaining months (June-October 2006) would be spent articulating a strategic plan, with key results areas and organizational implications.

The BCMMS process mobilized the planning committee to delve into significant research into the state of the system, as reflected in the historical and demographic descriptions above. To the knowledge of those who researched the history, no such in-

\(^{11}\) The consultant, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, is the advisor of this thesis. The researcher was an appointed member of the commission.
depth diagnosis of the system’s realities had ever been performed before—perhaps reflecting the pattern of lack of internal accountability. While conceived initially as an important and necessary step on the way to developing a strategic plan, the results of the research ended up changing the direction of the process significantly by calling into question the system’s ability to carry out such a plan.

The several dimensions of research done in this first phase of the BCMMS process brought the system, its culture, and its context into clearer picture. One key facet of this was describing how this particular diocese interpreted and understood its theological and liturgical heritage—the system’s theological DNA. One means of answering this question was implemented at the 2005 diocesan convention, when delegates were asked to answer in writing the question, “What does it mean to be Episcopalian in [this state]?” Responses were collected from 109 delegates, representing the range of congregations in the system.

The themes that emerged were to be echoed later in the subsequent BCMS intervention, and provide glimpses into hallmark characteristics of the system’s identity and culture. The largest number of comments dealt with questions of diversity and democracy. In the words of one respondent, being an Episcopalian means “freedom to believe and live out your faith as you choose.” Many affirmed the democratic nature of the church’s polity, which grants voice to those with differing perspectives and permission to disagree. The liberal flavor of the system’s culture was reflected in such comments as “being part of a stunning progressive community,” “a secular, democratic approach,” and “liberal, inclusive, and willing to (at its best) live with ambiguity,
conflict, and questions.” One likened membership in the Episcopal Church to being part of a Public Radio audience—“a small group, but discerning!”

Reflected in these comments—and evidenced throughout this intervention—are differing and competing ideas of democracy. In order to understand the complexity of how the key value of democracy functions in this system, it is helpful to distinguish three models of democracy.\(^\text{12}\) The first is *liberal democracy*, classically defined by John Locke, in which private citizens enter freely and contractually into social relations in order to pursue their private economic and lifestyle choices. Citizenship consists of negative rights—freedom *from* restrictions to pursue one’s own interests. The political process is a strategic struggle to control administrative and legislative power through election of like-minded representatives who will assert the voters’ own private interests. Liberal democracy tends to assume a highly individualistic anthropology. It is often associated with bureaucratic practices, and it typically lacks ongoing means of assessment, beyond simply replacing leaders in the next election. Many of the comments about freedom of belief and action heard at the grass roots in this diocese reflect the liberal understanding of democracy.

A second model of democracy is republican, or *aristocratic democracy*. Rooted in Aristotelian tradition, aristocratic democracy involves an elite of leaders recognized to be virtuous, who are granted authority to rule by the citizenship. Unlike liberal democracy, which stresses competing private interests, in aristocratic or republican democracy there is a greater sense of shared communal values. Those values—and the community’s integrity—are upheld by the virtue and integrity of the rulers, though often with little

public assessment or accountability. This form of democracy deeply informs the polity of the Episcopal Church, with its elected vestries and monarchical bishops for life. It is also highly compatible with the benefactor tradition referenced above, sharing roots in classical Greek culture. The inherent elitism in this form of democracy was evident in various voices and behaviors in the diocese during this process.

A third model of democracy is deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy, as retrieved in recent decades by Jürgen Habermas,\textsuperscript{13} combines elements of both the liberal and republican models in seeking to foster public, communal norms and values through processes of communicative reasoning, argumentation, and action. It stresses widespread, mutual participation. Leaders are responsible for opening spaces of dialogue and deliberation for public conversation about the good. In many respects, the process intervention that is the subject of this study embraces principles of deliberative democracy as a way of affirming the democratic ethos of the system but reframing it more fruitfully.

This affirmation of and ambivalence about democracy is reflected in respondents’ attitudes about congregations’ participation in the larger life of the diocese and denomination. They expressed both affection and resentment for ties to the diocese and national church, seeming to resent the hierarchical, aristocratic, and bureaucratic character of diocesan and denominational structures. On the other hand, a number of respondents identified a pattern of conflict avoidance within the diocese. They saw the deeper levels of conflict being consistently suppressed rather than fruitfully engaged. Some recognized the tendency for a liberal democratic approach to foster dissent and

fractiousness without providing a means to engage or resolve conflicts between competing private interests.

The core mission value reflected in these responses at the 2005 convention focused on understanding the Episcopal Church as a space of acceptance and safety to those who might feel excluded elsewhere, whether through their theological doubts, intellectual seeking, or sociological diversity. The word “inclusive” appeared repeatedly. Several comments explicitly linked the tradition of reaching out to those on society’s margins back to the first bishop of the diocese. His example of inclusion and advocacy continues to inspire and define the sense of mission. At the same time, the church was often construed in the language of family, and numerous respondents wondered about an elitist class identity. “We tend to be in a higher social class than the rest of society,” said one.14 For a church whose sense of mission is so focused on inclusion and diversity, the self-perceptions of a close-knit family identified with the elite presents something of a contradiction.

Worship and liturgy were widely affirmed as core theological and cultural values. “Beautiful traditional liturgy and churches,” said one respondent. Another wrote of being “part of a widely diverse community, held together, I think, by love of God and love of liturgy.” The Eucharist was affirmed as lying at the center of this emphasis on liturgy. These comments accord with longstanding Anglican practice—the principle of comprehension, in which people of diverse pieties would be unified in common prayer—as well as the Liturgical Movement’s renewed focus on weekly Eucharist, reflected in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

14 The social status of Episcopalians does, in fact, tend to be among the highest of American religious groups. See Roof and McKinney, American Mainline Religion, 110-13.
These definitions of what it means to be Episcopalian in this diocese from convention delegates were supplemented by further reflection by members of the BCMMS. It was recognized that this particular diocese was most influenced by the Latitudinarian, or Broad Church, movement within Anglicanism. This movement, which sought to integrate Christianity with modern western culture, reflects many of the assumptions of liberal theology. It downplays key aspects of Anglicanism’s Reformed roots, such as an emphasis on human depravity, and focuses instead on the doctrines of creation and the Incarnation, interpreted as an expansive affirmation of human life and culture. Within the framework of the Book of Common Prayer, freedom of thought and belief tend to be privileged over theological uniformity or consensus.

It is striking to note how the competing conceptions of democracy, with the attendant value of representation, played out within the BCMMS process itself. The original planning committee was comprised of people chosen primarily upon gifts and skills for the work, not based on strict representation. The group did include geographical, ethnic, and lay/clerical diversity. However, only a few months into the process, several members of the planning committee raised the question of representation in the committee’s makeup, calling for a resetting of the table. One of the concerns motivating this call seemed to be legitimacy: the unspoken assumption was that within the liberal democratic ethos of the diocese, only a group that was truly representative would have the authority to carry out the work. Trust seemed to be granted in this system only to those identified with one’s own private interests. Liberal democracy was emerging as a much stronger operating value in the system than a theology of gifts. The
mistrust that had been identified as one of the reasons for the inception of this process was now appearing within the process itself.

The consultant challenged the planning committee on this request as a way to try to hold the committee accountable to the work it had covenanted to do. Ultimately, however, he agreed to modify the process, new members were invited, and a significantly larger committee was present at the next meeting. Questions of representation and authority would continue to appear in the BCMMS process as well as in the Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS) intervention that followed, and will be explored further below.

As the work groups of the planning committee put together their pieces of the picture of the diocese, a consensus about next steps began to emerge. The systemic character of the problems identified could not be ignored, and it threatened to sabotage the BCMMS process itself. Recounting the long pattern of failures, the subgroup tasked with researching the planning history concluded,

Based on past performance, we have no reason to believe we are capable or have the capacity to manage the implementation of a strategic plan for metro congregations. . . . Fundamental change must be addressed concerning the way congregations, priests, diocesan staff, and bishops are engaged in planning.

Another report in March 2006 drew similar conclusions:

It seems obvious to us that we cannot continue to plan mission strategy while ignoring the fact that the diocese has operated in survival mode for several decades, squandering its financial assets and grinding down human resources while repeating the same mistakes. Planning a mission strategy for the future should be shelved until we resolve existing systemic problems.

It was becoming clear that moving forward directly to a new mission strategy would prove unworkable.
Instead, the report delivered by the BCMMS to the nearly 150 participants at the May 2006 stakeholders’ retreat focused on three areas: 1) *Understanding Where We Are*; 2) *Understanding Who We Are*; and 3) *Understanding Where God Might Be Leading Us*. Framed by worship, each plenary presentation was followed by significant discussion time in small groups, with BCMMS planning committee members serving as facilitators and recorders. There was a high level of engagement by laity and clergy from across the metropolitan area congregations.

The retreat presentations told the story of the church’s numerical decline against the rapid growth and diversification of the metropolitan population. It also described the pattern of failed mission planning and church planting efforts over several decades. The history was probed for mission values that could be carried forward into the future, including insights from the vision of the first bishop. In particular, his holistic, missionary view of the church was set against the subsequent backdrop of 20th century ecumenical missiological developments and current thinking about missional ecclesiology.

While the original plan for the retreat had been to follow these materials with a draft mission strategy, instead the group was led in an exercise in scenario planning. Four scenarios were offered that built upon strengths and opportunities. In the first, the focus was on prophetic advocacy. The second concentrated on mission through institutions—one arguably successful element of the history of the diocese. The third cast a vision for planting new congregations in certain growing population segments. The fourth sought to revitalize existing congregations in strategic areas. Strengths and limitations of each of these scenarios were outlined.
A fifth and alternative scenario was also proposed that sought to address the underlying systemic issues. This scenario recommended an additional year of work on identity and purpose that would engage the system as a whole and reach deeper into the grass roots to build relationships and trust. It proceeded from the premise that without doing this foundational work, no other form of mission strategy would succeed. In particular, it recognized the need for theological reflection on mission—something that seems to have been underdeveloped in the system for decades—so that a new focus and consensus could be reached. It would be as much a process of spiritual and theological discernment as strategy.

Participants responded to the presentations with a variety of emotions. One recurrent response was relief that the realities were being candidly described and confronted. One group summarized its discussions by reporting: “Episcopal diocese has a ‘come to Jesus’ meeting.” Some had no idea things were this bad. The precipitous decline fostered a strong sense of urgency among some, who wanted to leap to solutions rather than delay action. The need for significant change was widely acknowledged. One question posed was, “Are there things to do to stop the bleeding while the group decides how to do surgery?” Balancing action and reflection, urgency and patience, planning and discernment became major themes for the work ahead.

While no vote was taken, it was the BCMMS planning committee’s sense that the alternative scenario of deeper study and engagement was the most promising way forward. The participants at the stakeholders’ retreat simply did not voice sufficient confidence in the system’s ability to carry through any of the other four scenarios effectively. The need for clarification of identity was repeatedly raised in the group
discussions. As one group stated it, “We define ourselves by what we are not more than what we are. We need to define a positive identity theologically.”

The BCMMS’s intentional framing of the day with worship and reflections by the bishop linked the story being told about the diocese with the larger biblical narrative and theological resources from the church’s tradition. The morning worship opened with antiphonal reading of penitential lines from Psalm 51, followed by a reading from Romans 12:1-2 that stressed discernment. The bishop encouraged deep listening to one another during the day and set a prayerful and inviting tone. Then everyone sang “Veni, Sancte Spiritus.”

The midday worship centered on John 15:1-5—Jesus’s words about being the true vine and the Father as the vinegrower who removes unfruitful branches. The bishop’s reflections on that reading were telling. He explicitly disavowed that God judges individuals but acknowledged that perhaps God judges us corporately. While reflecting the affirming, creation-centered, liberal theology that was echoed by many voices in the system, the bishop’s comments left little place for God’s holding humanity personally accountable. The system’s reluctance to evaluate itself, hold its members accountable, and make hard decisions about its fate may be directly linked to this theological outlook.

The closing devotions moved toward a tone of praise and possibility. Psalm 22 was recited antiphonally, with its injunction both to praise, to remembrance of the poor, and to “all the families of the nations” coming to bow before the Lord. Mark 4:30-32—the parable of the mustard seed—suggested that great promises can lie hidden in small things. The closing collect (prayer), from the Book of Common Prayer, asked God to
“look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery . . . let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up. . . .”

The May 2006 stakeholders’ retreat represented a key transition moment for the system—a public naming of realities hitherto undisclosed, a time of listening across congregational lines, an invitation to do the hard work required to discern more clearly what the Episcopal Church in this place was called by God to be and what God wanted it to do. It was out of this moment that a vision began to emerge for a new process that would take the system and its members deep into that work together, making new discoveries, building bridges, continuing to listen to the grass roots, and reflecting intentionally upon their place in God’s mission.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Need for a New Approach

From the story that has just been told, it is clear that a fundamentally different approach to mission planning would be necessary to remedy the deep patterns of mistrust, disconnection, suspicion, and lack of accountability in this system. Such an approach would have to overcome the sense of estrangement from the judicatory leadership commonly expressed by grass roots members. It would have to encompass both a more intentional level of theological reflection upon mission and careful attentiveness to spiritual discernment. While addressing the system’s sense of urgency and crisis, it would have to avoid the temptation to resort to quick fixes. It would have to embody in its own practices some of the key theological developments outlined above. These factors point toward an opportunity to innovate a new way to lead church systems through a process of missional transformation—a process with potential for wider application.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky’s work on adaptive versus technical challenges offers a useful lens for understanding this judicatory’s situation, as well as that of many mainline church systems in the United States today. Heifetz and Linsky distinguish adaptive challenges, in which an organization faces fundamental changes in its operating environment and must learn new behaviors beyond existing knowledge, from technical
challenges, which can be resolved by expertise already possessed by the organization.¹ When adaptive challenges present themselves, the tendency is for members of an organization to look to experts to resolve the ambiguity and offer solutions. Yet no such “easy answers” exist for adaptive challenges; they require learning and change on the part of the organization’s members as a whole.²

The role of leaders in the face of adaptive challenges is to define the challenge in such terms; to “turn up the heat” by making sure organization members experience the stress and anxiety of the challenge; to fail their expectations to resolve the challenge for the people, but to do so at a pace that people can stand.³ Recognizing the propensity to revert to technical approaches, leaders must “get on the balcony” and attend carefully to the movement taking place on the dance floor below.⁴

Heifetz’s theory suggests that in this instance, the leaders of the new intervention process would have to work carefully to interpret the challenges facing the system in adaptive terms. If, as Max De Pree observes, “The first responsibility of a leader is defining reality,”⁵ then checking the tendency toward quick-fix solutions by naming the depth and systemic character of the crisis would be pivotal. Any process that could succeed in engaging that crisis at its roots would have to reflect the adaptive character of the challenge.


³ Ibid., 207.


Moreover, the complexity of the challenges facing the judicatory warrants a multi-layered process that would deal with various dimensions simultaneously. For instance, theological reflection on identity, purpose, and mission would have to accompany careful attention to contextual realities, both drawing deeply on the system’s theological heritage and confronting the highly dynamic cultural and sociological situation in which it finds itself. Grass roots members would have to be listened to attentively, while strong leadership would also have to be exercised in collaborative and empowering ways from those most directly involved. Planning and discernment would have to be carefully interwoven. Yet throughout this complexity, clear focus must be maintained to avoid the system’s past tendency toward vague, dispersed mission efforts that never coalesced into a compelling vision.

Given the pattern of a lack of successful implementation of past planning efforts, this new intervention needed to attend carefully to the way in which change actually happens in organizations. Traditional strategic planning processes, in which a small team typically creates a plan with a set of measurable goals and then systematically publishes it back to the system for discernment and engagement, have come increasingly out of favor in recent years for several reasons. The first is that such approaches tend to reflect the linear assumptions of modernity—that change happens in continuous, predictable ways, and can be enforced by leadership. Typically, such approaches fail to integrate the real behaviors and assumptions of organization members with the change envisioned in the plan, and thus never really gain traction on the ground. Within a voluntary organization like the church, it is very difficult—if not impossible—to enforce change from above.

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Such strategic plans typically end up getting filed away without ever really affecting much transformation within the system. That is certainly the case with historical mission planning efforts within this judicatory.

In this case, the predominance of liberal democratic ideas at the grass roots level and ambivalence about the aristocratic model of democracy embodied in many of the church’s structures and practices suggest that a traditional approach to planning that inadequately engaged the grass roots would likely fail. A participatory approach utilizing the principles of deliberative democracy, however, would offer a way to reframe this dynamic in the system. It would affirm the central value of democracy but create space for conversation, discernment, and decision making leading to the articulation of a shared vision.

Everett Rogers’ *Diffusion of Innovations* traces how innovation and change take place in complex human systems. He points out that innovations spread through relational networks of influence—largely informal ones that cut across organizational lines. Various members of an organization or community play different roles. While there are usually very few actual innovators (Rogers calls them “change agents”), key opinion leaders play a critical role in their innovations spreading. Such opinion leaders hold extraordinary influence within their social networks. Once key opinion leaders adopt an innovation, it tends to spread rapidly. Repeated studies of innovation adoption within a variety of cultural contexts have demonstrated that adopter groups tend to fall predictably into a bell curve, with a small number of innovators leading the way (2.5%), followed by

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8 Ibid., 316ff.
a somewhat larger group of early adopters (13.5%), then a significant number of early majority (34%), then late majority (34%), and finally the laggards (16%), who resist the innovation.\textsuperscript{9}

If, as the diffusion research suggests, innovation and change occur not predominantly in a linear fashion, but rather through a process of trial and experimentation carried out through social networks, then the kind of system-wide transformation called for in this intervention process must take seriously the participation of as many members as possible and attend to the realities of relational networks and influence. In their book \textit{The Missional Leader}, Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk liken the change process to that of a sailboat tacking in the wind.\textsuperscript{10} Progress forward is made through a series of movements that do not necessarily adhere to a straight line. What can seem to be a turn away from the destination may actually be a temporary move that ultimately leads forward.

The \textit{participatory} nature of the process is critical for a number of reasons beyond those mentioned above. A cultural shift is taking place in our context today. One of the characteristics of the shift from modernity to postmodernity is a shift from hierarchical, controlling, top-down styles of organizational structure and leadership to participatory, empowering, bottom-up styles. As organizational scholars Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury assert, “The emergent worldview has been described as systemic, holistic,

\hspace{1cm} \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 281.}

\hspace{1cm} \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{10} Roxburgh and Romanuk, \textit{The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World}, 79.}
relational, feminine, experiential, but its defining characteristic is that it is participatory: our world does not consist of separate things but of relationships which we co-author.”

For Christians, there are even more fundamental theological reasons to utilize a participatory approach to transforming church systems. They begin with our understanding of God as Trinity—a dynamic, relational, perichoretic community of mutuality and shared participation. The church participates in the life of the Triune God through the power of the Holy Spirit, having been created in God’s image and called to embody the communion that characterizes the divine life. A participatory, communal doctrine of God invites an imagination for a participatory, communal doctrine of the church.

Moreover, a dialogical or conversational understanding of the Trinity also points toward a participatory, conversational approach to organizational planning and change. If, as Robert Jenson and others have argued, the Trinity is a community of conversation, both within itself and with created others, then a model of planning that engages in mutual, participatory dialogue best reflects the imago Dei. The Trinity is an open, invitatory community; the church’s own community of conversation about its future must also be open, as transparent as possible, and invitatory. The perichoretic communion, or fellowship (koinonia) that characterizes the Trinitarian life and is a gift to the church’s

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life in the Trinity should be reflected in the way the church practices discernment about its future.

It is the Spirit of God who brings about that communion, as Michael Welker reminds us, moving among the full membership of the community to enliven, reconcile, inspire, and lead it into participation in the movement of God in the world.\footnote{Michael Welker, \textit{God the Spirit} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 309-10.} The Spirit gives the church a \textit{future} orientation, working to reveal God’s eschatological horizon for the church and all of creation. Since mission strategy planning—like any form of planning—addresses the future, the Spirit must be at the center of the process.

While many previous models of strategic planning tend not to take local congregation members very seriously in their discernment (preferring to focus instead on the view of “experts” among the leadership or from the outside), a missional ecclesiology asserts a primary role for local congregations in mission and discernment. As Roxburgh and Romanuk say, “God’s future is among the regular, ordinary people of God. It’s not primarily in great leaders or experts but among the people, all those people most leaders believe don’t get it.”\footnote{Roxburgh and Romanuk, \textit{Missional Leader}, 20-21.}

This is consistent with another key Christian doctrine—Incarnation. Given the tendency toward hopelessness among and about congregations in decline, particularly small ones, the doctrine of the Incarnation challenges us never to write them off. Roxburgh and Romanuk remind us, “In the Incarnation we discern that God is always found in what appears to be the most godforsaken places—the most inauspicious of
locations, people, and situations.”

Rehearsing the biblical narrative, they point toward God’s repeated pattern of showing up on the margins, among groups with little ostensible basis for hope. For judicial systems in decline and crisis, it is all too easy to assume that small, declining congregations have no place in the future. The biblical story, however, challenges us to take them seriously as places where God is at work and may be speaking the greatest truth. In the process that unfolded below, this turned out to be powerfully the case, as those congregations most on the margins were actually already living into the vision for ministry that would eventually be embraced by the wider system.

Incarnation also affirms the necessity of critically engaging cultural forms within the church’s own life and context. Just as in the Incarnation of Jesus God embraced, embodied, critiqued, corrected, and fulfilled the particular human culture in which Jesus lived, so too does the church (the body of Christ) enflesh the gospel in all the myriad cultures in which it exists. This means that aspects of those cultures—such as democracy—are to be embraced, incorporated, called into question, critiqued, corrected, and fulfilled by the gospel.

The Incarnation—a central doctrine for the Episcopal Church—in invites us to engage deeply and critically with the practices and forms of human culture, particularly those pertaining to human community. The “clay jars” of the human body, the body of Christ, and human culture are necessary vessels for the gospel.

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16 Ibid.

17 “[T]he gospel, which is from the beginning to the end embodied in culturally conditioned forms, calls into question all cultures, including the one in which it was originally embodied.” Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986), 4.

Alongside the temptation to try to resort to quick fixes (or to confuse adaptive with technical challenges), another common error made by church systems today is to attempt *organizational*, rather than *culture* change. Edgar Schein’s work on organizational culture and leadership presents a compelling theoretical lens for understanding the way in which culture functions in organizations and how it can be changed.19 Schein distinguishes three levels of organizational culture: *artifacts* (visible organizational structures and processes), *espoused beliefs and values* (strategies, goals, and philosophies, usually formally expressed), and *basic underlying assumptions* (unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings).20 Typically, in an organization’s history, the culture is largely the creation of the first leader, who instills the basic underlying assumptions that determine the other facets. Understanding organizational culture involves a process of anthropological interpretation that proceeds through the artifacts and espoused beliefs and values into the basic underlying assumptions, which are not commonly recognized in an organization.

As Schein points out, culture exercises a powerful influence on all members of an organization, especially leaders: “The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them.”21 Thus, when leaders or change agents attempt to transform organizations merely by introducing structural change, the result is usually failure. Patrick Keifert uses the examples of “worship wars” within congregations, in which a new worship style is used

20 Ibid., 26.
21 Ibid., 23.
to try to turn around a declining church, and small group technology, to describe how this approach often plays out in churches. The sought-for transformation typically does not materialize, and there are significant casualties along the way.\textsuperscript{22}

Rather, the culture of the church system must be transformed for lasting change and renewal to occur. Schein points out that culture change is usually very difficult to lead, for most people do not want to renegotiate the basic underlying assumptions that govern their reality. To do so brings significant anxiety and insecurity, which must be recognized and dealt with carefully by leaders. Drawing from Kurt Lewin’s work, Schein asserts that disconfirming data (signs that the basic underlying assumptions no longer pertain to today’s reality) must be kept in front of people by leaders, at the same that that enough psychological safety is maintained for people to risk changing.\textsuperscript{23} Echoing Rogers, Schein describes a period of innovation and learning that takes place through trial and error and imitation of role models, once the old paradigm has been shaken and before the new reality is established. Learning anxiety must be lowered by increasing people’s sense of psychological safety, so that they feel comfortable taking risks and innovating.

Schein’s theoretical insights point toward the importance of careful attention to organizational culture in this process—a reading of artifacts and espoused beliefs and values, and an identification of basic underlying assumptions. It also suggests that culture change only comes when an organization’s equilibrium is destabilized, when the pain of continuing in the same old patterns is too great, and a crisis has appeared. Such is exactly

\textsuperscript{22} Keifert, \textit{We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era}, 39-48.

\textsuperscript{23} Schein, \textit{Organizational Culture}, 319-24.
the kind of *kairos* moment of opportunity that had dawned on this judicatory when this intervention process began.

Organizational learning is one of the hallmarks of a participatory understanding of human community. Pioneered by Chris Argyris, the concept of the learning organization has been developed by Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.²⁴ Senge’s theoretical framework contributes fruitfully to understanding the organizational transformation required in judicatories like the one that is the subject of this study. He notes a shift from a previous paradigm in which knowledge and expertise were seen as the province of a few specialists or high-level leaders in an organization, to a new, more participatory paradigm: “The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization.”²⁵

For Senge, learning organizations embrace several key disciplines. The first of these is *personal mastery*—“the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively.”²⁶ The second is recognizing the power of *mental models*—“deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.”²⁷ Similar to Schein’s basic underlying assumptions, mental models are the paradigms we inhabit. Transformation and learning

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²⁵ Ibid., 4.

²⁶ Ibid., 7.

²⁷ Ibid., 8.
often involve the *metanoia* (a theological term that Senge uses), or conversion of those paradigms. The third discipline is *building shared vision*, which “involves the skills of unearthing shared ‘pictures of the future’ that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance.”²⁸ Fourth is *team learning*, which “begins with ‘dialogue,’ the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine ‘thinking together.’”²⁹ Collaboration is foundational to effective organizational learning.

Senge’s fifth discipline is *systems thinking*—“the discipline that integrates the disciplines, fusing them into a coherent body of theory and practice.”³⁰ Building on several decades of development of systems theory within organizational science, Senge recognizes the importance of keeping the whole in view, rather than just focusing on the parts. In a complex church judicatory, a systems approach is vital to comprehend the ways in which congregations, leaders, structures, and policies interact within a larger organizational culture. Any primary focus on congregations has to take into account the wider ecosystem of which those congregations are a part. This is particularly critical for a tradition like the Episcopal Church, which attaches theological significance and ecclesial identity to the bishop and diocese.

**Research Design**

Given these observations, a *participatory action research* approach that deeply involved and mobilized the system’s own members to address the challenges facing them was the most appropriate research methodology for renewing and reframing the

²⁸ Ibid., 9.
²⁹ Ibid., 10.
³⁰ Ibid., 12.
missiology of this judicatory system in light of a missional ecclesiology. Given the similar nature of the challenges facing so many mainline church systems, such an approach has the potential for wider relevance. Most missiological scholarship about mainline denominations in the United States draws primarily on historical and theological methods. This is commonly supplemented by sociological research that often eschews overt theological assertions and analysis. Neither the historical, theological, nor sociological approaches need necessarily take seriously the perspectives, experiences, and vision of members of the church at the grass roots level. Moreover, the transformation of the system is not commonly a direct goal of those forms of research.

This project sought to address these limitations by implementing a mixed-methods participatory action research methodology that combines theological, theoretical, historical, and sociological insights while collaborating directly with members of the system to effect change and renewal. Understanding the challenges facing such a system calls for a deep integration of theological and social science approaches as lenses that describe the church as the body of Christ incarnate within a social community and institution. In his essay, “The Hermeneutics of Leading in Mission,” Craig Van Gelder calls for a theologically-framed, theoretically-informed, communally-discerned approach to strategic action. Such a frame is helpful for integrating the various dimensions that must be attended to in engaging a complex church system in significant change.

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About Action Research

Action research has been defined as “social research carried out by a team that encompasses a professional action researcher and the members of an organization, community or network (‘stakeholders’) who are seeking to improve the participants’ situation.” Reason and Bradbury call action research “a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment.” The roots of action research lie in the work of organizational theorist Kurt Lewin and the philosophies of Marx, Dewey, Habermas, Gadamer, and Rorty. Action research is concerned with developing practical knowing through collaborative partnership. Local stakeholders are understood to be co-researchers in the process as they are empowered to interpret and reshape their reality. As Reason and Bradbury note, “Action research is only possible with, for, and by persons and communities, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sensemaking that informs the research, and in the action which is its focus.”

The professional researcher brings expertise that is interwoven with the stakeholders’ insights in a dialectical process of co-generative learning.

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34 Ibid., 13.


functions through cycles of planning, taking action, evaluating, and diagnosing.\textsuperscript{38} There is a continuous movement of interventions by the researcher and system participants, mutual reflection, and responses as additional interventions are made. Action research typically involves multiple cycles operating concurrently.\textsuperscript{39} The unfolding of the research process is itself subject to revision along the way in response to the system’s behavior and self-reflections. This was the case with the study in question, where the design of the process was modified at several key moments based upon the results to that point.

Perhaps most importantly, action research correlates well with the theological presuppositions behind this project. Its embrace of a communal, distributed approach to authority that affirms the integrity and otherness of participants echoes the social conception of the Trinity. The intentionally open, communicative nature of participatory action research reflects a dialogical understanding of the Trinity and the Trinity’s life with us. It is focused on developing the capacity of others to grow into greater unity and effectiveness in service, which resonates with the work of the Holy Spirit in the church’s life, empowering and unifying disparate members of God’s people toward renewed action. The posture of the researcher in action research is one that eschews attempts to control the outcome and genuinely trusts the participant-collaborators while working closely alongside them. This is consistent with the cruciform, incarnational, servant-leader character of Christ’s ministry. While further development of a theology of action

\textsuperscript{38} Coghlan and Brannick, \textit{Doing Action Research}, 22.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 23.
research lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, its emancipatory, reconciling potential is beginning to be noted by theologians.40

The Process Design

This project arose from an existing mission strategy process underway within a diocese of the Episcopal Church in which the researcher was invited to participate. The Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS) process began in fall 2006 at the bishop’s behest. It succeeded the BCMMS process undertaken in the prior year that was focused only on the primary metropolitan area in the diocese and concluded that the challenges facing the judicatory were system-wide and deeper than the merely strategic level. The bishop authorized an expanded process with a mandate of addressing the root issues of the system’s decline.

The process, developed by the same consultant who had overseen the BCMMS intervention, involved numerous action teams comprised of lay and ordained members of the system (approximately 60 total). It had four primary levels:

1. **Baseline assessments** of the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes about mission among leaders at the start of the process;

2. **Action team visits** to congregations throughout the system for modified Appreciative-Inquiry style discernment and listening sessions;

3. The development of a **theological position paper** on mission by a group of leaders; and

4. **Follow-up assessment** to measure the change effects of the intervention and assist the system with planning for next steps.

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Data from these levels of intervention were gathered and interpreted by members of the system, mutually informed the various dimensions of the process, and were fed back into the system along the way. The process was officially launched at the judicatory convention in October 2006 and concluded at the judicatory convention in October 2007. In May 2007, a visioning Convocation was held in which the emerging identity, purpose, mission and ministry priorities, and organizational implications were presented and tested with a large, system-wide group of over 200 key stakeholders.
Data Collection and Analysis

As a participant-leader in the process, this researcher was directly involved in the generation of data in the intervention and granted full access to all data collected in the process. A concurrent mixed-methods approach was used to analyze the data collected. Data were gathered through the following primary sources:

1) Clergy Conference: Clergy in the diocese, representing a variety of congregations, engaged in individual and group definition of beliefs and perceptions about the judicatory and its value to the surrounding community at a clergy conference in September 2006. They were invited to write short “This I believe” statements individually, which were put into conversation with each other in small groups. The small groups then produced summary statements,
which were reported in plenary. In addition, the question, “If the [judicatory system] were to disappear, what would be lost?” was asked of individuals and small groups. Responses were written down at each level of these conversations and collected. The individual “This I Believe” statements in particular offer rich insights into the working theologies of the clergy. These were analyzed qualitatively and coded for themes using NVivo 7.0 software.

2) **Baseline Survey:** A survey was conducted of the population of leaders in the diocese in September and October 2006, with a robust response of 787 participants (or 64% of 1,238 identified leaders), who shared nearly 1,000 write-in comments. The survey was conducted primarily via the Web through Survey Monkey, with paper copies mailed to those leaders for whom current email addresses were unavailable, and additional paper copies completed on-site at the judicatory convention in October 2006. Paper copies were entered into Survey Monkey by a contract data entry worker. The survey results were analyzed quantitatively in SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlations. The researcher coded the open-ended comments and summarized them in collaboration with a small action team under his direct leadership and supervision. After repeated discussion and multiple revisions by the action team, the results were reported back to the system in early 2007 through a written report distributed to key constituencies and freely downloadable from the judicatory website. In addition, the researcher presented a summary of the results to the full mission strategy commission and to the formal leadership bodies (bishop, staff, governing councils, trustees) of the judicatory.
3) **2006 Convention Discussions**: Delegates at the diocesan convention in October 2006, consisting of all clergy and several lay representatives from every church in the system, engaged in small group discussions of defining where God was at work in their midst and what they perceived the church’s value to be to its context. Their written notes were collected and analyzed qualitatively by the researcher for themes and theological content.

4) **Congregational Visits**: Notes, transcriptions, and summaries of the congregational discernment sessions were summarized by the mission strategy commission action teams and used to define emerging themes regarding identity, purpose, mission and ministry priorities, and organizational implications. This analysis was conducted first by the action teams who performed the congregational visits in the form of summary reports. These reports were then distributed to the full mission strategy commission, which spent a day in small groups discussing and drawing conclusions from them. A smaller working group, of which the researcher was a member, integrated written documentation of this work into a draft statement of an emerging identity, purpose, mission and ministry priorities, and organizational implications for the judicatory. This statement was presented to the stakeholder convocation in May 2007 for discussion and refinement in small groups.

5) **Theological Position Paper Development**: As a member of the drafting team and larger presenting team for the theological position paper on mission, the researcher was present at a series of conversations about mission theology with a variety of constituencies, including the judicatory governing council, the commission on ministry, a board for indigenous ministries, and a regional clergy
gathering. Notes were taken at each of these sessions. In addition, notes were taken by other members of this team at additional conversations with further constituencies (metro clergy, for instance). These notes influenced revisions of the theological position paper by the team. Together with the paper itself, they reflect the content and character of theological reflection in the system around issues of mission.

6) Journal: This researcher kept a journal of observations and reflections from meetings, interactions and events within the process. He also retained copies of emails and other written correspondence related to the intervention. This data helped illuminate the responses of members of the system to the process as it unfolded, as well as his own internal reflections and responses as a participant researcher.

7) Follow-Up Survey: Finally, a concluding quantitative survey was conducted in November 2007 to evaluate and assess the intervention’s change effect on perceptions and attitudes of key leaders and participants in the process—specifically, the full BCMS members, diocesan staff, Council, Trustees, and Standing Committee. The researcher constructed, implemented, and analyzed this survey in consultation with members of the previous survey team, using SPSS for statistical tests. The survey primarily used Survey Monkey, with paper copies mailed to those few without working email addresses.

This multi-layered, multi-perspectival corpus of data offers rich opportunities for analysis and interpretation. In action research, much of that interpretation is intentionally carried out not by the professional researcher alone, but in close collaboration with
members of the system. This collaboration primarily took place within action teams, of which the researcher was a leader and member, as well as in private and public consultation with key stakeholders in the system as conclusions were drawn and tested. This helped to ensure the validity and reliability of the data and also worked to build the organizational learning capacity of the system’s stakeholders.

As a researcher-participant in the process, the researcher’s role was to help design, facilitate, and execute the data collection and interpretation, continually testing whatever conclusions were drawn with members of the system. Data were analyzed concurrently and fed back into the system as part of the action research cycle. The system’s responses to the various stages of analysis served to ensure a high level of validity, as members had opportunity to react to the conclusions being drawn, correct misinterpretations, and clarify ambiguities. These reactions then became part of the learning process and succeeding cycles of intervention and analysis.

