

# **Re-Creating Parish Communities: A Protocol for Restructuring**

Developed by the Deanery of Conception Bay  
For the Diocesan Council of the Synod of the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and  
Labrador

November 2007

## Preamble

At the 2007 Synod of the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador the following motion was made:

*Be it resolved that in light of ongoing conversations around the Diocese regarding new and effective ways of providing ministry in parishes, the diocese appoint the Conception Bay Deanery to establish a protocol for Parish restructuring by January 2008.<sup>1</sup>*

A few introductory comments are necessary. First, the Deanery of Conception Bay realizes that this motion grew out of a need for reorganization within multi-point parishes. Therefore, this document is best suited for multi-point parishes and parishes that are, geographically, within close proximity to one another and who wish to share programming and resources. Second, while the original intent was for this document to be of a Diocesan nature, the deanery recognizes that the document will not apply to Parishes in Labrador. Due to the unique geography of Labrador, this document will not be feasible without consultation from that Deanery. Third, as is evident from this motion the word “restructuring” is often used when examining the area of reorganizing Parishes. This deanery recognizes the negative images that this term often conjures up in the minds of its hearers and as such we have opted to refer to Parish reorganization as a process of “recreating community.” We recognize that impetus for change can come from many sources including a shift in demographics, a change in financial viability, and a sense that the Holy Spirit is doing a new and wonderful work in the midst of God’s people. It is the latter of these that we have chosen to focus on. The concept of recreating community is one that is mission focused. A Christian community can be recreated through any one or combination of the following: shared liturgy, shared Christian education, shared mission and/or shared administration. In presenting this process we hope that it will be a proactive approach to our current reactive reality.

Fourth, the Deanery of Conception Bay recognizes that when recreating community conflict is unavoidable. Change, by its very nature, involves resistance. With change comes the casting of a vision, the initial acceptance or resistance of that vision, an adjustment period, and then an acceptance stage. As such, parish plans must include strategies to confront resistance and all levels of leadership must be aware of it.

Fifth, this deanery upholds and affirms Canon 5 of the Constitution as it applies to those who are entitled to vote at a congregational meeting.

*Every baptized person who is at least sixteen years of age, is a member of or in Communion with the Anglican Church of Canada, and for at least three months prior to such meeting has been identifiably involved with the congregation in regular worship, fellowship, and financial support to that congregation, shall be qualified to vote at meetings of the congregation.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> This motion was moved by A. Gilbert and seconded by W. Savory.

<sup>2</sup> The Diocesan Constitution, Canon 5, Section 3.

Sixth, while this deanery affirms the Bishop's role in being a "faithful pastor and wholesome example for the entire flock of Christ"<sup>3</sup>, no conversation regarding the **administration** surrounding the mission of the Parish to recreate community should happen in isolation from the incumbent and the wardens. The incumbent, however, must always respect and be guided by the pastoral direction and leadership of their bishop.<sup>4</sup>

To conclude, the following document is intended as a guide to assist parishes within the Diocese in considering organization for future mission. The Conception Bay Deanery recognizes that no single document will meet the needs of every Parish. It is our hope, however, that this document will be general enough to be adapted to individual parishes; yet, specific enough to assist parishes with the potential re-organization process. This document, when adapted, can be used by many parishes in the Diocese, even if closing buildings is not in the foreseeable future, and it will be an invaluable tool in assisting them to become better stewards of their time and resources.

It is our hope that this document will be most helpful to the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador as we confront the pastorally sensitive issue of Parish reorganization. The process of recreating communities will enable us to be faithful to God as we struggle with how best to extend His kingdom in this time and in this place.

### **Definitions and Descriptions of Roles:**

Before beginning the process of recreating communities, leaders must clearly understand the definitions and descriptions of roles. The following is meant to assist us with this:

**Mission:** A mission makes clear our purpose of existence and it clarifies what it is the ministry/parish is supposed to be accomplishing. Although specific mission objectives vary from parish to parish, the general mission of all parishes is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19).

**Vision:** A vision is the map for the future of the ministry/parish. A vision is a set of objectives that will assist in upholding the mission. A vision must constantly be reevaluated as the strategy of the Parish(s) may or may not change.

**Community:** The community is the Eucharistic people gathered around the mission and the vision.

**Incumbent:** The incumbent is the cleric or other licensed person appointed by the Bishop to have charge of a Parish, including an appointed Rector, Priest-in-Charge, Deacon-in-Charge, or other designation approved by the Bishop.<sup>5</sup> It is necessary for the incumbent to invite the Bishop for a pastoral visit that would publicly demonstrate the Bishop's support for the Parish(s) on-going ministry.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services*, "Ordination of a Bishop", page 636.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, "Ordination of a Priest", page 646.

