

Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

To create and sustain Christ-centered, mission-minded, ministering communities of faith.

Overview

Our Diocese serves over 20,000 Anglicans in 96 parishes (224 congregations) in the two civil provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Island. More than one-third of our parishes are currently being served by clergy in part-time appointments. The composition of our parishes is: Rural – 42, Urban – 21, and Ex-Urban/Small town – 33. Our parish configurations are almost evenly-split between multi-point (46) and single point (50).

Our Diocese is in the midst of massive transformational change. In addition to the impacts of a global pandemic, over the past year our Diocese has experienced a change in episcopal leadership with the retirement of Archbishop Ron Cutler. This is the first time in almost 100 years that we have elected a Diocesan Bishop who was not previously ordained as a Suffragan or Co-Adjutor Bishop either in this Diocese or elsewhere. That we could conduct an Episcopal Synod virtually, with clergy and lay delegates gathered in ten different geographic locations across the Diocese and linked to the Cathedral Church of All Saints in Halifax, is a testament to the technological pivot we've made as a result of Covid-19. We are continuing to learn and adapt as we find new ways of staying connected to one another and sustaining our faith in Christ.

Diocesan Statistics	2019	2020 (from data received to date)
Baptisms	213	41
Confirmations	59	8
Marriages	73	20
Funerals	829	368

Covid-19 has had a huge impact on the ability to gather to celebrate foundational moments in the life of faith. This can be seen in our statistical comparison between 2019 and 2020.

Signs of Hope

In spite of the many challenges and changes necessitated by Covid-19, we are witnessing many signs of hope for the time ahead:

Establishing an Online Presence – While many of our parishes had websites or Facebook pages before Covid, few were offering online worship, study or prayer opportunities. The pandemic changed all of that. Now only a handful of parishes, primarily those without high-speed Internet service, are NOT offering these opportunities online. The platform and delivery options vary, but it's been encouraging to see clergy and parishioners alike adapt and learn and find ways to stay connected in this new context. It has been exhausting to climb the steep learning curve and yet people have given it their best. Parishes have also been reminded of the benefit of, as one priest calls it, "PCP," pastoral care by phone. We are reaching out to stay connected however we can and re-connecting with people who were house-bound, those who had lost regular contact with the church, and those who we didn't know were interested in what the church or the Christian faith had to offer.

Developing Missional Ministries – Our third missional leadership learning cohort, *The Connectors 3*, began in January 2021 with 11 participants (including one from another Diocese), plus an assistant. They are enthusiastic and eager to dig in and discern where God is at work in the neighbourhood and are looking forward to joining in. They have met almost entirely over Zoom thus far. These missional cohorts are bearing much fruit. One participant from the previous cohort started a *Spiritual Cafe* on Zoom for people who identify as "spiritual but not religious." Monthly gatherings feature a guest speaker who explores things like meditation, the Quaker faith, your brilliant mind, and the healing power of Reiki. So far there are 76 members who may be classified as 'nones' and 'dones' (people who are not active with a Christian faith community).

Collaborating with other Dioceses and the National Church – Our Diocese partnered with the Diocese of Fredericton to offer the Lenten luncheon Zoom series WOW - Word on Wednesday, an opportunity to experience Gospel-Based Discipleship. We are also partnering with the Diocese of Montreal to offer *Pew & Beyond*, a weekly Zoom series coordinated by the Anglican Church of Canada's Spiritual Formation for

Discipleship Network. These are just a few ways we're working collaboratively across the wider church and sharing staff expertise and resources.

Training and Equipping via Technology – Our Youth and Family Ministry (YFM) team is developing online courses to provide training for those involved in ministry to children, families, youth and young adults. This will replace some of our in-person training and offer new opportunities to those for whom training is inaccessible due to geographical distance. Early in the pandemic members of our YFM team also provided online sessions to help clergy and lay leaders transition to online forms of youth and family ministry.

