



Faith, Worship, and Ministry

Appendix 6

REPORT OF THE VITAL AND HEALTHY PARISHES WORKING GROUP

Background

In 2013, the Faith, Worship, and Ministry department received a three-year grant from the Ministry Investment Fund to launch a major initiative in congregational vitality education. The starting point was a vision of a set of networks of practitioners, experts and learners, an accessible web-based resource centre, educational gatherings and other tools that would combine to make up a virtual 'school' for congregational development.

Building on the successes of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario's Congregational Development and Stewardship networks, a small leadership team began to explore the vision and to grow strategic aims, objectives, and goals. The team grew to include specialists in the field, two from each Province.

Opportunities abound for education and training through networks such as *Fresh Expressions*, *Natural Church Growth*, *the Inter-Diocesan Learning Circles*, and *Vital Church Planting*, as well as through established institutions that serve the churches ecumenically. Roughly one third of our dioceses have staff or otherwise dedicated personnel who serve as resource people, consultants to parishes, and otherwise support the diocese's local ministries. A few dioceses, such as New Westminster, have established, on a continuing education model, schools for ministry leadership, run by the diocesan specialists. These same people – staff and designated personnel - generally meet up at annual conferences. They develop skills in particular models for nurturing healthy local communities of worship and service.

With all of these developments and opportunities, what has been missing? Working from the theme of *connect, extend, build capacity, and accompany*, the working group identified the following critical pieces. What has been missing...

- the opportunity to gather the whole church, insofar as possible, beyond those dioceses who have the resources to hire staff;
- the ability to make local-to-local connections across very different contexts;
- a relationship with the synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada to help each other to grow in this area of learning;
- a place to gather up insights from the many different models;
- a national conversation – in full communion – that integrates the themes of baptismal ministry, local engagement in God’s mission, worship and actions in care and justice, leadership and vocation;
- an ‘equal playing field’ where all voices can be heard and learned from.

The Vital and Healthy Parishes Consultation

Now having convened twice, and with the third gathering scheduled for June of 2016, the Vital and Healthy Parishes Consultation has emerged as the critical centre of this work.

Purpose Statement

The annual Vital and Healthy Parishes gathering is a timely response to the need for leaders in congregational ministry from across the country to share, learn and resource each other in the work of building healthy, vital, missional churches.

Participants find, and dioceses and synods benefit from:

- Mutual and shared practical learning across the many and diverse contexts of the Anglican & Lutheran churches nationally;
- New resources and ideas, expanded tool kits, and an awareness of best practices;
- Connections with colleagues who are willing and able to share insights, experiences and resources with each other.

The Consultation is for Anglican and Lutheran church leaders (lay and ordained) who are working with congregations and who have perspective and responsibility beyond a single parish or congregation, For example, bishops, archdeacons, diocesan staff and volunteers, regional deans, regional missionaries.

What previous participants have said:

- *There was a level playing field and a non-competitive, generous sharing of ideas, resources, time, and wisdom.*
- *We learned that small and large, urban and rural, lay and ordained, experienced congregational development professionals and newcomers to the field, all have something important and valid to share and to learn.*

- *There was a real encouragement to see the realistic challenges and still be creative; know you might fail but not fear these failures and rather learn from them; to keep innovating.*
- *I feel less isolated and have more grassroots tested and immediately transferable ideas and resources to use.*

In May, 2014, 74 people gathered, representing 24 dioceses and 3 ELCIC synods. In 2015, 65 people participated, from 16 dioceses and 4 ELCIC synods. The present registration commitment for 2016 shows upward of 75 people, from over 22 dioceses and from all five ELCIC synods.

VHP has emerged as a successful model for the sort of gathering that is core in the ministry of the General Synod. The consultations, and the relationships forged and nurtured in that context, gather a great diversity of leaders, connecting people across all sorts of diversities, geographical, cultural, urban/rural/remote, and theological. The connections are strong, because at the heart of it we are talking and learning together from each other about the simple-complex life that is discipleship, the living out of the Gospel, and forming communities of disciples as leaven in their local contexts.

Following the 2014 consultation, eight participants, including the 2014 planning team, met to digest the learnings from the event. The main result of that meeting was the creation of a “Prospectus” for the work. This document is appended to this Report, as is one of the preparatory letters sent to participants.

By the time of the 2015 gathering, all five ELCIC synods had committed to this initiative and the steering committee for the gatherings is working to make the sorts of changes necessary to make the gathering more hospitable to Lutherans – much of that has to do with language and references; some of it has to do with the different authority structures in our two churches.