<sup>5</sup> The Diocesan Constitution, Chapter 1, Page 2.

**Bishop:** The Bishop is the pastor of the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, and as such, plays a strong *pastoral* role in the process of recreating community. It is essential that he or she give guidance, affirmation and support to the incumbent and parish throughout the entire process. The Bishop is key at all stages of the Parish Plan including the initial stages when the Parish discerns how best to carry out its mission. No stage of the plan happens in isolation from the Bishop.

**Diocesan Council:** The Diocesan Council is the body charged with overseeing Diocesan affairs between Synods. The Diocesan Council has the responsibility of oversight in Strategic Mission Option II.

**Administration and Finance Committee:** The Administration and Finance Committee is charged with overseeing the administrative issues pertaining to financial matters and property matters. The Administration and Finance Committee reports to the Diocesan Council. It will be a channel through which the **Parish Restructuring Committee** (*please see next definition*) would report to Diocesan Council and it would assist the Bishop in appointing such a committee.

**Parish Restructuring Committee:** Such a committee will be one of the recommendations of this document. This Sub Committee of the Administration and Finance Committee would be a body of four individuals, including the Office Manager/ Confidential Secretary to the Bishop and the Executive Archdeacon, along with two other members appointed by the Bishop to support a given Parish throughout the **entire** process of recreating community. Its role would be to regularly meet with a Parish throughout the process, and it would work with the Administration and Finance Committee, to make appropriate decisions pertaining to administrative issues in the areas of finances and property. The Administrative and Finance Committee will set the boundaries of the Parish Restructuring Committee.

With these key points in mind we will now turn to the actual process of recreating community. Each Strategic Mission Option will answer two questions: *What is the purpose of this option?* and *How will the community accomplish it?*

### **Strategic Mission Option I: BUILDING A FOUNDATION**

Building a solid foundation is key to the process of recreating community and, it must be noted that this process does not happen quickly. It takes time. How much time is needed is up to the individual parish to discern.

*What is the purpose of this option?*

- To determine how best we live out the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:19-20) in this time and in this place
- To develop a Vision, keeping in mind that the visioning process is on-going and that it must be reevaluated periodically
- To discern mission objectives asking, “What do we hope to achieve?”

*How will the community accomplish this?*

- By the leadership of the Parish(s) (both ordained and lay) doing the visioning and then the congregation(s), in due process, endorsing that vision.
- By conducting strategy workshops with lay leadership at the Parish level.
- By bringing the community together. This is necessary if the idea is to work. Some areas in which the community can work together are liturgy, children's/youth ministry, adult Christian education, mission and outreach, and administration.<sup>6</sup>
- By keeping the goal in mind- to have a more functional administrative, liturgical, and/or catechetical congregation(s) and/or Parish(s) and to more effectively use physical resources.<sup>7</sup>
- By discerning when to introduce new concepts and ideas. Timing is VERY important.
- By reserving Diocesan involvement to the Bishop's ongoing involvement.

## **STRATEGIC MISSION OPTION II: ADMINISTRATION**

Now that the Parish(s) and/or congregation(s) have developed a mission and vision, and that the potential for new ministry models has been realized, before such a new ministry model is official there is a legal reality that must take place. Discernment as to when to implement this strategic mission option is key to this entire process. Diocesan involvement is necessary and is required at this stage.

*What is the purpose of this option?*

- To approach the Diocese to make constitutionally legal/official what the Parish(s) has already become.

*How will the community accomplish this?*

- By the dissolving of individual vestries and/or congregation(s) into one vestry and congregation.<sup>8</sup>
- By approaching the Parish Restructuring Committee with a request to become one vestry and/or congregation. Appropriate motions must accompany this request. Please note that the involvement of this committee is not necessary until this point. The Parish Restructuring Committee must be involved only when decisions about structures, properties, and/or buildings are to be made.

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<sup>6</sup> This could involve the sharing of any or all of the following: financial committee, bank account, vestry(s), recorders, treasurers, lay administrators. Multiple vestries may also come together as one governing body. Possibilities for shared ministry are endless and specific to the needs of the Parish(s) or congregation(s).