About Appreciative Inquiry

A particular form of participatory action research was used in certain stages of this project. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach to organizational visioning proposed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in the 1980s that seeks to build upon what works best in organizations as they envision a new future.\(^{41}\) Rather than focusing on problems or deficits, like traditional strategic planning, AI instead mobilizes members of an organization to identify life-giving forces. Using storytelling, AI draws

out themes that are used to shape an emerging vision for the future. Recognizing the
power of images and narrative to form and influence our reality, AI reflects back to the
organization those elements of its life that contain the greatest promise for a better future.
Mark Lau Branson has applied AI to congregational life within a United States mainline
context.42

This project drew upon and adapted AI at the congregational and system-wide
levels. The congregational discernment visits that took place employed an AI-style
approach in which local members were asked where they saw the Spirit moving in their
midst and what was working well in mission. This data was instrumental in shaping the
emerging mission strategy and vision for the future. One of the dangers of AI is always
that a focus solely on the positive will feed an organization’s tendency to avoid facing its
adaptive challenges. Indeed, classical AI tends to assume a fairly benign theological
anthropology and view of organizations as human communities. It doesn’t necessarily
provide adequate means for addressing the propensity for human sin and distortion,
which can be accentuated in human community.

In this case, the wider process provided a critical corrective force, so that the AI
conversations took place within a framework in which the realities of decline and crisis
were clearly defined. In fact, when action team members went to local congregations,
they made a presentation of the system’s larger patterns of decline, as well as that
particular congregation’s membership trends, before inviting the discernment
conversation focused on the positive. The AI conversations occurred within a wider
deliberative context at the diocesan level that was designed to encourage mutual truth-

42 Mark Lau Branson, Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and
Congregational Change (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004).
telling and accountability. Nonetheless, the questions of power and sin in human community would need to be attended to and will be taken up at various points in the following narrative as key dimensions of the transformation process.

**Ethical Considerations**

**Role of the Researcher**

As a member of the clergy in good standing in the judicatory and leader of the mission strategy commission, the researcher was a participant-member in the organization being studied. He was authorized as a researcher in the mission strategy process by the bishop and the commission. Full access to data from the intervention was granted by the system.

As one who was very close to the issues, personalities, and structures being studied, the researcher has had to be careful to own and account for his own bias. Throughout the process, whenever possible, he has sought to test observations and analysis with other members of the system, as well as with faculty overseeing the research, to identify and correct for bias. The consultant on the project was also the faculty advisor for the dissertation, allowing for significant ongoing reflection about the process as it was unfolding.

At the same time, this dual role of being both researcher and participant in the system means that the researcher was a stakeholder in the long-term success of the intervention and will live with relationships, effects, and consequences that endure beyond the period of the intervention. Thus the researcher’s personal interests were aligned to a large degree with those of the system.
Data Collection and Storage

Ethical issues also exist concerning data collection, analysis, and storage. The surveys promised anonymity to respondents, and any references that would identify individuals or congregations were expunged from public reports and analysis. Survey respondents were given numerical codes to ensure anonymity during analysis. After the research was concluded, the names of respondents were deleted from the data files. Data will be stored for a three-year period and protected in electronic form by passwords or in paper form in a lock box. Names of participants in the system were changed in the published accounts of the research, unless permission was granted for real names to be used. The name of the judicatory itself is not being used in published accounts of the research.

Conclusion

In the spirit of the dynamic, participatory approach that has been outlined above, the succeeding chapters of this dissertation will seek to tell the story of what happened in this church system’s pilgrimage over the year of this process. It will draw on the multitude of voices heard along the way, describing events, reactions, ideas, challenges, setbacks, and signs of change. The researcher’s own theological and spiritual reflections will be put into conversation with those of other members of the system. Sociological and theoretical insights will be integrated with biblical and theological ones in an attempt to convey the richness, complexity, and innovation of this system’s movement from a posture of crisis and paralysis to one of greater unity, coherence, and hope.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH, PART I

A Time of Transition and Preparation: Summer 2006

As the members of the BCMMS gathered in a church meeting room following the May 2006 stakeholders’ retreat to plan next steps, one overarching question hung in the air: How do we change who we are in this diocese? The system’s conversation about its future had undertaken a remarkable shift from What do we do? to Who are we? The stakeholders’ retreat had revealed the urgent need to clarify the underlying issue of identity in such a way that long-established patterns of mistrustful and destructive behaviors would be transformed.

Those patterns were still in evidence, however, at this June meeting. The bishop was present for this meeting—the first time he had met with the BCMMS group since his commissioning of them the previous September. In his remarks, he made two simple requests. The first was to engage the wider diocese (beyond the metro) in the next round of planning. The second was to avoid making structural changes until the future vision was clear, so that such changes would be in support of that vision and the work of the diocese would not be prematurely disrupted in the meantime.

The assembled group of lay and clergy leaders who had served for months together on the BCMMS team did not contest the content of these requests, which seemed reasonable and prudent enough. However, they interrupted and challenged the bishop throughout his conversation on almost everything else he said. In the eyes of this
researcher, who had come to this system only recently, it was an astounding display of disrespect. After the bishop left, the consultant pointed out how adversarial the group had been—a pattern of behavior regarding which they were largely unconscious. The deep-seated ambivalence about the bishop and his authority was playing out in harmful ways. The bishop and the BCMMS group were both committed to moving the process forward, yet they seemed incapable of actually cooperating and trusting one another.

The consultant helped to frame the system’s behavior using a theoretical map proposed by Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk in *The Missional Leader*. Roxburgh and Romanuk describe three zones of organizational life—the *emergent* zone, in which pioneering leaders innovate and establish the organization; the *performative* zone, when norms and skills are clearly known and organizational life proceeds on a linear path; and the *reactive* zone, when an organization enters discontinuous change, old patterns no longer work, the system declines, and crisis and chaos ensue.¹

Figure 4.1: Roxburgh and Romanuk’s Leadership Zones

Mapped onto the history of this system, the emergent zone corresponds to the tenure of the first bishop—a classic pioneer who innovated energetically. The performative zone was the first half of the 20th century, as diocesan structures and systems were solidified and expanded, up to the mid-1960s. At that point, the diocese entered a reactive period, characterized by an increasingly regulatory approach to ministry, tightened control, a new sense of scarcity, and greater levels of internal conflict.

Roxburgh and Romanuk’s description of reactive zone behaviors echoes what this system was experiencing:

- People become anxious, expressing anger at leaders for their inability to address the situation.
- Staff retreat into ever-deeper silos to protect their dwindling budget and positions. Subtle power and political struggle emerges as they fight over policy, staff, and finances in order to maintain control.
- Battle lines form around issues other than those that are critical to the life of the system. People take sides and demonize each other over secondary issues, which further reduces the system’s ability to address the real crisis.
A constitution, books of order, and operations manuals are used to assert control.

Some opt out (emotionally or physically) of the organization’s life. They might do so by setting up their own network or suborganization. The system becomes Balkanized around secondary issues that deepen the crisis.

As pressure increases, leaders resign to relieve stress in their lives.²

The turning point in the reactive zone is the moment of crisis, when the system tips into confusion and disarray, and attempts to deal with the challenges by resorting to performative skills appear increasingly futile. It is in that zone of confusion—which Roxburgh and Romanuk liken to the biblical wilderness—that deep spiritual and theological work around identity must be done in a context of dialogue and discernment.³

Dialogue and discernment would become hallmark features of the BCMS process that was emerging. The team of BCMMS leaders who agreed to continue in the work spent the summer planning what would take place when the process was formally launched in the fall. At the forefront of their minds was a commitment to building bridges of relationship and cultivating trust through listening across the system. A script developed by one of the BCMS action team leaders for use in inviting congregational leaders to participate put it this way: “This is an intentional, relationship-based process. We are looking for signs of the diocese God is calling us to become in the midst of the death of the diocese we have been.”

The approach of the BCMS team sought to involve key leaders from across the breadth and depth of the system—metro and wider state; small, medium, and large churches; younger and older members; representatives of ethnic minority groups as well

² Ibid., 52-53.
³ Ibid., 55.
as the dominant Anglo culture. The reconstituted BCMS Steering Committee became comprised of leaders of the various action teams. The great majority of the action teams were responsible for conducting discernment visits with the congregations of the diocese. Alongside these were action teams focused on establishing a baseline assessment, developing a theological position paper, and carrying out a communications strategy. Prospective members were identified who would connect the process into existing relational networks of key influencers in the various parts of the system. This was intended both to foster the clearest input and feedback into the process, and also to facilitate the greatest diffusion of change.

While designed and facilitated by the consultant, the process was officially chaired by an Internal Resource Person, a seasoned lay leader who held primary responsibility for interfacing with the bishop. His role proved to be critical at a variety of moments along the way as he tended to various political dynamics. Since the bishop and his chief of staff represented in many respects the status quo of the system’s life and leadership, such a large-scale, grass-roots intervention might well have proven threatening to them. The bishop was remarkably generous in authorizing the project and publicly supporting it. Nonetheless, the complex political and power dimensions of the process would have to be recognized and managed very carefully.

**Baseline Assessment**

Consistent with the preceding BCMMS process’s emphasis on defining reality, the BCMS intervention sought to measure in a variety of ways where the system was in its theological identity, attitudes, behaviors, and assumptions about mission as the process began. This took place in three primary forms. The first was an exercise in articulating
answers to the question, “If the Episcopal Church in [this state] were to disappear, what would be lost?” and “This I Believe” statements at the September 2006 clergy conference. Second, delegates to the October 2006 diocesan convention were asked the same question and responded in table groups. Finally and most significantly, a survey of the whole population of identified leaders was conducted in October-November 2006. This researcher was the leader of the action team responsible for baseline assessment.

Fall 2006 Clergy Conference Data

The annual September clergy conference, which all active clergy (deacons and presbyters) are expected to attend, provided a key opportunity to measure theological beliefs on the eve of the process among influential spiritual leaders. In this case, the BCMS consultant was fortuitously invited to serve as conference facilitator, allowing for integration between the emerging process and engagement with this key constituency.

The theme, selected by the planning team, was “The Ties that Bind”—a reference to the familiar old hymn, but also recognition of the key issue of widespread mistrust and division in the system. It was used by the consultant to engage the question of what in fact does tie the system together—both theologically and relationally. The sessions were entitled, “Do We Have Ties that Bind?,” “Ties that Bind Us to a Trustworthy God,” “Ties that Bind us in a Trustworthy Community,” and “Ties that Bind us to One Another.”

In the plenary sessions, the consultant opened with a diagnosis of the system’s membership trends and past planning efforts, drawn from the work of the BCMMS. The response of the clergy participants was a mixture of sober acknowledgment and of critique—questioning the veracity of the information presented. The consultant, having lived with this pattern of critical mistrust for some months now, named the propensity to
critique and distance oneself from, rather than own, the dysfunction in the system. There was a murmur of acknowledgment in the room.

Participants were led in an exercise of answering the question, “If the Episcopal Church in [this state] were to disappear, what would be lost?” This question is a valuable way to recognize the value of a church system to its wider community. First, individuals were invited to answer the question themselves. Then, they reflected in groups of two, then four, then eight—all randomly assigned to ensure mixing. The responses, which were written down and collected, reveal themes that would emerge elsewhere in the baseline data. Of the 68 responses, the themes referenced more than once were:

Table 4.1: Individual Clergy Responses to What Would Be Lost

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics/liturgy</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual freedom/permission to disagree</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness/acceptance</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness/advocacy/social justice</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensiveness (scripture/tradition/reason)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial diversity/Native American ministry</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place for disaffected/intermarried Christians</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecumenical and global commitments/partnerships</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/intimate belonging</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender ministry</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buildings/spirituality of place</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational and social service institutions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarnational theological emphasis</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth/resources to be accessed for common good</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in ministry</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay/Total Ministry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When put into groups, the participants echoed and reinforced these same themes. The participants saw the Episcopal Church as a unique feature of the religious landscape in the state, characterized by its particular, rich liturgical traditions, its integration of Protestant and Catholic sensibilities (and intermarried couples), its openness to diverse theological perspectives and demographic constituencies (specifically, GLBT and Native
American members, with lesser reference to immigrants as well), its commitment to advocacy for social justice, and its capacity to serve as a safe space for doubters, seekers, and those who might feel unwelcome elsewhere.

The planning team for the conference, inspired by the National Public Radio practice of featuring brief “This I believe” vignettes, had invited several clergy to offer such statements in the context of devotions during the conference. The consultant suggested expanding this by inviting all the participants to write and submit one-page “This I believe” statements as an exercise and means to gain baseline data for the BCMS process. Participants were given the exercise one evening and asked to bring their statements to the following morning’s session, at which they were put into random groups of four, then groups of eight, to formulate “This we believe” statements. The movement from individual to communal agreement in a process of dialogue proved to be rich, as it sparked lively theological conversation and helped participants discern common theological ground.

The individual “This I believe” statements offer a fascinating glimpse into the professed theologies of a significant portion of the active clergy. The 51 statements turned in reflect a wide array of theological themes. The themes that were mentioned more than once are listed below:

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Table 4.2: Clergy “This I Believe” Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God's affirming and accepting love</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarnation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God the Creator and in creation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy, justice, and peace</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus as exemplar</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacraments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering gifts</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican method of Scripture, tradition, and reason</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of God</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry as accompaniment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine presence within</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body of Christ</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution vs. Spirit</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s love and concern for world</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing what we believe</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradox, ambiguity, and tension</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s leadership</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following Jesus</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming human diversity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming religious diversity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripture</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolution</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s call</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ’s sacrificial redemption</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptismal Covenant</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being sent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The largest cluster of statements by far affirms God’s unconditional love, as evidenced in such statements as, “A good God who loves us as we are,” and “I am accepted for who I am, more importantly, who God made me to be.” Grace is clearly a central theological theme operative here. This is closely linked to the affirmations of the
Holy Spirit, Creation, and Incarnation as a belief in God’s immanent presence in the world and every human life. “I believe the Holy Spirit works through all of us,” said one respondent. “The Holy Spirit is God’s presence in and through all things,” asserted another. Likewise with the Incarnation: “The Incarnation makes this world a place of God’s redeeming work,” wrote one. “God wants us to care not only for ourselves but for each other, everyone on the planet because all are created in the divine image,” expressed another. Others wrote: “God is the creative life force in all of creation”; “I see God in everyone, in all of nature and in all things”; “As a ‘creation-centered’ believer I love working with others in protecting our environment and world.”

This strong creation-based theology of grace leads then to mission commitments such as advocacy for the marginalized and oppressed, environmental stewardship, and envisioning the church above all as a safe space for a variety of people on their spiritual journeys—themes heard throughout the intervention. Ministry is construed for some respondents as a path of accompaniment or facilitation of others’ spiritual growth and understanding. The Eucharist, a frequently-cited theme, functions as an enactment of God’s grace and affirmation of human diversity. One participant wrote, “Eucharist-centered celebration of faith at Jesus’ table open to all without distinction, wherever we are on our journey of faith.” Consistent with this line of thinking, several stressed the divine presence within all people: “There is in everyone an inner light,” said one. “God delights in the diversity of humanity and faiths,” wrote another.

It is striking to note the theological themes rarely mentioned—the cross, redemption, judgment, and sin, for instance. While Scripture was affirmed as part of the classic Anglican theological method of Scripture, tradition, and reason, it came up only
twice otherwise—as frequently as belief in evolution or anxiety (the word “Bible” was never mentioned in any of the responses).

The ambiguity around the concept of “inclusion” in relation to how power operates in the life of the system was reflected in comments the bishop made at the clergy conference. He said during his opening address that the only people who should be excluded from the church are those who try to exclude others (in the context of this speech, referring presumably to those who do not agree with the bishop’s affirmation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons as ordained leaders in the church). As we will see below, the system’s self-understanding as an inclusive community was central to its identity and concept of mission. Yet the exalted rhetoric around “inclusion without exception” turned out to have significant limits. Only those who agree with the ones who hold power to exclude are in fact exempt from exclusion.

In *Plurality and Ambiguity*, David Tracy reminds us of the fact of the plurality of interpretations of human experience brought to our attention by postmodern hermeneutics. Moreover, history is ambiguous in consisting of both constructive and destructive elements. This is particularly the case with the church. One wonders how the bishop’s comments about “inclusion” were heard by those in the audience professing more traditional Christian sexual ethics, who in this system are often members of ethnic minority or immigrant groups. For all the narrative about the use of episcopal power on behalf of underprivileged groups in this system’s history, one wonders about the plurality of interpretations of those events, particularly among the Native American community, which may have experienced them much more ambiguously than the bishop might recall.

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The ambiguity around inclusion and plurality evidenced here stems perhaps from the predominant two democratic frameworks at work, both of which offer little means of integrating plurality into a unifying whole that respects difference while overcoming division. The liberal democratic paradigm tends toward forms of individualism or relativism that can deny the genuine differences that exist. As Lesslie Newbigin reminds us, this kind of liberalism (or “ideology of pluralism,” to be distinguished from the “fact of plurality”) can be as repressive a power as any other.⁶

No doubt the bishop’s concern to “exclude those who exclude” derives from a concern for justice. However, the aristocratic, benefactor paradigm in which the bishop was operating makes little provision for accountability to those whose values or norms are in the minority within the community. The leader (benefactor) never really has to make space to listen to the differing perspectives that may exist. In the bishop’s concern for one marginalized group (GLBT persons), he might easily exclude another (theologically conservative immigrants or ethnic minorities). The system’s own imagination for how diverse and uniform it in fact was would be called into question by this process, which asked the question on a scale and in ways that the bishop and other leaders previously had not.

While the Spirit had been referenced frequently by clergy in the “This I believe” statements, the implications of a biblical theology of the Spirit for the issues of pluralism, power, and inclusion warrant further attention. Michael Welker offers a powerful way of reframing the question of pluralism in his treatment of the Spirit.⁷ Welker distinguishes

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the genuine pluralism of the Spirit from two forms of what he calls false pluralism—the indeterminacy of pure individualism, which is disintegrative and lacks any basis for unity, and a mono-hierarchical uniformity that collapses real differences under abstract claims of equality. In contrast, “The Spirit of God gives rise to a force field that is sensitive to differences. In this force field, enjoyment of creaturely, invigorating differences can be cultivated while unjust, debilitating differences can be removed in love, mercy, and gentleness.” Bringing a more robust doctrine of the Spirit into this system’s operative theology would prove to be a key means of reinterpreting the issue of pluralism as the process subsequently unfolded.

October 2006 Diocesan Convention Table Discussions

At the diocesan convention the following month, the same question, “What would be lost if the Episcopal Church in [this state] were to disappear?” was asked of delegates during table conversations. Their responses—recorded and reported back on the floor by representatives of each table, then collected—parallel the data from the clergy conference and the answers to the question, “What does it mean to be Episcopalian in [this state]?” from the previous year’s convention.

The predominant themes cluster around diversity of opinion and belief, with an attendant emphasis on liberalism, reason, and individual theological choice; liturgy, music, and the arts; incorporation of marginalized groups such as Native Americans and GLBT persons; a theology of affirmation and grace; a via media or “bridge denomination” between Catholicism and Protestantism; women in ministry; advocacy for social justice; and a connection to the global Anglican Communion.

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8 Ibid., 22.
The following sampling conveys the tenor of the comments: “A place to question, not be fed answers”; “Reasonable, rational Christian ‘gathering place’”; “Doubt and healthy skepticism are tolerated”; “Shelter for people that have been kicked out or shunned due to divorce, sexual orientation, or gender”; “Liturgy that incorporates all the senses”; “Beauty of our worship”; “Umbrella church”; “Extending a hand and not a fist”; “A space of kindness and acceptance”; “A church concerned with social justice issues”; “Liberal voice of an established denomination”; “Commitment to the margins—poorest and richest—Native Americans”; “The model of worldwide Anglican fellowship would be broken”; “The important mission work that the Episcopal churches (and institutions) do would be lost”; “Prophetic ministry and advocacy”; “Public engagement of realities ahead of other faith traditions”; “Branch of Christianity where it is OK to think”; “An absence of legalism”; “An incarnational faith”; “Inclusiveness of women in ministry”; “The Indians would suffer greatly”; and “The Episcopal Church is a voice for the voiceless.”

These voices of both clergy and laity, gathered at the clergy conference and the convention, echo what theologian Philip Turner critically calls a “theology of divine acceptance (rather than redemption).” Given how closely Turner’s description encapsulates what was heard from these clergy, the bishop, and others in the system at the beginning of this process, it is worth quoting at length:

The standard Episcopal sermon, at its most fulsome, begins with a statement to the effect that the Incarnation is to be understood (in an almost exhaustive sense) as a manifestation of divine love. From this starting point, several conclusions are drawn. The first is that God is love pure and simple. Thus, one is to see in Christ’s death no judgment upon the human condition. Rather, one is to see an affirmation of creation and the persons we are. The great news of the Christian gospel is this. The life and death of Jesus reveal the fact that God accepts and affirms us. From this revelation, we can draw a further conclusion. God wants us to love another,
and such loves requires of us both acceptance and affirmation of the other. Accepting love requires a form of justice that is inclusive of all people, particularly those who in some way have been marginalized by oppressive social practice. The mission of the church is, therefore, to see that those who have been rejected are included, and that justice as inclusion defines public policy.9

In this theology, Christ is primarily a moral exemplar, rather than Lord or the Son of God—an understanding reflected in several of the “This I believe” statements, such as “I believe his life is a model for humanity,” and “I follow Jesus as a human, whose love and sacrifice remind me and carry me in kinship with other Christians on our sacred journey to dwell more fully with God.”

The roots of this predominant theology lie in liberal Protestantism, and its Anglican variant, Latitudinarianism, specifically the Liberal Catholic stream, as cited above. At its best, this theology recognizes expansively God’s work in the world, the integrity of creation, and the church’s call to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.”10 It invites an imagination for diversity in the church’s life and a concern for the excluded other. Whether it can integrate that diversity into a coherent community as the body of Christ is another matter.

At its worst, however, it naively blesses humanity in its present state without hearing the gospel’s call for transformation and amendment of life. It overestimates human capacity to realize a vision of the kingdom on its own—without the sacrifice of the cross and the agency of the Spirit. It can eclipse Jesus’ call to accountability and condemnation of the powers and principalities of this world and its institutions. It can reduce the gospel to cheap grace, superficially offering acceptance and affirmation

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10 Baptismal Covenant, Book of Common Prayer, 305.
without ever taking seriously the depth of difference, estrangement, alienation, and distortion in the fabric of human life and community.

Also significant from a missiological view is the emphasis on the church as a *sanctuary*—a “safe space.” This is not a sectarian ecclesiology that would reject the world as corrupt and beyond redemption, seeking to rescue people into the ship of salvation, but rather a vision of the church as an institution that more fully reflects the democratic values of inclusion and equality that its members hold dear, and that argues for those values in the public sphere. One influential theological stream shaping Anglicanism is the Benedictine stress on stability and hospitality—a “come to us” missiology and ecclesiology. This is played out in the comments about the church’s mission being one of “radical hospitality” (a common phrase currently among the congregations of this system and the wider denomination). The assumption is that the church is a *place where people come*, rather than primarily a *people sent*. A missional ecclesiological reframing would have to appreciate the value of this Benedictine posture, while balancing it with a corresponding emphasis on the church’s sending.

2006 Mission Survey

The richest and widest-reaching baseline assessment data were gathered over October and November of 2006 in the form of a survey on mission. The survey was targeted at everyone in the diocesan database identified as a leader—all clergy, members of the elected governance bodies of the system (Council, Trustees, Standing Committee), delegates to diocesan convention and the denominational convention, members of local vestries (congregational governing boards), church and diocesan staffs, and any other people who had played some formal leadership role in the system’s life within recent
years. This amounted to 1,238 persons—a significant portion of a system averaging approximately 8,000 total average Sunday attendance.

The survey\textsuperscript{11} was developed by the Baseline Assessment Action Team led by the researcher and comprised of two local church members with Ph.D.s, one of whom teaches survey design at the state university. It was reviewed by the BCMS Steering Committee and pilot tested before implementation. It sought to do the following:

- Identify which mission practices leaders engage in and their frequency.
- Ascertain how aware leaders were of their ministry talents and specifically of the biblical spiritual gifts.
- Assess confidence levels in proclaiming the gospel in a pluralist society.
- Identify which mission priorities and values were most strongly held.
- Find out how leaders perceived the relationships and roles of clergy and laity, congregations and the diocese, and congregations, the diocese, and the national church.
- Discover what leaders perceived to be the greatest mission challenges facing the church.
- Measure levels of hopefulness for the Episcopal Church’s future in this state and the sources of that hopefulness.
- Provide an opportunity for leaders to share their thoughts and comments about mission and the Episcopal Church anonymously.

\textsuperscript{11} See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.
The survey was conducted primarily via the Web through Surveymonkey.com.\textsuperscript{12} Eight hundred and twenty-three individuals with e-mail addresses listed in diocesan records were sent an e-mail and asked to complete the survey on the Web. A printed form of the survey was mailed to 415 individuals without e-mail addresses. Additionally, printed copies were available during diocesan convention. Responses were received from 787, for a very robust response rate of 63.6%. Since many of the addresses the team was given to work with turned out not to be current, the effective response rate among those reached was actually higher.

Characteristics of the respondents included:

- Respondents were weighted somewhat toward the major metro area than the nonmetro (63\% vs. 37\%, roughly consistent with the church population distribution) and fairly evenly split between churches smaller than 100 and larger (47\% vs. 53\%). A slight majority (55\%) had been in the diocese 20+ years.
- Almost three-fourths of respondents were lay people not employed by the church.
- 131 priests and 38 vocational deacons responded.
- The ages of respondents were most heavily concentrated in the 50s and 60s. Fewer than 30\% were younger than 50.
- 55\% of the respondents were female, 45\% male.
- 94\% of the respondents were white, with American Indian (3\%) and Black/African American (2.6\%) the largest minority groups.

\textsuperscript{12} Survey Monkey is a widely-used online survey tool. See www.surveymonkey.com.
Findings

Mission Practices

Respondents were asked to say how frequently they had engaged in a variety of mission practices in the previous year.

Table 4.3: Frequency of Mission Activities in the Past Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission Activity</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>1-2 times</th>
<th>3 to 4</th>
<th>5 to 10</th>
<th>&gt;10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visited a sick person.</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served the poor or needy through an outreach ministry.</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personally reached out to a neighbor in need.</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led an activity of a ministry team.</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicly advocated against injustice or oppression.</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invited a friend to church.</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentored or developed other ministry leaders in your church.</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared your faith story with a non-believer.</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in a local cross-cultural mission trip.</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited someone in prison.</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in a non-local cross-cultural mission trip.</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The most common mission practices of leaders in the diocese were visiting the sick, serving the poor or needy through an outreach ministry, reaching out to a neighbor in need and leading an activity of a ministry team.
- Participation in local or non-local mission trips and visiting prisoners were the rarest, with more than 80% of respondents never having done these things in the past year.
- It is noteworthy that more than a full quarter of respondents never shared their faith story with a non-believer in the past year, and only 36% did this 1-2 times.
• While public advocacy was spoken of by many in the diocese as a strong mission value, a majority did this either not at all (35%) or only 1-2 times in the past year (24%).

• Mentoring or developing other church leaders was an infrequent practice, with 38% of leaders not engaging in this activity at all in the past year.

Talents and Spiritual Gifts

Another set of questions asked respondents about their ministry talents and the biblical spiritual gifts.

Figure 4.2: Ministry Talents and Spiritual Gifts

• While 72% of respondents said that the church had helped them discern their ministry talents, 33% said that they were using those talents "quite a bit" and only
28% said they were using those talents “very much” (on a 5 point scale from "not at all" to "very much").

- A substantial number of respondents (45%) didn’t know what the biblical spiritual gifts are.
- Only slightly more than half (55%) knew what biblical spiritual gifts they have been given.

When asked how confident they were to "Proclaim the Good News of God in Christ," 55% said somewhat or fairly confident, but only 26% were very confident.

Figure 4.3: Perceived Confidence to Proclaim the Good News

Understandings of Mission

Moving from questions about behavior to those about beliefs, the survey asked respondents first to rate on a 1 to 10 scale the importance of several mission goals, and
then to choose the two goals they felt were the most central. The ratings give us a sense of the importance of ideal mission goals unconstrained by the need to prioritize, while the choice reveals priorities. The question was intentionally formulated to problematize the classic bifurcation in mission emphases between personal evangelism and social action, offering instead a wider range of possibilities.

Table 4.4: Importance of Mission Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission Goals</th>
<th>Rating a 9 or 10</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Choosing as one of two most important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating an inclusive community in which there are no outcasts.</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>8.91</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipping the church’s members for ministry in daily life.</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preaching the good news of God’s gracious rule over the whole of human life.</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
<td>8.64</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocating for the poor, marginalized and oppressed.</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering reconciliation within individuals, families, the community and the world.</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting people’s spiritual needs in today’s competitive religious marketplace.</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord.</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
<td>8.07</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and supporting educational social service and other community service institutions.</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing the sick.</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority of respondents assigned the highest ratings (9 or 10) to 7 of the 9 items, indicating a desire for an expansive and multi-faceted mission for the church. Creating an inclusive community, equipping the church’s members for ministry in daily life and preaching the good news of God’s gracious rule over the whole of human life received the highest average scores as understandings of the church’s mission. However, when asked to choose the two most central mission emphases, the greatest number of respondents (42%) chose bringing people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus as Lord, followed by creating an inclusive community (36%).
The two items that received the highest scores from only a minority were “Building and supporting educational, social service, and community institutions” (something that the diocese has arguably done very well), and “Healing the sick.” The latter goals received the highest ratings from only about a third and were chosen as one of the top two by only 6% and 2%, respectively.

**Perceptions of the Church's Organization and Vitality**

The survey asked what should be the relationship between clergy and laity, and then what is and what should be the relationship between congregations and the diocese, and between the diocese and the national church.

Figure 4.4: Perceived Current and Ideal Relationship between Congregations and the Diocese

- There was considerable agreement with regard to the relationship between the clergy and lay people: 82% believed that the clergy’s primary role should be...
equipping lay people for ministry in daily life, as opposed to having clergy exercise the primary ministry of the church and lay people primarily supporting that ministry.

- On the question of the role of congregations vis-à-vis the diocese, there was a major misalignment between what people perceive to be the current reality and what they think it should be. A majority (57%) believe that congregations currently primarily serve the diocese by contributing resources for a larger mission. However, an overwhelming 81% believe that congregations and the diocese should instead partner mutually.

- Similarly, 85% currently see congregations and the diocese primarily supporting the national church’s mission, but 61% believe that the national church should instead primarily serve the local mission of congregations and the regional mission of the diocese.

Respondents were asked to rate the vitality of their personal faith, their congregation, the diocese, and the national church.

Table 4.5: Perceived Vitality, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not vital at all</th>
<th>Not very vital</th>
<th>Somewhat vital</th>
<th>Very vital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My personal faith and discipleship</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The life and ministry of my congregation</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The life and ministry of Episcopal Church (USA)</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The life and ministry of diocese</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Respondents' own personal faith and discipleship were rated highest, with 63% choosing “very vital.”
Congregational vitality was also rated fairly high, with 46% rating it as "very vital."

However, vitality scores for the diocese and the national Episcopal Church were much lower, with 35% rating the diocese and 30% rating the national church as "not at all" or "not very" vital.

Another set of questions asked respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with statements about the current state of the Episcopal Church in this state and the challenges facing it.

Table 4.6: Perceived Mission Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Mission Challenges</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our society is changing rapidly and the church must adapt in order to survive and thrive.</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We lack strategies and methods for growing our churches.</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political and theological battles at the national level have damaged our public image.</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Episcopal Church needs to do a better job of meeting its members' needs.</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our institutional image is too elitist and exclusive to attract diverse populations.</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our theological identity is too vague for us to be bold in mission.</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have diluted the gospel and compromised the message of Christ.</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our form of church has lost its relevance and cannot compete with other religious and secular attractions.</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are too traditional in our theology to speak to contemporary people.</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Majority opinion recognized a strong need for organizational adaptation and change. Majorities agreed that “Our society is changing rapidly and the church must adapt in order to survive and thrive” (78%), “We lack strategies and
methods for growing our churches” (71%), “The Episcopal Church needs to do a
better job of meeting its members’ needs” (55%), and “Political and theological
battles at the national level have damaged our public image” (54%).

• However, majorities rejected a need to change the church’s basic theological
commitments. Most disagreed with the statements “We are too traditional in our
theology to speak to contemporary people” (75%), “Our form of church has lost
its relevance and cannot compete with other religious and secular attractions”
(72%), “We have diluted the gospel and compromised the message of Christ”
(64%) and “Our theological identity is too vague for us to be bold in mission
(52%).”

These questions were followed by a free answer question on what is the single greatest
challenge facing the diocese, answers to which are summarized below in the section on
open-ended comments.

Looking to the Future

The questionnaire asked a series of questions about the future of the Episcopal
Church in this state: a general question about how hopeful the respondent is, ratings of
sources of hope, perceptions of what would be lost if there were no Episcopal presence,
and, finally, a solicitation of free answer comments about the current and future mission
of the Episcopal Church in this diocese.
Figure 4.5: Hopefulness about the Future of the Episcopal Church in [This State]

Table 4.7: Sources of Hope about the Future of the Episcopal Church in [This State]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Only a Little</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Quite a Bit</th>
<th>A Great Deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The vitality of my local congregation</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our mission history of advocacy on behalf of oppressed people</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signs of the active leading of the Holy Spirit in our midst</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our mission history of church planting in the early years</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leadership of the diocese</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our record of implementing new strategies and techniques for church growth</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Respondents were ambivalent in their feelings of hope for the church: 57% said they were fairly or very hopeful, but 43% said that they were no more than somewhat hopeful.
• The things that give people greatest hope were: “The vitality of my local congregation,” “Our mission history of advocacy on behalf of oppressed people,” and “Signs of the active leading of the Holy Spirit in our midst.”

• Most did not find much hope in “Our record of implementing new strategies and techniques for church growth.”

As a way of understanding what church leaders felt to be the unique attributes of the Episcopal Church, the survey asked what would be lost if the Episcopal Church in this state disappeared.

Table 4.8: What Would Be Lost if the Episcopal Church in [This State] Disappeared?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Would be Lost if the Episcopal Church in [This State] Disappeared?</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A rich liturgical musical and artistic telling of God’s story</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry to and with the Native Americans would be significantly diminished</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many seekers doubters and progressives would not have a place to explore their faith questions</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many members of marginalized groups such as gays and lesbians would not find a welcoming church community</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without our unique expression of the gospel some people would not hear the gospel at all</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The poor and needy in our state would not be as well served</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many members of the burgeoning immigrant populations in our midst would not find a church home</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• The highest level of agreement (87%) was with “a rich liturgical, musical and artistic telling of God’s story.”

• This was followed by diminishment of ministry to and with Native Americans, the loss of a place for seekers, doubters and progressives to explore their faith
questions, and the loss of a welcoming church community for members of marginalized groups, such as gays and lesbians (all 71-72%).

- The lowest level of agreement (36%) was with “Many members of the burgeoning immigrant populations in our midst would not find a church home.”

Open-Ended Comments

There were two open-ended questions in the survey, the first asking about the greatest challenge facing the diocese and the second about the future of mission in the diocese. Including both questions, the survey elicited nearly a thousand comments, with 78% responding to the challenge question, and 48% responding to the future question. This extraordinarily high response rate reflected the energy unleashed in this process and the simple fact that a widespread survey of this type, in which grass-roots members across the system were asked for their comments, had not taken place before.

Table 4.9: Free-Answer Comments about the Greatest Challenge and Future Mission of the Episcopal Church in [This State]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Challenge N=614</th>
<th>Future N=380</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Go back to basics. Renewed focus on Bible, Jesus, Holy Spirit; orthodox Anglican theological identity over liberalism</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor diocesan and clergy leadership, structures and financial practices</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for church planting and church growth techniques and strategies</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge of irrelevance to the unchurched and our own youth</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal conflict, mistrust, fear and division</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need greater communication/marketing/getting word out about the Episcopal Church</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipping members to respond to needs in our communities and share their faith</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirm tolerant, liberal theology (inclusion of GLBT in particular), even if unpopular</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for greater focus on rural and small congregations</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge of changing demographics and declining membership</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances and giving</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The comments were coded into twelve categories, using the same coding scheme for both questions. The most frequent category of comment to both questions was one the team labeled "Go back to basics," the common themes of which include a renewed focus on the Bible, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit and affirming an orthodox Anglican theological identity over liberalism (15% and 22%). The second most frequent category of comments concerned the leadership from the diocese and from clergy (12% and 15%). In third and fourth place were comments about the need for church planting and growth (12% and 8%) and the challenge of irrelevance to the unchurched (13% and 6%).