Discovering new ways to use our Church buildings – Parishes in our Diocese are actively exploring possibilities for the re-purposing/co-purposing of Church buildings. One parish that has met almost entirely online during the pandemic is considering whether they even need to own a physical space in which to gather anymore. We are re-examining our core assumptions about how and where we gather and considering how our buildings might enable new possibilities in our communities.

Connecting through Environmental Concern – Our Diocesan Environment Network (DEN) moved from meeting in-person on a monthly basis to meeting weekly online since the pandemic began. Speakers for these weekly gatherings address a range of topics relating to the care of the environment. The network reaches and connects people of faith and people with no expressed faith commitment, both within our Diocese and beyond. Their shared concern for the earth has enabled collaborative action and a deeper level of respect and understanding, one for the other. In response to the growing lament over the state of the planet, DEN launched a monthly online Ecological Grief Support Group, facilitated by a trained counselor. They also offer a weekly online prayer gathering and hosted an online Art Exhibition as a way to foster love and care for creation and instill hope for the future.

Flourishing in Creativity – Parishes are finding new ways to reach into their communities by offering neighbourhood prayer boxes, food cupboards, blessing bags to people in need, Bible & Brew Zoom discussions, YouTube Church, free community soup ministries, labyrinth in the park prayer opportunities, garden church, online laughter yoga, daily or weekly online prayer services, semi-weekly morning messages via YouTube, and Zoom meditation groups or Bible studies, to name just a few. Covid-19 has caused us to consider how our parishes might better serve the wider community, and to find fresh ways of challenging the limits of our diocesan geography.

Tackling Systemic Racism – In the face of increasing racism made all too visible by the death of George Floyd last year, our Diocese has launched a Facebook group, *Anglicans for Anti-Racist Ministry*, under the umbrella of our Mission, Outreach and Social Transformation (MOST) team. This online group includes members within and beyond our Diocese and provides a space to share information and resources about systemic racism, as well as actions we can take as individuals, and collectively, to address it.

Rejoicing in Hope at Difficult Times

Our Diocese acted quickly to support parishes as the pandemic swept across our communities and our world. Financial assistance was offered in the form of allotment and salary/stipend relief for the first months of the pandemic. We also provided resources to help parishes transition to online giving options. We continue to benefit from the federal CEWS program, which the Diocese administers on behalf of our parishes. Some parishes with allotment arrears made substantial payments to eliminate or pay down their outstanding financial commitments to the Diocese.

Consecrating a new bishop when only five people were allowed in the worship space at any one time was a challenge that our Diocese met with determination and resolve. While the Cathedral was essentially empty, there were more than 6000 views as people from all over the world tuned in to the live-streamed service at some point to share in this important moment in the life of our Diocese. It was clear that most people connecting would not have been able to do so without the benefit of technology.

We are learning that while we long to gather in-person for worship, study, community-building and pastoral connection (and need to do so whenever we can), technology is enabling us to meet new people in new ways.

There is considerable lament and grief as we experience rapid change and live in this time of anxiety and uncertainty, and yet we are hopeful about what the future will hold, trusting in God's guidance and grace along the way.

Ways to Gather and Support One Another

While we are learning the benefits of technology in helping us to stay connected, I hope that time and effort will continue to be spent in finding ways to gather in-person to strengthen our relationships and support each other in our ministries throughout the Province of Canada. Like others, I have benefitted from a monthly gathering of the Provincial House of Bishops, where ideas, hopes and concerns are shared, and prayers are offered for one another. On a diocesan level we are sometimes meeting more frequently for shorter periods of time over platforms like Zoom, but are also planning for less frequent, longer in-person gatherings when restrictions lessen. It will be a hybrid approach going forward, as it will in many parishes with worship being offered both in-person and online. A similar approach – perhaps alternating an in-person provincial synod and an online synod – would help us to stay in touch, attend to the ministry and work at hand, manage costs and the environmental impact of travel, but also get to know each other over shared meals and conversation, and face to face prayer and worship.