The Ministry Investment Fund grant has been used principally to cover the ground costs for the three day gathering, and to supply travel bursaries. This financial commitment to create a budgetary level playing field is something that will need to be maintained into the future after 2016. The recommendation of the working group is that this work be funded from core budget in Faith, Worship, and Ministry, and that a different, and even more equitable expenditure formula be devised.

The nature of the gatherings themselves lends itself to further development. New insights have already emerged after two consultations that shape the direction for the next. The basic model, using small groups and marketplace conversations, remains the core ‘container’ in which the lively work gets done by participants feeding each other with their stories, insights, and learned wisdom.

Other Initiatives

A web “hub” for resources and electronic conversation is in development. Once launched, it will have dedicated personnel attached to it to keep it up to date and to facilitate conversations and inquiries.

FWM has also supported participants in the Symposium on Ministry Development, and in the New Westminster School for Leadership. In the case of the latter, it is with the intention of bringing in people from outside the diocese to develop their own leadership in this learning model, the better to support learning and training back in their own dioceses.

Members of the Vital and Healthy Parishes Working Group

Ms Tasha Carrothers (New Westminster)
Pastor Eric Krushel (ELCIC British Columbia Synod, to 2014)
The Reverend (Canon?) Christopher Pappas (Edmonton)
Bishop Elaine Sauer (ELCIC Manitoba and North West Ontario Synod)
The Reverend Canon Dr. Jay Koyle (Algoma)
Canon David Robinson (Toronto)
Ms Janet Marshall (Montreal, Toronto)
The Reverend Lynn Uzans (Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island)
Pastor Adam Snook (ELCIC Eastern Synod, 2015-16)

Staff: Mr. Dayjan Lesmond, the Reverend Dr Eileen Scully

See 2014 Report, appended



(Letter sent to participants, 2015)

Preparing for the Vital and Healthy Parishes Consultation 2015

The second *Vital and Healthy Parishes Consultation* is coming up in just a few weeks' time! This mutual learning event is built upon what you and your diocesan or synodical team contribute into holy conversation.

What to bring in preparation:

- You are invited to bring your **stories, knowledge, questions, hopes, and challenges**. These are the foundations from which **insight** and **renewed practice** will be built.
- Carry with you the lessons you have learned, and even more importantly, the things about which you **wonder** and the **puzzles** that you engage.
- We will share reflections on congregational life initiatives that have **borne fruit** in ministry, mission and worship, as much as we ponder and learn from those that **failed, flubbed or froze**.
- All of these are learning opportunities, especially when we bring the fragility of our discipleship and leadership into **holy conversation** with others.

What to expect in the process:

- On Monday, you will have time in small groups. You will be invited to **share your stories** of hope and good news, as well as those of challenge and frustration.
- We will then reflect together on these stories in light of what we see as **characteristics of vitality** in congregations. Indicators identified at last year's gathering are contained within the *Vital and Healthy Parishes Report 2014*, appended to this communiqué as a tool to engage our **imaginations** and our **strategic thinking**. You will also spend time in **diocesan/synodical** or regional **groups**, to talk, to vision, and to plan together about what you will be bringing home with you.

Much of our time together will be in focused discussion groups, the topics for which will be created by you in a process known as 'The Marketplace'. Here is what you should be thinking about in advance:

What puzzle, question, or wondering do you have about congregational vitality that comes from your own local context, about which you want to engage others in conversation?

- Note that this is not a time for 'show and tell' and for making a presentation to a group, but about **mutual engagement** on a point of challenge and in the spirit of **engaging mutual learning**.
- That said, all things worthwhile begin in story, so the **sharing of the story** out of which your questions have arisen is important. What do your conversation partners need to know about the location—culturally, socially, ecclesially, and so forth—from which your questions arise?
- Think about an initiative that has **gone well**, and what further you wish to explore coming out from that experience. Think about work that has you **stumped**.
- Think about something that is presently **in process**: an experiment, a fledgling ministry, a significant turn-around in a community.
- Please bring with you any **resources** that you have to share, whether locally developed, or from networks and associations with whom you have connections. Again: presentation of these sorts of things is not the principal aim of the Marketplace conversations, but the sharing of resources is a major gift in our network-building and mutual learning. Please also **share these resources—before the Consultation**, if possible—with our staff (see the end of this missive for contact information), and certainly during or shortly after the eve