Subgroup Differences

The survey asked a number of questions about people's backgrounds and experiences, allowing us to break down the data into a number of subgroups. Some of the statistically significant differences are highlighted here.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Clergy Versus Laity}

About a quarter of the respondents were priests or deacons. Many of their responses clearly reflect their professional role. They reported significantly more involvement in mission outreach activities, and they tended to place a higher priority on all aspects of mission activities, both those aimed at individual spiritual growth and those aimed at the improvement of the community.

Interestingly, clergy were stronger in their support of lay ministry than were lay people. Only 3% of clergy, but 23% of lay respondents, said that clergy should exercise the primary ministry of the church and that lay people should support this ministry. And

\textsuperscript{13} See Appendix B for a detailed table of subgroup differences.
in their comments about the single greatest challenge facing the church, 14% of the clergy versus only 6% of lay persons cited a need to better equip church members for ministering to their communities.

Other responses suggested some degree of dissatisfaction with their clergy among lay leaders. Lay leaders were more likely than clergy to say that churches need to do a better job of serving their members (56% vs. 46%) and to cite as the single greatest challenge the irrelevance of the church to the unchurched and youth (15% vs. 7%).

Ethnicity Differences

Only 50 of the church leaders responding were persons of color, a number too small to meaningfully break down by individual ethnic backgrounds. However, a pattern of differences did emerge when the team looked at persons of color as a group. Compared to whites, minority respondents placed a significantly higher missional priority on community improvement, including advocating for the poor, fostering reconciliation, and healing the sick.

Minority respondents also were more likely to say that the church isn't relevant to the unchurched and youth (31% vs. 15%), that its theology is too traditional (18% vs. 10%), that it's too elitist (44% vs. 34%), and that it isn't serving its members (64% vs. 53%). These responses were echoed in the open-ended comments about the single greatest challenge facing the church. Minority respondents were more likely to cite the irrelevance of the church to modern life (24% vs. 13%).

Gender Differences

Respondents were 55% women and 45% men. In general, male respondents were more conservative and critical, and female respondents were more community-oriented
and hopeful. Women placed a significantly higher priority on advocating for the poor, fostering reconciliation, providing an inclusive community, and equipping people for daily ministry. They also placed a higher priority on preaching the good news, but felt less confident than men in proclaiming it. Women were more hopeful than men about the future of the Episcopal Church in this state, and took more hope from nearly all the sources listed.

In contrast, men were more likely to choose as one of their top mission goals bringing people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus, and to cite a need to go back to the basics (27% vs. 17%) as the biggest challenge facing the diocese. Men were more likely to agree that the church's theological identity is too vague (36% vs. 22%), that the diocese has diluted the gospel (30% vs. 16%), that the church isn't relevant to the unchurched (20% vs. 12%), that the diocese lacks growth strategies (76% vs. 69%), and that the church isn't serving its members (60% vs. 48%).

*Age Differences*

Significant age differences were very few, partly because younger people were very scarce in this sample of church leaders (which in itself is an important and perhaps telling datum). Fewer than 8% were under the age of 40, and over 70% were 50 or older. Differences worth mentioning were that those under 50 were less likely to know their own spiritual gifts, were more hopeful about the future of the church, and placed a lower priority than did older respondents on competing in the spirituality marketplace.

*Location Differences*

Two thirds of the respondents were from the major metropolitan area, and one third in the rest of the state. Those from outside the metro area had a somewhat more
positive view of the diocesan leadership than did those from the metro area. They gave significantly higher marks to the vitality of the diocese and the national church, and took more hope for the future from diocesan leadership, the growth record of the church, and its advocacy history. Non-metro churches were more likely to say that the demise of the Episcopal Church would mean fewer places for immigrants to worship and a diminished ministry with Native Americans. They also were more likely to cite the need for a greater focus on smaller congregations as the greatest challenge (8% vs. 2%).

Metro residents were more likely to say that they were using their talents in ministry quite a bit or very much (63% vs. 56%), and they rated the vitality of their own congregations as higher. Metro residents were also more likely to agree that we've diluted the gospel (26% vs. 17%) and that our theological identity is too vague (32% vs. 21%). They were also somewhat more likely to cite going back to the basics as the greatest challenge facing the church (16% vs. 12%).

Church Size Differences

Nearly half (47%) of respondents said that their home churches had an average Sunday attendance of fewer than 100, and 64% said that the size of their congregation was less than 150 on a Sunday. For purposes of comparison, we broke out the relatively large churches, sized 150+, from the smaller churches.

In some ways the differences by size are similar to those observed by location, since most of the larger churches are in the metro area. Those in the larger churches felt that their congregations were more vital, were more likely to feel that their talents were being used, and were more confident in proclaiming the good news.
Those in smaller churches placed a higher priority on creating an inclusive community, while those in larger churches placed a higher priority on advocating for the poor. The smaller church respondents also gave higher marks to the vitality of the diocese and the national church. Accordingly, those in the larger churches were more likely to cite poor leadership as the greatest challenge facing the church (16% vs. 10%). Those in the larger churches were also more likely to cite the need to go back to theological basics (20% vs. 12%).

**Mission Practice Differences**

The survey revealed a strong correlation between participation in mission outreach activities and attitudes toward mission. The team constructed a mission practices scale by summing the responses to the 11 mission activity items, and then divided the respondents into those above and below the median on this scale. Those who were higher on the mission practices scale were significantly more likely to know the biblical spiritual gifts, to know their own gifts, to be using their ministry talents, to feel confident in proclaiming the good news, and to give higher ratings to the vitality of their personal faith. They also gave a higher priority rating to most of the listed mission activities including both the communally-oriented ones like advocating for the poor, and the personally-oriented preaching the good news and bringing people into a relationship with Jesus. A further confirmation of this relationship comes from the free answer responses to the question of the greatest challenge facing the church: 20% of those who

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14 Nancy Ammerman documents a similar finding in her recent large-scale study of American congregations: “Those most deeply involved in congregational life—Catholic or Protestant—are also most involved in their communities.” *Pillars of Faith*, 265.
were lower on the outreach scale said that the church was not relevant enough, compared to only 7% of those who were higher on outreach. Relevance is as relevance does.

Summary Observations

Like those who responded, the Baseline Assessment Action Team saw in the data both significant challenges and reasons for hope:

- *Yearning for Partnership*: In numbers too large to be dismissed, respondents expressed a perception that the diocese suffers from a culture of mistrust, anxiety, and skepticism. There was a great yearning for a new spirit of partnership and collaboration.

- *Equipping the Laity*: Leaders in the diocese strongly believed that the church’s members should be equipped for ministry in their congregations and the world and saw clergy as primarily responsible for doing this. While a majority of respondents felt that the church has helped them discover their talents for ministry, less than a third reported using their talents very much. It is striking to note that over a third of the responding church leaders said they didn’t know what the biblical spiritual gifts are, and only slightly more than half know which biblical spiritual gifts they have been given.

- *Returning to Theological Roots*: The open-ended comments suggest a groundswell of interest in returning to the church’s roots in the Bible, a fresh focus on Jesus as Lord, and renewed attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This pattern is reflected in the understanding of the church’s mission most frequently identified by respondents as most central (“Bringing people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord”) and in the greatest
number of written comments. Such comments cut across a variety of different demographic groups. While a minority expressed concern over the church’s perceived liberal position on homosexuality and other social issues, many did not. The common thread in these comments is the belief that mission renewal for the diocese is directly linked to refocusing on the sources of the church’s theological identity in Jesus, the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and Anglican theology.

- **Inclusion**: At the same time, creating an inclusive community was the other of the two most highly rated mission goals and was referenced frequently in the comments. Exactly what being “inclusive” entails seems to be contested, however. Some respondents, particularly those on the conservative end of the spectrum, interpret what they see as efforts to be inclusive, in fact, to be exclusive of them and their beliefs. The BCMS process would seek to integrate these two commitments toward theological re-grounding and inclusion by reframing the inclusion concept in theological terms, as will be explored below.

- **Immigrant Ministry**: The church’s ministry with Native Americans received several positive comments and was seen as one of the distinctive aspects of mission that would be lost if the church disappeared. However, very few commented about ministry to immigrants and refugees, and creating a home for immigrants ranked lowest among the items that would be lost if the Episcopal Church here were to disappear.

- **Class and Education**: The survey also reveals ambivalence about issues of class and education. The comments of some lauded the Episcopal Church's appeal to the well-educated, in contrast to the perceived anti-intellectualism among other
Christian groups. Other comments, however, were critical of what they view to be the classism and elitism of the Episcopal Church and see this as a hindrance to participation in God’s mission.

- **Relationship of Diocese to Congregations**: Finally, there was a marked misalignment between how people perceive the diocese currently relating to congregations and how they think it ought to relate to congregations. This was echoed in the high number of comments critical of the bishop, diocesan staff, and clergy. A large majority of respondents want a greater degree of partnership between the diocese and congregations, as well as between clergy and laity within congregations. Again, the questions of leadership and structure would be taken up through a fresh theological lens during the process in the hopes of fruitfully reframing these relationships.

The process of analyzing and reflecting upon the survey results was a dynamic and complex one for the Assessment Team. The team’s three members represented a variety of theological viewpoints. The survey report published back to the system went through more than a dozen drafts before the team agreed upon the final wording and interpretations. This is an instance where the participatory action research process was especially valuable, providing for internal testing of the researcher’s own conclusions with system members. The team’s debates over how to read the results challenged its members to greater clarity and fidelity, resulting in a more accurate report. The dissemination of the report in the early winter of 2007 was itself a key intervention that provoked fascinating responses within the system—a story that will be revisited below.
The 2006 Diocesan Convention: Public Launch of the Process

The formal, public kick-off to the BCMS process took place at the 2006 diocesan convention, where the BCMS work was a central feature of the convention agenda. In a plenary presentation, members of the BCMS Steering Team gave a summary of the demographic trends of the diocese and its surrounding context, showing a series of Powerpoint slides that illustrated the patterns of decline. The presentation concluded that, “All key indicators suggest that the diocese is continuing to experience a precipitous decline and in a systemic crisis in regard to its life and ministry. We need a different kind of process for renewing and transforming our congregations and the diocese.” That process was then outlined publicly and invitations to participate in its various facets were extended to the delegates and their congregations.

In his remarks to the convention, the bishop acknowledged “the systemic issue of failing in congregational development and evangelism for generations.” He said:

I have tried to encourage and gather you together in this work of mission for thirteen years, and the first three attempts did not bring any results to crow about. People ask me why I just haven’t thrown in the towel and given up. I cannot do that. . . . There are some who think that I am the problem, and while I have my shortcomings, it has been my thinking, affirmed by the results of the historical research the BCMS did during the past year, that no one person is the problem or the stumbling block. There is something about the way we relate to each other and to the gospel that holds us back, and given my knowledge of the church as an institution, or a family system, as some have named it, I believe it will take my successor a period of time after consecration to be able to tackle something as deep-seated as this matter is for us.

The bishop’s reference to family-systems theory in this address reflects his tendency—and that of other key leaders in the diocese—to frame the issues facing the church through this particular lens.

It is hard to overestimate the influence of family-systems theory, particularly Edwin Friedman’s *Generation to Generation*, on Episcopal clergy in the past twenty
years. For liberal clergy trained in the therapeutic model of pastoral leadership in the 1960s and 70s, the psychological approach of Bowen, Friedman, Steinke, and others offers a familiar and resonant lens. Family-systems theory has undoubtedly shed fruitful light on the life of the church and its organizational dynamics in many instances. It is, however, substantively inadequate to address the primary challenges facing the church in Northern America today and is problematic on three fronts. First, it has an atheological focus; God is not taken seriously as an acting subject in the system. Second, it has a pathological bias, focusing on neurotic and dysfunctional organizational behaviors, through a clinical lens, where the leader takes the posture of clinician. Finally, and most importantly for a missional ecclesiology, it is a closed systems approach, rather than open system theory, failing to attend to the church’s interaction with its environment. For the bishop to lay blame for the diocese’s mission failures over the past several decades on family systems dynamics was in part a way to recognize the complex and systemic character of the crisis, for which the system as a whole was responsible. However, family-systems theory had not, and can be argued could not, break the longstanding patterns of mistrust and anxiety—no matter how much of a “non-anxious presence” the bishop tried to be.

At the convention, the keynote speaker began to reframe the issues theologically with a focus on following Jesus. The speaker, a Native American bishop serving in another part of the church, urged the delegates not to be ashamed of talking about and emphasizing Jesus. While short on theological content or specifics, his spirited talk

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16 See Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 143.
seemed to inspire those in attendance to new levels of cooperation. As the chair of one of
the formal leadership bodies of the diocese remarked, “We came away from convention
more united than we have been for a long time.” One priest said that the convention was
“far more celebratory and mission-focused than I have experienced before. My sense is
that we are all ready to engage this endeavor.”

New glimmers of hope and unity seemed to be emerging, with the system coming
to terms with its situation, recognizing the need for renewed theological and spiritual
focus, and being ready to invest in a process that would build bridges and move everyone
forward. The initial key step in any significant change process—creating a sense of
urgency\textsuperscript{17}—had been accomplished through the very public naming of patterns of decline
and crisis. This destabilizing move had been accompanied, however, by an open
invitation to participate in a process that would involve hundreds and even thousands of
members of the system. As one participant said from the floor microphone at convention,
“It is a relief that we’re finally talking about this.” The relief of putting the system’s
challenges at the center of its life, where the system’s members were invited to engage
them together, sparked a significant surge of energy, momentum, and hope.

CHAPTER 5
RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH, PART II

The Work of the Congregational Discernment Action Teams

When the BCMS Steering Team met in November 2006 for its first gathering following convention, there were a number of new faces at the table—freshly-recruited leaders from across the system who would convene Discernment Action Teams to visit the congregations. During the opening devotions at the meeting, participants were asked why they were there. The responses reflected the sense of newfound hope that the process was generating. “Seeing drive, spirit, and joy in congregations gives me hope,” said one. Another remarked, “I’m here because people in the pews are finally being asked the question of what God is up to.” One had vowed never to serve on a diocesan mission strategy commission again, after seeing “previous train wrecks,” but felt “compelled by the spirit coming out of this new group.” Another remarked, “I want to see the diocese succeed as a whole and not just separate parts.” Many confessed a sense of ambivalence about the Episcopal Church’s prospects but a strong commitment to persist in working for its renewal.

The Discernment Action Teams would employ an Appreciative Inquiry-style process that had three stages.\(^1\) The first was an initial visit to each congregation that agreed to participate. The invitatory nature of the congregational visits was critical to

\(^1\) See chapter 3 above for details on the Appreciative Inquiry methodology.
building trust in a system which tended to resist anything seen as imposed from the center. At this meeting, the Action Team visitors began by leading the assembled congregation members in a time of prayer and study of Philippians 1:3-11. This was followed by an explanation of the BCMS work and a recap and discussion of the diocesan trends and history. Then, Philippians 2:1-13 was read. After this, demographic and membership data specific to the congregation being visited were presented, followed by discussion of three key questions: 1) *Where are you presently experiencing God at work in your church? In your community?* 2) *When are you feeling energy and excitement in your church? Please illustrate and tell a story about it.* 3) *Where do you feel the Holy Spirit leading this congregation in its future ministry?* At the conclusion of this discussion, Philippians 4:1-9 was read as a capstone of encouragement and hopefulness.

Congregation members offered a rich variety of answers, which clustered around an emerging set of themes. The first was a strong sense of the value of *fellowship.* Congregations across the system cherished the relationships and community that exist within them as people share in one another’s lives. One respondent encapsulated this sentiment: “We care for each other, and we support each other on our journeys.” This involves both a pastoral care dimension and a hospitality dimension, as many participants linked their sense of community to a spirit of welcome. “There’s a feeling of acceptance here,” remarked one. “We love the community that is here and we bring that back to our own communities,” said another. As in the baseline data, many participants were proud of their congregations’ inclusion of gay and lesbian persons and “non-traditional spiritual seekers,” as one phrased it.
Alongside this sense of a welcoming and caring community was the importance of mission and service activities in the surrounding context. The examples cited took a wide variety of forms, from Habitat for Humanity to helping feed the homeless, from prison ministry to serving migrant workers. Congregation members from across the range of congregational sizes and locations emphasized the sense of vitality and momentum they experience in these service activities. Most of the activities take place through partnership with other community organizations. Attending to the neediest in the community and fostering a sense of social justice were major ways in which these congregations saw themselves as participating in the Spirit’s work.

There were also a significant number of comments around children, youth, and young adults. For those congregations in which children and young people were actively present, this was cited as a sign of vitality. They commented: “God is at work in our children.” “Our youth are very involved and inspired.” “Growing and supporting youth programs is where we see energy.” Yet other congregations, particularly small rural ones, cited the absence of children and youth as a major concern. Some looked back to a previous era in which a diocesan youth camp played a critical role in forming and enlivening young people in the life of the church and lamented its demise.

Clergy were seen by many as a source of vitality. The impact of strong clergy leadership was recognized by many congregation members in such comments as: “The energy and vision of the vicar.” “Our new priest is a source of God’s grace,” and “Clergy are the glue—God is working through our clergy.” At the same time, several stressed an emerging sense of collaborative leadership between clergy and laity and claiming the priesthood of all believers as signs of God’s movement in their midst.
This was particularly the case with congregations who have embraced Total Ministry. Total Ministry is a form of team congregational leadership that was developed in the past few decades in the Episcopal Church, largely within dioceses with large numbers of smaller, rural congregations. Total Ministry congregations undertake a process of discernment in which all members seek to identify their spiritual gifts. Rather than one person being set aside for ordination, the functions of a traditional priest or pastor are distributed among a team of bi-vocational leaders according to spiritual gifts. It is a highly collaborative, non-hierarchical model that has worked dramatically to transform and revitalize many smaller congregations who could not afford a seminary-trained clergy leader. As we will see below, the principles of Total Ministry would be lifted up in this process for wider application across the system.

When asked where they saw the Spirit leading their congregations, participants in this first round of discernment visits highlighted such themes as deepening spirituality and worship, creating a space of hospitality and inclusion for others, fostering new forms of collaboration, presenting an “intellectual face of Christianity,” and using marketing techniques to enhance their congregation’s visibility. There was a recurrent sense that if only people could find the Episcopal Church, they would be warmly welcomed and made at home.

The second phase of the Discernment Action Team process, which took place several weeks later, brought a handful of leaders from each participating congregation together in a cluster meeting with other congregations of similar size (in the metro) or in a similar geographical area (in the rest of the diocese). These conversations, led by

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Discernment Action Team members, focused on what was impeding the Spirit’s movement and the congregation’s participation in God’s mission. Having named the assets/gifts and what was working well in the first round, these conversations sought to identify clearly what was standing in the way of renewal and greater effectiveness in ministry.

The themes that emerged from these conversations built upon what was identified in the first round. There was a striking consensus among many participants—from a variety of congregational contexts—that the organizational structure of the diocese seemed to be hindering, rather than facilitating, mission. In the context of a strong call for deeper and more widespread collaboration at all levels, participants cited the bureaucratic, hierarchical nature of the judicatory as an impediment. As one said, “The focus of the diocese is not on equipping the saints in our parishes for ministry.” Others commented, “The diocesan staff appears often to hold too much control on matters. There needs to be a streamlining of the diocesan staff and a concomitant decentralization of decision-making at the diocesan level.” As the leader of one cluster meeting reported, “Many commented on the lack of communication from the diocese and often decisions are made for them instead of with them.”

This call for collaboration included a challenge to local clergy to share authority and partner more fully in ministry. It was recognized that many congregation members expected the clergy to do everything. As one remarked: “Hierarchical expectations—waiting for change to come from the top, rather than the grass roots—we are clergy dependent.” This ambivalence toward leadership and authority from above, which was cited at both the judicatory and congregational levels, was one of the provocative
challenges the system would have to face, as its hierarchical polity came into conflict with a populist local culture and liberal democratic ideals.

Throughout the discussions of impediments to the Spirit’s work, participants repeatedly affirmed a shift toward local mission through congregations as the priority. As one leader summarized, “Members felt that they wanted to concentrate efforts on local concerns more and national/international concerns less.” Such local engagement was seen to encompass a global dimension, however, as demographic changes in the diocese had brought migrant workers and immigrants from across the world. Congregations were recognized by many to be central to mission, and they called for clergy and diocesan leadership to equip them for that mission.

Many congregational leaders in the cluster meetings conveyed a sense of scarcity as one of the major challenges facing their churches. This was understood in financial terms, but also in terms of energy, talents, and gifts. One participant summarized this attitude as “thinking small.” The scarcity mindset was directly linked in the minds of some to “Not having a clear vision of our calling” and “Not a clear understanding of why we exist—do we serve ourselves or others?” This “deprivation mentality” was recognized as fostering a sense of fear, anxiety, and inertia which inhibits innovation, risk-taking, and creativity in mission.

In the third and final phase, which took place in the early spring of 2007, the clusters were reconvened to discuss the theological position paper on mission (see below), which was distributed ahead of time. Having recognized where God was at work and what was impeding their participation in God’s mission, the congregational leaders were encouraged to engage the theology paper as a way of framing and deepening the
discussion. Out of this, questions were asked about identity (Who has God called us to be? What are the gifts God has given us as Episcopal congregations?) and purpose (What is God calling us to do? What are our tasks in faithfulness to God’s call?). The content of these conversations was then fed into the emerging identity and purpose statements that would be tested at a special diocesan-wide convocation in May 2007.

The Discernment Action Team process proved to be critical to cultivate trust and build relationships across the system, as well as for generating core content for the emerging vision. It was not, however, without its complications, as the political realities and behavioral patterns of the system made their presence felt. In particular, the metro/wider-state dynamic presented itself as the mobilization of the Discernment Action Teams for the congregations outside the metro and subsequent meetings took longer than those in the metro. This fueled suspicion on the part of some wider-state participants that they were somehow coming late into a process that had already begun (at the center) without them. Despite the fact that the consultant and Steering Committee showed flexibility in modifying and adjusting the process timetable in order to accommodate their concerns, this was seized upon by some in the system as a cause for mistrust, estrangement, and criticism.

Moreover, one prominent clergy leader among the Native American community adopted a highly vocal posture of criticism against the process—a stance he never really moved from. Some years earlier, a mission strategy process had taken place within the Episcopal Native American community in this diocese. The results of the process had emphasized personal discipleship on the part of all church members, cultivated in part through Gospel-Based Discipleship, a grass-roots method of Bible study and reflection in
small groups. Not unlike the Total Ministry congregations, the Native Episcopal community had embraced a less-clerical, collaborative, gifts-based understanding of the ministry of all of God’s people than was prevalent in the dominant culture. However, this strategy was apparently never well received or integrated into the life of the wider diocese, further deepening long-held resentments within that community against the dominant culture. Perhaps the benefactor posture of the leaders at the center of the system made them less inclined to accept gifts from those to whom they were more accustomed to giving. While key Native American leaders did participate in the BCMS process, many of them demonstrated ambivalence about any large-scale process emerging from the dominant culture.

In hindsight, the integration of the unique gifts and perspectives of the Native community could have been done more intentionally and sensitively, had the consultant, researcher, and other key designers of the process known more fully the background history of mission planning efforts within that community. However, this was not discovered until well into the project. While the BCMS process was in many respects decentralized and grass-roots based, it could still easily be perceived as one more effort coming from the center to the margins by those used to being the recipients of such movements. The Native/Anglo fault line remains a long-term challenge for the system to address.

Addressing the center/margin dynamic around geography was also difficult from a process perspective. The invitatory nature of the process meant that local leaders would have to bear responsibility for forming teams in their areas and mobilizing them for the work. In some instances, the system’s pattern of shirking responsibility appeared to be
alive and well, as one of the bishop’s own staff members, who had been given the task of organizing leaders in the region for which she was responsible, failed to execute this task in a timely manner and then blamed the process itself. While key leaders from the metro congregations had been building trust and capacity during the previous year of BCMMS work, the surrounding regions had not had the same opportunity to do so, and it caused some bumps in the road.

The Theological Position Paper on Mission

The process of developing a theological position paper on mission\(^3\) for the diocese turned out to be a highly provocative one—both for the ways in which the existing values and behavior patterns of the system came into play, and for the paper’s content, which sought to respond to and reframe these very issues theologically. The process protocols had called for a Theological Position Paper Action Team to develop a position paper on mission that would help to provide a shared understanding of biblical and theological foundations for the emerging mission strategy. According to the process design, the paper would employ a deliberative process, beginning with a small drafting team, whose first draft would be brought into conversation with a larger “presenting group,” who would offer feedback. The revised paper would then be tested in a series of conversations with key constituency groups before further revision, finalization, and circulation for general use.

The Theological Position Paper Action Team leader, a priest from the metro area widely respected for his theological acumen, assembled a team based on gifts, inviting those he recognized to have particular strengths or training in theological reflection. The

\(^3\) See Appendix C for a copy of the final version of the paper.
team was balanced between women and men and included representatives of ethnic minority groups and the various geographical areas of the diocese. All those invited were clergy—a decision based upon the team leader’s sense that through their gifts and training, clergy are called to offer theological leadership to the church—not having the final word, but convening and framing the conversation.

The initial drafting team, of which the researcher was a member, settled on a fourfold movement for the paper’s structure: the Trinitarian basis of mission; the wider church’s role in the Triune God’s mission; the Episcopal Church’s particular identity and prospective role in God’s mission; and organizing for that mission. Beginning with a doctrine of God, the paper would focus more narrowly at each step in order to outline how this particular church system might understand its participation in God’s mission and the implications for its organization and life.

Following a first, fruitful work session with the drafting group, the researcher was given the task of writing a first draft, which was circulated for feedback to the other drafting group members, who then developed and fleshed out key sections and significantly expanded and enriched the text. When the larger presenting group convened to discuss this second draft, a highly-engaged theological conversation ensued. There was significant energy around the theological core in the Trinity and a missional ecclesiology, which the group strongly affirmed. The discussion of Anglican hallmarks was lively, as the group suggested casting the uniqueness of the Anglican tradition in terms of gifts to serve God’s mission while acknowledging the church’s historic propensity to fail to steward these gifts well for mission.
Having been revised a second time by the drafting group, the paper was now taken into a series of conversations around the diocese with such groups as the BCMS Steering Committee, regional clergy groups, the board for Native ministries, the Commission on Ministry (overseeing the ordination process), and the Diocesan Council (central programmatic governing board). These conversations were notable for two overarching patterns—the absence of substantive theological critique, and the difficulty of actually talking together about God. In most of the conversations, participants gravitated toward discussing process more than content. This took a number of forms, from discussions of the paper’s style and form, to how it was developed and would be used, to the larger BCMS process, to problem-solving around mission challenges. In several of the conversations, the words, “God,” “Jesus,” or “Holy Spirit” were never mentioned.

Most pointedly, questions of authority and inclusion tended to dominate these conversations. The issue of authority had been raised by the Theological Position Paper Action Team leader from the outset, based on his experience in the system. He had asked, “By what authority can such a paper be created and promulgated within this system?” While authorized formally by the BCMS process itself, there was uneasiness about the ability of anyone in this system to put forward a theological statement—in other words, to take a position—and speak on behalf of more than one’s own individual self.

This seemed to stem from the operative theology of the system—its prevailing liberal democratic ethos, with its emphasis on autonomous individualism, and the stress on freedom of personal belief, which seemed to undercut any group’s ability to make communal theological assertions. For instance, in the baseline data, it was recognized that
the Book of Common Prayer is the key unifying theological text for Episcopalians, but many admitted to not agreeing with its theology. As in the classic modernist paradigm, matters of belief had become largely private, not public, concerns in this diocese.

While the process for the creation and dissemination of the paper was intentionally deliberative, it ended up evoking a conflict between the other two operative models of democracy—the liberal and the aristocratic/republican. The action team leader responsible for pulling the team together to create the paper was, as the researcher realized in hindsight, working out of an essentially aristocratic or republican model of democracy and leadership. In his view, clergy have been entrusted by the community with exercising theological leadership by nature of their office, training, and recognized gifts (which the community discerns). Yet many at the grass roots were uncomfortable with exactly this kind of understanding of leadership and authority, which they perceived as clerical and elitist.

Thus the creation of a theological position paper immediately raised the question of theological authority. As one participant in a regional clergy discussion of the paper asked, “Who has the credentials to have this conversation?” Another remarked, “Is this to be received or engaged?” Anything perceived as coming “from above” would be liable to be resisted and rejected by the system’s members. It was clear from the system’s past behavior that even the bishop could not easily speak authoritatively on theological matters without challenge, disagreement, or at the least, indifference. His tendency seemed largely to avoid overt theological discourse. What was not clear, however, was whether the system could actually engage its theological differences in open and productive conversation together—whether it could in fact engage in deliberative
democracy, and whether difference could be overcome in a larger movement of unity for the sake of mission.

The position paper was intended to foster exactly this kind of conversation, and the team leader had framed its presentation by describing various levels of communication, from talk, to conversation, to dialogue, to argument, to fighting. As he said, “A fight spoils a good argument.”4 He was making an intentional effort to legitimize vigorous and public disagreement for the sake of arriving at truth together. The larger presenting group for the position paper was able to have two lively, generative theological conversations. Yet other invited groups not specifically organized for that purpose struggled to do so.

Some participants in those wider conversations interpreted the makeup of the presenting group as “exclusive” since there were no lay people or deacons on it. While the leader described his gifts-based approach to forming the team, some respondents called the document’s legitimacy into question on the grounds of representation—a pattern that had emerged as far back as the BCMMS process the previous year. Given the emphasis on a missiology of “inclusion,” the prioritizing of liberal democracy in the system’s culture, and the calls for greater collaboration between clergy and laity that were emerging elsewhere in the process, it should have been no surprise that this issue would rise to the surface.

At the same time, it was causing the theological position paper—a document intended to generate consensus and unity—to become a flashpoint for mistrust and suspicion about the larger BCMS process. This is one instance where the action research

4 David Tracy asserts that “argument is a vital moment within conversation that occasionally is needed if the conversation itself is to move forward.” Plurality and Ambiguity, 23.
cycle of planning, intervening and then reflecting upon the response to the intervention was critical. The team leader sought to counter the pattern of suspicion that was emerging by writing a one-page preface that was used in subsequent conversations about the document. This preface clarified the action team’s intent that the paper spark generative theological conversation in order to create greater clarity about theological identity and its implications for mission. The preface called the paper a “gift offering” to encourage theological conversation, and explicitly recognized that conflict often accompanied such a process of theological engagement.

The ambivalence about conflict, in which people felt strongly divided from one another yet seemed to have no fruitful means to engage their differences, seemed to the researcher to be related also to the lack of emphasis on the cross in the theology of this system. Within the overarching democratic framing of the church’s life, there was little imagination for sacrificial suffering with and for the other. Instead, people maintained distance and kept their views to themselves, rather than risking engaging one another deeply in theological dialogue. The cross represents a theological answer to these questions of plurality and ambiguity, as the paper itself would suggest.

One priest acknowledged to me privately after one of the group discussions that “people/clergy just don’t bother about theology much” in the system. Yet, he affirmed that theology ("talk about God," as he defined it) is something that all are capable of participating in—especially lay people. He pointed to the larger culture of mistrust as the reason people were so hesitant to engage in substantive theological discussion. “What we’re talking about requires mutual vulnerability, openness to the other, and a willingness to make mistakes and learn from one another. I don’t generally see clergy do
that except in my support group,” he commented. This priest, with many years in the system, went on to remark that up until the most recent diocesan convention (in 2006), he had never heard the bishop talk as publicly about Jesus Christ as he did on that occasion. “The lack of precedent was so complete that this departure stood out in stark relief to me,” he said. What was modeled by the bishop and clergy strongly influenced, in his view, the ability or willingness of laity to risk theological assertions in public.

Some of the Discernment Action Team members who conducted congregational visits also noted how difficult it was for people to link to God where they saw energy and vitality in their congregations. One even commented that the word “God” never came up in all the congregational visits she conducted. The researcher wondered whether the operational church with a mission (rather than missional church) ecclesiology and missiology in this system left its participants with little ability to understand God’s relationship to the church and mission. Instead the focus remained on us—on the church as a family system or institution—rather than God or the world.

This inability to identify God as an acting subject suggests a pervasive practical atheism consistent with modern theological liberalism, in which there is little imagination for how a transcendent God actually engages with human life in the here and now—to say nothing of leading it toward a new future. Practical atheism is correlated with the eclipse of the doctrine of the Trinity from western theology, where God’s acting in history (both in the biblical narrative, in the history of the church, and in the present) recedes from view.

Modern practical atheism is also deeply related to a de-emphasis on the Spirit, as Michael Welker points out, in what he calls “the modern consciousness of the distance of
The intervention had revealed many strong indications that this system had a very thin operative pneumatology. The Spirit of God was not often acknowledged in the baseline data or in these conversations as an acting subject in the life of the church. When referenced, as in the clergy “This I believe” statements, the Spirit was commonly a vague presence not linked to the Trinity or to the church—a “spirit” (as some actually named it) rather than the Holy Spirit. This was not the third person of the Trinity and had little explicit link with the biblical Spirit of God.

Welker traces the role of the Spirit in the biblical narrative as it unifies, empowers, and liberates God’s people from times of trial, confusion, and loss. Looking at the stories of the Spirit raising up leaders in Judges, Welker writes that “the Spirit causes the people of Israel to come out of a situation of insecurity, fear, paralysis, and mere complaint.” Welker’s words describe well the situation of this judicatory. Moreover, as Welker observes, the Spirit unifies disparate persons without erasing their uniqueness or plurality: “The individualism of the Spirit is marked by a diverse concreteness and by concrete diversity, without crumbling into the indeterminate plurality of ‘pure’ individuality.” Welker’s insights suggest that a biblical theology of the Spirit of God is pivotal to establishing a movement toward unity within plurality—one of the deep challenges facing this system.

The baseline data and results of these initial stages of intervention suggest a predominant operative theology that saw God as detached and aloof from the world and

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6 Welker, *God the Spirit*, 56. Italics in original.

7 Ibid., 22.
church, with Jesus as primarily a moral model for humanity to emulate, and the church as a closed system. All the rhetoric about Incarnation seemed not to point in a Trinitarian direction toward God’s continued, active involvement in the world, but rather toward a sign of God’s blessing the created order—Incarnation functioning, in the final measure, as essentially a doctrine of creation. Without a robust pneumatology or theology of the cross, nothing could lift the system’s individual members beyond their conflicted posture toward one another and into unity for the sake of mission.

The questions of mistrust, authority, inclusion, and representation came to a head at the February 2007 meeting of the full BCMS. After a remarkably rich and prayerful time of devotions drawing from a passage in Roxburgh and Romanuk’s *The Missional Leader* in which they argue that we should not give up hope on churches that seem forsaken,⁸ the discussion turned to the theological position paper. Several Action Team leaders and participants from the wider state raised the question of representation on the drafting team and suggested that the paper reflected an urban, elite bias. They said they felt excluded. The patterns of murmuring and mistrust were surfacing once more. Again, there was no substantive criticism of content—only of process and style (“too academic,” which was heard primarily from clergy, not laity).

Indeed, the paper had begun in the metro and then was reshaped by voices from the wider state, so the charge of an urban bias was not unfounded. Under the leadership of the Position Paper Action Team, the process for the creation and dissemination of the paper had proceeded from the center to the margins, from those in hierarchical leadership positions (clergy) to those below (laity), from the top down. This is consistent with the

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hierarchical character of Episcopal polity and of the aristocratic or republican model of
democracy, which assumes trust in those who are placed in positions of leadership and
authority. When such trust failed to be granted by some people at the grass roots already
suspicious of that very model of leadership, it should not have been a surprise.

In hindsight, the paper could have utilized a more participatory, mutual process of
dialogue in its creation. A better process design might have been for it to have begun with
leaders in the wider state in order to reverse the old patterns of center/margin and create a
greater sense of mutuality. Representatives from those regions had not, however, objected
to the drafts discussed in the presenting group on those grounds and in fact had made
suggestions that were duly incorporated. Extensive discussions had taken place within the
drafting group and larger presenting group about the paper’s style, which was intended to
be accessible but not overly simplified (something that several lay respondents actually
commended). Despite these efforts, it seemed at that February meeting like the process—
though making critical steps forward—seemed in danger of failing to break through the
deep culture of mistrust.