<sup>7</sup> This may mean five congregations becoming three- still using three buildings but having one administrative body. It could also mean three congregations becoming one and using one building and one liturgical structure. It may include two separate parishes sharing a building. Any number of options is possible depending on the circumstance of the Parish(s) involved.

<sup>8</sup> Please note that for the purposes of this document this committee is working with the Constitution's understanding that a congregation does not exist without a vestry

- Although the community has already been operating under a consolidated leadership, in order to make the practice legally binding each individual vestry(s) must meet to make a motion
- After the vestry(s) has approved the decision it must be taken to a congregational meeting(s) for endorsement. As stated above, rules for voting as found in the Canon must be upheld and enforced.
- Upon Diocesan approval, the practice of the new vestry(s) and new congregation(s) is now legal. An entirely new administrative reality is realized.

### **STRATEGIC MISSION OPTION III: DISCERNMENT OF PHYSICAL ASSETS IN RELATION TO MISSION OBJECTIVES**

At this stage parishes will potentially begin confronting the pastorally sensitive issue of buildings. While resistance is felt throughout the entirety of this process, it is often strongest at this stage. Leadership, both ordained and lay, must be educated in the psychology of change. Encouragement and support for all levels of leadership is crucial at this time.

*What is the purpose of this option?*

- To discern what physical space is necessary as the Parish(s) continues meeting its mission objectives
- *How will the community accomplish this?*
- In referring to the Parish(s) mission objectives, the community will conduct an assessment of existing buildings to determine whether or not renovating is feasible or if selling is possible. It is appropriate to consult outside people at this stage (i.e. real estate agents, contractors, etc.)
- Members of the Parish Restructuring Committee are key participants at this stage.
- The newly formed vestry(s) will make the necessary decisions and formulate motions that are then taken to a congregational meeting(s). Note that the community has now been recreated to include one vestry(s) and one congregation(s). The mandate to move forward with the Parish(s) plan is now only needed from these two groups.
- As per the Constitution, minutes of all vestry and congregational meetings should be made available within seven days of the meeting.
- If or when the time comes to close an existing building steps must be taken to ensure that it is done in a pastorally sensitive manner. This will be a process of grief for many parishioners and care must be taken to treat it as such.

### **STRATEGIC MISSION OPTION IV: MISSION OBJECTIVES AND A NEW SPACE**

Once a new community has been formed consideration of the liturgical and administrative space needed to carry out the mission objectives is necessary. The needs of the community must be reflected in the potential design, renovation or construction of the building. This step varies from parish to parish depending on the needs and mission

objectives of each. Whether building a new structure or renovating an existing one, this stage must be discerned and mandated at the congregational level.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Upon speaking with parishes that have gone through this painful process, and in our own study and discussions of restructuring, the Deanery of Conception makes the following recommendations:

1. The Bishop must be involved in and aware of all stages of the Parish Plan.
2. Clergy who are within a Parish considering recreating community should be mentored by another priest as a source of support and encouragement. This mentor can be, but does not have to be, somebody who has already gone through this process.
3. Any dialogue with the Diocese regarding the implementation of the Parish plan must not be discussed in isolation from the incumbent and wardens. Again, with reference to the Diocese, any changes to be made to the Parish plan must not occur without the input of the incumbent and wardens.
4. All parish leadership, both ordained and lay, must be educated in the area of the “psychology of change.” This may involve presentations by “experts” in this area.
5. The establishment of the Parish Restructuring Committee would greatly assist parishes in this process. This committee, totaling four people including the Executive Archdeacon and the Office Manager/Confidential Secretary to the Bishop, as well as two other people to be appointed by the Bishop, would see the parish through the entire process of recreating community. It would report to the Administration and Finance Committee and to the Diocesan Council, Members of this committee would work with the Parish, A& F, and Diocesan Council. This committee is necessary to ensure continuity as a Parish moves forward with its mission objectives. The Deanery of Conception Bay suggests that membership of the Parish Restructuring Committee would change, with the exception of the Executive Archdeacon and the Office Manager/Confidential Secretary to the Bishop, for each parish under-going this process. Such a committee would ensure the Parish of Diocesan support and it would also ensure that the Diocese is informed about all matters pertaining to the Parish Plan.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion the Deanery of Conception Bay recognizes that demographics and other cultural factors have evolved to the point that our current administrative and physical structures no longer meet our ministry and mission needs. In this light, it is our hope that this document will assist in providing a way forward for the Church in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador. Through recasting a vision and by discerning mission objectives to meet the needs of the Church today, congregations will be able to take bold steps to more effectively proclaim the Gospel in this time and in this place.

