

An Executive Summary
of
The Planning Study Report
for the
Diocese of Fredericton

Draft October 2008
Final January 2009



Prepared by a consultant team from General Synod

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Introduction:

A consultant team from General Synod's Letting Down the Nets (LDTN), an initiative of General Synod on educating and empowering church leaders to improve the ongoing financial capacity at all levels of the church, was retained by the diocese to conduct a Planning Study. The study was conducted by Geoff Jackson and Rob Waller from July 15th to August 30th, 2008 and consisted of 42 personal interviews and two focus groups, comprising 10 participants, with individuals associated with parishes in various parts of the diocese. The context and purpose of the Planning Study was presented in a document called *Our Journey Moves On!* that was prepared by diocesan leaders and is attached here for reference purposes.

The Planning Study offered a vital opportunity to analyze and test certain factors in the life of the diocese and its regions. Above all, the Study provides the kind of objective information needed by diocesan leadership to make decisions with confidence about how best to move forward with both the Shared Ministry Plan and the proposed stewardship education initiative.

It was the LDTN Consultant's Team task to identify how to best structure and position a stewardship education program within the diocese, as a component of the Shared Ministry Plan, and also to take the pulse on the ability and inclination of the diocese's lay and clergy leaders to provide leadership support. Not only is this information instrumental in planning for the future but it also builds the kind of ownership or engagement that is essential to a faithful and successful response to what God is calling the diocese to be and do together.

A General Comment:

In the opinion of the LDTN Team, the diocesan "family" is mired in a complex set of problems that is now at such a crisis point that a planned intervention is absolutely essential to the diocese's sustainability. We are of the opinion that the diocese will continue to decline dramatically unless there is a carefully planned intervention that....

- A. allows for new ways of acting together as a diocesan faith community in making meaningful decisions together at Synod that will shift the diocese from decline to a thriving faith community;**
- B. develops well-coordinated strategies and decisions for addressing conflicts, strengthening the role of diocesan leaders, diocesan relationships and communications with parish leaders;**
- C. consults with clergy and lay leaders and builds a foundation of trust and respect in developing genuine ownership of the diocese's Shared Ministry Plan;**
- D. implements a well-coordinated and well-resourced plan for strengthening parishes through a stewardship/congregational development initiative.**

Key Findings:

1. The Shared Ministry Plan.
 - o There is a general lack of understanding of what this plan is all about.
 - o There is not sufficient “buy in” within parish leadership at this time to move forward with this plan in an effective way.
 - o Many people see this is a plan to cut back on clergy and to amalgamate parishes.
2. There are those who feel that the Bishop spends the majority of his time travelling across the diocese “putting out fires” whereas others feel that they are neglected by the Bishop in times of need.
3. The majority of parishes do not currently have any kind of parish vision yet they are wrestling with significant challenges.
4. The number of parishes that appear to have fairly sizeable gatherings of youth and children surprised us. However, many interviewees were not aware of the existence of diocesan staff support for these areas of ministry.
5. There is a diocesan culture that avoids teaching parishes about holistic stewardship that has led to a focus on fundraising.
6. Recent Synods have been somewhat confrontational resulting in a level of distrust that inhibits the genuine sense of partnership between parish and diocesan leaders.
7. Parishes seem to be able to “get away” with not paying their fair share to the diocese without any consequences.
8. The diocese has a number of very respected leaders with acknowledged expertise that will be vital to the success of The Shared Ministry Plan and the proposed stewardship initiative.
9. There are a growing number of negative perceptions that the diocese is moving too slowly in addressing the issue of the number of church buildings.
10. 80% of those interviewed indicated that the proposed stewardship initiative is very important to their own parish’s future.
11. At this time only 12” of the parishes represented in the Planning Study indicated that they had either a stewardship committee or stewardship plan.

12. There is a belief that the diocese keeps asking for more money from the parishes through the current assessment and apportionment system. In fact, this is not true in that the parishes are retaining more of the income raised at the parish level.
13. The diocesan Proportional Gift to General Synod has been declining in percentage terms over the past 8 years. For 2008 the percentage of diocesan income is at 18.6% compared to the requested percentage of 26%.
14. Study participants acknowledged the huge, untapped potential of financial resources within some segments of the diocese for funding parish, diocesan and national ministries.
15. The majority of parishes have no clear sense of the value of what it means to belong to the diocese (and General Synod).
16. Some parish priests, especially those in the rural areas, feel that they are basically “on their own” without any tangible support.

Key Recommendations:

1. Establish a new group, The Sharing Ministry Task Force with a mandate to;
 - a. Coordinate and implement the significant initiatives of the Diocese, and;
 - b. Oversee the presentations to be made at Synod 2009 so that they are all seen to be part of the same overall plan.
2. Commission a total evaluation of the diocese in terms of governance, structures and systems to develop a structure that will lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness.
3. Amend the membership of Synods by reducing the number of lay members and determine a date following which all retired clergy will no longer have membership at Synod, with existing retirees being “grandfathered”.
4. A diocese of this size should have a full-time staff person knowledgeable in stewardship and congregational development to support a Diocesan Committee.
5. As the Budget Funding Task Force prepares revisions to the report to be presented to the next session of Synod we suggest that any system of seeking funds from parishes to the diocese should be based on a mandatory practice as long as the system is considered fair and equitable. A mandatory system does not have to be a punitive system.
6. The diocese should consider again the possibility of changing its name to The Diocese of New Brunswick.

7. Consider the possibility of hiring AMB Research to undertake a review of every church building and parish and to produce a set of recommendations along the same lines as has been done for several other dioceses.
8. The proposed stewardship initiative be regionally based and implemented as pilot projects within two regions in the first year, with other regions participating in later years.
9. A clearly defined set of objectives for a gift-planning program is developed as part of the proposed stewardship initiative.
10. The Stewardship & Financial Development Team ought to give consideration to building upon the work already done in distributing a diocesan narrative budget to a wider audience than at present by developing a “Case for Support” that articulates a clear picture of both the diocese’s and General Synod’s preferred future.
11. There needs to be a Communications Plan developed for promoting the Shared Ministry Plan and all the various components of reports that will be presented to the next session of Synod.
12. The Diocesan Stewardship and Financial Development Team has been presented with a plan for the proposed stewardship initiative that they will be reviewing and implementing in the near future.