It is unfortunate that none of these conversations addressed the actual content of
the position paper, because the paper actually spoke directly to the patterns and behaviors
named above. While its creation was enmeshed somewhat in the process dynamics
characteristic of the status quo, the paper’s theology offered foundations for a different
future. As the researcher walked further along the process with the system, he became
increasingly convinced that the system’s predicament was directly linked to its working
theology. The symptoms of decline and dysfunction that were evident had everything to
do with its prevailing understanding of God and the church. Thus reframing those theological underpinnings was critical.

The position paper, which came to be titled, “What Are We Here For?,” sought to affirm what was most fruitful and illuminating in the impulses of the diocese while reframing them theologically. Building on the strong call in the mission survey comments to return to the church’s theological roots, it began with a Trinitarian doctrine of God and drew heavily on classical Anglican theology while also incorporating ecumenical insights, including contemporary Orthodox theology. The theme of fellowship and community, so powerfully articulated in the congregational visits, fed into a new focus on communion (*koinonia*), understood on multiple levels. The overwhelming value on democracy and representation, while leading to seemingly endless division and bickering within the system’s life, was seen as a rightful intuition about the mutual, participatory nature of the divine community and God’s vision for human community.

Early in its discussion of mission, the paper began with the statement:

For Christians, the heart of mission is the heart of the Triune God, who is an open, interdependent community of three persons, traditionally called Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Christian understanding of God is highly relational: God’s identity consists in the loving *communion* (Greek *koinonia*, or fellowship) of three distinct yet inseparably united divine persons: the ineffable Mystery, the expressive Word, and the active Spirit eternally indwell each other in a dynamic exchange of self-giving and sharing love.

Grounding mission in the social Trinity allowed for an affirmation of interdependent relationships within creation: “The threefold relationship of the divine life creates the condition of the possibility of relationship for all creatures, as the inner-Trinitarian life is reflected in the pattern of creation and salvation.” Sin was cast as a fracturing of that web of interconnectedness “through our willingness to doubt God, seek our own purposes and agendas, and reject dependence upon our Creator (Genesis 3).”
In a text box, the paper addressed the issue of mistrust directly with the headline, “Trustworthy community begins with a trustworthy God.” It went on to say:

Learning to trust one another begins with our trust in God, who as a loving community of three divine persons, creates, calls, forgives, and leads us into a new future. God’s promises and active presence in our midst are the foundation of the church’s common life—not our own strength, skill, or best intentions.

Asserting God’s active agency in the life of the church, the paper then sought to integrate the social and sending conceptions of the Trinity, building upon the communion concept introduced above:

*We assert that God is a missionary God.* God the Holy Trinity creates the world for loving, interdependent relationship, or communion, and then seeks to invite all creation back into the communion of the divine life when it has been estranged. The Trinity lives in everlasting communion; Jesus is the human one who lives most fully into that communion; the Spirit-filled community of Jesus lives in the world to draw the world into that communion. “Mission” comes from a Latin term for *sending.* Within the movement of salvation, God the Father sends Jesus the Son; the Father through the Son sends the Holy Spirit; the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together send the church into the world. Mission is the journey to the New Creation (Revelation 21).

By reclaiming an eschatological horizon of communion, the church is then seen as a community of Jesus filled by the Spirit whose purpose is to draw the world into the divine communion.

Moving into a discussion of the church’s role in mission, the theme of communion was extended and complemented by an emphasis on reconciliation through the cross. The system’s impulse toward inclusion was affirmed, but critiqued as insufficient without a deeper understanding of communion and reconciliation. A text box said:

*Inclusion and Communion:* This is a state with a deep heritage of democratic and egalitarian ideals. Perhaps it is no surprise that we in the Episcopal Church often talk about *inclusion* as one of our primary commitments. Yet mere inclusion is not the same as *reconciliation* and *communion*—words from our scriptural and theological tradition that describe more accurately what sets the church apart from
other societies, clubs, or organizations. At the church’s center is God’s active work of reconciling the world in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into the communion of the divine life.

While there was occasional reference to reconciliation up to this point in the process by system members (echoing the Prayer Book’s definition of the church’s mission as “to restore all people to unity with God and one another in Christ”), there was little emphasis on the centrality of the cross in reconciliation. The paper sought to reclaim the costly character of Christian reconciliation as a participation in Christ’s own self-emptying identification with the other.

The church is a community of the cross. For Christians, the cross signifies both Jesus’ death and his resurrection. Thus, the church is to be characterized by self-emptying service, foot-washing (John 13) and the laying aside of personal agendas for the greater good (Romans 15). It bears the brokenness of the cross—imperfect and incomplete, yet growing together into full maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4).

The cruciform character of Christian community and mission and the theme of Trinitarian communion were placed side by side as integral to one another. The paper asserted a key theme of this study—no communion in the church or world without the cross.

The theme of communion was further developed in the section on Anglican gifts for mission. Building from the practice of the Eucharist, which had been strongly affirmed as central to Episcopal identity in the baseline data, the paper argued:

The Holy Communion provides a liturgical experience of reconciled diversity, in which genuine differences between persons are neither ignored nor dissolved, but are gathered up into a larger commonality. Christ is the center of this common life: “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (2 Corinthians 5). The faithful people are then sent forth from the liturgical gathering as ambassadors of Christ to bear the promises of the gospel and model and work for reconciled diversity in the brokenness and need of the world.

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9 Book of Common Prayer, 855.
The centripetal, or gathering, movement of the liturgy was balanced here with a corresponding centrifugal, or sending, movement. The impulse toward advocacy for justice was then recast in light of Trinitarian communion:

The experience of reconciled diversity gives rise to a vision of the communion of all, from which no person, indeed no creature in all creation, is meant to be excluded. It is from the communion-inspired vision that Episcopalians in [this state] derive their commitments to advocacy for the marginalized and oppressed, and to the inclusion of all sorts and conditions of persons in open congregations.

Recognizing the propensity for God to be eclipsed from the church’s understanding of its mission, the paper asserted: “The simple inclusion of diverse persons is not in itself communion; inclusivity becomes communion when diversities are reconciled in Christ into one body that works together for the common good.” The paper acknowledged the gap between the system’s own sanguine view of its inclusiveness and the realities of classism, racism, and other forms of exclusion identified in the baseline data: “It is only in recognizing our own need for continual reconciliation in Christ that we will be able to join God’s mission to bring reconciling communion to the world.”

The paper went on to affirm some of the key identity markers for the Episcopal Church that were noted in the baseline data as potential strengths for mission. These included “the centrality of communion,” “comprehensiveness,” “distributed authority,” “rich liturgical and artistic expressions of the Christian story,” and “intellectual curiosity, freedom, and engagement.” The intent here was to encourage the system to cultivate an imagination for the missional opportunities its own identity might hold.

The paper’s final section on organizing for mission and leadership drew attention to the discontinuities between the system’s present cultural context and the contexts in which many of its forms of organization and leadership first emerged. These included the geographical parish concept and the church’s assumed role at the center of society—both
carryovers from the established Church of England. Acknowledging the sense of loss and anxiety that the major changes in context underway today involve, the paper cautioned against making idols “out of what we once knew or what surrounds in the culture” and clinging “tightly to what we know best.”

Instead, our primary task today is to return to the core sources of our identity—our Christian identity. This means learning to listen to the biblical narrative and the Holy Spirit together with a fresh depth and openness, and practicing the classic spiritual disciplines of our faith (such as prayer, worship, witness, service, silence, Sabbath and solitude).

This call to reground the church’s identity in Christian discipleship picked up on the survey comments by focusing on imaginative engagement with the biblical narrative in community and other spiritual disciplines. A text box in this section lifted up the Gospel-Based Discipleship form of community Bible study developed within the Native American Episcopal community as a fruitful practice for the wider system to adopt.

The paper went on to explore the paradigm shift from mission and ministry being carried out primarily by specialists or experts (“missionaries” or clergy) to all of God’s people, asserting, “the church’s primary missionaries are its lay members in their daily life and work.” Referencing the innovation taking place currently within the Church of England around “fresh expressions of church,”10 the paper called for an expanded imagination for what church and ministry might look like in order to engage people where and how they live today. It also explicitly critiqued the family metaphor for congregational life, noting, “Our understanding of the church as a family has often become an overly constricting one that has closed us off to the world.”

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In the section on regional mission, the distinction between local and mobile ministries\textsuperscript{11} was invoked as a way of reframing the purpose of the judicatory away from mere governance and control and toward cultivating mission across local boundaries. The theme of \textit{communion}, which had been the central metaphor of the earlier sections of the paper, was evoked here to suggest an alternative organizational paradigm for the diocese:

Instead of a geographical domain controlled by a corporate CEO (bishop) and diocesan bureaucracy, the diocese may be reconceived as a \textit{communion} of congregations and other ministries networked and equipped for mission. Reflecting the shape of the Trinity, the congregations, institutions, and members of the diocese share an interdependent, common life of service and witness.

This conception was to be developed in the succeeding phase of the intervention as a primary metaphor for the system’s future identity. It would serve in part to address the concerns about diocesan organization and control being voiced at the grass roots.

A final section on leadership acknowledged that many clergy leaders “are typically not trained to lead in mission, think like missionaries, or develop collaborative teams.” It called for a new emphasis on spiritual gifts discernment, cultivating communities of imaginative engagement with scripture, and developing lay leaders, rather than the current “predominant models of clergy leadership” which “have been that of family care-giver/chaplain and administrator of a non-profit voluntary organization.”

The leadership of bishops was recast as “facilitating relationships, partnerships, and resource-sharing for mission among congregations and other bodies as bridge-builders.” Acknowledging grass roots resistance to centralized, bureaucratic forms of leadership, the paper continued, “Those partnerships and mission initiatives may more likely emerge from and remain at the grass roots than be conceived and controlled at the diocesan

\textsuperscript{11} See Van Gelder, \textit{Essence of the Church}, 166-72.
level.” It also noted, “Unity can no longer be enforced by regulation; it must be cultivated through interpretive leadership, leadership that makes sense out of the realities of the contemporary world in light of the biblical and theological story we share.”

In all, the theological position paper contained significant insights for the renewal and redevelopment of the system, drawing both on its own theological values and heritage, enriching them with ecumenical insights, and also challenging the system to adapt in major ways. Given the resistance to the paper that had emerged thus far in the process, however, it was clear that better communication about its intended use was necessary to get people actually to read and engage it. Following the February 2007 meeting where it had been a flashpoint for controversy, a subtitle, “A Working Document as of February 2007” and a further, longer preface were added to make even more explicit the intention that this paper existed to initiate, not end, theological conversations about mission in the diocese. This was clearly “a” theological position paper; the system was not yet capable of uniting in consensus around one document. The preface, subtitle, and process clarifications did serve to ease the mistrust, and the paper went on to spawn generative conversations within a variety of contexts in the system in the succeeding months.

**Seeds of Influence**

Two opportunities arose to engage key opinion leaders in the system in conversations about the missional church in the winter of 2006-07. The first was the second annual Missional Church Consultation at Luther Seminary that took place in November, at which the researcher presented a paper and workshop on reframing
Episcopal polity.\textsuperscript{12} Eighteen clergy from the diocese were among the attendees. For some, it was a key introduction to the missional conversation. The theme of “The Missional Church and Denominations” fit particularly well with the wider process taking place at the time in the system. Participants from the system had opportunities to engage one another and leaders from other church systems in dialogue about the challenges facing denominations today and how a missional ecclesiology might address them.

The researcher was subsequently invited to present the same paper at a meeting of the clergy in the metro area of the diocese which took place in February 2007. This time, there were between 30 and 40 clergy in attendance. As with the Missional Church Consultation, the researcher’s paper was distributed ahead of time, so in this case it also reached those who could not come in person. The presentation was received warmly, and the conversation that ensued generated significant energy. In particular the paper’s call for a network organizational design for dioceses and the denomination struck a positive chord. There was also significant interest in re-envisioning the diaconate. At the conclusion, the discussion shifted toward implementation. “How do we make this happen?” asked one key leader, who saw a “train wreck” coming between what the paper envisioned and “the current realities of the system.” Afterward, the researcher received an email from another priest who wrote, “I was one of the persons who answered on my survey that I was not feeling much hope for the church. Your paper changes that for me in every way.”

The researcher began to recognize at this point some of the complexities of his own role as a key change agent, responsible for framing much of the content discovered

by the process, introducing key concepts, and naming baseline data that deeply challenged the status quo. In his own journal, the researcher drew on Ronald Heifetz’s concept of leading without formal authority as a useful lens for understanding his own role. Heifetz recognizes that those without formal leadership authority in an organization are freer to focus on the adaptive challenge than those in positions of formal authority. They have what he calls “latitude for creative deviance.” The challenge, according to Heifetz, is to draw attention and then deflect it to the issues that need to be addressed. The danger is being overly identified personally with the adaptive challenge, which could invite sabotage or assassination.

The researcher was not unaware of the possibility that the system might seek to sabotage or assassinate him as he took an increasingly public role in the process at this particular juncture. He was both the bearer of bad news to those significantly invested in the status quo, as well as the one casting an alternative vision for the system’s life that would have widespread impact were it to be adopted. He could be the subject of attempted manipulation by any number of parties agitating for change.

The researcher sought to address these complexities by taking Heifetz’s counsel to “give the work back to the people” to heart—by seeking to place the burden for resolving the challenge back onto the system’s leaders whenever they tried to place it on him. Close collaboration with the Steering Committee was essential, since they were the first line of key influencers in the process and the wider system. Under the consultant’s

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13 Heifetz, Leadership without Easy Answers, 183-231.
14 Ibid., 188.
15 Ibid., 225.
16 Ibid., 262-63.
leadership, the Steering Committee repeatedly engaged in deliberative processes—hashing out issues facing the system as a smaller group, learning in the process to trust one another, to appreciate one another’s gifts and perspectives, and to live into a new level of partnership. They mulled over and tried on for size the new ideas on a provisional basis. The Steering Committee was where critical early signs of culture change began to appear as its members modeled a new way of being church together.

The researcher’s role within the Steering Committee was one of significant, but selective, influence—framing the issues, raising questions at opportune moments, sometimes deliberately refraining from speaking, other times expressing views passionately if he sensed it might serve the transformation underway. The researcher and consultant frequently reflected together on their respective roles throughout the process in order to bring as high a level of intentionality as possible to their work with the system. They also engaged in informal planning sessions with key Steering Committee leaders at several stages in order to further the cycle of diagnosis, planning, action, and evaluation.

Throughout the project, the Internal Resource Person and consultant met periodically with the bishop and his chief of staff to apprise them of the progress and developments and also gain their feedback and insights. The Internal Resource Person proved adept at managing many of the political dynamics with the bishop, who generally adopted a posture of support, creating room for the process to go deeper and wider than was previously imagined. At the same time, the bishop’s chief of staff—widely-recognized to wield significant authority behind the scenes—communicated a somewhat more ambivalent set of messages about the project.
System Convergence

As the intervention progressed and began to pick up more momentum, the bishop sensed a need for a conversation about integration with the existing program initiatives, activities, and formal leadership structures of the system. He invited the consultant to facilitate a meeting in February 2007 that would include the diocesan staff and the three governing bodies (Council, Trustees, and Standing Committee), as well as a few members of the BCMS Steering Committee. The fact that this meeting took place was a sign that the energy unleashed by the BCMS process was now beginning to touch, and in some ways call into question, the ongoing business of the system.

On behalf of the Baseline Assessment Action Team, the researcher was invited to present a summary of the results of the 2006 Mission Survey. The day’s agenda did not allow for significant discussion of the results in plenary session, but the researcher was approached by the bishop during a break with some concerns. The bishop said that the high number of comments critiquing the drift toward secularization and calling for theological and spiritual renewal (what the survey report called “Go back to basics”) and the affirmation of “ Bringing people into a life-changing relationship with Jesus as Lord” as the highest mission value were “out of character with the diocese I know,” in his words. He wondered whether one particular congregation, known for its evangelical ethos, had somehow manipulated the results or “stuffed the ballot box.” The researcher was also to hear similar concerns later from two other leaders.

There was clearly some cognitive dissonance at play between the bishop’s own mental model of the system and the actual reality at the grass roots. Since the system had never asked the questions in as widespread a way as we did in this survey, the bishop and
these other leaders were making assumptions that turned out to be at odds with the attitudes of a significant portion of key constituents. The researcher provided the bishop with a detailed explanation of the results, explaining that it was technically impossible for one congregation to manipulate the survey, and showed that the comments that he thought were confined largely to one ostensibly evangelical congregation actually came from across the system—from churches of different sizes and locations. The dissemination of the results of the survey itself was beginning to shake up the system’s own imagination and render more complex some of the dominant assumptions.

After the survey presentation, the assembled leaders at the meeting were invited to spend time in mixed small groups discussing the current state of the system and beginning to articulate identity and purpose statements. Some of the key themes from the survey report and the theological position paper were heard in what was reported back, including a Trinitarian view of community, a stress on cultivating spiritual gifts, the theme of reconciliation, and a new focus on collaboration. Later in the day, a list of 42 activities and processes taking place in the diocese was distributed, and participants were asked to gather in small groups to add to, categorize, assign responsibility for, or recommend “strategically abandoning” these tasks. The groups were fairly quickly overwhelmed by the multiplicity of activities currently taking place in the system. They had a difficult time organizing them, yet were also reluctant to recommend abandoning any.

This exercise was a brilliant way for the consultant to force the system’s leadership bodies to own and feel the complexity and disorder of its current life. Patrick Keifert reminds us of Augustine of Hippo’s definition of sin as “disordered love” in the
Confessions. Trying to do and love all the many good things in the world leads us to “dissipate our lives into nothing, and like cold water onto a hot griddle, our love and action evaporate into thin air if we do not order our loving by God’s will.”17 This system was profoundly unfocused in its life and mission, and heretofore, the elected governing bodies seemed reluctant to assume strong ownership of this reality.

That began to change at this very meeting, however, as the data from the intervention sparked a new and strikingly different conversation among the Diocesan Council. During the final session of the day, each governing body was allowed to meet separately. For the members of the Council, who were accustomed to meeting only with the bishop and staff present, and working through agendas prepared by the staff and distributed only shortly before the meeting, it was an empowering experience. As the notes from their conversation indicate, members repeatedly referenced the survey data, as well as the researcher’s essay that had been presented at the Missional Church Consultation (at which several council members had been present) in order to call for a new approach. “Council’s job is to chart the course for mission,” said one. “Running the institution is secondary.” Another called for a “paradigm shift: the diocese seems to be micromanaged; we shouldn’t just be a rubber stamp; we need opportunities to discuss the larger issues of the diocese.” “What does it mean to move from a pyramidal, hierarchical structure to a new paradigm?” asked another. Someone proposed that the group draft its own agenda for its next meeting right there on the spot. Key leaders in the system were beginning to own their own future and find their voice. This put them on something of a

17 Keifert, We Are Here Now, 72.
collision course with the bishop, his chief of staff, and the way in which things had previously been done.

A few days later, the full BCMS (including action team members) met for a daylong session. This was the meeting referenced above in the theological position paper discussion in which the theme of representation emerged as a predominant way to critique the process. The meeting was significant for bringing to the surface some of the deeper behavior patterns that had been cropping up at various places. Rather than simply respond to the presenting issue, the consultant challenged the group to go deeper in recognizing how it was in its own life replicating exactly the mistrust, suspicion, and enmity that the process was seeking to change. It was a sobering conversation.

The researcher presented the mission survey results to this group as well. They then spent time in small groups wrestling with identity and purpose, just as the governing bodies, bishop, and staff had done. Those conversations revealed some theological contradictions that the survey comments had also pointed to. For instance, a number of participants resisted the call to reclaim the church’s biblical and theological tradition, arguing instead for a more interfaith stance in the name of “inclusion” and “ambiguity.” Many seemed to have a hard time thinking through the missional implications of the Anglican tradition. There was much discussion of the fact that 70% of the leaders who took the survey were over age 50, a sign of an aging church. Some focused on growth techniques like better marketing of the church. Others began to envision a renewed diocese in which networking was facilitated to overcome the current “silo” reality and “maze of bureaucracy,” as the notes read.
For the researcher as a participant and observer, these two meetings brought to his attention the depth of the theological and spiritual challenges facing the system. He began to wonder whether the gifts that were being generated in the process would be able to be received by a system that seemed to resist cooperation. It seemed that organizational process interventions alone would not be sufficient to change the system’s behaviors; what was required was a renewed theological core around which people could come to consensus. The researcher noted the system’s inability to dwell long in spiritual or theological conversations without quickly reverting to discussing process. At the heart of much of the suspicion in the system seemed to be a pervasive secularism that reflected the church’s deep accommodation to late modern American culture, with its strongly individualistic, consumerist tendencies, difficulty in engaging in substantive dialogue about things that matter across lines of difference, and continued privatization of religious belief.

It occurred to the researcher that it was only through reclaiming understandings of the church as the body of Christ comprised of gifted, yoked members; of the Spirit’s work in unifying plural persons for the sake of mission; of the cross as the center of reconciliation; and of God as a perichoretic Trinitarian community; that real change would occur. There was too much autonomous individualism embedded in the ideals of liberal democracy and representation that defined this system’s self-understanding. The only alternative metaphor operative was a claustrophobic sense of the church as intimate family, with little room for the stranger. It was only through reclaiming understandings of the church as the body of Christ comprised of gifted, yoked members; of the Spirit’s work in unifying plural persons for the sake of mission; of the cross as the center of reconciliation; and of God as a perichoretic Trinitarian community; that real change would occur. There was too much autonomous individualism embedded in the ideals of liberal democracy and representation that defined this system’s self-understanding. The only alternative metaphor operative was a claustrophobic sense of the church as intimate family, with little room for the stranger.  

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within which to comprehend plurality and unity, cooperation and trust, difference and interdependence. The intervention would need to engage the system further in coming to agreement around one in the months ahead.
In early March 2007, the consultant convened a conversation with a handful of key leaders from the BCMS Steering Committee to reflect upon the status of the process and plan for next steps. In calling the meeting, he noted the continued challenges to the process by some factions in the name of representation, as well as the fact that in the past, process solutions were typically developed to address such challenges. He raised the question of whether process solutions would in fact ever fully appease people disenchanted with the process. Instead, was the system now at a key turning point, where the only way to move forward was to address directly the underlying issues of identity and purpose?

The conversation was intense, fueled in part by a short theological paper drafted by the Theological Position Paper Action Team leader. He explicitly raised the question, “Can Jesus be Lord in this diocese?” His question emerged from wrestling for many years with the predominant Liberal Protestant ethos of the system, which tended to eschew the Lordship of Christ. The researcher was struck by the fact that the bishop would frequently alter the words of the Prayer Book liturgy from “The Lord be with you,” to “God be with you.” Given the strongly monarchical style of the bishop’s own leadership, this avoidance of the term “Lord” seemed somewhat ironic. The Action Team leader’s paper noted, “We in the liberal wing of the Episcopal Church would like to erase the fact of our historic hierarchical ordering and our confession of Jesus as Lord.” He
went on to argue that reclaiming a confession of Jesus as Lord was critical to
“transcending those differences that inhibit our evangelical impulse and missional
intent.”

Given that many of those present in the meeting adhered to a liberal theology,
such an assertion was not uncontroversial. Reaffirming monarchical lordship and
hierarchy is indeed one way to establish unity in a system. Yet the intervention so far had
indicated that such an approach would not work on a widespread basis, given the
resistance to hierarchy and elitism that was so commonly voiced. If lordship were to be
reasserted, it would have to be on different terms than most people in this system
imagined it.

From the researcher’s perspective, the deep ambivalence about leadership and
authority was in fact profoundly theological, and rooted specifically in a lack of a robust
theology of the cross. As the intervention had discovered, lordship without the cross was
being practiced to some extent by the office of the bishop, as it operated in a monarchical
pattern experienced by many at the grass roots to be controlling and dictatorial. Those
grass roots members rejected such lordship in the name of inclusion and democracy, yet
there was no functioning alternative with which to conceive leadership positively. The
demands of absolute representation were paralyzing the system, stripping any group or
individual’s chance of fruitfully asserting authority and leading.

It seemed to the researcher that this was one dimension of the system’s life in
which theological renewal was critical. To reconceive—and reclaim—an understanding
of Christ’s Lordship as cruciform and perichoretic would open up new possibilities for
construing leadership and authority in the system. Leadership would no longer be
resented as “lording over” (Luke 22), but rather recognized as a self-giving that empowers and lifts up the other to participate more fully in God’s mission. Leadership would no longer be seen in isolated, monarchical terms, but rather within a larger community of mutuality and reciprocal exchange (perichoresis). Communion and cross, inseparably interwoven, could directly address the crisis of leadership and authority that was evident in the system.

In this meeting of Steering Committee members, the theological dimensions of the system’s challenges began to come into clearer focus for many participants. As one noted, “Until the authority we exercise is connected to Christ’s authority, we won’t get anywhere.” It was clear that the intervention had reached a new stage. Process revisions were still being entertained, but a new willingness was emerging to look deeper into questions of theology and culture—the basic underlying assumptions of belief that were exercising powerful influence over the system’s life. Not only was the intervention now more explicitly defining and engaging the system’s culture, it was correlating that culture to behavior patterns that were inhibiting mission.

**Formulating Identity and Purpose**

A couple of weeks later, the larger BCMS Steering Committee gathered for its regularly scheduled meeting. The consultant began with the question, “Are you ready and willing to have a constructive conversation about God in relation to identity and purpose?” He allowed for a significant discussion of process for the first hour, during which he and the researcher were largely quiet as the group wrestled with whether they could in fact move forward. All the familiar issues of representation and inclusion were surfaced, and various attempts at problem-solving them were suggested. When the
conversation seemed to have run its course (without any real resolution to the old issues),
the consultant moved into suggesting a framework for the emerging report on identity
and purpose that was to be presented to a diocesan-wide convocation in May. The
remainder of the day’s work would be spent in trying to define identity and purpose in
draft form.

What transpired next was truly remarkable. As the Steering Committee members
worked in two groups to formulate themes of identity and purpose, the spirit of
tentativeness, paralysis, and complaint that had been so much in evidence in the earlier
session disappeared. It was replaced by genuine theological engagement and hopeful,
constructive visioning. When asked to sketch out answers to the questions, “Why has
God called us into existence?” and “What is God calling us to do?” the group was able to
come together and make a substantive contribution. It turns out they were indeed ready—
more ready than they realized—to talk about God in relation to identity and purpose.

Prior to the meeting, summary materials of the data gathered so far had been
circulated to the Steering Committee members so that they could come into the
conversation steeped in what had been heard at the grass roots. The consensus around
overarching themes of identity and purpose, and the unity that the group found in this
discussion, stood in stark contrast to the divisiveness that had been so prevalent. One
participant remarked, “I think we can do this! It is fun to do God-talk.” Another said, “It
felt great to have the conversation.”

The first of the two working groups proposed a draft identity and purpose
centered around the themes of communion, cross, and covenant, which embraced such
values as hospitality, diversity, giftedness, reconciliation, redemption, baptismal
vocation, and partnership. The second working group suggested as an identity statement,

We the Episcopal Diocese of [X] are a community of communities, rooted in the
historic, Trinitarian, Christian faith, committed to building God’s community by
bringing people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus as Lord so as to
equip them for being open to the Spirit as agents of God’s reconciling work in the
world.

They followed this with a draft purpose statement: “Our purpose as the Episcopal
Diocese of [X] is to equip, empower, and embolden people to be more fully Christ’s
hands and heart in the world by helping them to find their place in the biblical story.”

These draft statements, together with the summary data gathered in the process,
were then brought into a meeting of the full BCMS the following month, at which the
themes of identity and purpose were further explored in small groups. This meeting,
comprising a much larger number of people (approximately 45), employed a similar
process of constructive conversation, with very positive results. There was a strong sense
of unity and creativity in the table conversations and in the larger group as themes were
recorded and reported back. While the project had identified aspects of the system’s
culture that were profoundly unhelpful to its vitality and mission, there were other values
embedded within the culture that were highly promising. Building upon and reframing
these values provided a new basis for unity.

The system was making a turn toward the future, in which participants were
discovering that they did in fact have much more in common than they seemed to realize.
The tone of the conversations was spirited and generally hopeful, as members from
across the demographic diversities came together around shared interests and
commitments. The fact that so much data had been garnered from the grass roots seemed
to empower participants to risk assertions and dream dreams, once they realized that their
passions were held so widely by others in the system. The participatory nature of the process was fueling a new momentum for change.

Even the capacity of the group to dialogue fruitfully and respectfully in public about substantive issues was growing. The vocal clergy critic from the Native American community identified above was engaged constructively by the Position Paper Action Team leader at his table when he raised his process complaints. They listened attentively to each other but were able to share in a good argument rather than either avoiding conflict or denigrating into fighting. As the Steering Committee met briefly together at the end of the day to reflect upon the meeting, there was a consensus that the day was unifying and productive.

The 2007 Convocation

The next step was to take the draft identity and purpose themes that had been developed at the March and April meetings by the Steering Committee and full BCMS and work them into a draft report to be presented and discussed at a diocesan-wide gathering in May. This meeting, called a *convocation* in the system’s parlance, was a key participatory step that would help to test and refine what had been developed so far. It would then be finalized and expanded for the final report, scheduled to be delivered to the diocesan convention in October. The process had started out by gathering data as widely as possible, then worked to integrate and coalesce that data, before taking it back out to as wide an audience as possible.

A small drafting group of Steering Committee members was charged with creating the draft document for the convocation. This group included a key clergy leader from the metro, three lay leaders (one from the metro, two from the wider state), and the
researcher. Given all the differences and fault lines present within the diocese, the ease with which this drafting group came to consensus on identity, purpose, and mission and ministry priority statements was noteworthy. The process had succeeded in uncovering core content that lay at the heart of what it means to be Episcopalian in this diocese, and articulating that content proved to be relatively easy.

The group proposed the following identity statement: *We, the Episcopal Diocese of [X], are a communion of Christian congregations and other ministries, rooted in the breadth of the Anglican tradition, called by God, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to share in Christ’s ministry of reconciliation.* Every word in the statement was carefully chosen. The statement began with “we” to make clear that all members of the church constitute the diocese together, and all share responsibility for its fate. The term “communion,” and the deliberate Trinitarian references that follow, reframe the system’s identity in terms of a *koinonia* ecclesiology, in which diverse church bodies (“congregations and other ministries”) share a common life of mutuality and co-participation in mission. That mission is fundamentally a participation in the Triune God’s mission. It proceeds from baptismal vocation (“called by God”), is pneumatologically driven (“empowered by the Holy Spirit”), and is Christocentric (“Christ’s ministry of reconciliation”). This particular church system is distinguished from others within its geographical space by its roots in the Anglican tradition, with the term “breadth” referring to the predominant Broad Church stream that has historically informed it.

In the draft report, the identity statement was followed by a bulleted list of assertions that flow from it:
Therefore . . .

- We must discern the Spirit’s movement in our rapidly-changing state and world.
- We believe that God has a mission in the rural areas, small towns, cities and suburbs of our state in which we have a particular role.
- The primary focus of our ministry is congregations and the communities they serve.
- We gather in congregations in order to experience Christ’s love, forgiveness, and healing, to be challenged by his Word and fed at his table, and then sent out in ministry to the world.
- We will seek Christ’s reconciliation of our divisions as we share Christ’s ministry of reconciliation with the world.
- We are bound to one another at all levels in an interdependent life of mutual partnership, sacrificial support and accountability that reflects the life of the Trinity.
- We are called actively to engage our members in discerning their spiritual gifts to serve in ministry in all the spheres of their lives.

These statements develop some of the key implications of such an identity for the system’s life. They include a priority on spiritual discernment, with the Spirit as an acting subject in the world. They assert that mission is God’s first and foremost, in which the church participates. The focus of mission shifts toward the local level of the congregation in its context. Gathering in Christian community is counterbalanced by sending in ministry. Reconciliation is an ongoing process led by Christ. The system is invited into a common life of interdependent partnership in the shape of the Trinity. Spiritual gifts discernment (something that the baseline survey revealed is underdeveloped in this system) is imperative to effective baptismal vocation.

This identity statement was followed by a purpose statement: Our purpose as the Episcopal Diocese of [X] is to plant and cultivate vibrant congregations of mature Christian disciples, equipping and emboldening them to be Christ’s heart, hands, and voice in the world. This statement very intentionally places the primary emphasis on the cultivation of local Christian communities comprised of disciples equipped for ministry
in the world. It reinforces the paradigm shift toward local mission referenced above, recognizing the laity as the primary missionaries in their daily life and work. Such lay disciples must not only be equipped for ministry; they also must constantly be growing into Christian maturity in their discipleship—something the Episcopal Church has historically not always prioritized.

This purpose statement was also followed by a number of theses that develop and make explicit its implications:

Therefore . . .

- We take seriously God’s mission in the world and our responsibility to participate in it.
- Our primary commitment will be developing healthy, vital congregations.
- We will attend deeply to the necessary spiritual transformation of our congregations and shared life together.
- We will dwell together in the biblical narrative, allowing our imaginations to be shaped and inspired by God’s story.
- We will raise up leaders capable of forming fully-committed disciples of Jesus who are equipped for ministry.
- The church’s primary missionaries are its lay members in their daily life and work.
- We are called to an active, public presence in our communities for the common good.

In a denomination in which any focus on congregations is liable to be quickly dismissed as “congregationalism,” the steady emphasis here on local Christian communities is not insignificant. However, the framework of a koinonia ecclesiology, when applied to the diocese, offers a means by which local congregations can be affirmed as central to God’s mission yet integrated into a wider ecclesial reality.

The purpose statement theses further develop key themes from above, all of which were articulated at the grass roots throughout the process: a focus on the world as the locus of God’s saving activity; the need for spiritual renewal within congregations and their members; the importance of imaginatively indwelling the biblical narrative,
which has been under-emphasized in this system; the crucial role leaders play in forming disciples; and affirming the church’s work of advocacy and justice in the public sphere.

The report then proposed a series of mission and ministry priorities, which stem from the identity and purpose statements:

- Deepening the discipleship of all members by helping them know the biblical story and their place in it; practicing the spiritual disciplines of our faith; and fulfilling the promises of the Baptismal Covenant.
- Creatively drawing young people into the heart of the church’s life in order that the living treasures of faith we have received may anchor, nourish, and enliven them and future generations.
- Engaging our changing context through turning our churches outward in their focus; studying our communities; learning about and from the diverse populations in our midst; and cultivating a fresh imagination for the forms that Christian community and local mission must take.
- Equipping all members for ministry in daily life through spiritual gifts discernment and collaborative leadership, so that all may know and tell the story of God’s movement in their lives. Total Ministry is one pivotal means to accomplish this.
- Empowering and assisting congregations through cultivating servant leaders capable of leading people deeper into Christian faith and more boldly into the world in mission; networking for ministry partnerships; and sharing resources and best practices for congregational renewal.

These statements would become the blueprint for concrete action steps and mission initiatives in the final report. They lift up themes contained within the identity and purpose material and also link them to other key concerns and mission opportunities identified in the process, such as ministry with children, youth, and young adults; the need for an expanded imagination for expressions of church; turning congregations outward into deeper contextual engagement; spiritual gifts discernment; and leadership development.

Alongside each of these identity, purpose, and mission and ministry statements and theses in the document was a sidebar of quotations from the source material.
(theological position paper, congregational visit reports, and survey report).\(^1\) This helped to link the content explicitly with what had been heard and developed in the process. The remainder of the report raised a series of questions about organizational implications around the areas of personnel and staff, structure, facilities, and finances. The consultant helpfully noted in the process a common propensity of people to focus immediately on organizational implications without ever tending seriously to identity and purpose. He resisted the eagerness of some within the BCMS process to leap prematurely into organizational redesign. Rather, participants in the convocation would be invited to reflect on these questions in light of the identity, purpose, and mission and ministry priorities.

The convocation, held at a church outside the metro near the geographical center of the diocese, brought together 206 participants from across the range of congregations. This very robust attendance was matched by a spirit of constructive engagement throughout the day. The draft identity, purpose, and mission and ministry priorities were presented by members of the BCMS Steering Committee, and participants had ample time in small groups to discuss them, as well as to wrestle with the organizational implications. Notes were taken in each group, reported back in plenary, and collected.

