



CONNECT EXTEND BUILD CAPACITY ACCOMPANY

A STRATEGY FOR NATIONAL CHURCH
SUPPORT OF VITAL & HEALTHY PARISHES

A Project of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada

in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada



The nurture of healthy congregations is not an end in itself. Fostering healthy congregations must be about much more than strengthening and growing churches.

Faced with decades of numerical decline and the realization that we no longer reside at the cultural centre of most of our communities, we may be tempted to fashion programs or strategies that aim for little more than attracting people to our pews and coins to the coffers. However, years of experience have shown that the path to vitality does not wind across the terrain of ecclesial self-interest.

Today's need is not stepped-up efforts to buttress our institutions, but rather a renewed way of being church, one that contours lives in the way of discipleship, bringing people into a deeper relationship with God, one another, and the world around them.

We do not need more vital churches for the sake of reversing membership decline, paying bills, or keeping open our buildings. We need vital congregations because they are where people's lives are changed. Vital churches fulfill our vocation of being a sign, witness and foretaste of God's Kingdom.

Fidelity to this identity and vocation lies at the heart of the project described in this proposal.

We long to be a church...

...existing for the sake of others. Our God remains active in the world, already engaged in mission. It is the essence of the vibrant, faithful church to participate in this mission.

...patterned by a particular narrative. The Bible traces the story of a God who liberates people from every form of bondage, making the whole creation new. In the fullness of time, this God sent Christ Jesus to "shatter the chains of evil and death and banish the darkness of sin and despair." As those buried with Christ in baptism so that we might walk in newness of life, it is the essence of the vibrant, faithful church to proclaim and embody this good news.

...inspired by a robust hope. In recent decades, renewed liturgical rites and theological reflection are recovering the notion that our actions of the present must be understood from the standpoint of God's future. It is the essence of the vibrant, faithful church to act in the confidence that God's promises will be fulfilled.



...dependent on God's grace and one another. It is the presence of the risen Christ who breathes the Spirit on us that transforms a frightened and powerless church. It is in receiving the wisdom, gifts and service of its members that the whole Body of Christ is edified for witness and service. It is the essence of the vibrant, faithful church to depend on the work of the Holy Spirit in, through and around us.

These longings are echoed in the guiding principles for both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) and the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC). The ELCIC's mission statement reads:

The mission of this church, as an expression of the universal Church and as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, is to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people in Canada and around the world, through the proclamation of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments and through service in Christ's name.

The four Vision Priorities through which the ELCIC is presently living out this mission are:

- ◆ Spirited Discipleship
- ◆ Compassionate Justice
- ◆ Healthy Church
- ◆ Effective Partnerships

Within the Anglican Church of Canada, the *Marks of Mission* have brought a renewed focus on the mission of God active in the world, and the church's responsibility in all places to discern and live into that mission. One of the strategic priorities of *Vision 2019* specifically calls on the General Synod...

to develop leadership education for mission, evangelism and ministry... to develop lay and ordained leaders who will lead vital, intergenerational congregations who will serve the mission of God in worship, learning, evangelism, and service.

Both *Vision 2019*, and, later, *Embodying God's Call* (report from the National Consultation on Structures and Priorities), emphasize new ways of working that gather the gifts, wisdom, and resources found in the local church across the country, to better share, through the General Synod as *convenor*, both our common life and witness and the vitality of the local church itself.

What are Healthy, Vital Parishes?

Throughout the May consultation a question hung in the air and wove in and out of the conversations. What are healthy, vital parishes? We told stories of what they look like, what they do, and what they feel like. We pointed to where we feel we're getting closer even when the journey was difficult. We told of the risks we were willing to take and shared honestly what we learned when the outcomes were not as expected.

