

The Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

Report to the 48th Synod of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada, June 2018

Questions for reflection

1. Describe in detail any initiative in the diocese where there has been a movement towards being a missional church through missional leadership?

In 2014 our diocese was invited to participate in IDLC (Inter Diocesan Learning Community). This involved a group of six leaders of the diocese attending four intensive residential gatherings over a three year period. The purpose was to learn about culture shift, current Missional initiatives and evidence based studies in structural change. Each gathering resulted in a plan of action for the following 9 months and diocesan teams were accountable to the larger group for follow-up. The gatherings were hosted and facilitated by the Diocese of Toronto and based on their experience with a similar program hosted by the Diocese of Liverpool, Church of England. Between gatherings our leadership group “The Innovation Group” created and delivered a number of initiatives to raise awareness of the missional nature of the church throughout the diocese. The group has also proposed a number of structural changes to reinforce and support mission over maintenance activities in the diocese. These culminated in the 2015 Diocesan Synod with the theme “It’s About the World” (By implication, “It’s not about the Church”). The Synod was a place for us to face the realities of the changing culture and demographic trends and their impacts on parish and diocesan life. It was a place where we looked at the “walls” which prevented us from engaging with the great commission and the gifts which God gives in order to fulfil this commission. This Synod and the follow-up Diocesan Synod in 2017 were places where over 300 parish leaders (at each Synod) were given opportunities to learn more about God’s mission and were invited to have input in shaping Diocesan priorities for mission.

One of the significant outcomes of the 2015 Synod was “MORE Mission School”. Many members of synod said: “we understand God’s call to be in mission, but we don’t know how to do this.” MORE is not an acronym; it simply reflects our belief that God offers more to people, than we frequently look for. The Mission School will consist of 5 or 6 modules. Each one day module is delivered by a diocesan team of facilitators in each of the 10 regions of the diocese. Attendance is open to anyone in parishes with an interest in learning and implementing skills for missional leadership. Parishes are strongly encouraged to send teams of people to the presentations along with the parish clergy. Our first module was delivered in 2015-16. It introduced missional concepts and encouraged leaders to begin thinking of their parishes as missional communities. The second module in 2016-17 looked at how to deal with resistance in this shift to a missional focus. Module three is now being written. It will focus on vitality and abundance (rather than scarcity theology). Where do we see God at work in our neighbourhoods and communities, how do we join in God’s work, how do we discern God’s call. So far 466 people have attended one of the modules.

One of the other significant diocesan leadership development tools has been the “Vital Church Maritimes” Conferences. The focus here is on reimagining parish life. In 2014 our keynote speaker was

the Rev. Dr. Michael Monyagh from Fresh Expressions UK who introduced us to “Fresh Expressions” of church. In 2015 The Rev. Dr. Judy Paulsen Director of the Institute of Evangelism at Wycliffe College spoke about “welcome”. In 2016 The Rev. Dr. Cameron Harder, professor of Systematic Theology at Lutheran Theological Seminary, spoke about transforming rural and small churches. Last fall we heard from the Rev. Canon Phil Potter, the Archbishop’s missioner and team leader for Fresh Expressions in the Church of England. He spoke about refreshment, reimagining church and how to begin new ministries. In 2018 our keynote speaker will be the Rev. Canon Susan Brown Snook, Canon for Church growth and development in the Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma. The theme is “Open Minds, Open Hearts, Open Hands”- how to be bold, risk taking and prayerfully discerning leaders. Hundreds of lay and clergy leaders from our diocese, the diocese of Fredericton and other churches have attended these conferences and have come away with inspiration, practical skills and lots of ideas to try in the local setting.

Two other changes in the past three years have greatly assisted in missional leadership development. The first was the hiring of a “Parish Vitality Coordinator” (Instead of a Suffragan bishop). The Rev. Lisa Vaughn’s position supports parishes in all and every kind of transition. She also provides organisation and staff support for MORE Mission Schools and Vital Church Maritimes. The second change is to see the Diocesan Council as a place for more than policy discussions and receiving of reports – but as a learning community. Almost every meeting of the Council includes an educational session of some sort.

2. What initiatives are under way, but have yet to bear fruit, or are still in the planning stage?

- Missional Leadership Cohort. We have just secured funding to launch the “Missional Leadership Cohort”. This will be a group of ten leaders, clergy and lay, who will gather for 10 residential learning opportunities over a year. The ten topics will equip participants for leadership as agents of change in their local ministry settings. This is modeled on a similar program in the Diocese of Fredericton.

- Conversations with Atlantic School of Theology. We are one of the ‘founding parties’ of the Atlantic School of Theology along with the United Church and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth. The school has been our primary institution to train clergy for our diocese since 1974. All theological schools in North America are dealing with the same systemic shifts as our churches are encountering. As the governing documents for the AST partnership are being renegotiated this year, the conversation about how the school can support each of the founding denominations in preparing missional leaders has had a prominent place. AST is creating a “Leadership Institute” which will begin offering a pilot program next year.

- Missional Allotment Exemption. Our parish allotment system has provided an allotment exemption for money that parishes spend on building maintenance and capital works projects. We are proposing the curtailing of this exemption and the creation of a new allotment exemption based on the amount that parishes spend on missional activities. We hope that this shift will incentivise parishes to shift focus from buildings to mission. The details of how we define mission and how we move from one exemption to the other are being worked out by a task group through regional consultations. The proposal will be presented to our next diocesan Synod in May 2019.

- Our diocesan Layreader's Association has voted to request the Synod to change the name of this ministry to "Licensed Lay Minister". The change of name is more than semantics, it both reflects the change in what our lay readers are doing and opens up the possibility of recognizing a variety of trained lay leadership in parishes. This conversation will take another step forward at our next diocesan Synod.

3. How can the Province of Canada help your diocese with these initiatives? What can we offer to other dioceses in the province?

In the past five years we have had a significant increase in the number of parishes which can no longer afford to pay for full time stipendiary clergy leadership. This has resulted in the situation today where 36 of our 96 parishes are being served by clergy in part-time appointments. Although this level of part-time staffing is probably an interim phase in how we provide sacramental leadership in parishes, it has all kinds of consequences in parish and diocesan life. To what extent are these realities (part time and bi-vocational priestly ministries) being taken into account in candidate selection for ordained ministry, how does this impact ACPO?

We value the experiences of other dioceses in responding to the trends we see in parish life and are more than happy to use good ideas that other people find. The internet and diocesan webpages are useful but there may be other more direct ways for ideas and programs to be shared in the dioceses of the Ecclesiastical Province.

We are prepared to offer our experience and resource materials from the IDLC process to the dioceses of the Ecclesiastical Province. We are also prepared to share the MORE Mission School Modules with others.