Overall, the convention participants strongly endorsed the identity, purpose, and mission and ministry priorities. While constructive suggestions were made, there were no major, widespread, substantive criticisms of what was presented. Given the history of polarization and divisive culture of the diocese, this is quite a significant development. Yet it is consistent with what the BCMS had experienced in its own deliberations—

\(^1\) See the final version in “Rethinking, Reframing, and Reframing Our Identity, Purpose and Mission” in Appendix D.
enough voices at the grass roots had been heard saying similar things, and there was
remarkable unanimity at the core. The small group conversations varied in the depth of
their theological engagement, with some probing deeply the theological dimensions of
the draft report and others focusing more on problem-solving and strategies. Yet overall,
there was a clear sense of affirmation for what the process had produced.

Two days after the convocation, the annual spring clergy conference was held,
providing another opportunity for key leaders in the diocese to engage the draft report.
The conference agenda was dominated by the BCMS report, as clergy leaders from
among the BCMS Steering Committee presented the new identity, purpose, and mission
and ministry priorities, shared their own reflections, and invited discussion. The
consultant also played a leading role in the conference, inviting all the participants to read
the new identity and purpose statements together aloud in unison. Opportunity was
provided for participants to talk together about the report contents in randomized small
groups.

Out of the data gathered in the small group discussions both at the convocation
and at clergy conference, the Steering Committee suggested several revisions to the
purpose and mission and ministry priorities statements. In the purpose statement, the term
“plant” was replaced with “seed,” since many people were still haunted by the failed
legacy of church planting efforts in the system and didn’t want to perpetuate the idea that
new churches should be planted by the judicatory (rather than by existing congregations).
Likewise, the phrase “mature Christian disciples” was changed to “maturing Christian
disciples” to convey more accurately a sense of continual spiritual growth. In the mission
and ministry priorities, there was a call for more explicit reference to children in the
bullet on youth, and the addition of a new bullet to address multi-cultural, immigrant, and refuge ministries. A small group was appointed to undertake revisions and to flesh out answers to the organizational implications over the summer, reporting back to the Steering Committee and full BCMS along the way.

**Redesigning the Diocese**

When that group undertook its work, it had the opportunity and challenge of integrating more than a year’s worth of learning into a concise plan\(^2\) that would carry the diocese forward into a better future. The drafting group, comprised largely of those who created the earlier document for convocation (including the researcher), realized that the detailed answers to many of the mission and ministry initiatives and organizational implications could not yet be articulated. In fact, the document would serve in many respects as a blueprint for the system’s continued work in the coming years, calling for a new phase of action research that would further engage grass roots members and deepen the change in the culture of the system. Since such strong consensus existed around identity, purpose, and mission and ministry priorities, the final plan would have to build upon these with a set of clear goals to galvanize support and cast a vision for the diocese that was beginning to emerge.

Theologically, the communion (*koinonia*) concept had come to define the new imagination for the diocese’s life and structure. It was rooted in God’s own Trinitarian life, expansive enough to encompass the wide diversity of congregations and contexts in the diocese, called for new levels of mutuality, partnership, and collaboration in ministry, and was missional in its outward-reaching, open, dynamic character. Given the centrality

\(^2\) See Appendix D for the final version of the plan.
of the Eucharist in this system, it also built upon the primary ecclesial practice that defined this church’s common life.

The organizational implications of a *koinonia* re-conception of the diocese suggest a major paradigm shift from the centralized, corporate, bureaucratic ethos that had dominated this system since the early 20th century. This previous paradigm had not only ceased to function well; it was not nearly participatory, collaborative, or mutual enough to embody this fresh theological vision. Recognizing how favorably key leaders in the system had responded to the *network* metaphor as a new organizing principle for the diocese, the researcher and drafting group incorporated this as one of the pillars of the final report.

Network theory, which has its roots in mathematical graph theory, is rapidly becoming a key way of re-envisioning organizations in this postmodern, participatory era. It can be argued that the Internet is the primary cultural metaphor of the contemporary Northern American context—a decentralized, self-organizing network. As sociologist Manuel Castells argues, “Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture.” Network organizational structures encourage innovation, facilitate information sharing, liberate decision making, and are capable of flexible and rapid adaptation. In networks, members

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voluntarily work together to innovate, solve problems of mutual concern, and coordinate their activities.\(^5\)

Networks are comprised of nodes, or individual participants, links between them, and hubs, which are nodes that are more extensively linked and function as facilitators of network flows.\(^6\) Research in a variety of types of networks has determined that networks are surprisingly robust—up to 80% of nodes can be removed and they still function, provided key hubs remain in place. Remove those hubs, however, and the effect is devastating. The physicist and network scholar Albert-Laszlo Barabasi likens key hubs to keystone species in an ecosystem—they hold everything together.\(^7\)

The drafting team for the final report began to work through what a network structure would look like for a mainline judicatory such as this diocese. Rather than a large central office, the judicatory infrastructure would be dispersed to decentralized hubs. These hubs would largely consist of congregations with particular gifts, capacities, and resources in various ministry areas, who could serve as key facilitators of ministry and mission in their geographical areas, as well as serve as resources to the wider system. Some hubs might be non-congregational ministries, such as social service organizations that are linked to partner organizations and constituencies in the community. Judicatory staff would be dispersed, sharing their time with local congregations. This would largely erase the *us-versus-them* mentality that had long pervaded this system, in which “the

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\(^5\) Hatch, *Organizational Theory*, 192.

\(^6\) Barabasi, *Linked*, 58.

\(^7\) Ibid., 116-20.
“diocese” is seen as some centralized office which absorbs resources and offers little in return.

The bishop’s office itself would function like a hub, as the role of the bishop and his staff would shift from regulating and controlling ministry within the geography of the diocese to serving as network facilitator. As Mary Jo Hatch notes, networks are comprised of relationships that must be tended: “Probably the greatest challenge in managing network relationships is developing and maintaining an organizational identity and sense of purpose in the face of geographic diversity and loosely coupled interests and activities.”8 There is no one better positioned than a bishop to cultivate organizational identity and purpose, fostering unity not through control, but rather through interpretive, or sense-making leadership, in which the church’s common story is theologically reinterpreted.9

As the group developed the report, four goals emerged as the defining areas in which to focus the system’s future work: 1) **Spiritual transformation and fuller participation in God’s mission**; 2) **Renewing congregations in context**; 3) **Recreating the diocese as a network**; and 4) **Developing effective stewardship of financial resources**. The report recommended a number of ministry and mission initiatives under each of these goals.

1) **Spiritual Transformation and Fuller Participation in God’s Mission**: This goal sought to address the recurrent call heard from the grass roots to put God back into the center of the life of the diocese. Ultimately, the challenges facing the system were recognized by

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8 Hatch, *Organizational Theory*, 192.

the BCMS to be spiritual and theological in character. Such spiritual transformation must take place at the local level within congregations, involving all of the baptized. Operational strategies under this goal included Bible study and Gospel-Based Discipleship; spiritual gifts discernment; and a diocesan-wide liturgy of repentance, reconciliation, and re-dedication.

2) Renew Congregations in Context: Building from the fresh focus on congregations as the central units of mission, carried out primarily by the baptized, this goal called “for every congregation to connect or re-connect its ministry directly to its particular mission field and become a community in which discipleship is a way of life for all God’s people.”

Five mission and ministry initiatives proceeded from this goal. The first, “Engage Congregational Contexts,” acknowledged the dynamic character of many communities in which congregations are located, and the fact that those congregations have often not kept up with the changes taking place. It called for resources and processes to assist congregations with reading their communities, as well as pilot projects in which networks of congregations could undergo transformational journeys together and share what they learn with the wider system.

The second initiative, “Children, Youth, and Family Ministry,” addressed the aging of the church’s membership by inviting those with gifts and passions for ministry with young people to convene conversations and share their leadership with the wider system. Young adults were encouraged to be empowered by the system to experiment with new forms of church that would engage their unchurched peers.
The third initiative, “Multi-Cultural Ministries,” recognized the historic presence of Native and African American ministries within the system and invited their leaders to design a process to work toward a fuller sense of partnership with the majority culture congregations. It also called for a strategy to be created for ethnic-specific and multicultural congregations for other populations, beginning with learning from the few congregations in the system which had embraced new immigrants on a large scale in recent years.

Finally, the concluding initiative under this goal was “Creative Ministry Models,” an affirmation of the fruitfulness of the Total Ministry approach to congregational leadership and an invitation to an expanded imagination for diverse forms of church. Total Ministry had been overwhelmingly cited by participants in the process from the wider state in particular as a viable and transformative ministry strategy. In fact, a few grumbled about the wider state being included in the mission strategy process because it seemed to presume that those congregations didn’t have an existing mission strategy that worked. In their minds, Total Ministry was that strategy. In this initiative, the document suggested that the larger system learn from its experience with Total Ministry and entertain new variations of congregational life.

3) Recreate the Diocese as a Network: Having begun with spiritual transformation and then focused on congregations, the goals shifted to re-conceiving the wider system as “a network of congregations and ministries where organization, communication, and the use of resources flow along the lines of meaningful relationships and shared ministry commitments.” The first initiative centered on identifying and mapping existing and emerging networks and their hubs. The assumption guiding this section was that some
networks already exist and should be built upon. Key grass-roots leaders would be invited to map the networks and convene conversations about hubs and their roles. Only after this had taken place would the more formal reconfiguration of diocesan structure and organization take place.

A second initiative under this goal focused on lay disciples. The baseline data and congregational visits uncovered a strong sense that the laity in the system were not currently being engaged, equipped, and empowered in ministry as fully as they should be. This initiative asserted, “Lay disciples of Jesus Christ are the church’s greatest gift and resource.” It called for cultivating the baptismal vocations of all of the laity, as well as strengthening lay leadership in the governance of the church.

This was followed by a closely-related initiative, “Re-Envision Clergy Leadership.” While recognizing the importance of ordained clergy in the life of the church, the report called for “a shared process of reflection and reevaluation of their roles in relation to a changing paradigm for ministry.” The BCMS intervention had surfaced a strong call for renewed partnership in ministry between clergy and laity. The confusion surrounding clergy expectations and roles must be addressed in a collaborative way by the clergy themselves in partnership with laity.

The fourth initiative under this goal addressed a central issue repeatedly voiced: “Select Bishop and Diocesan Staff Capable of and Committed to Leading Plan to Fruition.” There was no question that without leadership from the bishop and his or her staff, this paradigm shift would have little chance of succeeding. Many people in the process shared doubts about the current bishop’s ability to live into this emerging vision. However, he had announced in October 2006 that he planned to retire in 2010 and would
call for a bishop coadjutor (bishop with right of succession) in October 2007. This opening gave the BCMS process the potential to guide and shape the selection of a new bishop. Rather than detail the criteria for such a bishop, the report raised key questions that the system’s leaders would need to address around the bishop’s role and the size and makeup of the staff.

Finally, a fifth initiative called for an “Aligned, Integrated, and Supportive Organization and Structure.” This initiative recognized the importance of structural alignment with identity, purpose, mission and ministry priorities, and the new vision. It urged attentiveness to structure and policies during the phase of transition into the new reality. The fact that such a structure would take time to evolve and be discerned was noted, and a provisional approach to structure was recommended as a means to live into the new organizational design on a trial basis.

4) Develop Effective Stewardship of Financial Resources: Money was a flash point of concern and interest throughout the BCMS process. Many at the grass roots articulated frustration in the baseline survey and congregational visits with diocesan financial policies, which were seen as self-serving rather than fully supportive of local mission. Finances were one area where major issues of mistrust had become lodged in the system. The report sought to attend to this important dimension of the system’s life by calling for better stewardship of resources on all levels—from personal tithing to the management of real estate held by the diocese.

The first of two initiatives under this goal addressed the stewardship of financial resources within a theological framework, as a personal practice of discipleship and as a response to compelling vision for ministry. Rather than being caught in the vortex of
controversy about congregational assessments and financial policies, the report called for a system-wide conversation about policies for funding the central budget. While some BCMS members wanted to make very specific proposals on this point, the group was not of a unified mind. The wise thing seemed instead to give the work back to the people by calling for the system to undertake mutual discernment in light of the emerging new organizational design. To try to resolve these issues prematurely could have detracted seriously from the report’s viability. The report did invite rethinking the size and placement of diocesan staff (the largest component of the central budget), raising the possibility of purchasing some of the time of local congregational leaders to facilitate cluster networks rather than have so many full-time diocesan staff members.

A final initiative was focused on stewardship of facilities and land. It was recognized that no current capital plan existed within which to comprehend the missional or strategic value of the various physical assets of the system. Better utilization of these assets was critical to moving forward in mission, and a plan must be developed. Since the diocesan office building had recently gone under contract for sale, the question of what size, type, and location of facilities for a diocesan office was also raised in light of this larger vision.

An introduction to the report prefaced the recommendations by reiterating the sobering realities of decline faced by the system and the pattern of past failures to turn things around. It asserted that there were no simple solutions—the crisis was systemic and adaptive in character. Continued short to near term decline was likely—the system should be prepared for trends to continue downward, including the loss of some congregations that prove unwilling or unable to adapt. Yet the good news is that God is at
work in the system’s midst—it is God’s agency and movement that ultimately generates confidence and hope.

**Integration with Formal Leadership Structures**

With the plan largely drafted, the next step was to engage not only the Steering Committee and full BCMS, but also the key formal leadership body, the Diocesan Council. Alignment with and ownership by the formal authority structures of the system had been an ongoing concern in the process, as the leaders recognized how critical it was for those in positions of formal power to embrace the emerging vision. Indeed, several of the previous planning efforts that failed did so in part because of insufficient alignment with existing power structures. Given the bishop’s monarchical leadership style and the tendency for the work of the governing bodies of the system to be controlled by the bishop and his chief of staff, the Council represented a potentially key countervailing leadership force for change.

Members of the BCMS Steering Committee were invited to attend the July 2007 meeting of Diocesan Council. What ensued was a remarkably constructive conversation. The Council, which had received and read the draft report prior to the meeting, was enthusiastic in responding to it. Council members, including the bishop, offered helpful suggestions for clarification. One key clergy leader remarked, “The work of the BCMS has been so superb that it has earned an authoritative position among the voices of the diocese.” Another said, “The BCMS should feel great satisfaction at holding such a variety of passions and opinions together in this process.” A well-respected lay leader thanked the BCMS and professed his “awe at the high standard set so far.”
The drafting group had intentionally left open the section on next steps in order to prompt the Council to own the process’s future beyond the coming diocesan convention. The Council agreed that the work needed to continue but be more deeply integrated with the formal governing bodies of the system. They wrestled with how the future work might be constructed, agreeing that a variety of task forces were needed to explore in more detail the various facets of the report. They expressed their eagerness to partner with the BCMS in formulating a plan for next steps.

Following the meeting, the drafting group decided to add a one-page section to the document entitled, “Guiding Principles of the Plan.” The group’s sense from the meeting with Council was that clarification of the paradigm shifts inherent in the document would better ensure that readers understood how radical the plan’s proposals were. Such a framing would help deflect the tendency for people to get mired in details and lose the bigger vision.

The guiding principles, drafted by the researcher, were the following:

- *Spiritual transformation and theological renewal.* The BCMS believes that God is calling the Episcopal Church in [this state] to a deep experience of spiritual transformation and renewal, one that touches all Episcopalians personally and deepens our collective experience and understanding of God.
- *Moving to a more collaborative style of organization and leadership.* Calling to mind the Trinity in whose image we are created, the church has an opportunity today to live more deeply into the vision for partnership, mutuality and community that we find in the New Testament—and for which so many of our members are calling.
- *Moving to a decentralized network.* In this Internet era, leading organizations of all types are eschewing centralized bureaucracies in favor of decentralized networks. The age of the corporate, bureaucratic, regulatory denomination has passed in American culture. Denominations are once again entering a period of major adaptation and reformation.
- *Moving to resourcing and empowering the grass roots.* For too long, the diocese has been focused on regulating the ministry within its borders. Now is a time to shift our emphasis instead to resourcing and empowering local disciples for ministry.
• *Moving into an expanded imagination for diverse expressions of church.* The Episcopal Church has been dominated for generations by a narrow set of assumptions about what church should look like. The diversity of our context today calls for a wider imagination for how we can faithfully express our Anglican tradition in a new and changing era.

• *Moving into a posture of innovation, creativity, mutual trust and risk taking.* The diocese has lived too long under a paralyzing cloud of mutual mistrust, suspicion and critique. This has inhibited our ability to innovate. We must diligently seek together the guiding, enlivening and reconciling leadership of the Holy Spirit to lift us into a better future, in which we dream big dreams and take big risks for the gospel.

This section served to set the stage for the specific goals and recommendations. While a few people had called for the creation of an executive summary, the drafting group felt that this statement of guiding principles would better serve to clarify the key themes.

The draft plan was taken to the full BCMS in August. These key participants in the process also engaged in a sustained, fruitful conversation, making a number of helpful suggestions on content, phrasing, and organization. Like the Council, they were generally enthusiastic about the plan as it had been articulated. Substantive dialogue occurred around some of the key issues, such as the need for spiritual renewal, the network organizational design, diocesan funding, and timelines for the next steps. The question of authority once again surfaced around who would carry the work forward in its next phase. Some participants were anxious that the work could be compromised if those holding formal authority for the ongoing business of the system failed to adopt it. Convergence with the elected leaders and the bishop’s office in the future was recognized once again to be critical.

The BCMS Steering Committee had an opportunity to take up the question of next steps in earnest at its September meeting. There was extensive discussion of the various risks and issues at play. The political and power dynamics took center stage. The
consultant helpfully circulated a draft proposal for how the continuing commission might be structured. The new group would be comprised of 14-16 people, with at least six members of the current BCMS Steering Committee, and representatives from the Diocesan Council, Trustees, Standing Committee, Commission on Ministry, and bishop’s staff. With some minor revisions, the proposal was accepted by the group. Members of the Steering Committee were asked whether they were willing to serve on the new commission team. With only a couple of exceptions, all indicated they were. Given the extensive amount of time dedicated by these leaders to the BCMS over the past year (and the BCMMS for many in the prior year), this was a remarkable sign of commitment and service. Yet, as one lay leader with many decades of volunteer experience in the church remarked, “This is the most fulfilling thing I’ve done with the church.”

One final meeting remained with the Diocesan Council in September. The revised report, incorporating feedback from the Council and the Steering Committee in July, the full BCMS in August, and the Steering Committee again in September, was presented to the Council for final affirmation. Members of the Steering Committee huddled in prayer before the meeting, knowing that this was a critical moment for the process. In the meeting, after they walked through the key highlights and changes in this version, the bishop stood to speak.

“TI don’t know that we’ve ever had a process that has engaged so many people in the history of this diocese,” he said. “The members of the BCMS have come at this work from different vantage points but shared a longing for the common good of the diocese. Is the document perfect? Nothing is.” He said that he wished the document celebrated more the positive elements of the diocesan history, but then went on to commend various facets
of the document. He recognized that it called for a new level of partnership and collaboration between him, the governing bodies of the diocese, and the general membership. “We have learned how to do partnership in this process,” he remarked. “We are up to this work, but are we willing?” He charged the Council to join with him in uniting behind the plan and unanimously endorsing it as co-recommenders with the BCMS itself.

The Council members had time in small groups to talk together and mull their response. For a bishop who had primarily been a somewhat distant, though key supporter of the BCMS process, his strong call to commitment around the plan was a remarkable moment. Living into the plan would involve a major paradigm shift in the bishop’s own leadership identity and style—a transition some doubted he would be willing or able to make. As the groups reported back in plenary, the widespread enthusiasm for the report was reaffirmed. The bishop called for a vote of approval of the plan, asking whether the Council would “own and implement” the plan. This passed unanimously. The group stood and sang together the Doxology. The uniting of the bishop and Council around support of the plan was a key turning point. While there may have been a variety of understandings in the room of what approving the plan would actually mean for the diocese, the ability to unify around it was a fruitful sign not only of culture change, but of the Spirit’s work.

Interestingly, one additional sign that the new vision was already taking root in the system’s life was the fall 2007 clergy conference. Previous clergy conferences in this system had tended to focus on an outside speaker, often addressing a theme that presupposed conflict within the system (i.e., family systems theory). This time, the
proposed an event focused instead on networking and sharing of best practices in ministry and leadership. Various members of the clergy of the diocese with specific gifts and/or experience in particular areas of ministry were invited to convene workshop discussions with their peers. This represented a preliminary enactment of the decentralized, hub-based re-conception of the diocese, in which local members partner with one another at the grass roots level to enhance one another’s ministry capacity. The conference was well received by attendees.

**Process Culmination: Diocesan Convention 2007**

The next and final step in the BCMS process was the diocesan convention, which serves as the system’s ultimate governing authority. Lay representatives from every congregation, alongside all the clergy, jointly hold responsibility for making major policy decisions. Even if unanimously endorsed by the bishop and Diocesan Council, the BCMS plan would not proceed to implementation without the support of the convention delegates, who more fully represent the system’s grass roots.

This convention was notable not only for the presentation of the BCMS plan. The bishop’s plan for a coadjutor (successor) bishop was also on the agenda for approval, as was a proposed canonical change that would penalize congregations for not paying their financial assessments in full by stripping their lay delegates of votes. In the weeks leading up to convention, much energy had been unleashed at the grass roots around both issues. In fact, a new network of lay leaders from many of the largest congregations had emerged, focused on the issue of congregational assessments and the canonical change.
They also began to address the question of the bishop’s transition plan. The network reality was increasingly beginning to function, albeit informally, within the system.

The BCMS plan was the first major business item on the convention agenda, and it came to define what followed. After a brief presentation of the highlights of the plan (which had been pre-distributed to all delegates and made publicly available within the diocese), time was opened for debate. There were two floor microphones, one marked for those supporting, and the other for those opposing. A steady stream of delegates, representing the diversity of the congregations of the system—laity and clergy, metro and wider state, large and small, Anglo, Native, Latino and black, young and old—rose to speak in favor. They gave testimonies to the spirit of collaboration and partnership the process had engendered, the positive vision that had emerged, and the plan’s promise for a renewed diocese.

Only two spoke at the microphone reserved for those opposing the plan. The first raised the question of how the culture change envisioned in the plan would actually come about—a question not so much of content, but of process. Members of the BCMS Steering Committee were seated on the dais, and the researcher was invited to step forward and respond. The researcher spoke to the ways in which those most involved in the process had already come to trust one another, to cooperate in mission, to reflect theologically together, and to live into the new reality that the report envisioned. This culture change would spread as more members of the system engaged in the coming phase of work.

The only other speaker at the opposing microphone asked for more detail in the initiatives around children and youth, lamenting the fact that her child was the only one in
her small congregation. This was not a substantive critique of the report, only a call for further development. Another member of the Steering Committee rose and affirmed the speaker’s concern, clarifying that further development would take place in the next phase. The speaker was invited to participate in that further work.

There being no other objections, the bishop called for a voice vote. It passed nearly unanimously, with only a faint couple of “nays” audible in the room, in sharp contrast to the thundering “ayes.” It was a historic moment. The diocese had come together across its diversities and deep-seated patterns of mistrust to endorse the BCMS vision with essentially one voice. For those with long experience in this system, it was nothing short of miraculous. Nothing of this magnitude—fundamentally re-envisioning the theological and organizational framework of the diocese and its basic mission paradigm—had been proposed and so enthusiastically supported by so many different constituencies in memory.

The approval of the BCMS plan set the tone for the business that followed. The bishop’s plan for a coadjutor bishop, which would involve an overlap of tenures for at least a year before the present bishop retired, stirred extensive debate. The BCMS vision was cited on both sides of the aisle as speakers weighed in for and against. Several key leaders, however, spoke against the bishop’s plan because it was perceived as running against the new spirit of collaboration and partnership the BCMS had engendered. One lay leader said, “The BCMS was a highly-collaborative, mutual, cooperative partnership. We are looking for that with you (bishop) now.” He called for rejecting the bishop’s proposal because the bishop had not substantively consulted other leaders in the system about what was best for its future. Another influential clergy leader rose and said,
“Bishop, you indicated that you discerned this was the best way to move forward. I have no doubt that you did discern. However, we have not discerned together. And for that reason, I cannot support your plan.”

In the end, the bishop’s proposal was narrowly rejected, rendering him speechless (he left the dais to huddle with his staff to formulate a response). While the bishop later interpreted this vote as yet another sign of dysfunctional, oppositional behavior in the system’s life, many others saw it as a critical turning point in which the system stepped forward and claimed its own future. The system wanted mutually to own its discernment about this critical decision for its future, rather than simply accept the bishop’s decision. It was a watershed moment.

Likewise, the proposed canonical change fostered significant debate in which the BCMS work was repeatedly referenced. The report’s call for a new spirit of accountability was cited at the “pro” microphone, while the shift away from a regulatory paradigm for judicatory life was cited at the “con” microphone. In the end, the proposed change was defeated.

These votes signify a shift in the terms of the system’s own dialogue about its life. While the bishop persisted in using family-systems theory language even at the end of the convention, leaders from the grass roots had begun to adopt the new language of missional partnership, collaborative spiritual discernment, and mutuality. When the BCMS plan was presented that morning at convention, the Steering Committee chair began by saying, “This is your report.” Behind him on a screen was a slide listing the names of the more than 65 people directly involved in the process as Steering Committee or action team members. The process had touched more than 2,000 members of the
system along the way, and more than 76% of congregations had engaged in it directly. That extensive participation gave this plan a credibility and prominence that no previous plan had possessed. It meant that the changes envisioned in it were already taking root in the system’s life at the local level. In this case, the bishop and other formal leaders would have to catch up.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

A prominent clergy leader called the researcher shortly following the convention and said, “It is a new day in this diocese, and I am grateful for that.” The overwhelming approval of the BCMS report at the 2007 diocesan convention, together with the various testimonials and signs of changed behavior and belief within the system noted in the pages above, indicate that the process exercised a significant transformational impact on the system’s life. It is a story of metanoia on many levels—of changed mental models, of new trust in the work of the Spirit, of reframing and reinterpreting a complex system’s life so that new possibilities for fruitful mission might emerge. Yet it is fundamentally an unfinished work, the beginning of a long-term culture change of which this process was an initiator and catalyst.

One final step in the formal process remained—to evaluate it by measuring its effect upon and soliciting feedback from those most directly involved. In order to do so, a follow-up survey was conducted during the month immediately following the 2007 convention. Its results confirm the overall fruitfulness of the process, suggest ways in which it could be enhanced, and also point toward opportunities and challenges for next steps.
2007 Follow-Up Survey

The BCMS Follow-Up Survey\(^1\) was targeted only at those leaders within the system who had most directly participated in the process as members of the full BCMS, Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, Trustees, and the bishop’s staff. While many amidst the wider population of leaders had been touched over the past year by the process, it was simply too early to gauge a significant change effect within the overall population. However, the members of the BCMS, the diocesan staff, and the elected governing bodies of the system were most integrally involved and keenly aware of the process and its content. Their opinions would provide an important measure of the process’s impact upon the heart of the system’s leadership and life.

Accordingly, the researcher created a survey in consultation with the Baseline Assessment Team members and the consultant. The survey was targeted at 104 people, 79 of whom responded, for an excellent response rate of 76%. As with the previous instrument one year earlier, the survey was conducted primarily through the Internet, using SurveyMonkey.com, with paper copies mailed to the few people without email access.

About the Respondents

Characteristics of the respondents were as follows:

- Respondents represented a wide cross section of congregational sizes, with 22% in churches worshipping fewer than 50 on Sunday, 15% in churches with 50-99, 14% in churches with 100-149, 17% in churches with 150-199, 8% in churches with 200-249 and 250-299, and 14% in churches over 300.

\(^1\) See Appendix E for a copy of the Follow-Up Survey.
Almost half (46%) of respondents had more than 20 years longevity in the diocese, and nearly 90% had been in the diocese more than five years.

Regional distribution of respondents was roughly consistent with the overall population of the system (63% from the metro and 37% from the non-metro).

Respondents were fairly evenly divided between clergy and laity, with 41% lay respondents, 8% deacons, 43% priests, and 8% indicating “Other.”

Consistent with the size of their respective bodies, a slight majority of respondents were members of the BCMS (58%), followed by Diocesan Council (23%), Standing Committee (13%), diocesan staff (13%), and Trustees (8%). Some members served on more than one group.

As with the previous survey, respondents were mostly middle-aged. There were no respondents under age 30; only 4% were aged 30-39; and 17% were 40-49. Sixty-three percent were in their 50s or 60s.

Female respondents slightly outnumbered male (52% to 48%).

Eighty-nine percent of respondents were white, with the largest non-white group being Native American (5%), followed by African-American (4%). There was one Asian and one Hispanic respondent each.

Findings

The survey asked a series of questions about the impact of the process on respondents’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, using numbered scales of agreement. Overall, respondents indicated strong levels of agreement about the positive effect of the process. Means ranged from 2.34-5.21 on a scale of 1 to 11, with 1 being “strongly
agree,” 6 being “neither agree nor disagree,” and 11 being “strongly disagree.”2 Means for individual questions are broken down as follows:

Figure 7.1: Mean of Agreement for Follow-Up Survey Question 1

This first question focused on the naming of realities in the diocese through the process. It garnered the strongest agreement of any of the questions, as respondents indicated overwhelmingly that their understanding of the system’s situation, numerical trends, historical patterns, and changing context improved as a result of the process. Respondents also agreed, though less strongly, that they had a better sense of how to serve their neighbors and that leaders were better prepared to identify challenges facing the church.

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2 This corresponds to the listed values on the actual instrument of agreement levels between 9 and 6 on a scale of 10 to 0, with 10 being “strongly agree,” 5 being “neither agree nor disagree,” and 0 being “strongly disagree.”
The next question concentrated on the process’s effectiveness in building bridges of relationship, mutual understanding, and partnership across the system. Respondents agreed overall that the process did contribute to doing so, though somewhat less strongly than they felt that it named the system’s realities.

Figure 7.2: Mean of Agreement for Follow-Up Survey Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean of Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I have healthier relationships with other leaders around the diocese</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I better understand the differing perspectives of others within the diocese</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I feel a stronger sense of connection to my congregation and its ministry</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. I feel a stronger sense of connection to other congregations in our area</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. I feel a stronger sense of connection to the diocese as a whole</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. I have a deeper appreciation for the mission challenges faced by congregations in other parts of the diocese</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sixty-seven percent of respondents agreed that the process had led to healthier relationships with others in the diocese, while 88% said that it gave them a better understanding of others’ perspectives. Given the diversities within the system and the longstanding patterns of mistrust and estrangement across fault lines of geography, race, ethnicity, congregational size, and economics, the progress made here is notable.

To those who would fear that the final plan’s focus on congregations as the primary unit of mission would foster congregationalism and further isolate congregations from the larger diocese, the survey indicates that the process actually created a stronger
sense of connection to other congregations and the diocese. Seventy-two percent indicated that they had a stronger sense of connection both to other congregations in their areas and to the diocese. The fact that respondents strongly agreed that the process had given them a deeper appreciation for the mission challenges facing by congregations elsewhere in the diocese is not insignificant, as it lays a foundation for future collaboration.

A third question addressed issues of spiritual vitality and renewal, listening, and trust.

Figure 7.3: Mean of Agreement for Follow-Up Survey Question 3

A large majority of respondents (74%) agreed that they felt a renewed sense of spiritual vitality through their participation in the BCMS process. Since the first goal of the plan was focused on spiritual transformation, this finding indicates progress already realized toward that goal. Spiritual renewal at the congregational level was also attributed to the
BCMS process—a secondary, not primary focus. A significant majority of respondents (67%) agreed that they could see spiritual renewal taking place at the diocesan level through the process.

There was very strong agreement that the process allowed for many voices to be heard—both the voices of those responding to the survey and voices at the grass roots. Eighty-two percent felt that grass roots voices were heard. Respondents also indicated a new sense of trust in their fellow system members, in the governing bodies of the system, and in the bishop and staff, though less strongly than they felt that voices were heard. Finally, 70% of respondents agreed that the diocese was more adequately prepared to enter a new era of partnership and collaboration through the process.

Respondents were then asked a series of questions about the final BCMS report. The great majority of respondents had read all of it (86%), with the remaining 14% having read some of it. Most (79%) felt that they had understood it very well, with 20% saying they had understood it “somewhat well” and only 1 respondent claiming not to understand it very well.

The survey then asked how strongly respondents felt that the new identity and purpose statements and mission and ministry priorities in the plan resonated with them.
Figure 7.4: Resonance of Identity, Purpose, and Mission and Ministry Priorities

Overall, the identity and purpose statements and mission and ministry priorities in the final BCMS plan resonated very well with large majorities of the respondents. A full 79% felt that the identity statement resonated very strongly or strongly with them. For the purpose statement, this number was even higher at 84%, with nearly half of respondents claiming it resonated very strongly with them. The mission and ministry priorities had the highest overall resonance, at 85%, though greater numbers of respondents resonated “strongly” than “very strongly” with the priorities.

The survey then asked another question about strength of agreement to a series of statements concerning the process’s effectiveness in enriching imagination for mission, excitement generated by the process, and confidence that the goals can be achieved.
Respondents agreed strongly that their own imagination for mission had been enriched by the BCMS process. However, they were more ambivalent about the BCMS process enriching the imagination for mission of their congregations or other congregations in their area. This is to be expected, since the process was primarily focused on the diocesan, not congregational, level. Large majorities professed excitement about the new vision generated through the BCMS process (84%), felt that the goals articulated in the BCMS plan would lead the diocese into a better future (85%), and were confident that the system would be able to achieve the goals with God’s help (81%).

The survey next asked two questions that were also asked in the 2006 baseline survey. The first concerned vitality of the respondents’ own personal faith and discipleship, their congregations, the diocese, and the denomination. Of the 79 total respondents to the follow-up survey, 59 had also responded to the baseline survey in
2006. Comparing their responses at the beginning and end of the process reveals a marked shift.

While respondents’ ratings of their own personal faith and discipleship were essentially unchanged (75% rated “very vital” both times), vitality ratings for the diocese increased significantly. The percentage of respondents rating the diocese “very vital” nearly doubled, from 12% in 2006 to 22% in 2007, and the percentage rating it “not very vital” and “not vital at all” dropped significantly (from 34% to 25% and 9% to 2%, respectively).

Figure 7.6: Vitality Comparison for the Diocese, 2006 and 2007

Interestingly, ratings of congregational vitality also improved at the end of the BCMS process, even though congregations were not its primary focus.
From 2006 to 2007, the percentage of respondents rating their own congregation “very vital” jumped from 37% to 51%, and the percentage rating their congregation “not very vital” dropped by nearly half, from 17% to 9%.

Perceptions of the vitality of the denomination also significantly improved over the course of the process, even though its scope was limited to the diocese. While the greatest number of respondents perceived the Episcopal Church nationally as “somewhat vital” in both years, the percentage seeing it as “very vital” more than doubled, from 14% to 31%, and the percentage of those rating it “not very vital” and “not vital at all” dropped precipitously (from 24% to 14%, and 7% to 2%, respectively). While any number of external factors could also influence people’s perceptions of the vitality of the denomination, it is possible that the renewal people saw taking place within this particular diocese was understood to be applicable more widely across the church.
Both the baseline and follow-up surveys asked respondents about their sense of hopefulness about the future of the Episcopal Church in this state. Comparing the responses of the same population who answered both questions reveals a marked improvement over the course of the year. Those who marked the strongest level, “very hopeful,” increased from 19% to 32%. The percentage in the “only slightly hopeful” category dropped from 19% to 5%, and no one expressed a complete lack of hope in 2007, compared with 2% in 2006.
The survey also asked respondents to indicate in an open-ended comment what gave them the most hope about the future of the diocese. The 2006 baseline survey had asked a similar question, but not in open-ended form. The strongest answers to that question had been “The vitality of my local congregation,” “Our mission history of advocacy on behalf of oppressed people,” and “Signs of the active leading of the Holy Spirit in our midst.” This time, respondents offered a wider range of answers, many of which referenced the BCMS process directly. The themes are summarized in the table below.

Table 7.1: Follow-Up Survey Open-Ended Comments on What Gives Hope for Diocese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing spiritual transformation/God’s agency in our midst</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truth telling/honesty/having the conversation together</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting around common vision</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater partnership/collegiality/relationships across diocese</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation of Total Ministry and its alternative paradigm</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation/voices being heard/engagement of grass roots</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future planning and implementation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop’s transition</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The greatest number of responses attributed the respondent’s sense of hope to trust in God’s active agency in the life of the church and a continuing of the spiritual transformation that had taken place over the previous year in the BCMS process. Examples of these comments include, “God is at work in new ways”; “Remaining open to the movement of the Holy Spirit within oneself, as well as the diocese as a whole, and allowing ourselves to be transformed to minister more effectively in an ever-changing world”; and “God is with us.”