This was a powerfully positive experience for participants. Stories of relationships and new initiatives born in this gathering continue to be told. *This is a 'fullness of time' moment as leaders from across the country are expressing their enthusiasm for sharing, learning and resourcing each other in the work of building healthy, vital, Missional churches.*

To continue to shape the VHP initiative, the leadership team felt it was important to gather up what they had heard, and what they know from their own practices to define how we recognize vitality and health in parishes. *What are we looking to support and resource?*

The first principle is that vital, healthy parishes are always contextual. They participate in God's mission within their particular location with their particular people. So there are many different ways that parishes can be vital and healthy. This being said, there must be some common characteristics that we can point to without devolving to a one-model-fits-all simplicity.

Characteristics of Healthy, Vital Parishes

Vital churches
fulfil our
vocation of
being a sign,
witness and
foretaste of
God's Kingdom

They are vision led. They are good at discerning of God's call for this place and time then letting this discernment guide their ministries and decisions.

They have worship that is connected, relevant, participatory, and inspiring. Worship invokes a depth of connection: connecting story of God and story of God's people.

They practice intentional faith formation:

- ◆ These are parishes that can answer the question "Why church?"
- ◆ They draw people into inhabiting the story: God's story, the bible, the long to connect their story with God's story.
- ◆ They have an articulate, lived Christology.

They know who they are and who they are not as a parish, as Anglican/ Lutheran, and in whole Body of Christ. Their identity distinguishes them from mainstream culture.

- ♦ They are rooted in denominational ethos and identity.

They pay attention to relationships: with God, with one another, with their neighbours. They practice an open and generous hospitality.

- ♦ There is intergenerational engagement with each other and in their mission and ministry.

They integrate witness and evangelism into who they are and what they do. There is engagement beyond the building and worship into wider community and world.

Their approach is creative and imaginative and there is self-conscious learning, risk taking and the ability to learn from mistakes.

They are sustainable either independently or in partnerships. They allocate their resources (finances, time, energy, vision) to ministry more than their buildings.

They live a culture of generosity in time, talent, and treasure.

- ♦ They practice gift-based ministry. People's ministries and tasks are invited and deployed according to their gifts and skills.
- ♦ Culture of leader training and mentoring, empowering leaders; nimble.
- ♦ Leaders and structures work well together.



Connect, Extend, Build Capacity, Accompany

Online Resources:

- Goal:** An online site with an easily accessible, up to date, list of resources that are being used by dioceses and parishes within the Canadian Church.
- Description:** An annotated list coded to by approach (organizational development; catechetical; Missional).
- Value added:** Contact names and information will be provided directing to people who have used the resource and who are willing to advise and/or coach. Short videos will guide people to the find the type of resource they are looking for. This allows the VHP folk to advocate and broker the resources and highlighting those we have had the best results with.



National Gathering

- Goal:** Continue to develop collegiality and sharing of practice and learning across the country. Seed on-going partnerships and initiatives.
- Description:** Follow the model of 2014, inviting people with a diocesan perspective (Anglican and ELCIC); asking them to share and engage in honest conversation about their successes and failures, reveal what they are learning, share the resources and processes they are finding most helpful.
- Value added:** For this next gathering we will pay attention broadening the participation. This begins with the planning team itself, which has expanded and includes participants from the last consultation. "Ensure that the 'level playing field' experience of the 2014 consultation is experienced again."

Coach/Consultant Pool

- Goal:** Consultants and coaches are available to work with dioceses and parishes.
- Description:** People skilled and experienced in developing and supporting vital, healthy parishes through one or more of the three approaches (organizational development; catechetical; missional) are listed on the VHP web pages.
- Value added:** Coaches/consultants will be identified with particular resources or projects because they have had experience leading these in their own dioceses. It will be an affirmation of local leaders and a grass-roots expansion of resource base.



Telling our stories

Goal: Make the outcomes of the national gathering public.

Description: Through the FWM web pages, the Community, the Journal tell the stories of shared diocesan and parish initiatives seeded and nurtured through the VHP project.

Value added: People will be affirmed in their initiative in taking what they have learned and putting it into practice. Attention will be paid to collegial relationships that are built across our geography. This will grow and nurture a culture of sharing across the country.

National School for Congregational Leadership

Goal: Expand the accessibility to the curriculum and resources developed in the Diocese of New Westminster.

Description: The school will be made available more widely in different areas of the country with local leadership.

Value added: Local leaders are recruited and trained to deliver the school's programme near home broadening the school's impact through both in parish teams and diocesan leadership.

National Overview of Congregational Development

Goal: The staff and volunteers of General Synod have a better knowledge of what is happening to support vital, healthy parishes.

Description: Through the gatherings, the consultant/coach group, and the work of the School information is generated that can be used in General Synod visioning and planning and for the development of initiatives and projects.

Value added: A richer, current accounting of what's happening in the field that can inform the development of nationally brokered resources and potentially further initiatives of the General Synod.

Inspired by a robust hope,
dependent on God's grace and
one another...

Rooted in Our Commitments

The General Synod and the leadership of Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee and its staff have had an ongoing interest in supporting healthy, vital parishes. Whether it was in the liturgical reform that led to the *Book of Alternative Services*, to re-imagine faithful Anglican worship, or through the congregational and ministry leadership development initiatives of the 1970s and 1980s, General Synod was well positioned in a place of leadership, offering visions of new ways of ministry. Since the 1995 restructuring, when congregational development was not prioritized for national work, there has been a significant reduction in resources available, but it never quite disappeared. There lingered a sense that supporting congregational health and vitality was so crucial to the life of the church that there needed to be some national expression of this work.

Supporting congregations is also an ongoing interest of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Since the inception of the Church Extension and Capital Fund (CECF), the national church has supported ongoing mission in the Canadian context through making available capital for the purchase of land for new mission starts and construction of new church buildings as well as distributing interest income to synods which are disbursed as grants for local ministry initiatives. Through restructuring in 1995 Canadian mission became the responsibility of the five synods. In support of this synodical responsibility, the national church created the Annual Mission Consultation as well as financial support through CECF for synod mission consultant positions. The National Mission Consultation continues annually to gather representatives of the five synods for mutual learning, dialogue and exploration around various topics of interest and concern in the area of mission.

By 2005 the encouragement and facilitation of some congregational development work was added to a new FWM staff position of Coordinator of Ethics, Interfaith Relations, and Congregational Development. This resulted in a very successful and energetic consultation at Geneva Park. The format was classic and timely. People from across the country gathered to learn from keynote speakers Alan Roxburgh of Allelon, who was in the early stages of developing what is now known as the Missional Listening process, and Tex Sample who spoke of multimedia and worship. These were supported by a wide series of workshops offered by congregational development leaders from across the country. Over the next few years there was again a lull in activity as the FWM volunteers and staff attended a full agenda focused elsewhere. But the hope for another consultation was always present.

When General Synod 2010 adopted VISION 2019 as the Anglican Church of Canada's strategic plan it renewed its commitment to vital, healthy congregations. The development of lay and ordained leaders who will lead vital, intergenerational congregations who will serve the mission of God in worship, learning, evangelism, witness, and service was named within the first priority.

In 2013 there was a resurgence of energy when a small team of three congregational development consultants, Janet Marshall (Montreal), Jay Koyle (Algoma) and David Robinson (Toronto) began meeting with Eileen Scully to shape the next national consultation. The planning team was committed to enacting

the General Synod's ministry of *gathering* the church, the dioceses of the Anglican Church of Canada, and in commitment to the Waterloo Declaration of full communion, the synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC).

The expertise we need is within our own leadership.

They discerned that at this time it would be most empowering and creative to recognize that the expertise needed to build and sustain healthy, vital parishes is within our own leadership. They worked from the principle that the best learning is mutual sharing-teaching-learning, that every diocese and synod had something to contribute and something to learn. For this consultation there would be no need to draw on the expertise from outside our own practitioners.

Invitations were made to people who have a diocesan or synod-wide view of developing and supporting healthy, vital parishes. The tasks were to enter honest conversation about our successes and failures, to reveal what we are learning, and share the resources and processes we are finding most helpful and life giving.