This was followed by three sets of closely-related comments that cited the truth-telling that had taken place in the process, the fact that the diocese had united around a common vision by approving the final report at convention, and the building of relational bridges and enhanced collaboration across the system over the previous year. Other sources of hope included the alternative leadership paradigm of Total Ministry, which was affirmed by the BCMS report; the engagement of grass roots members of the system; the upcoming episcopal transition; the fact that the process would continue into a new phase of planning and implementation; and the new leadership that emerged in the BCMS.

The survey also asked about potential obstacles to successful implementation of the BCMS plan. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale the ten potential obstacles listed and to write in additional ones if they wished. They were then asked to indicate which two they felt were the most important obstacles.
Organizational inertia was by far the most frequently cited potential obstacle, listed by 46% as one of the two most important. This was followed by resistance from clergy (25%), lack of faith and spiritual renewal (23%), and resistance from the current bishop and staff (21%). The potential obstacles written in by respondents may be summarized as follows:

Table 7.2: Potential Obstacles to Successful Implementation Write-In Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old patterns of behavior and conflict, esp. among clergy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial issues</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency toward congregationalism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of leadership with requisite skills</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to change</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of full attention to non-metro congregations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties of organizational design</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for practical tools</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-centeredness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-described roles in canons that conflict with new vision</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The largest number of comments concerned entrenched patterns of conflict and mistrust, particularly among clergy and between clergy and the bishop. This was followed by financial issues, whether perceived lack of funding for the plan or conflicts around the diocesan budget.

The final three questions in the survey solicited open-ended comments around three foci: keys that made the BCMS process as successful as it was; ways in which the BCMS process could be improved; and any further comments about it. The first of these generated a large number of responses.

Table 7.3: What Made the BCMS Process As Successful as It Was?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative, participatory nature of process, engaging grass roots</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard work and commitment by BCMS leaders</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant’s design and leadership skill</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theological and spiritual foundations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest naming of realities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong communication and transparency</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not believe it was successful</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While a very small minority (three respondents) disputed that the BCMS process was successful, by far the greatest number of comments cited the collaborative, participatory nature of the process and its engagement with the grass roots. Examples of the comments include: “It was a true partnership across the diocese. It modeled a new way of being—collaborative, cooperative, honest, transparent”; “I deeply appreciated its efforts in meeting with people where they live and minister”; “All kinds of input from lots and lots of people all over the place”; and “By engaging so many people in the process, it gave ownership to all who were interested.”

The next group of comments cited the toil, commitment, and strength of the BCMS leaders and participants. Their persistence and sacrifice were recognized by many
as integral to earning credibility within the system. When so many previous planning
processes had ground to a halt or quietly faded away, the fact that this team worked hard
all the way to the end was recognized as vital to its success. Closely related to these
comments was another set crediting the consultant with skill in designing and guiding the
process. Theological and spiritual foundations were also recognized as key by some
respondents, as were the process’s attempts to name truths and foster a transparent
atmosphere of open communication.

On the question of how the process could have been improved, there were half as
many responses as on the previous question, spread across a wider array of themes.

Table 7.4: How Could the BCMS Process Have Been Improved?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More specific plan/recommendations</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More extensive congregational involvement, esp. non-metro</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better communication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More inclusion of laity and deacons</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving whole diocese from start</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better process for theological position paper</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better listening by facilitators</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing less on negative</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More involvement of young people</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More involvement by bishop</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The largest number of suggestions concerned the level of detail in the final report. These
respondents wanted further specificity in the plan’s recommendations. This was followed
by several sets of comments centered around greater inclusiveness and even higher
degrees of participation than those achieved by the process. Some wanted more extensive
congregational involvement, especially in the non-metropolitan areas. Others thought that
increased levels of communication would have helped more people to participate and
contributed to greater effectiveness. More significant and visible roles for laity and
deacons were also referenced several times.
A number of respondents felt that including the whole diocese from the very start (i.e., from the inception of the BCMMS process in 2005) would have helped the process. Several respondents also cited the process for the development of the theological position paper as a something that could be improved in order to engage more fully lay contributors, deacons, and those from the wider state. A few cited instances where BCMS facilitators were perceived as lacking in listening skills, as well as a sense that the BCMS plan overemphasized the negative aspects of the history of the diocese.

The final question invited a range of comments, clustered around two primary themes.

Table 7.5: Final Open-Ended Comment Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Praise/thanks/celebration for job well done</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for next phase of implementation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing less on negative in history</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further inclusion of deacons in future</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to deal with systemic elitisms</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubts about viability of network structure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for ongoing spiritual transformation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for more specific goals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCMS process used against bishop’s transition plan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The largest number of these comments were basically celebratory, either praising the process and its leaders or thanking God for the fruits borne so far. Examples include: “Hallelujah!”; “Job well done—thank you”; and “Just an incredible amount of gratitude to those on the commission who gave so tirelessly of themselves and their time.”

This was followed by a set of comments that expressed concern about the next phase of implementation, recognizing that the gains won so far would mean little without further work to anchor them more deeply in the life of the system. Given the past problems with inadequate follow-through in the system’s life, this was a key issue for
many respondents. A handful of other themes were referenced, including focusing less on the negative in the diocesan history and dealing with racism and other systemic patterns of exclusion (including the need for more explicit reference to the ministry of deacons).

Summary

Overall, the 2007 Follow-Up Survey offers a remarkably affirmative evaluation of the BCMS process. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the process had helped members define the realities facing the system, build relational bridges of connection to one another and to the whole, foster spiritual renewal, tap into grass roots voices, and increase trust. Moreover, respondents strongly affirmed the answers generated by the process to the foundational questions of identity and purpose with which this study began, Who is God calling us to be in this new, unsettling time? and What does God want us to do? They agreed that the process had enriched their imagination for mission and excited them about a new vision for ministry. They were confident that the goals articulated in the final plan would lead the system into a better future.

The significant increase in ratings of diocesan, congregational, and denominational vitality revealed by the follow-up survey also point toward the process’s fruitfulness. Respondent comments were generally highly favorable, naming key elements of the process as significant sources of hope. These elements include greater attention to God’s active agency in the life of the church, new levels of mutual honesty, greater unity around a common vision, and expanded participation, partnership, and collegiality.

The survey respondents also offered a number of substantive suggestions for improvement. These include attending even more carefully to participation, so that some
members on the system’s margins (such as ethnic minority and wider state congregations) might more fully engage and offer their gifts along the way. The theological position paper process could have been more fully grounded in diverse grass roots voices. The emphasis on the negative aspects of the system’s history and current predicament could have been better balanced with appreciation for the positive. Many yearned for more detail in the final plan—something that was not possible to achieve in this phase of the process given the timeline involved, but clearly necessary to attend to in the next phase.

The follow-up survey provided useful data for the system to consider in moving forward. This includes a naming and ranking of potential obstacles, as well as a concern that the system might revert back into old patterns of behavior. Clearly, a great deal was riding on the next phase of implementation. Some respondents worried that those holding formal leadership authority among the clergy and in the bishop’s office might stymie progress toward the new vision. Organizational inertia was regarded as a major threat to effective future transformation and must be countered intentionally.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

Living into a New Identity and Purpose

This study began with questions of identity and purpose for a church in a changing world. The answers to those questions lie in part in the process itself—a journey that embodied in many ways the very outcome that was realized at the end. Re-envisioning a mainline church judicatory as an open, outward-reaching ecclesial communion comprised of diverse members and ministries sharing an interdependent life was consistent with the open, participatory, grass-roots process used to develop that very vision. The shift from a corporate, bureaucratic, hierarchical approach to church
organization, leadership, and planning to a bottom-up, decentralized, empowering one was experienced powerfully by this system along the way.

How mission planning is done ought to reflect both the theological values of a church system, as well as the cultural context in which it finds itself. This process sought to affirm and build upon the fruitful theological impulses in this system’s heritage and operative belief and practice—the centrality of the Eucharist; an expansive, graceful stance toward God’s world and those on its margins; a passion for justice; and an intuition about human community as egalitarian and participatory. It also sought to reframe and enrich those impulses by retrieving dimensions of the Anglican and ecumenical Christian theological tradition that seemed to have been eclipsed or neglected, such as a clearer Trinitarian focus, a theology of the cross, a more robust pneumatology, a missional ecclesiology, and a stronger theology of gifts in the body of Christ.

The missiology that was unearthed in this process through extensive grass-roots dialogue and participatory engagement places communion at the center of God’s life and mission and the church’s life and mission in God. Heretofore in the theological literature, the missional and koinonia ecclesiologies have not been well integrated. The former emerged primarily out of a reclaiming of the western, sending conception of the Trinity; the latter out of the eastern, social Trinity. Yet both are true and valid emphases that complement our picture of God and God’s movement in the world. This project ended up working toward an integration of the two, in which communion (koinonia) is at the heart of mission, and the church’s participation in mission is an open, outward-reaching, dynamic embodiment of communion within the diversities of human contexts. Further
theological development of this integration, in more sustained dialogue with theologians of the East and West, as well as of the Global South, is necessary to unpack the full promise of this theme.

However, this project is unique in developing that theme directly from grass roots voices of a particular community of Christian congregations struggling with change, decline, and what it means to be church in a new era. Such a missional communion ecclesiology fit naturally with the theological heritage and ecclesial practice of this particular diocese of the Episcopal Church. It could likely take root within other dioceses and provinces of Anglicanism in rich and fruitful ways. Other Christian traditions and denominations may find it more or less resonant depending on their particular theological sensibilities.

The process employed to reframe this system’s missiology and ecclesiology has the potential for wider application across judicatories of varying types. Its key elements—extensive grass-roots participation, deliberative conversation, intentional spiritual discernment, theological framing, and living into the new vision even while formulating it—can be replicated in any number of forms. While highly labor-intensive for those involved, this process represents a critical alternative to planning efforts that fail to tap deeply enough into a system’s roots to effect lasting change.

If, in fact, the underlying cause of many of the problems of this particular system lies in certain theological commitments, as I have argued above, then further theological transformation must take place before those problems can be expected to be resolved. Such theological change requires ongoing sensemaking or narrative leadership from the bishop and clergy in particular. Whether the current or next bishop of this system, as well
as the clergy, can lead such change is a significant unresolved question. Further research into other judicatory systems with similar or differing theological commitments would be one useful way to compare the impact of theology upon organizational life.

**Short-Term Vulnerabilities, Long-Term Hopes**

As noted above, significant culture change in organizations is inevitably a multi-year project. That is all the more the case in geographically-dispersed voluntary organizations like a church judicatory. What transpired in the BCMS process within this particular system in 2006-2007 was only the beginning of a long-term journey toward renewal. Significant challenges remain as the system’s members continue to engage and own the identity, purpose, and vision for mission and ministry that emerged in this process. There are indeed no easy answers to renewing a complex church system such as this one—only diligent, sacrificial, prayerful work in community that constantly seeks the Spirit’s leadership. For this system, much of that work must still be done.

As of this writing, it is not yet clear how the political and power dynamics regarding the bishop, his staff, the elected leadership bodies of the diocese, and its grassroots members will ultimately affect the implementation of the plan. Given the threat of organizational inertia and potential resistance by the clergy, bishop, and staff identified in the survey, there is a possibility that those deeply invested in the status quo might intentionally or unintentionally seek to undermine the momentum toward further change. Given the qualified monarchical polity of the Episcopal Church, the bishop’s authority should never be underestimated. He supported the process in powerful ways. That is not the same thing, however, as leading the system into continued transformation. Even during the remaining few years of this bishop’s episcopate, leadership will have to
emerge from the grass roots and within the formal leadership structures to anchor and consolidate the culture change.

Whatever the short-term risks, seeds of change have been planted that cannot easily be uprooted. Those seeds lie primarily in the leaders transformed along the way and the new relationships and community they built together in the process. Over a yearlong journey, the process formed a new imagination for how to be the diocese together in mission. Leaders and grass-roots members long frustrated by the system engaged in dreaming together about what the diocese could become. Such dreams are not easily erased from memory. Nor are the new categories and language—the new mental models—that were created and disseminated in the process.

How lasting and deep the change wrought by the BCMS process in this diocese was remains to be seen. A longitudinal study in the years ahead would provide a helpful insight into lasting effects and no doubt further illuminate the process’s strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, the network organizational design proposed in this process must be lived into before its viability can be accurately assessed. Further research into the network paradigm for judicatory and denominational structure is a promising avenue that exceeds the scope of this dissertation.

Another key limitation of this study is that it was focused primarily on the judicatory level, rather than directly on the congregations that comprise it. Further transformation at the congregational level is necessary for missional renewal to take place in the whole of the judicatory. As the final report suggested in its goal of renewing congregations in context, congregations themselves will have to be explicitly engaged in their own multi-year missional change process. The principles of participatory action
research that defined this judicatory-level intervention also offer promise at the
congregational level. This judicatory intervention would serve well as a precursor to
further congregational work. ³

This thesis began with a description of a church system that was stuck. At the
conclusion of this action-research intervention, numerous signs within the system
indicated that the moment of paralysis, despair, and confusion had given way to a new
way of being church together in the power of the Spirit. Members of the system had been
empowered more fully to define and own their present and their future in light of God’s
presence and promises. A new unity that respected difference had emerged. Significant
indications of renewal were evident.

Ultimately, the questions and challenges that arose so centrally in this process
found their answers in the life of the Triune God. For a system struggling with how to
comprehend the various forms of difference in its midst and wanting to embrace
otherness in a just manner, the life of the Trinity invites us into an imagination for
heterogeneity in purposeful, dynamic harmony—a community in which the mutuality of
divine persons forms the basis for relationships with created persons who are invited into
a life of communion, each with her or his own unique voice to contribute to the chorus.

In the Eucharist, in which the church most vividly experiences that communion,
otherness is reconciled by the self-giving, sacrificial hospitality of God. At that table,
Christ hosts as the one who integrates within his own person two distinct natures,
representing freedom and otherness in perfect unity. ⁴ God’s own self-differentiation in

³ One such process is Church Innovations’ Partnership for Missional Church. See Keifert, We Are
Here Now, or www.churchinnovations.org.

⁴ See Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 37-38.
the Trinity allows for the differentiation of human persons in all their plurality—a plurality not to be glossed over or coercively diminished, but rather accentuated in a larger movement of reconciliation and love.

At the heart of that reconciliation is the cross of Christ, the place where the ambiguity of human life and history is brought into sharpest focus. It is in Christ’s utter identification with those he came to save—even and especially those on the farthest margins, outside the gate, deemed godforsaken—that we see most poignantly the redemptive power of God’s mission in which we are called to share.5 The lordship of this crucified Christ is a sacrificial lordship that challenges all who have been entrusted with authority and leadership to pour their very selves out into the flourishing of the other—not for the worldly honors due a benefactor, but so that the mutual, perichoretic life of God may be practiced in human community.

To those trapped in the private, competitive individualism of liberal democracy or the hierarchical elitism of aristocracy, the Trinity offers us an invitation to a far more mutual, integrative conversation of discernment, deliberation, and discovery. The work of leading, guiding, and shaping that conversation in our midst is the work of the Spirit of God—the force field where the atomized or hegemonic patterns of mere human power are transformed by the power of God. To those in this church system or other systems who feel isolated, alone, overwhelmed by the challenges and crises facing them, the promise of the Spirit must be reclaimed. As Welker writes, “The persons seized, moved, and renewed by God’s Spirit can know themselves placed in a force field that is seized, moved, and renewed from many sides—a force field of which they are members and

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bearers, but which they cannot bear, shape, be responsible for, and enliven alone.”⁶

Welker describes how the action of the Spirit leads to “the production of new structural patterns of life. Disintegrated persons and communities are stabilized and regrouped. They are given a new capacity to act…. Old forms of power and domination are replaced, bearers of hope appear unexpectedly and unforeseeably on the scene.”⁷

The experience of transformation and renewal in an Episcopal diocese described here evidenced many promising indicators of the Spirit’s movement. For a system whose future seemed so dim and hopeless at the inception of this process, new signs of vitality and hope have clearly emerged among this community of God’s people. Yet the moment of trial and danger has hardly passed—for this system, or for so many others in the Northern American church today. The new apostolic era is not a settled one, in which new visions can be encased in stone, but rather a dynamic one in which God’s people must learn to listen to the Spirit’s leading constantly together in community.

The real test of the fruitfulness of this process—or any other aimed at renewing and reframing the mission of the church—is whether the imagination, willingness, and capacity of all of God’s people to share in God’s own dynamic, generative, self-giving, reconciling movement in the world has increased. The more deeply the church can live into the patterns of God’s own communal life, the more promising its witness to the world will be.

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⁶ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 228.

⁷ Ibid., 318.
2006 Diocesan Mission Survey
What does it mean to be an Episcopalian in [X] at the beginning of the 21st century? This survey is designed to help the Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy understand the behaviors and beliefs of leaders in the diocese around questions of mission. Please respond candidly, from the perspective of your primary congregation. The data will be reported in group form only and individual responses will never be identified. If you have questions about the survey please contact Dwight Zscheile at [phone number]. Thank you!

I. Personal Practices of Discipleship and Mission
First, we’d like to know about how you express your sense of mission in the things you do, as well as a little more about who you are.

1. In the last year, how many times have you done the following?

Mark one for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>1-2 Times</th>
<th>3-4 Times</th>
<th>5-10 Times</th>
<th>More than 10 times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Served the poor or needy through an outreach ministry</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Invited a friend to church</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Shared your faith story with a non-believer</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Led an activity of a ministry team</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Mentored or developed other ministry leaders in your church</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Participated in a local cross-cultural mission trip</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Participated in a non-local cross-cultural mission trip</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Publicly advocated against injustice or oppression</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Visited a sick person</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Personally reached out to a neighbor in need</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Visited someone in prison</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mission practice: (write in below, if any)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Has the church helped you understand what your primary talents for ministry are?  
   (mark one)  
   ○ Yes  
   ○ No  
   ○ Not Sure

2-A. How much are you actively using your primary talents for ministry?  
   (mark one)  
   ○ Not at all  
   ○ Very little  
   ○ Some  
   ○ Quite a bit  
   ○ Very much

3. Do you know what the biblical spiritual gifts are?  
   (mark one)  
   ○ Yes  
   ○ No  
   ○ Not Sure

3-A. Do you know which of the biblical spiritual gifts you have been given, if any?  
   (mark one)  
   ○ Yes  
   ○ No  
   ○ Not Sure  
   ○ Not applicable—don't know what they are

4. What is the size, in average Sunday attendance, of the primary congregation in which you worship?  
   (mark one)  
   ○ Less 50  
   ○ 50-99  
   ○ 100-149  
   ○ 150-199  
   ○ 200-249  
   ○ 250-299  
   ○ 300+  
   ○ Not sure

5. How long have you been a member of the Diocese?  
   (mark one)  
   ○ Less than 1 year  
   ○ 1 to 2 years  
   ○ 3 to 4 years  
   ○ 5 to 9 years  
   ○ 10 to 14 years
6. What region of the diocese do you live in? (mark one)
   - 1 (Northwest [state])
   - 2 (Northeast [state])
   - 3 (West-central [state])
   - 4 (Southwest [state])
   - 5 (Southeast [state])
   - 6 (Northeast Metro)
   - 7 (Southeast Metro)
   - 8 (Downtown Metro)
   - 9 (West/Southwest Metro)
   - 10 Not sure

7. In what type of community do you live? (mark one)
   - Rural
   - Small Town
   - Suburban
   - Urban

8. What is your role in the church? (mark one)
   - Lay person, not employed by the church
   - Lay person, employed by the church
   - Vocational Deacon
   - Transitional Deacon
   - Priest

9. What was your age at your last birthday? (mark one)
   - Under 20
   - 20 to 29
   - 30 to 39
   - 40 to 49
   - 50 to 59
   - 60 to 69
   - 70 to 79
   - 80+

10. What is your gender? (mark one)
    - Male
    - Female
11. Which of the following describe your racial/ethnic background? (mark all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Pacific Islander
- Asian American
- Black/African American
- Hispanic/Chicano/Latino
- White (non-Hispanic)

II. Attitudes and Beliefs about Mission and Ministry

10. On a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is not important and 10 is absolutely essential, how important are each of the following in your understanding of what the church’s mission should be?

Mark one for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Bringing people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus and Lord.....</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Creating an inclusive community in which there are no outcasts</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Healing the sick</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Fostering reconciliation within individuals, families, the community and the world</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Meeting people’s spiritual needs in today’s competitive religious marketplace</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Building and supporting educational, social service and other community service institutions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Advocating for the poor, marginalized and oppressed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Preaching the good news of God’s gracious rule over the whole of human life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Equipping the church’s members for ministry in daily life</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12-A. Of the ways of understanding the church’s mission listed above, which two do you see as most central? (Write in two letters of items from the list above)

☐   ☐
13. How confident are you to proclaim the gospel in a society of many beliefs? *(mark one)*

- Not at all confident
- Only slightly confident
- Somewhat confident
- Fairly confident
- Very confident

14. Which of the following better describes your understanding of what the relationship between the clergy and the laity SHOULD be? *(mark only one)*

- The clergy’s primary role is equipping lay people for ministry in daily life
- The clergy exercise the primary ministry of the church and lay people support this ministry

15. From what you know, which of the following best describes the CURRENT relationship between congregations and the Diocese? *(mark only one)*

- Congregations primarily serve the Diocese by distributing resources for a larger mission
- The Diocese primarily serves congregations by equipping and networking them for ministry
- Congregations and the Diocese partner mutually at the local and regional levels to participate in God’s mission in the state.

15-A. What SHOULD that relationship be? *(mark only one)*

- Congregations primarily serve the Diocese by distributing resources for a larger mission
- The Diocese primarily serves congregations by equipping and networking them for ministry
- Congregations and the Diocese partner mutually at the local and regional levels to participate in God’s mission in the state.

16. From what you know, which of the following better describes the CURRENT relationship between the Diocese and the national church? *(mark only one)*

- Congregations and the Diocese primarily support the mission of the national church, which transcends local concerns
- The national church primarily serves the local mission of congregations and the regional mission of the Diocese

16-A. What should that relationship be? *(mark only one)*

- Congregations and the Diocese primarily support the mission of the national church, which transcends local concerns
- The national church primarily serves the local mission of congregations and the regional mission of the Diocese
17. How would you evaluate the vitality of the following?

*Mark one for each item.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not vital at all</th>
<th>Not very vital</th>
<th>Somewhat vital</th>
<th>Very vital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. My personal faith and discipleship</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The life and ministry of my congregation</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. The life and ministry of the Diocese</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. The life and ministry of Episcopal Church (USA)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Please check how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the current state of the Episcopal Church in the state.

*Mark one for each item.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree or Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Our society is changing rapidly and the church must adapt in order to survive and thrive</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Our form of church has lost its relevance and cannot compete with other religious and secular attractions</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Our institutional image is too elitist and exclusive to attract diverse populations</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. We lack strategies and methods for growing our churches</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Political and theological battles at the national level have damaged our public image</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. We have diluted the gospel and compromised the message of Christ</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. We are too traditional in our theology to speak to contemporary people</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. The Episcopal Church needs to do a better job of meeting its members' needs</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Our theological identity is too vague for us to be bold in mission</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

19. What do you think is the single greatest challenge facing the Episcopal Diocese in this state?

*(write in below)*
III. Looking toward the Future

20. How hopeful are you about the future of the Episcopal Church in this state? (mark one)
   ○ Not at all hopeful
   ○ Only slightly hopeful
   ○ Somewhat hopeful
   ○ Fairly hopeful
   ○ Very hopeful

21. How much hope do the following give you for the future of the Episcopal Church in this state?
   Mark one for each item.

   a. Our mission history of church planting in the early years .......................................................
      ○ None ○ Only A Little ○ Some ○ Quite a Bit ○ A Great Deal
   b. Our mission history of advocacy on behalf of oppressed people ............................................
      ○ None ○ Only A Little ○ Some ○ Quite a Bit ○ A Great Deal
   c. Signs of the active leading of the Holy Spirit in our midst ..........................................................
      ○ None ○ Only A Little ○ Some ○ Quite a Bit ○ A Great Deal
   d. The leadership of the Diocese................................
      ○ None ○ Only A Little ○ Some ○ Quite a Bit ○ A Great Deal
   e. Our record of implementing new strategies and techniques for church growth ....................
      ○ None ○ Only A Little ○ Some ○ Quite a Bit ○ A Great Deal
   f. The vitality of my local congregation ..............
      ○ None ○ Only A Little ○ Some ○ Quite a Bit ○ A Great Deal

22. Please check how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about what would be lost if the Episcopal Church in this state were to disappear.
   Mark one for each item.

   a. Without our unique expression of the gospel, some people would not hear the gospel at all.
      ○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
   b. The poor and needy in our state would not be as well served
      ○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
   c. Many seekers, doubters, and progressives would not have a place to explore their faith questions ..........................................................
      ○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
   d. Our state would lose a rich liturgical, musical and artistic telling of God’s story ....................
      ○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree or Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree
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<th></th>
<th>Many members of the burgeoning immigrant populations in our midst would not find a church home</th>
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<th>O</th>
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<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Many members of marginalized groups, such as gays and lesbians, would not find a welcoming church community</td>
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<td>g</td>
<td>Ministry to and with the Native Americans would be significantly diminished</td>
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<td>h</td>
<td>Other (write in below)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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23. Finally, please add your own comments about the current and future mission of the Diocese.  
(Write in below)
One-way ANOVA; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01

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### Church size short

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Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy
Episcopal Diocese of [X]

What Are We Here For?
A Theological Position Paper on Mission

A Working Document as of February 2007

Offered by the Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy
Position Paper Action Team
Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy

February 2007
To: Episcopal Diocese of [X]

It is my pleasure, as the Internal Resource Person for the current work being done by the Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS), to introduce to the diocese this current “working document” of a “Theological Position Paper on Mission.” In recent months, the over 50+ members of the BCMS have been hard at work in visiting congregations to discern how the Spirit of God is at work in our midst. They have also been engaged in carefully considering how to rethink, reframe and reclaim the identity of the diocese.

Part of this work has involved the development of this paper. The mandate that the BCMS received indicated that the diocese is in need of developing “a shared understanding of its scriptural and theological foundations, as well as a shared understanding of purpose among the congregations in relation to the diocese.” Several things are important to note about this current “working document” version of this paper:

1. “A” Position Paper – This working document is intended to invite all of us into an ongoing conversation. In this sense, it is a conversation starter. It is not intended to be the final word, nor the only word in relation to thinking about the theological identity of the diocese, but rather to contribute to helping to generate an important conversation which the BCMS believes it is crucial for us to have.

2. Process Employed – The protocols that the BCMS is working under called for this working document to be generated in three stages: (a) a smaller Drafting Team to do an initial framing of key themes and issues; (b) a larger, representative Presenting Group to interact with, edit, and refine the emerging draft; and (c) the testing of the emerging draft with numerous focus groups of diocesan constituents – at least seven such groups were convened in the fall of 2006 which led to many edits.

3. Purpose – The primary purpose of this paper is to help invite, generate, and cultivate a conversation about the theological identity of the diocese in relation to its mission. It is the belief of the BCMS that this conversation needs to be open, dynamic, system-wide, and contributive to our shared work. This conversation, we believe, will deeply inform the eventual proposals of the BCMS, and will also lead to this “working document” being further revised and enhanced.

May the Spirit of God be present in our midst as we engage this important conversation, and may each of you find your voice in contributing to it.

Respectfully,
Internal Resource Person, BCMS
Preface

How this Paper Came into Existence

1. Bishop [X] convened a planning process in 2005-06 for developing a mission strategy for the metro area congregations of the Diocese of [X]. It became clear from that study that a diocesan-wide planning process was required in order to address the systemic issues that were being identified. This led to the formation of the Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS) which is now working in 2006-07. The process being used by the BCMS is designed to involve as many congregations and members of the diocese as possible in a variety of activities for the purpose of helping to clarify the identity of the diocese and its mission in the future.

2. One of the key activities of this approach is the development of this position paper. Its primary purpose is to assist the diocese to rethink, reframe and reclaim the identity of the diocese around a shared understanding of scriptural and theological foundations, and to provide for a shared understanding of purpose among the congregations and the diocese. Particular attention is being paid in this paper to understanding the place and role of congregations within the diocese.

3. An initial draft of this position paper was developed by a designated writing team, which then tested and refined that draft with a larger Action Team Presenting Group (as listed on the cover page). This revised draft was presented in many different forums where input and feedback were invited. Further changes have been made in light of this feedback.

How this Paper Is Intended to Be Used

4. This paper is envisioned to have multiple uses within the larger BCMS process. First, the BCMS process involves a series of grass-roots conversations with congregational leaders. This paper will be discussed in the third round of those conversations as a way of providing leaders with a scriptural and theological framework for understanding God’s movement in our midst. Second, the paper will help inform the ongoing discernment of the BCMS as it develops a vision and strategies for the mission of the Episcopal Church in [this state]. Third, the paper will be available with a study guide for congregations to use in adult forums and other educational settings. It will also be available via the Web to anyone who seeks to read it.

5. As we have brought drafts of this paper into discussion with numerous groups of lay and ordained leaders around the diocese, we have been struck by how difficult it seems to be for leaders in the diocese to talk directly about God with one another (in other words, to do theology). As theology involves faith seeking understanding, we offer this paper as a starting point for conversations about God’s purpose for us. We do not intend this paper to be the final word, but rather a means of enriching our mutual imagination about our church’s participation in God’s mission in this new, unsettling and dynamic era.
I. Introduction
6. If the Episcopal Church in [this state] were to disappear, what would be lost? What would be the impact on our communities, on those who have not heard the good news of Jesus Christ? Would it hinder God’s mission in our time and place? Who would miss us? What might God be calling us to do?

7. The Diocese of [X] faces many challenges. We live amidst a highly pluralistic society of many religions and cultures, in which basic acquaintance with the story of Jesus can no longer be assumed. Demographic shifts over the past decades have transformed the population, reducing it in some places while expanding it exponentially elsewhere. Immigration is enriching [this state] with new faces, languages and customs. Economic disparities are alive and well in our state and world.

8. We have inherited many church structures, norms and behaviors from different eras, while the pace of cultural change seems to accelerate by the year. Membership in our Episcopal congregations is diminishing while the ministry needs of a polarized, violent and broken world are as great as ever.

9. At this time, we in the Diocese of [X] are engaged in a project of renewal. Through the Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS), a number of pathways to renewal are being explored. Through fact finding and study we are in touch with our history – both our accomplishments and disappointments. Through a process of engaging one another in conversation about God’s activity in our congregational life, we hope to see more clearly what God would have us do and be. By entering into theological conversation and reflecting on Holy Scripture, we seek clarity about our “position” and identity, both of which are foundational to understanding our mission.

10. The position paper is a “gift offering” from the BCMS to encourage theological conversation in our diocese. As noted in the paper below, “being Anglican … means being a theologian—the answers aren’t all give in advance” (¶37). All the baptized “do” theology as we seek to discern what God would have us do in this time and place. In other words, the goal of theology is to work out what God wants God’s people to be and do in their situation. Because God in Christ continues to be present in the church and to be active in our history, we are constantly challenged to align our ways with God’s ways. Doing theology is meant to assist with this alignment.

II. Mission Impossible!? Where Do We Begin?
11. “Mission” is an ambiguous word in the minds of many Episcopalians in our Diocese today. In recent years, churches have followed businesses in fashioning “mission statements” designed to focus their energy and effort. For some, the word “mission” conjures the problematic colonial legacy of Western imperialism, both overseas and in our own history, particularly among Native populations. For others, “mission” means obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus
(Matthew 28), making disciples out of all nations. Others understand mission as the church’s activities on behalf of a more just society. Many are simply confused about what mission means in a world where our neighbors adhere to a great variety of religions or no religion at all. They hunger for a definition of “mission” that they can embrace.

**Mission Begins with the Trinity**

12. For Christians, the heart of mission is the heart of the Triune God, who is an open, interdependent community of three persons, traditionally called Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Christian understanding of God is highly relational: God’s identity consists in the loving communion (Greek koinonia, or fellowship) of three distinct yet inseparably united divine persons: the ineffable Mystery, the expressive Word, and the active Spirit eternally indwell each other in a dynamic exchange of self-giving and sharing love.

13. The threefold relationship of the divine life creates the condition of the possibility of relationship for all creatures, as the inner-Trinitarian life is reflected in the pattern of creation and salvation. The Creator calls the universe into being through the Word and the Spirit (Genesis 1) and continually draws the universe into communion in the Trinitarian life (Colossians 1). Humans are created in the image of God to reflect God’s interdependent, creative life of freedom and love and to live in right relationship with all creation (Genesis 1-2). Humanity’s deep tendency, however, is to fracture this web of interconnectedness through our willingness to doubt God, seek our own purposes and agendas and reject dependence upon our Creator (Genesis 3). Sin is a personal, social, institutional and spiritual reality from whose power we cannot free ourselves (Romans 7, Ephesians 3).

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**Trustworthy community begins with a trustworthy God**

Within the Diocese of [X], leaders have identified a pervasive culture of mistrust, skepticism and anxiety that impedes our common life and mission. Learning to trust one another begins with our trust in God, who as a loving community of three divine persons, creates, calls, forgives and leads us into a new future. God’s promises and active presence in our midst are the foundation of the church’s common life—not our own strength, skill or best intentions.

14. The biblical narrative tells us of God’s constant and patient efforts to redeem and restore humanity, beginning with a family (Abraham and Sarah), which grows into a people and nation (Israel). Oppressed by the imperial power of Egypt, God liberates them from slavery and through a long journey in the wilderness forms them into a covenant people. When established as a nation, God sends prophets to recall them to faithfulness in times of prosperity, tribulation and exile. Throughout, Israel’s purpose is to show forth to all nations God’s vision for shalom, or just and peaceful human flourishing.
15. God makes a defining intervention into Israel’s story in the person of Jesus, born to a poor family in an occupied land. In his ministry, Jesus embodies the divine Word as the herald and prime instance of God’s reign (or kingdom or rule) over the whole of human life (Mark 1). He heals the sick, challenges the powers that corrupt and oppress, liberates the captives and helps the blind to see (Luke 4). Yet people reject, spurn and ultimately kill him. On the cross Jesus breaks the cycle of retribution and violence and reaches out in compassion even to the torturers who put him there (Luke 23). Jesus empties himself of power and makes the ultimate sacrifice so that all people might be forgiven and reconciled to God (Philippians 2). God raises Jesus from the dead as the promise that we might be raised with him to new life too.

16. Jesus left a community as his legacy—a community at first tentative and afraid, but then empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness boldly to God’s reconciling love. This community of the Holy Spirit, which came to be known as the church (Greek ekklesia, or assembly), is called to proclaim the good news of God’s liberation and justice. Participating in God’s mission, the church strives to be an adequate sign of God’s reign so all may live in light of the vision of reconciled humanity and restored creation yet to come.

17. We assert that God is a missionary God. God the Holy Trinity creates the world for loving, interdependent relationship, or communion, and then seeks to invite all creation back into the communion of the divine life when it has been estranged. The Trinity lives in everlasting communion; Jesus is the human one who lives most fully into that communion; the Spirit-filled community of Jesus lives in the world to draw the world into that communion. “Mission” comes from a Latin term for sending. Within the movement of salvation, God the Father sends Jesus the Son; the Father through the Son sends the Holy Spirit; the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together send the church into the world. Mission is the journey to the New Creation (Revelation 21).

18. God’s mission is one of repentance and reconciliation. It restores right relationships, unifying without erasing difference, promising new and eternal life to all who are willing to accept Jesus’ vision and live as his disciples. God’s mission gathers all creation into an ultimate fulfillment of justice and love. It is non-coercive; it proceeds through radical identification with people where they are in life, seeking not to colonize and control but rather to transform and set free.

Waiting behind the red doors?

Placing God’s mission at the heart of the church’s understanding of mission challenges us to shift our focus from welcoming the world to us to seeking to partner with God out in the world. Offering hospitality to those who seek us out is profoundly important. Yet the primary field for mission is the world, not the church.
III. What Does the Church Have to Do with Mission?

19. The church is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12), the continuing presence of Jesus’ ministry in the world. The church therefore is created to carry out his ministry of reconciliation, proclaim his forgiveness, offer his healing and promote God’s justice for all people. The church’s mission is not fundamentally its own, but rather a participation in God’s mission. Mission is not merely an activity, program or function of the church, but rather its essential nature.