The overarching goals were to build collegiality, develop a far more comprehensive vision of what is happening in dioceses and synods across the country and to seed partnerships and initiatives.

Concurrently, Janet Marshall had submitted a proposal through FWM for the development of a national school for congregational leadership. The planning team saw that this grassroots networking and sharing event would provide the information and direction necessary to shape this project, rooting it in a nation-wide needs and resource assessment.

A National Consultation on Vital, Healthy Parishes

The consultation was held in May 2014. 74 participants gathered from 24 dioceses and 3 ELCIC Synods. They were asked to bring with them

1. 2 stories (case studies) from their region to share: one of an initiative that they feel had gone well and one that hadn't
2. any resources or processes they would be willing to share with their colleagues

Through a series of small, regionally-mixed groups and workshops (organized through a marketplace process), participants met, learned, found hope, encouragement and energy.

Our goals are to build collegiality, have honest conversations about successes and failures, share what we are learning, and seed partnerships and new initiatives.

- * Evidence – based organizational intelligence: a data rich approach to identifying what motivates people to invest their time, energy and finances in
- * The Diocese of New Brunswick 12-12-12 peer coaching and support programme
- * The future of *Fresh Start* (a programme that supports clergy and parish transitions) in Canada
- * Moving our assets from property to ministry: grants that provide funding for new experimental, Missional ministries.
- * What to do with our buildings?
- * Team ministry for Missional curacies
- * Liturgy as a vehicle for creating Missional congregations
- * Multi-point parishes: exploring issues of clergy recruitment, responses to depopulation, lay leadership, developing forums for rural voices
- * What does Missional church look like in rural areas?
- * Lay led and directed rural multi-point ministries

It was remarkable how much we have in common across the country and these common interests, concerns and initiatives spanned small and large, urban and rural. Anglicans and Lutherans listened and learned from each other and possibilities for partnerships in ministry and deeper full communion grew. As the stories of the communities met and mingled it became palpable that the work of the consultation itself was about our mutual participation in God's story. Perhaps one participant said it best

It is precisely this kind of event which the General Synod should be facilitating. An effective means of developing the insights and relationships arising out of the consultation must be discovered. Faith, Worship and Ministry along with the General Synod staff must take the leadership in this.

The organizing committee is to be congratulated and thanked. Since this was a peer consultation involving facilitators, planning and executing the event was not easy. It appeared as if most participants were able to relinquish their need to plan and control outcomes, so the event went well.



What Participants Said About the Event

The evaluations were remarkably positive. In particular people valued:

- * A wider lens to the Canadian Anglican and Lutheran Church that enabled us to see what God is doing in congregations throughout the country – small and large, urban and rural.
 - * 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 or newcomers to the field, all have something important and valid to share and to learn. A number mentioned that this was the first time they had this experience at a national gathering.
 - * People were honest and unflinching in their sharing of the initiatives that failed and what they learned from these. It proved the point that often the richest learning is from endeavours that did not go as hoped.
 - * People celebrated with each other what is going well. We were able to build on each other's experiences.
 - * 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.
-
- * Participants left feeling that they were less isolated and had more grassroots tested and immediately transferable ideas and resources to use.

MEMBERS OF THE VHP PLANNING TEAM

Tasha Carruthers (New Westminster)
Jay Koyle (Algoma)
Eric Krushel (ELCIC)
Janet Marshall (Toronto)
Christopher Papas (Edmonton)
David Robinson (Toronto)
Elaine Sauer (ELCIC)
Eileen Scully (Staff)
Lynn Uzans (NS & PEI)

What's Next?

The final session of the consultation identifying next steps resulted in a swift and unanimous call for

- ⇒ The repeat of this style of mutual-learning model national gathering, increasing the participation base (both Anglican and Lutheran).
- ⇒ A nationally coordinated way of sharing resources such as website, speakers' bureau.
- ⇒ There was also interest in pursuing online technologies to continue the connections.