20. The church is created and called to reflect the communion of the Trinity. Diverse persons, groups, cultures and structures share an interdependent, common life that is open, inviting and outward-reaching. The church’s unity lies not in homogeneity, or sameness, but rather in the integration of the fullest possible range of human diversity in a community marked by love, justice and right relationships (Acts 2). This community is in its way of life to be a sign, foretaste and witness to God’s reign—modeling the new creation begun in Christ (2 Corinthians 5, Revelation 7).

21. The church is a community of the cross. For Christians, the cross signifies both Jesus’ death and his resurrection. Thus, the church is to be characterized by self-emptying service, foot-washing (John 13) and the laying aside of personal agendas for the greater good (Romans 15). It bears the brokenness of the cross—imperfect and incomplete, yet growing together into full maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4). As an Easter People, the church is also characterized by joy in celebration and service.

22. Fundamental to the church’s life is the gospel story of Jesus’ baptism. In his baptismal moment at the Jordan River, the Spirit descends and the Father’s voice proclaims the Son. In our baptism, God’s Trinitarian life comes alive in the church. In baptism we become members of Christ’s body, receive the forgiveness of sin and are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we affirm “The Baptismal Covenant” (BCP, pp. 304-5), we take on the life of discipleship, pledging to be persons of learning and prayer, repentance and proclamation, justice and peace. Also fundamental to the church’s life is our gathering to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. Together we rehearse the biblical story and pray for the concerns of God’s world. At table, we remember Jesus’ last meal with his friends, are fed by his body and blood and experience a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. In the Eucharist we share in a ritual enactment of our ultimate destiny: the union and communion of all sorts and conditions of people from every generation all rejoicing in the presence of the living God (Luke 14).

23. In reciting the Nicene Creed, we affirm that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. As we proclaim that “there is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...” (Ephesians 4) we experience the unity of the church. Through the sacraments and the exercise of our ministry and mission we become one in Christ. The church is holy because God is holy (Leviticus 11). In baptism we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and “set apart” to be God-like, that is, to have a real involvement in the divine life. The church is
catholic, or universal, in its inclusion of all cultures, tribes and nations. It is apostolic, or sent into the world in ministry in continuity with the earliest followers of Jesus.

IV. What Is the Episcopal Church’s Unique Role in Mission?
24. What special gifts has God given to Anglicanism and the Episcopal Church, which they in turn may contribute to the body of Christ? Anglicanism today is very diverse in its global expressions, a dynamic tradition that has evolved throughout its history, including here in [this state]. The following dimensions may be highlighted as specific Anglican gifts for the work of God’s mission in our time and place:

The Centrality of Communion
25. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Anglican tradition as it is lived out in [this state] is the central place given to communion. The three Persons of the Trinity live in perfect communion; they create a universe as a beloved other and seek to draw it into sharing their communion; the church is an agent of God’s mission of communion; therefore the church is characterized first and foremost by its living in communion. The church expresses this symbolically in the liturgy of communion, the Holy Eucharist, as its principal act of worship. The eucharistic liturgy creates a sacred space in which people of differing backgrounds, experiences, cultures and identities can join their varied gifts and needs in sharing the new creation in Christ: “when you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up” (1 Corinthians 14). The Holy Communion provides a liturgical experience of reconciled diversity, in which genuine differences between persons are neither ignored nor dissolved, but are gathered up into a larger commonality. Christ is the center of this common life: “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (2 Corinthians 5). The faithful people are then sent forth from the liturgical gathering as ambassadors of Christ to bear the promises of the gospel and model and work for reconciled diversity in the brokenness and need of the world.

26. The experience of reconciled diversity gives rise to a vision of the communion of all, from which no person, indeed no creature in all creation, is meant to be excluded. It is from the communion-inspired vision that Episcopalians in [this state] derive their commitments to advocacy for the marginalized and oppressed, and to the inclusion of all sorts and conditions of persons in open congregations. American religion has tended to be individualistic and fragmented among endless splinter groups and factions. While the Episcopal Church is not without its own sad history of factionalism and fragmentation (indeed, to this day), we hold as an ideal the principle of sharing in a common life together, even when we disagree. In a society in which narrow personal preferences and “going our own way” are ascendant, we can be a sign of living for a greater whole, doing the painstaking work of sharing life together and “seeking the mind of Christ” amidst our differences.
Inclusion and Communion

This is a state with a deep heritage of democratic and egalitarian ideals. Perhaps it is no surprise that we in the Episcopal Church often talk about inclusion as one of our primary commitments. Yet mere inclusion is not the same as reconciliation and communion — words from our scriptural and theological tradition that describe more accurately what sets the church apart from other societies, clubs or organizations. At the church’s center is God’s active work of reconciling the world in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into the communion of the divine life.

27. Communion of reconciled diversity is both gift and task in the church. Rooted in Christ, communion is something that comes to the church from beyond itself and can only be received joyfully as a gift. Yet it must also be lived out in the practicalities of church life, and such practical living involves continual work in concrete tasks of reconciliation, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The simple inclusion of diverse persons is not in itself communion; inclusivity becomes communion when diversities are reconciled in Christ into one body that works together for the common good. Many Episcopalians in [this state] are committed to the ideal of inclusivity; yet our life together is infected with racism, classism, sexism and other patterns of exclusion. We often succumb to the divisiveness of special pleading for special interests. While we speak the rhetoric of inclusion, we do not always rise to the hard work of reconciliation; our living into genuine communion is thereby compromised and impaired. The Episcopal Church in [X] is a “wounded healer,” which must seek continual repentance and bind up its own brokenness even as it acts to bind up the brokenness of the world. We have the treasure of the gospel in the “clay jars” (2 Corinthians 4) of our weakness. It is only in recognizing our own need for continual reconciliation in Christ that we will be able to join God’s mission to bring reconciling communion to the world.

Comprehensiveness

28. God the Trinity is a diversity of divine Persons in unity of Being. The church is called to reflect and represent the Trinitarian life in its own diversity-in-unity. A signal form of diversity-in-unity for Anglicanism has been the principle of comprehensiveness. At its best, Anglicanism has striven to be a microcosm of the richness of the universal Christian church. Anglicanism embraces three primary historic strands of theology and piety: evangelical (“low church”), catholic (“high church”) and liberal (“broad church”). In history, different Anglicans have tended to stress one of these strands, while others have sought to integrate them in their own piety and practice. Today, there are Anglicans who emphasize the Reformed/Protestant stream of Christianity, including a large number deeply influenced by the Evangelical revivals that occurred from the 18th through the
20th centuries. Others resonate more deeply with the return to catholic worship and piety that emerged in the 19th century in the Oxford Movement. Still others find themselves most at home in the open engagement with modern culture represented by the Latitudinarian movement in the 19th and 20th centuries. These are all legitimate historic expressions of Anglicanism.

29. Unlike many Christian denominations, which identify with only one of these strands, Anglicanism has sought to unite them into one church—drawing from Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox sources and traditions. The promise of this approach is the potential for an unparalleled richness of Christian life and witness to the world. The problem of this approach is a tendency to succumb to infighting, which leaves the mission possibilities of Anglican comprehensiveness not yet fully realized.

Distributed Authority

30. If the Trinity lives in non-hierarchical, mutual relationship, and if the church is called to reflect the Trinity in its own life, then the church should strive for non-hierarchical, mutual relationships in its structures and polities. In Anglicanism this has classically been expressed in a drive toward distributed authority.

31. The American Episcopal Church especially has pioneered a polity in which lay people, bishops, priests and deacons share collaboratively in leading the church. Our governance reflects the ideals of federalism and representative democracy. While some traditions tend toward the extremes of strict hierarchy or disconnected congregationalism, we value local autonomy and interdependent bonds of unity.

32. Similarly, we recognize distributed authority in our theological resources. In the 16th century, the theologian Richard Hooker famously described Anglicanism’s three sources of authority on matters of Christian life and belief as a “three-legged stool” comprising scripture, tradition and reason. In Hooker’s formulation, we read the Word of God in scripture, by means of our reason, informed by tradition. In the 16th century the word “reason” meant more than it means now; while we today use the word to indicate analytical intellect, historically the word meant something more like “the capacity to reflect reality.” For Anglicans, theology happens when the Word is reflected in the individual soul within the community of interpretation.

33. Theological authority, then, comes from reading the Bible through the lens of tradition with the full engagement of our critical and intellectual faculties; from reflecting upon tradition in light of the Bible and contemporary knowledge; and from interpreting innovations in human thought through eyes shaped by Scripture and the tradition. In a world in which many Christians tend to emphasize Scripture alone, tradition or reason, Anglicans seek to hold all three in tension. At its best, this can lead to great depth and relevance in our engagement with the world and its questions.
34. In another example of distributed theological authority, Anglicanism seeks to balance two core doctrines that in other traditions are sometimes prioritized at each other’s expense, namely, the doctrines of *Incarnation* and *Redemption*. We affirm the sacramental character of the universe, created and blessed by God as good (Genesis 2). The creation reflects the wisdom of God’s Word (Colossians 2), was embraced profoundly when God became fully human in Jesus in the Incarnation, and is laboring toward its completion in eschatological fulfillment (Romans 8).

35. At the same time, we cherish the great Protestant insight about God’s definitive act of redemption on the cross. This atonement (“at-one-ment”) frees us from condemnation to slavery to sin, guilt and death (Romans 8). Through it, we receive grace and adoption as God’s children (Galatians 4). The cross renders null our attempts to earn our own salvation, which is a great temptation in our culture today. Both of these doctrines are theologically authoritative for Anglican belief and practice.

*Rich Liturgical and Artistic Expressions of the Christian Story*

36. God’s mission in the world is for communion and abundance of life; one sign of abundance is the coming-together of diverse feelings in the experience of *beauty*. Anglicans therefore value aesthetics—worshipping God “in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29). There are many Anglican expressions of worship, from charismatic revivals to solemn high masses, but we tend to share an attentiveness to form and beauty without which many people would not understand or participate in God’s mystery and truth as deeply.

*Intellectual Curiosity, Freedom and Engagement*

37. Believing in a whole and integrated life, we also believe that God calls us to pray with the spirit and to pray with the mind (1 Corinthians 14). Being Anglican therefore means *being a theologian* —the answers aren’t all given in advance. Every member of the church must wrestle with questions of Christian belief and behavior. The church doesn’t foreclose debate by requiring assent to strict confessional statements. Rather, we ground our unity in Scripture, the creeds, the historic episcopate and our practice of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. Members of the Episcopal Church are afforded the opportunity to think for themselves, which makes room for some rich and varied conversations about how to live a Christian life in the 21st century. When so many secular people in our society perceive Christians as narrow-minded and unthinking, the Episcopal Church is a powerful alternative witness.

38. These are some of the gifts God has made manifest in the Anglican and Episcopal way of being Christian. But we must also be mindful of the paradox of the Gospel: many are first who will be last, our strengths can become our stumbling blocks, and it is often in our weaknesses that we become most aware of grace. We Episcopalians can become too smug, or too complacent, or too attached to our gifts, and when that happens they cease to be instruments for mission. When
we think of our gifts as something to share with the world for the sake of God’s mission, they can be vibrant and vital signs of communion life.

V. Organizing for Mission and Leadership Today

39. The Episcopal Church in [this state] has a rich mission history with many facets, including expansive church planting in its first fifty years, costly advocacy for Native Americans and other oppressed groups, service to the poor and needy, evangelistic preaching, translation of the liturgy into other languages (including Ojibwe, Norwegian and, more recently, Hmong) and the building of a network of strong social service and educational institutions. We are the diocese of […] and countless other faithful and courageous Episcopalians over the generations.

40. We are also the inheritors of many denominational, diocesan and local church structures, assumptions and practices that bear critical reflection in today’s changing world. Like other Christian churches, the Episcopal Church’s organization and ministry are shaped by particular cultural influences from specific times and places. At best, when the times and context change, the church has adapted its organization and ministry to remain vital and engaged. This occurred when Anglicanism was transplanted from England to the American colonies in the 17th century, again following the American Revolution (when the Episcopal Church was formally born) and in the 20th century during the rise of American corporate bureaucracy.

Mission and Our Sense of Place

41. The Episcopal Church carried over from England the parish concept—the division of geographical territory into parishes, each with a local church building staffed by a priest. In England, inhabitants of a particular parish were expected to attend their parish church. Large blocks of parishes were organized into dioceses, with a bishop in charge of this domain.

42. Generally, Anglicanism assumed that everyone who lived within a particular parish was, nominally at least, a Christian. Clergy focused on preaching, teaching and pastoral care for settled flocks. For much of European history, mission and evangelism were understood as something primarily done across geographical frontiers, particularly overseas. Mission societies were organized for this purpose, sending specialist missionaries out to do the work. Most ordinary lay people were understood to be recipients of the church’s ministry, normally performed by the clergy.

43. In America, the parish system never really functioned very well since religious adherence became a voluntary preference. Nonetheless, the Christian church for much of American history saw itself at the hub of society—located on the proverbial town square, its steeple a symbol of its centrality and influence over American life.
44. The world has changed. We have entered a period of discontinuous change in our context today, when longstanding cultural norms and assumptions are breaking down and we don’t know clearly what lies ahead. Amidst a globalized economy, the emergence of postmodern culture, the dissolution of loyalty to institutions (particularly denominations) and a tendency toward radical individualism, the church’s place in our society is uncertain. The Constantinian ideal of the church standing at the center of culture is gone, replaced by a deeply pluralistic, post-Christian social reality.

45. While this sea change may feel threatening, it also represents a moment of great opportunity. The times in which we live are analogous to the biblical wilderness (Exodus and Numbers) or the Exile (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). One of the great temptations of the biblical wilderness is to make idols out of what we once knew or what surrounds us in the culture. In such a time of change, our tendency is to cling tightly to what we know best—whether it be the comfort and familiarity of our church communities as they are, or the skills and behaviors that worked in the past.

46. Instead, our primary task today is to return to the core sources of our identity—our Christian identity. This means learning to listen to the biblical narrative and the Holy Spirit together with a fresh depth and openness, and practicing the classic spiritual disciplines of our faith (such as prayer, worship, witness, service, silence, Sabbath and solitude). When the church in any particular place is in decline, it is often because of one of two reasons: the church has lost its clarity and commitment to the constants (or core beliefs and mission practices) of the faith, or the context has changed and the church hasn’t. We must take seriously both of these challenges. Now is the time to return to our roots and rediscover our identity and purpose as People of the Way of Jesus (Mark 1).

**Mission Is Local**

47. The incarnational principle testifies to God’s identification and engagement with human life in all its local particularity. The church’s mission is always rooted in place—specific cultural and geographical locales. It is through existing and new relational webs that the church’s members witness to God’s redeeming work by word and example on a daily basis. This includes family, neighborhood, workplace and community ties.

48. Relegating mission and ministry primarily to the clergy as a separate, “holier” caste betrays our baptismal identity. Rather, the church’s primary

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**Gospel-Based Discipleship**

In order to live as disciples in mission, we must all learn to dwell Imaginatively in the story of Jesus. The Native American community has developed a practice for engaging the Word and another called Gospel-Based Discipleship. It involves sharing reflectively in three questions about a gospel text: What words or phrases did you hear? What is Jesus (the Gospel) saying to you? What is Jesus (the Gospel) calling you to do? Gospel-Based Discipleship is a practice from which Episcopalians across this state and the Anglican Communion have benefited.
missionaries are its lay members in their daily life and work. This is the pattern by which the early church grew exponentially amidst a culturally and religiously diverse Roman world. Mission took place not through elaborate strategies, programs or techniques, but rather through the witness of ordinary Christians, who took Jesus’ encouragement to be salt, leaven and light to heart (Matthew 5).

49. Anglicanism is deeply shaped by Benedictine spirituality, which values community, stability and the rhythm of an ordered life of prayer, study and work, all in a particular place. In contrast, contemporary American society is highly mobile. People move frequently for reasons of education, work (sometimes with little choice at the whim of the corporate system), pleasure or retirement. The deep relational ties that once characterized American life and that could span generations have frayed amidst a hyper-individualism.

50. Effective Christian witness for the church today may in some cases mean making a sacrificial commitment to community and place in order to strengthen the relational ties so important for mission and evangelism. We cannot deepen our practice of Christian community, listen carefully to the stories, questions and needs of those around us or “give a reason for the hope that is within us” (1 Peter 3) and expect to be heard without being bound together in relationships.

51. At the same time, we must recognize the new forms that relationships are taking within emerging generations. The defining cultural metaphor for younger generations today is the Internet—a geographically-dispersed, decentralized network. For the Episcopal Church to be engaged with these generations, room must be created in our imagination for forms of church that depart from the parish model.

52. This might mean congregations organized around particular affiliations or interests or ones that gather in unconventional settings. For instance, in the Church of England today, there are network churches coexisting alongside traditional neighborhood churches. These include cell churches, pub and café churches, new monastic orders, and school-linked congregations, all of which are effectively connecting with younger people and others unfamiliar with the church. Grass-roots forms such as the Gospel-Based Discipleship and Base Ecclesial Community models have proven effective in developing Christian maturity and witness. This is a time to allow ourselves greater flexibility for discerning the multiplicity of ways in which God may be calling us to be church together.

53. For too long, our understanding of church has been dominated by the family metaphor. Many of our congregations conceive of themselves as an extended family with its quirky traditions (at times bewildering to outsiders), comfortable in the security of knowing one another. We gladly welcome newcomers to visit—but on our terms. Clergy are trained in psychology-based “family-systems theory” as a primary lens for their pastoral leadership of congregations. While the Bible does speak of the church as the “household of God,” our understanding
of the church as a family has often become an overly constricting one that has closed us off to the world.

**Mission is Regional**

54. While the church’s ministry is indigenous and local through the daily lives of its members and the witnessing practices of congregations, there have always been mobile, or cross-local, mission workers and ministries. In the early church, this included leaders like Barnabas, Paul and Timothy who planted churches, raised up new leaders and moved on (Acts), or Phoebe, who was an important emissary between churches (Romans 16). Europe was initially evangelized by traveling bands of monks, such as those led by St. Patrick and St. Columba.

55. The episcopate evolved as a way of overseeing and encouraging ministry across multiple house churches and congregations in a region. However, once Europe and North America were considered to be settled “Christian” territories, the apostolic (from a Greek word for *sending*) nature of bishops tended to shift. Instead of empowering and multiplying congregations and leaders, bishops often focused on governance and control. In 20th century America, the Episcopal Church adopted forms of hierarchical bureaucracy from secular corporate culture, with their command-and-control leadership styles. Bishops and diocesan staff came to spend much of their energy on regulating the ministry taking place within their dioceses (through credentialing clergy, licensing lay ministers and developing corporate policies, procedures and committees).

56. Today’s changed context calls for reframing the episcopate to emphasize *mission* rather than *maintenance*. Instead of a geographical domain controlled by a corporate CEO (bishop) and diocesan bureaucracy, the diocese may be reconceived as a *communion* of congregations and other ministries networked and equipped for mission. Reflecting the shape of the Trinity, the congregations, institutions and members of the diocese share an interdependent, common life of service and witness.

**Mission is Global**

57. Just as mission is local and regional, so too is it global. Today, that concept takes on a new twist. Whereas missionaries were once sent from America or Europe to Africa, Asia or Latin America to share the gospel, today the logic is being reversed. The areas of greatest growth and vitality in the global church are in the South (Africa, Asia and Latin America), while the North (the United States, Canada and Europe) struggles with the legacy of modern secularism. Mission in a post-colonial era is now from *everywhere to everywhere.*
58. We must take seriously the possibility that one of the greatest forces for renewal in once-mainline Christianity in North America and Europe will be immigrants from the global South. Relationships with sisters and brothers in Christ whose cultural experience of the gospel differs from our own offers the promise of mutual enrichment, correction and encouragement in the faith. This state has become a major immigration hub. Will the Episcopal Church here regard these immigrants as gifts from God, greeting them with openness, compassion and hospitality (Exodus 23)? Will we be responsive to their needs and also receive the fresh expressions of the good news they bring?

59. On a less promising note, global capitalism as a form of neocolonialism brings increasing disparity of wealth from which we in America (as in other developed nations) primarily benefit. God’s vision for shalom calls us to work actively for global peace, justice and reconciliation around the world, not imposing our will, but accompanying, seeking to listen to, collaborate with and support local people. The global character of mission calls us to recognize the impact on the poor and needy of the systems in which we are complicit. The U.N. Millennium Development Goals point fruitfully toward our responsibility, call and opportunity to serve in this regard.

**Reframing Leadership for Mission**

60. As described in the New Testament, leadership in the early church was primarily gift- and team-based. The primary purpose of those gifted to be “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers” was to equip all of God’s people for ministry (Ephesians 4). Leaders were identified and raised up from within indigenous local communities, often to serve those same communities. When Christianity became the established religion of the empire, leadership shifted to more restricted forms of clerical office. Gradually, ministry came to be seen as the purview of clergy tending to the needs of their parishioners, and the more collaborative models of ministry and expansive horizon of mission we find in the New Testament were eroded (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12).

61. In recent years in the Episcopal Church, our predominant models of clergy leadership have been that of family care-giver/chaplain and administrator of a non-profit voluntary organization. We have generally not developed leaders who are focused on unleashing the missional energies of the laity. Most clergy...
feel they should encourage the ministry of all, but are typically not trained to lead in mission, think like missionaries or develop collaborative teams.

**Total Ministry**

Total Ministry is a collaborative, team- and gift-based approach to congregational leadership that in many ways better reflects the Trinity and biblical models of leadership than the solo-priest chaplain model left over from the Christendom era. Through Total Ministry, the Spirit has breathed new life into many congregations in the non-metro areas. Churches across the diocese could learn valuable lessons from the principles of Total Ministry and our experience with it.

62. In order to live into a more missional understanding of the church, we need new generations of *missional leaders*. Missional leaders (lay and ordained) do not simply reproduce the latest business strategy or marketing technique in order to try to grow the church. Rather, they focus on cultivating communities in which the challenges and demands of people’s lives are placed in fruitful conversation with the biblical narrative; in which all members of the church discern and activate their God-given spiritual gifts and talents for ministry in daily life; and in which lay leaders are developed and multiplied for ministry.

63. Similarly, bishops have been understood as *pastors to the pastors* or administrative executives. In a missional era, the episcopate might discover a new purpose in facilitating relationships, partnerships and resource-sharing for mission among congregations and other bodies as bridge-builders. Those partnerships and mission initiatives may more likely emerge from and remain at the grass roots than be conceived and controlled at the diocesan level. Diocesan leadership will play a critical role in listening to, linking and equipping local leaders for mission. It also must tend to the theological identity that unites us. Unity can no longer be enforced by regulation; it must be cultivated through interpretive leadership, leadership that makes sense out of the realities of the contemporary world in light of the biblical and theological story we share. Bishops have an unparalleled position from which to exercise this type of leadership.

64. The idea that “mission” congregations are somehow the lesser cousins of proper “parishes” is inadequate to our context. *All* congregations should be understood to be mission outposts. The assumption that a congregation needs a full-time professional priest in order to be viable must be reevaluated. Our rich experience with Total Ministry teams (which in many ways better reflect biblical models of leadership) bears wider discussion. Many emerging leaders across America today are deliberately choosing team-based, bi-vocational leadership models for missionary, rather than financial, reasons.
65. Tending to leadership is critical for the renewal of the Episcopal Church’s mission in [this state]. It would be fruitful for the diocese to begin a serious dialogue around what it means to lead in mission and how the leaders we need can be identified, formed and deployed. There is too much at stake for us not to engage these questions deeply. Our world is deeply divided, broken and hungry for good news.

Notes


viiiSee Roxburgh and Romanuk, The Missional Leader.

ix“Planning for predetermined outcomes is legitimate but no longer primary. A mission-informed response, rather than a structural initiative, is now seen as authentic. Much that now happens is ad hoc and not officially planned.” Mission-Shaped Church, p. 24.


Rethinking, Reframing and Reclaiming Our Identity, Purpose and Mission

A Report of the Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy and Diocesan Council to the Episcopal Diocese of [x]

Convention

October 2007
Table of Contents

Foreword
Naming Our Current Realities
Identity and Purpose

Guiding Principles

The Recommendations - Summary

Introduction to the Plan

The Recommendations in Detail with Mission and Ministry Initiatives

Goal 1: Spiritual Transformation & Fuller Participation in God’s Mission
Initiative 1: Spiritual Transformation

Goal 2: Renew Congregations in Context
Initiative 2: Engage Congregational Contexts
Initiative 3: Children, Youth, and Family Ministry
Initiative 4: Multi-Cultural Ministries
Initiative 5: Creative Ministry Models

Goal 3: Recreate the Diocese as a Network
Initiative 6: Develop Network Infrastructure:
Initiative 7: Empower, Engage, Inspire Lay Disciples
Initiative 8: Re-Envision Clergy Leadership
Initiative 9: Select Bishop and Diocesan Staff Capable of and Committed to Leading Plan to Fruition
Initiative 10: Aligned, Integrated and Supportive Organization and Structure

Goal 4: Develop Effective Stewardship of Financial Resources
Initiative 11: Effective Stewardship of financial resources
Initiative 12: Effective stewardship and utilization of facilities and land

Accomplishing the Work Ahead

Appendix A
The Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS) Process
BCMS Participants
Foreword
These joint recommendations of the Bishop's Commission on Mission Strategy and the Diocesan Council are built upon: A) a naming of our current realities; and B) statements of identity and purpose that emerged from our conversations around the diocese.

A) Naming Our Current Realities
The Episcopal Diocese of [X] has been in numerical decline for forty years.
- Like the Episcopal Church as a whole, the Diocese of [X] peaked in baptized membership in the mid-1960s. Between 1964 and 2004, the diocese lost 40% of its baptized membership.
- Over the past forty years there has been a 55% decline in the number of yearly baptisms.
- Confirmations are down over 85% from their peak in the mid 1960s.

Baptized Members, 1940-2004
- Over the past decade, there has been modest growth in the overall pledge income in the diocese, but when adjusted for inflation, the trend is only slightly more than flat. However, the number of persons pledging continues to decrease. The fact that fewer people are giving more money represents an unsustainable and troubling trend.
- The Episcopal Church has lost ground relative to other denominations in [this state]. These include the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches, which have similar worship styles to ours and have managed to plant new churches and grow while most of our attempts to plant churches have failed.
- The number of Episcopal congregations in [this state] has dwindled by 20% over the past 40 years. Currently, numerous congregations stand at the brink of reclassification or closure around the diocese.

“Exploding our assumptions, unsettling our confidence, tarnishing our pride and challenging our hope.”
—Bishop X
Our leadership is aging, as represented by the nearly 800 leaders who participated in the 2006 BCMS Mission Survey. Over 70% of respondents were age 50 or above.

**Over the past forty years, the population of [this state] has grown in size and changed in composition.**

- From 1970 to 2000, the overall state population grew by 22%, from 3.8 million to 4.9 million. Some [non-metro] areas have diminished in population. However, demographic projections indicate continued rapid growth overall, especially in the metro and the [X] corridor. In many of these locations of rapid growth, particularly around the metro, there are few or no Episcopal congregations.

- The ethnic makeup of [this state] is rapidly changing. [This state’s] non-white population increased from 69,000 in 1970 (1.8% of the total population) to 519,000 in 2000 (over 10%). [This state] has become a major immigration hub.

- The number and proportion of religiously-unaffiliated persons in [this state] has grown over the past forty years to nearly 40% in 2000. The idea that [this state] is a fully “churched” state is far from the truth.

**Previous efforts to address this systemic decline have failed. We stand at a critical juncture in our history.**

- In 2005, the Bishop’s Commission on Metro Mission Strategy conducted an extensive study of the Episcopal Church’s position in the metro area, compiling a database of membership trends for the whole diocese, reviewing archives of past efforts, analyzing best practices from other denominations and looking at population trends and statistics. The Commission concluded that the challenges facing the Episcopal Church in the metro were deeply linked to underlying, system-wide issues that must be addressed before a new strategy could succeed.

- As a diocese, we have tried a succession of strategic and mission planning initiatives during the past forty years. The history of these efforts is largely a tale of aborted processes, missed goals, unmet expectations, and in many cases inadequate follow-through, accountability and evaluation.

- We have developed a culture of critique, complaint, and skepticism within the diocese that impairs our ability to cooperate fruitfully in mission and ministry.

- Our current patterns are unsustainable. The challenges facing us are deep, systemic, and complex, requiring a response that grapples seriously with fundamental questions of identity and purpose amidst a changing world.
B) Identity and Purpose

Identity
Why has God called us into existence as a diocese?

We, the Episcopal Diocese of [X], are a communion of Christian congregations and other ministries, rooted in the breadth of the Anglican tradition, called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to share in Christ’s ministry of reconciliation.

Therefore…

❖ We must continually discern the Spirit’s movement in our rapidly-changing state and world.

❖ We believe that God has a mission in the rural areas, small towns, cities and suburbs of our state in which we have a particular role.

❖ In light of the Spirit’s movement and God’s mission, the primary focus of our ministry is congregations and the communities they serve.

❖ We gather in congregations in order to experience Christ’s love, forgiveness, and healing, to be challenged by his Word and fed at his table, and then sent out in ministry to the world.

❖ As we celebrate our diversity, we will seek Christ’s reconciliation of our divisions and share Christ’s ministry of reconciliation with the world.

❖ We are bound to one another at all levels in an interdependent life of mutual partnership, sacrificial support and accountability that reflects the life of the Trinity.

❖ We intentionally engage our members to live out their baptismal vocation by discerning their spiritual gifts to serve in ministry in all the spheres of their lives.

“God’s identity consists in the loving communion of three distinct yet inseparably united divine persons…. The church is created and called to reflect the communion of the Trinity.” —What Are We Here For? A Theological Position Paper on Mission

“We are called to breadth and depth in our worship and identity.”
—Congregational Visits

“It is only in recognizing our own need for continual reconciliation in Christ that we will be able to join God’s mission to bring reconciling communion to the world.”
—What Are We Here For?

“We have entered a period of discontinuous change in our context today, when longstanding cultural norms and assumptions are breaking down and we don’t know clearly what lies ahead.” —What Are We Here For?

“We believe the Holy Spirit is calling us to go deeper in faith.” —Congregational Visits

“Both clergy and lay leaders want to partner in ministry, but many lack awareness of their spiritual gifts.” —2006 Mission Survey Report
Purpose
What has God called us to do?

Our purpose as the Episcopal Diocese of [X] is to seed and cultivate vibrant congregations of maturing Christian disciples, equipping and emboldening them to be Christ’s heart, hands and voice in the world.

Therefore…
- We take seriously God’s mission in the world and our responsibility to participate in it.
- In light of God’s mission, our primary commitment will be developing healthy, vital congregations.
- We will attend deeply to the necessary spiritual transformation of our congregations and shared life together.
- Following the example of our Native American community’s practice of Gospel-Based Discipleship, we will dwell together in the biblical narrative, allowing our imaginations to be shaped and inspired by God’s story.
- We will raise up leaders capable of forming fully-committed disciples of Jesus who are equipped for ministry.
- The church’s primary missionaries are its lay members in their daily life and work.
- We are called to an active, public presence in our communities for the common good.

“Now is the time to return to our roots and rediscover our identity and purpose as People of the Way of Jesus.” – What Are We Here For?

“The church’s mission is always rooted in place—specific cultural and geographical locales.” – What Are We Here For?

“We are called to bring an old story about a people and God to life.” – Congregational Visits

“In order to live as disciples in mission, we must all learn to dwell imaginatively in the story of Jesus.” – What Are We Here For?

“There is considerable interest in returning to the church’s roots through a fresh focus on the Bible, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.” – 2006 Mission Survey Report

“Respondents want greater partnership between congregations and the diocese.” – 2006 Mission Survey Report

“In order to live into a more missional understanding of the church, we need new generations of missional leaders.” – What Are We Here For?
Guiding Principles of the Plan

This plan is built upon a number of key principles that were voiced by leaders from the grass roots throughout the BCMS process. The specific goals listed in the pages that follow deal with the incarnation of these principles into areas of our common life and ministry. However, it is worth stating them clearly at the outset.

- **Spiritual transformation and theological renewal.** The BCMS believes that God is calling the Episcopal Church in [this state] to a deep experience of spiritual transformation and renewal, one that touches all Episcopalians personally and deepens our collective experience and understanding of God.

- **Moving to a more collaborative style of organization and leadership.** Calling to mind the Trinity in whose image we are created, the church has an opportunity today to live more deeply into the vision for partnership, mutuality and community that we find in the New Testament—and for which so many of our members are calling.

- **Moving to a decentralized network.** In this Internet era, leading organizations of all types are eschewing centralized bureaucracies in favor of decentralized networks. The age of the corporate, bureaucratic, regulatory denomination has passed in American culture. Denominations are once again entering a period of major adaptation and reformation.

- **Moving to resourcing and empowering the grass roots.** For too long, the diocese has been focused on regulating the ministry within its borders. Now is a time to shift our emphasis instead to resourcing and empowering local disciples for ministry.

- **Moving into an expanded imagination for diverse expressions of church.** The Episcopal Church has been dominated for generations by a narrow set of assumptions about what church should look like. The diversity of our context today calls for a wider imagination for how we can faithfully express our Anglican tradition in a new and changing era.

- **Moving into a posture of innovation, creativity, mutual trust and risk taking.** The diocese has lived too long under a paralyzing cloud of mutual mistrust, suspicion and critique. This has inhibited our ability to innovate. We must diligently seek together the guiding, enlivening and reconciling leadership of the Holy Spirit to lift us into a better future, in which we dream big dreams and take big risks for the gospel.
The Recommendations
of the Bishop’s Commission on
Mission Strategy

for

The Spiritual Transformation of the Diocese of [X]
and Our Fuller Participation in God’s Mission

Goal 1: Spiritual Transformation and Fuller
Participation in God’s Mission
For the congregations in the Diocese of [X] to experience a profound sense of
shared spiritual transformation and theological renewal, which leads all [the
state’s] Episcopalians to participate more fully in God’s mission in our world.

Goal 2: Renew Congregations in Context
For every congregation to connect or re-connect its ministry directly to its
particular mission field and become communities in which discipleship is a way of
life for all God’s people.

Goal 3: Recreate the Diocese as a Network
To redevelop the entire diocese by the end of 2009 to function primarily as a
network of congregations and ministries. These networks will exercise local
initiative and responsibility for shared ministry in their contexts.

Goal 4: Develop Effective Stewardship of
Financial Resources
For the diocese to develop and implement fiscal strategies that make the best
use of the resources God has entrusted to us, and to challenge and motivate all
Episcopalians to generous and faithful giving.

Each Goal has, in turn, a number of recommended Mission and Ministry
Initiatives.
Introduction to the Plan

The Episcopal Diocese of [X] is at a critical juncture in its life. Almost every measurable trend is downward. Courageous and visionary efforts to address this reality over the past several decades have not succeeded in any measurable way. Apart from a significant change in the way the diocese conceives of its life and engages in its ministry, the BCMS holds out little hope that these patterns will be reversed in the future. That is why this process has focused on rethinking, reframing and reclaiming the identity and purpose of the diocese. Recommendations regarding these matters constitute the first part of this report. The plan outlined on the following pages is designed to build on and help implement the identity and purpose that have been named. It assumes that the following critical realities need to be understood, accepted and addressed.

- No Simple Solutions – The crisis within the diocese is systemic. It stems from both a complex set of relationship dynamics and a history dating back several decades. Any effort to plan our way out of this crisis merely by setting more goals and strategies is doomed to fail and will only compound the problems we face. Systemic change takes time. We will surely make mistakes in this process of transformation. We will need to continually evaluate our efforts and progress. We need to be patient and gracious with one another as we move forward.

- Continued Short to Near Term Decline Likely – We must face the prospect that the diocese will continue to shrink in size of membership and congregations in the next five to seven years. The complex character of the systemic crisis before us is simply too deep to be resolved quickly. Some congregations and ministries will not survive in the interim period, and the required changes will be too great for others to make and they will continue on the path of decline.

- The Good News: God Is at Work in Our Midst – In spite of this stark picture, we know that God is at work among us bringing about renewal. Signs of positive and constructive change abound. God has planted the seeds of our future in our midst. We are inspired by the countless people who have committed themselves to making God’s vision for our church a reality. We take confidence in the Spirit’s work and we do not lose heart (2 Corinthians 4:2).
Goal 1: Spiritual Transformation and Fuller Participation in God’s Mission

For the congregations in the Diocese of [X] to experience a profound sense of shared spiritual transformation and theological renewal, which leads all Episcopalians [in this state] to participate more fully in God’s mission in our world.
Goal 1: Spiritual Transformation and Fuller Participation in God’s Mission

Recommended Mission & Ministry Initiatives

Initiative 1: Spiritual Transformation

We are in need of spiritual transformation and theological renewal, for it is only through God’s grace and guidance that we will find inspiration for our shared life and ministries. The key arena for this spiritual transformation is within congregations. The most significant resource we have to offer for God’s redeeming work is the ministry of the baptized – disciples living in faithfulness to Christ through their vocations in the world.

Theological Foundations – As Christians we are in communion because God is communion. For us, God is known in Three Persons indwelling as One Being. We share our life together because God draws us into God’s own life marked by diversity in unity. As members of Christ’s body, the Church, congregations give witness to God’s life as they come together for worship and are dismissed for service, thus reflecting God’s own movement. To bring integrity to our worship and adequacy to God’s mission in the world, each baptized person has the status of a disciple, thereby making a life-long commitment to learning and service.

Operational Strategies 2007-09

1.1 Focus on Worship, Bible Study, Dwelling in the Word.

1.2 Make resources available throughout the diocese for renewing worship and the spiritual practices of our members. These include: (a) sharing liturgical resources; (b) use of Gospel-Based Discipleship and other lay-led Bible study and prayer gatherings; and (c) learning from the Total Ministry model in relation to discipleship.

1.3 Plan a strategy for cultivating a diocesan-wide understanding and use of spiritual gifts, both in relation to ministry in the church and within one’s vocation in the world.

1.4 Convene conversations with groups of leaders throughout the diocese that will invite their imagination and creativity for enhancing the ministry of all the baptized.

1.5 We believe there is a need for a sacramental expression of our openness to God’s call that would involve a diocesan-wide liturgy of repentance, reconciliation and re-dedication of our lives to God’s purposes and mission in the world.
Goal 2: Renew Congregations in Context

For every congregation to connect or re-connect its ministry directly to its particular mission field and become a community in which discipleship is a way of life for all God’s people.
Goal 2: Renew Congregations in Context

Recommended Mission & Ministry Initiatives

Initiative 2: Engage Congregational Contexts

One of the greatest challenges facing the congregations of the diocese is that their ministries have often not kept pace with changes in their surrounding contexts. Our congregations need to engage their members about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and how to exercise their spiritual gifts both within the congregation and the communities they serve. This requires us all to re-imagine and re-engage our congregations’ unique mission field and to equip our members for Christian discipleship. Such work will raise significant questions in all our congregations regarding their own identity and purpose, and in many cases this will generate confusion and pain as congregations address needed change. The potential fruits of this work, however, are clearly worth the effort, as our congregations come to experience the excitement of renewed life and ministry.

Theological Foundations – From the beginning of creation to the “fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4) when God became incarnate in Jesus, the Divine Being blessed the world as the location for his presence and glory. Moreover, it is for the world that “he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16) and it is the world that God in Christ “was reconciling…to himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). A feature of contemporary life is that we live in many worlds—of home and office, of politics and law, of art and poverty, of work and play. Yet, for God there is one world connected through the church to “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). The challenge for the church is to align ourselves with God’s view of the world and not necessarily our own. As disciples of Jesus called to witness to God’s life and care for the world, we scan the horizon of every world in search of opportunities to display God’s glory and to meet human need. Indeed, God’s mission is global, regional and local.

Operational Strategies 2007-09

2.1 Identify resources and processes to assist congregations in engaging or reengaging their ministry areas, with particular emphasis on learning how those areas are responding to changes in culture, socio-economics and population.

2.1.1 Identify resources and processes that are available today for helping congregations re-define and re-engage their ministry areas. These resources are readily available and have helped congregations of other denominations experience renewal.

2.2 Pilot projects of networking congregations for revitalized ministry.
2.2.1 Invite three networks of congregations to take up the challenge of engaging in a formal process for revitalization and renewal of their ministries.

2.2.2 Walk alongside these pilot projects, learning from them and circulating to the entire diocese what the congregations are learning.

2.3 Sharing stories and cultivating imagination. Develop a communications strategy to continually lift up before the entire diocese progress made by congregations working on re-defining and reengaging their mission fields (both successes and learnings from failure).

Initiative 3: Children, Youth and Family Ministry

For the congregations of the diocese to develop ministries that promote the spiritual growth of children, youth and family members within a theological understanding of lay discipleship, vocation and God’s mission in the world. One of the sober realities of the diocese is that many congregations no longer have significant numbers of children and youth, and our ministries that serve children, youth and families have atrophied. The aging of our church is a symptom of decades-long decline. The absence of families will be addressed for many congregations as they connect or re-connect their ministries to their mission field—the communities in which they serve. We recognize that all congregations long for success in attracting families with children, but that for some the resources required are as yet beyond their reach. We must, therefore, make this a diocesan-wide priority, establishing networks of congregations to maximize resources and opportunities for ministry that are available.

Theological Foundations – In the prophet Isaiah’s vision of the peaceable kingdom, God will act to make possible that which seems impossible for people short on hope and faith. Leaders will be called forth to bring about God’s reign of justice and righteousness and not only will “the wolf live with the lamb” but “a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). Doubtless this is Jesus’ view of children as he used them to instruct his adult disciples in the ways of the kingdom (Matthew 18:2-3). In the Episcopal Church, the baptized of every age are acknowledged as recipients of the Holy Spirit and thereby manifest in some way God’s life. Moreover, emerging generations of young adults live within different cultures than many older generations, and the gospel must be incarnated creatively and faithfully within these cultures, primarily by those young adults themselves.

Operational Strategies 2007-09

3.1 Study current demographics of congregations and their contexts.

3.2 Convene conversations of persons with gifts and passion for these ministries.

3.3 Empower young adults to try new forms of church.

3.4 Determine how camps and conferences effectively strengthen these ministry areas on a diocesan level (Teens Encounter Christ is a noteworthy example).
Initiative 4: Multi-Cultural Ministries

For the diocese to become a multi-cultural community of congregations that reflects the diverse ethnic realities of our state, where all congregations are empowered to have a shared voice within a culture of mutual accountability. The diocese has historic roots in Native American and African American ministries. Given the increasing populations of immigrants throughout [this state], there are numerous opportunities before us to develop ethnic-specific as well as multi-cultural congregations. This work needs to move from the margins to the mainstream if the diocese is to reflect the richness of our mission field.

Theological Foundations – Diversity in unity; unity in diversity is the very character of our Triune God. Both as individual disciples and as Christian congregations we are called into this Trinitarian life so we may experience the profound joy of being in union and communion. As followers of Jesus our constant prayer is that our Father’s will be done on earth as in heaven. Although “what will be has not yet been revealed” (1 John 3:2), and our actual knowledge of heaven falls short of its mystery and promise, we are blessed with images in Scripture that help us to imagine the fullness of God’s glorious life. Moreover, our belief in Jesus’ incarnation causes us to incarnate as best as we can God’s future here on earth. In heaven, the Father’s house has “many dwelling places”; his mighty mansion has a place for all (John 14). In the heavenly realm, the seer John sees that “there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne before the Lord” (Revelation 7:9ff). God’s mission then is to make noticeable on earth the unity in diversity of heaven, and the church is to be a vibrant sign of this kind of life.

Operational Strategies 2007-09

4.1 Invite Native American leaders and congregations to help design a process of full partnership with other members of the diocese.

4.2 Invite African American leaders and congregations to help design a process of full partnership with other members of the diocese.

4.3 Develop a strategy for ethnic specific and multi-cultural congregations.

4.3.1 Engage those congregations with recent histories of ethnic-specific ministries, inviting the leaders to share their experiences and design a process to equip the diocese for this ministry.

Initiative 5: Creative Ministry Models

For the diocese to learn from its experience with Total Ministry and other models. The Total Ministry model has been spiritually-empowering and effective in many congregations of the diocese. This approach to ministry merits careful review and further consideration for expanded use, as well as consideration of other alternative models.
Theological Foundations – As the baptizing community, the church receives the gift of the Holy Spirit and is thereby enriched every time a newly baptized person is welcomed in the community of faith. In continuity with the differing gifts of the Spirit brought to expression in the earliest days of the church (Romans 12, Corinthians 12), the work of congregations is carried out as the particular gifts of preaching, healing, presiding and administering of various individuals are recognized and affirmed to be offered for the total benefit of all and for their participation in God’s mission.

Operational Strategies 2007-09

5.1 Evaluate the current use of Total Ministry and its present effectiveness.

5.1.1 We propose a thorough review of the Total Ministry model within the diocese, in order to identify its strengths and challenges.

5.2 Review and explore other ministry models for their applicability to mission and ministry in the Diocese of [X].
Goal 3: Recreate the Diocese as a Network

To redevelop the entire diocese by the end of 2009 to function primarily as a network of congregations and ministries. These networks will exercise local initiative and responsibility for shared ministry in their contexts.
Goal 3: Recreate the Diocese as a Network

Recommended Mission & Ministry Initiatives

Initiative 6: Develop Network Infrastructure:

We need to re-conceive and redevelop the diocese as a network of congregations and ministries where organization, communication and the use of resources flow along the lines of meaningful relationships and shared ministry commitments. We anticipate that much of this network will be experimental in character, especially initially, but that patterns once established will become more formally operational over time. In the short term, we may decide to maintain existing structures, such as regions, where they are helpful as an overlay on this emerging and evolving network. We need to devote attention, time and resources to cultivate the informal connections between congregations and ministries that are already coming into existence in numerous places.

Theological Foundations — Because our life as Christians resides in the living Christ, is continually informed by the biblical narrative and is forever open to the action of the Holy Spirit, we expect new expressions of the churches’ life to appear. We recall St. Paul’s proclamation that in Christ we are “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The church must always be incarnate within particular cultures, and culture is always changing. Today, our culture is shifting from bureaucratic and hierarchical forms of organization to decentralized networks, the primary example being the Internet. People seek connection through relationships more than institutional allegiances. In redeveloping the diocese as a network, we hope to follow the emerging work of the Holy Spirit and allow congregations to experience being “a new creation” as we engage others in fresh and culturally-relevant ways.

Operational Strategies 2007-09

6.1 Map existing and emerging networks and identify actual and potential hubs.

6.2 Invite and convene conversations among existing and emerging networks.

6.2.1 Recruit, orient, and resource a group of facilitators to convene and lead conversations among networks of congregations and ministries.

6.2.2 Invite existing and emerging networks of congregations to explore how their ministries can be strengthened and enhanced.

6.3 Identify hub congregations and their roles.

6.3.1 Determine criteria for hub congregations.

6.3.2 Identify potential congregations which can serve as hub congregations within a network of congregations and ministries.

6.4 Reconfigure the structure and organization of the diocese.
6.4.1 Based on the patterns experienced in working with the emerging networks of congregations, finalize recommendation to the Diocesan Council regarding organizational structure to replace the regional structure.

Initiative 7: Empower, Engage and Inspire Lay Disciples

For the congregations of the diocese to invite and support the full participation of laity in the life of the church, where lay disciples feel empowered to have a mutual voice, are actively engaged in ministry in their congregations and the communities these serve, and where they are theologically aware of how to understand their vocational call to carry out their ministries. Congregations exist for the purpose of bringing individuals into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ, to foster a communal identity among individuals as the people of God, and to equip God’s people for love and service to the world in God’s name. Lay disciples of Jesus Christ are the church’s greatest gift and resource. We need to invest our best resources into the formation of spiritually-mature, fully-empowered disciples of Jesus Christ.

Theological Foundations – One of the implications of the church’s renewal of the sacrament of baptism is not only to increase our awareness of the Spirit’s life in the baptizing community but also to highlight the status of all the baptized. In the church’s Outline of the Faith it is to be noted that the “ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons” (BCP p. 855). Importantly, lay persons are not only recognized as the foundational base in the life of the church upon which the other orders of ministry rest, but in this outline they are given a job description worthy of true disciples: “to bear witness to [Christ] wherever they may be; and according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world.” Fundamental to the church’s understanding of ministry, then, is that it be practiced in a mutual and collaborate manner according to the Spirit’s gifts.

Operational Strategies 2007-09

7.1 See Operational Strategies under Goal 1.

7.2 Empower and equip lay leaders for ministry in their contexts of relationships and work, in their congregations and in the ministry of the diocese.

7.2.1 Work with the emerging networks of congregations to create corresponding groups of lay leaders, providing them opportunities to interact, share ideas and plan for ministry.

7.2.2 Devote particular energy to the identification and equipping of young adults in our congregations.

7.2.3 Determine the role of campus ministry in our diocesan vision and honestly assess the needed resources for its successful implementation.

7.3 Strengthen the leadership and governance capacity of Diocesan Council, Standing Committee and the Trustees from among lay disciples.
**Initiative 8: Re-Envision Clergy Leadership**

For the clergy of the diocese to engage thoughtfully and intentionally in a shared process of reflection and reevaluation of their roles in relation to a changing paradigm for ministry. We recognize the importance of ordained clergy leadership in the life of the church. Generally, clergy are not well equipped to address current changes and ministry challenges.

**Theological Foundations** – In its Theological Position Paper on Mission, “What Are We Here For?,” the BCMS observes that “in recent years in the Episcopal Church, our predominant model of clergy leadership has been that of family caregiver/chaplain and administrator of a non-profit voluntary organization.” And further, it observes that “we have generally not developed leaders who are focused on unleashing the missional energies of the laity.” It argues, therefore, that this model should change so we develop a new generation of missional leaders who focus on “cultivating communities in which the challenges and demands of people’s lives are placed in fruitful conversation with the biblical narrative” and “in which all members of the church discern and activate their God-given spiritual gifts and talents for ministry in daily life…” (p. 16).

**Operational Strategies 2007-09**

8.1 Provide opportunities for clergy to deepen their spiritual lives and theological insights.

8.2 Equip clergy in leadership development, gifts discernment and collaborative decision making.

8.3 Strengthen the spirit of mutual support and collaboration among clergy and lay leaders.

8.4 Establish an expectation of mission-minded clergy in the discernment and call processes of the diocese.

**Initiative 9: Select Bishop and Diocesan Staff Capable of and Committed to Leading Plan to Fruition**

For the search process to identify and recommend candidates for a new bishop who can provide visionary leadership in implementing this plan, and who can recruit and lead a staff that is able to support that work. With the diocese facing a period of leadership transition, this is a critical time for clarity and alignment of leadership priorities. The bishop and diocesan staff must be fully committed to the implementation of this plan.

**Theological Foundations** – Regardless whether church polity and leadership are episcopal or congregational, the intent and style of the chosen leader corresponds to the success of the church’s effort in ministry and mission. Because God in Christ has been made known in history (Luke 3) and has a history (the biblical record and tradition of the church), God’s mission is always carried out in this place and at this time. At best, the hands of the church’s clock match the movement of God’s time as it goes about choosing leaders under the
aegis of the Holy Spirit. The discernment of the BCMS at this time is to bring focus to congregations and to highlight their importance in propelling God’s mission forward. Given that Episcopal congregations have expectations about the bishop and staff providing leadership, it is critical that their leadership be consonant with the vision and program of the diocese as a whole.

**Questions and Issues 2007-09**
Throughout the BCMS process the following questions have surfaced. They require discussion before operational strategies are drafted:

1. **What type of presence should the bishop have in the diocese?**

2. **What are the implications of this report for the search criteria for the election of a new bishop?**

3. **What type of diocesan staff will best serve the implementation of this plan, especially in light of the limited resources available to employ staff?**

4. **What services might better be outsourced rather than staffed internally within the diocesan office? Should personnel in congregations be utilized on a part-time basis for staff services? Should staff roles be linked to congregational cluster networks and hub congregations?**

5. **How can the diocesan staff best nurture and support grass-roots, bottom up ministry, focusing on vibrant congregations and investing time and resources in growing ministries that are strategic?**

**Initiative 10: Aligned, Integrated and Supportive Organization and Structure**

For the diocese to develop and implement a design for its organization and structure which is aligned and integrated with its identity, purpose and mission and ministry priorities. We must ensure that the organization and structure of the diocese are designed to carry out and fully implement its identity, purpose, and mission and ministry priorities. This design, in terms of achieving alignment and integration, will take time to develop and implement as the diocese begins to live into reshaping the paradigm for its life and ministry. One option is to utilize a provisional organization and structure during the transition period. Ideally, the new organization and structure should be in place by the time the new bishop takes leadership in the diocese.

**Theological Foundations** – Because the church is the extension of the incarnation and is sacramental in character, its form is affected by both godly intent and human wisdom. In other words, church structure and organization are contingent on its identity and purpose and the best way to do things. Also, due to the extent of God’s mission and the width of the world, priorities in ministry and mission need to be established and constantly reviewed. The Ten Commandments may be carved in stone, but God’s word about mission through the church is constantly being rewritten.
Operational Strategies 2007-09
10.1 Attend to organization and structure issues during period of transition to new paradigm in a proactive, intentional and strategic manner.

10.2 Develop a transition design that encourages and supports grass roots initiative in partnership with the diocese and staff.

10.3 Develop a transition design to move from regional structure to one that supports the congregational networks and hub congregations.

10.4 In light of the sale of the present property housing the diocesan office, the BCMS suggests that the diocesan office utilize temporary space during this period of transition until the requirements of the new paradigm are more clearly in focus.
Goal 4: Develop Effective Stewardship of Financial Resources

For the Diocese of [X] to develop and implement fiscal strategies that make the best use of the resources God has entrusted to us, and to challenge and motivate all Episcopalians to generous and faithful giving.
Goa 4: Develop Effective Stewardship of Financial Resources

Recommended Mission & Ministry Initiatives

Initiative 11: Effective Stewardship of financial resources

There are significant resources among the Episcopalians of the diocese. We believe stewardship needs to be addressed in two ways: first, as an outgrowth of personal faith and Christian practice; second, in response to a clearly articulated and compelling vision of ministry. There are many sound, biblically-based stewardship materials that the diocese could make available to congregations to great effect. Yet the basic principle that money follows vision has been consistently demonstrated in the church. As noted in the book of Proverbs, “Without vision, the people perish.” The current financial difficulties of the diocese are, at heart, related to a lack of a clear and compelling vision for the future that can inspire confidence and build trust. This situation will not be solved overnight. We believe that difficulties in meeting financial needs will continue in the next five to seven years, but as the new paradigm for ministry begins to bear fruit, we anticipate that the present financial struggles will gradually ease.

Theological Foundations – Money is stored energy and has to do with soul. For the church to have soul it needs to be both responsible and adventurous. God is changeless at the core but expressive in action. The church, therefore, is not meant simply to sit on money but to save it judiciously and spend it mostly in a wise and considered manner except at times—because of God’s radical generosity and mission imperative—when it is called to be extravagant and participate in the risk of God’s new creation.

Operational Strategies 2007-09

11.1 Design a diocesan budget that focuses on supporting local mission and ministry through emerging networks and hub congregations.

11.1.1 Determine essential staffing requirements to support the new paradigm.

11.1.2 Consider strategy of purchasing staff time of congregational leaders to facilitate cluster networks.

11.1.3 Convene a conversation within all the networks about the Apportionment for the Common Good (ACG) in relationship to diocesan mission and ministry priorities with a plan to develop a functional strategy for ACG by 2009 that provides for a diocesan budget consistent with our new priorities and focus on healthy congregations.

11.2 Develop a financial accountability system in the diocese that is accessible for providing input and which is transparent in reporting results.

11.2.1 Operating budget and expenditures.
11.2.2 Endowment and capital resources in relation to the trustees.

11.3 Create an option for congregations to reduce their ACG if they are able to clearly identify how these funds will be used to enhance local mission and ministry.

11.4 Explore how the newly appointed Development Committee can help support diocesan ministries during the transition period.

11.4.1 Implement a strategy of providing networks and hub congregations with resources for writing grants to fund local initiatives.

11.4.2 Invite potential donors to invest in the newly emerging vision.

11.4.3 Begin to frame what a long-term capital campaign might look like to support the emerging mission and ministry needs of the diocese.

Initiative 12: Effective stewardship and utilization of facilities and land

For the diocese, through its emerging networks and hub congregations, to develop and implement a design for the effective stewardship and utilization of its physical assets of facilities and land and explore sites for new congregations. The diocese and its congregations have significant resources in land and facilities. These resources are not always effectively utilized, however, to support mission and ministry. We anticipate more effective stewardship of these resources as congregational ministries are revitalized, but there will still be need for an intentional assessment of current resources. Moreover, the diocese sorely needs a strategic development plan for the placement of new congregations.

Theological Foundations – A judgment as to what constitutes effective stewardship rests on a discernment of how best the church can participate in God’s mission at any given point in time. Giving testimony to God’s faithfulness may result in supposed inefficiencies whereas aligning oneself with God’s surprising side and creative spirit may require bold moves in the deployment of resources.

Operational Strategies 2007-09

12.1 Redefine the stewardship of facilities and land theologically, and then develop a clear strategy and implement it for their effective stewardship.

12.2 Encourage the development of new forms of congregations through local initiatives within congregational networks and hub congregations, some of which may require different approaches to facilities and land.

12.3 Develop a clear inventory of existing properties and their current capital requirements for maintenance and required improvements, and determine which properties are viable for long-term ministry.

12.4 Explore an intentional strategy for transfer of some existing facilities to newly emerging ethnic-specific congregations.
12.5 Suggest that Diocesan Council determine what size, type and location of diocesan office best serves this new paradigm of diocesan ministry.
Accomplishing the Work Ahead

Continuity with and Continuation of Intentional Planning Required

One reason why good faith planning efforts in the past failed was due to lack of leadership continuity in the implementation stages. Another was the lack of alignment among leadership bodies in the diocese and the inevitable result of competing interests. A new leadership body needs to succeed the BCMS to oversee the work of spiritual and systemic transformation. For this work to move to the center of our common life, that group needs to be rooted in the bishop’s office and leadership bodies of our diocese, and yet not be overly constricted by past paradigms and priorities.

Members of the current BCMS are committed to the implementation of this emerging vision, but we also recognize that success depends upon collective commitment and leadership within diocesan systems of power and accountability. We recommend that the bishop and Council appoint a succeeding group immediately following Diocesan Convention 2007 in order to allow the new group to organize itself for work in early November to structure a specific set of time-lined steps for the implementation of the goals in “Rethinking and Reclaiming Our Identity, Purpose and Mission.” Outside consultation has served the BCMS process well, and we strongly endorse moving forward with similar guidance and systemic accountability. At the same time, diocesan staffing and resources need to be aligned with this effort.

Recommendation for the Succeeding Group

A leadership team of 14-16 persons to be appointed by the Bishop and Council:

- At least six (6) members from the current BCMS Steering Committee;
- Additional members to be appointed from:
  - The existing governance and management bodies of the Diocese of [X], including Council, Trustees, Standing Committee, Commission on Ministry and diocesan staff;
  - Other representative bodies of the diocese such as the Department of Indian Work.

This leadership team will be a working group comprised of persons willing to continue the action research approach that has characterized the process so far. That means engaging grass roots members across the diocese in reflective conversations and study that build trust and bring about the hoped-for change along the way. The leadership team will coordinate the work of a series of action teams responsible for carrying out the specific initiatives contained in this report. This work must become the central work of the diocese for the next few years, involving all those who have a stake in our future, especially those holding formal authority.

First Action Step

Meet in early November 2007 to structure a specific set of time-lined action steps for the full implementation of all the goals in the “Rethinking, Reframing and Reclaiming Our Identity, Purpose and Mission” document.
Appendix A: The Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS) Process

The BCMS process is a dynamic engagement with the diocese at multiple levels.

- We are using an approach known as **Action Research**, which involves implementing a process of action steps that begin to generate the change that is being sought along the way. This happens through a continuous cycle of diagnosis, planning, action, and reflection.

- We are developing and utilizing information from **multiple data sources** which reflect a variety of perspectives, including those of grass roots congregations, leaders within the diocese, and intentional theological reflection.

- We are making efforts to conduct the process in a manner that focuses on **building relationships** and **cultivating trust**.

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**Process 2006-2007**

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<td><strong>Convention</strong></td>
<td><strong>Action Research</strong></td>
<td><strong>Convention</strong></td>
<td><strong>Action Research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity and Purpose</td>
<td>1) Baseline Survey</td>
<td>Designing Infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Congregational Visits</td>
<td>3) Theological Position Paper</td>
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</table>
The BCMS process has brought three principal sources of information into conversation to discern an emerging identity and purpose for the diocese.

- A baseline survey of leaders’ behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs about mission was conducted in fall 2006. A very robust majority of 787 leaders representing the breadth of the diocese responded and shared nearly 1,000 write-in comments.

- Every congregation was invited to participate in ongoing congregational discernment team visits in which conversations are being held at the grass roots level about God’s movement in that congregation, what is impeding that movement, and how it can be understood theologically.

- A theological position paper on mission, “What Are We Here For?” was developed by a team of leaders for the purpose of framing and initiating an in-depth conversation about mission theology in the diocese.

**Identity and Purpose: Creating a Conversation**
Identity, Purpose, Mission and Ministry, and Organization

The BCMS process is working intentionally to address foundational questions of identity and purpose before moving to organization and structure.

- **Identity**: Why has God called us into existence as a diocese?
- **Purpose**: What has God called us to do?
- **Mission and Ministry**: How is the Spirit leading us in discerning priorities?
- **Organization**: How can we best organize our common life to reflect our identity and fulfill God’s call and purpose?
Mission and Ministry

How is the Spirit leading us in discerning priorities?

In order to live into God’s purpose for us, we must focus on the following essential mission and ministry priorities:

- **Deepening the discipleship of all members** by helping them know the biblical story and their place in it; practicing the spiritual disciplines of our faith; and fulfilling the promises of the Baptismal Covenant.

- **Creatively drawing children, youth, and young adults into the heart of the church’s life** in order that the living treasures of faith we have received may anchor, nourish, and enliven them and future generations.

- **Engaging our changing context** through turning our churches outward in their focus; studying our communities; learning about and from the diverse populations in our midst; and cultivating a fresh imagination for the forms that Christian community and local mission must take.

- **Responding to the expanding multi-cultural communities in our midst** by embracing immigrants and refugees.

- **Equipping all members for ministry in daily life** through spiritual gifts discernment and collaborative leadership, so that all may know and tell the story of God’s movement in their lives. Total Ministry is one pivotal means to accomplish this.

- **Empowering and assisting congregations** through cultivating servant leaders capable of leading people deeper into Christian faith and more boldly into the world in mission; networking for ministry partnerships; and sharing resources and best practices for congregational renewal.

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“Leaders who are most engaged in mission practices are also most knowledgeable about their spiritual gifts, confident in proclaiming the gospel and feel most vital about their personal faith.” —2006 Mission Survey Report

“We experience God in the lively presence of children—children are full members of our community.” —Congregational Visits

“We are changing who we are and stretching as a community while honoring our past.” —Congregational Visits

“Many respondents want a more collaborative, transparent and empowering relationship among the bishop, diocesan staff, clergy, and congregations.” —2006 Mission Survey Report

“The shift to shared ministry is invigorating everyone. It is like the church is resurrected.” —Congregational Visits

“Churches across the diocese could learn valuable lessons from the principles of Total Ministry and our experience with it.” —What Are We Here For?
Organizational Implications

How can we best organize our common life to reflect our identity and fulfill God’s call and purpose?

Implications must be developed and explored for the following:

- Personnel and Staff
- Organization and Structure
- Facilities
- Finances

“We are the inheritors of many denominational, diocesan and local church structures, assumptions and practices that bear critical reflection in today’s changing world.” —What Are We Here For?

“Respondents’ comments suggest a strong need for organizational adaptation and change…. There is a recurrent criticism of diocesan and clergy leadership, structures, and financial practices.” —2006 Mission Survey Report

“In a missional era, the episcopate might discover a new purpose in facilitating relationships, partnerships and resource-sharing for mission among congregations and other bodies as bridge-builders.” —What Are We Here For?

“The governance of the diocese should be more resource-providing than managerial.” —Congregational Visits
APPENDIX E: FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy
Follow-Up Survey
November 2007

Dear member of the Bishop’s Commission on Mission Strategy (BCMS), Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, Trustees or diocesan staff. Thank you for your leadership and participation in the BCMS process over the past year. Now that this phase has completed its intended mandate, we would like to hear from you regarding how you have experienced this work and how you assess its effectiveness. From your perspective, how helpful has this process been for helping the diocese engage its challenges and envision a better future? This survey is only being sent to those who have been most directly involved in the BCMS process as members of the bodies listed above. Additional surveys of the wider population of leaders and members of the diocese may be forthcoming in the months ahead. Please respond candidly about your own experiences, from the perspective of your primary congregation. Answers will be kept strictly anonymous and reported only in group form. If you have any questions or need assistance in filling out this survey, please contact Dwight Zscheile at dzscheile001@luthersem.edu. Thank you!

I. Naming Current Realities and Building Bridges

In this section, we’d like to learn about how your perceptions of our diocese and its situation may have changed through this process.

Naming Current Realities

1. On a scale of 10 to 0, with 10 being “strongly agree,” 5 being “neither agree nor disagree,” and 0 being “strongly disagree,” please respond to the following statements:

As a result of the BCMS process . . .

Mark one for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark one for each item.</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I have a clearer picture of the current state of the Episcopal Church in our state</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
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<td>b. I have a better understanding of the numerical trends of our diocese over the past century</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
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<td>c. I have been able to interpret our present challenges within a wider historical context of past planning efforts</td>
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<td>d. I am more aware of some of the demographic changes taking place in our state</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. I have a better sense of how the Episcopal Church might serve its neighbors in our state</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Leaders in the diocese are now better prepared to identify the challenges facing us as a church</td>
<td>0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0</td>
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</table>
Building Bridges

2. On a scale of 10 to 0, with 10 being “strongly agree,” 5 being “neither agree nor disagree,” and 0 being “strongly disagree,” please respond to the following statements:

As a result of the BCMS process…

Mark one for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Scale</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I have healthier relationships with other leaders around the diocese</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. I better understand the differing perspectives of others within the diocese</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. I feel a stronger sense of connection to my congregation and its ministry</td>
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<td>d. I feel a stronger sense of connection to other congregations in our area</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. I feel a stronger sense of connection to the diocese as a whole</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. I have a deeper appreciation for the mission challenges faced by congregations in other parts of the diocese</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. On a scale of 10 to 0, with 10 being “strongly agree,” 5 being “neither agree nor disagree,” and 0 being “strongly disagree,” please respond to the following statements:

Through participation in the BCMS process…

Mark one for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I feel a renewed sense of spiritual vitality</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. I can see spiritual renewal currently taking place in my local congregation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I can see spiritual renewal taking place within our diocese</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. I feel like my voice was heard in this process</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. I feel like voices from the grass roots were heard in this process</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. I have a greater sense of trust in my fellow Episcopalians in our state</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. I have a greater sense of trust in the governing structures of the diocese – Council, Trustees, Standing Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. I have a greater sense of trust in the bishop and diocesan staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. I feel like the diocese is now adequately prepared to enter into a new era of partnership and collaboration in ministry</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
II. Discerning and Envisioning the Future

Now, we'd like to know more about your views on the specific content developed during the BCMS process and articulated in the plan presented to the 2007 Convention.

4. How much of the BCMS report to Convention 2007 have you read?
   - All of it
   - Some of it
   - None of it

5. How well do you feel that you understand the contents of the BCMS report to Convention 2007?
   - Understand very well
   - Understand somewhat well
   - Don't understand very well

6. How strongly does the new identity statement for the diocese resonate with you? ("We, the Episcopal Diocese of [X], are a communion of Christian congregations and other ministries, rooted in the breadth of the Anglican tradition, called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to share in Christ’s ministry of reconciliation.") (mark one)
   - Very strongly
   - Strongly
   - Not very strongly
   - Not at all

7. How strongly does the new purpose statement for the diocese resonate with you? ("Our purpose as the Episcopal Diocese of [X] is to seed and cultivate vibrant congregations of maturing Christian disciples, equipping and emboldening them to be Christ’s heart, hands and voice in the world.") (mark one)
   - Very strongly
   - Strongly
   - Not very strongly
   - Not at all

8. Overall, how well do the mission and ministry priorities in the BCMS plan resonate with your sense of where God is leading us as a diocese? (mark one)
   - Very strongly
   - Strongly
   - Not very strongly
   - Not at all
9. On a scale of 10 to 0, with 10 being “strongly agree,” 5 being “neither agree nor disagree,” and 0 being “strongly disagree,” please respond to the following statements:

Mark one for each item.

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<th>10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. The BCMS process has enriched my imagination for mission</td>
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<td>b. The BCMS process has enriched my congregation’s imagination for mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. The BCMS process has enriched the imaginations of other congregations in my area</td>
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<td>d. I am excited about the new vision for mission and ministry that has emerged through the BCMS process</td>
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<td>e. I feel the goals articulated in the BCMS report to Convention 2007 will lead us into a better future</td>
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<td>f. I am confident that, with God’s help, we will be able to achieve these goals together as a diocese</td>
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</table>

10. How would you evaluate the vitality of the following?

Mark one for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very vital</th>
<th>Somewhat vital</th>
<th>Not very vital</th>
<th>Not vital at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. My personal faith and discipleship</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. The life and ministry of my congregation</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. The life and ministry of Diocese of [X]</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. The life and ministry of Episcopal Church (USA)</td>
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11. How hopeful are you about the future of the Episcopal Church in our state? (mark one)

- Very hopeful
- Fairly hopeful
- Somewhat hopeful
- Only slightly hopeful
- Not at all hopeful

12. What gives you the most hope about the future of our diocese? [write in]
III. About You

Now we’d like to know a little more about you and the primary congregation in which you worship.

13. What is the size, in average Sunday attendance, of the primary congregation in which you worship? *(mark one)*
   - Less than 50
   - 50-99
   - 100-149
   - 150-199
   - 200-249
   - 250-299
   - 300+
   - Not sure

14. How long have you been a member of the Diocese? *(mark one)*
   - Less than 1 year
   - 1 to 2 years
   - 3 to 4 years
   - 5 to 9 years
   - 10 to 14 years
   - 15 to 19 years
   - 20+ years

15. What region of the Diocese do you live in? *(mark one)*
   - 1 (Northwest)
   - 2 (Northeast)
   - 3 (West-central)
   - 4 (Southwest)
   - 5 (Southeast)
   - 6 (Northeast Metro)
   - 7 (Southeast Metro)
   - 8 (Downtown)
   - 9 (West/Southwest Metro)
   - 10 Not sure

16. In what type of community do you live? *(mark one)*
   - Rural
   - Small Town
   - Suburban
   - Urban
17. What is your role in the church? (mark one)
   ○ Lay person, not employed by the church
   ○ Lay person, employed by the church
   ○ Vocational Deacon
   ○ Transitional Deacon
   ○ Priest
   ○ Other

18. What was your age at your last birthday? (mark one)
   ○ Under 20
   ○ 20 to 29
   ○ 30 to 39
   ○ 40 to 49
   ○ 50 to 59
   ○ 60 to 69
   ○ 70 to 79
   ○ 80+

19. What is your gender? (mark one)
   ○ Male
   ○ Female

20. Which of the following describe your racial/ethnic background? (mark all that apply)
   ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
   ○ Pacific Islander
   ○ Asian American
   ○ Black/African American
   ○ Hispanic/Chicano/Latino
   ○ White (non-Hispanic)
IV. Next Steps and Final Comments

21. On the scale below, rate how much you see the following items to be potential obstacles to the successful implementation of the BCMS process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark one for each item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not an obstacle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Resistance from local congregation members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Resistance from clergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Resistance from the current elected leadership of the diocese (i.e., Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, Trustees, Commission on Ministry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Resistance from the current bishop and diocesan staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Lack of faith and spiritual renewal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Pre-existing theological foundations and assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Organizational inertia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Spiritual warfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Lack of focus and commitment by the leadership of the diocese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Poor communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>l. Other (write in below)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. Of the potential obstacles listed above, which two do you see as the most important?
(Write in two letters of items from the list above)

23. From your perspective, what were the keys that made the BCMS process as successful as it was? [write in]

24. How could the BCMS process have been improved? [write in]
25. Are there any further comments you would like to share on the BCMS process? [write in]
BIBLIOGRAPHY


