

Diocese of Kootenay: A Path Forward

To: Diocesan Council

From: The Diocesan Structures Working Group

December 1, 2022

Synopsis

Upon reviewing the feedback received at the Special Session of Synod on our suggested Primary Focus Areas (PFAs) and the discussions on the Green Shoots videos, the Structures Working Group believes **the institution of the Diocese of Kootenay—as it exists today—has entered a palliative state.**¹

Thus, we are in need of direction from Diocesan Council. This report describes how we arrived at this diagnosis, outlines several recommended paths forward, and requests approval of these. If Diocesan Council does not approve our suggested next steps, SWG requests specific direction on how it should proceed.

Current Status, Autumn 2022

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

—from Little Gidding by T.S. Eliot

Diocesan Council approved the SWG's Terms of Reference in January 2022. The Working Group reviewed these Terms in July of the same year. Our purpose is stated as follows:

The primary purpose of the SWG is to hold up an honest mirror of the structures and procedures of the Diocese and to critically examine what is working and not working. The SWG will make practical recommendations on restructuring or changes needed to enable the Diocese to adapt nimbly to serve Christ's mission, now and in the generations to come. This work will be grounded in the 5 Marks of Mission.

In October, the Working Group reflected on the feedback from Synod delegates on eight Priority Focus Areas (PFAs). This feedback consisted of the ranking of the primary areas², the verbal summaries from breakout

¹ "Gone by 2040?" Anglican Journal January 6, 2020. <https://anglicanjournal.com/gone-by-2040/>

² Delegates to the Special Synod ranked the Primary Focus Areas in this way:

1. Transitioning Ministries

groups coupled with the emotion in the delivery of these summaries (and also the comments on the Green Shoots videos).

Knowing the Place for the First Time

The Structures Working Group finds itself at the beginning of its task all over again and “knowing the place for the first time.” Our analytic work over the past year did indeed start to hold up a mirror to the Diocese and indicate what is working and not working. Furthermore, it provided a path forward in prioritizing particular Focus Areas as starting points for possible restructuring to be made. With this work accomplished, five truths have come into focus:

- 1) Bringing good health to the Diocese is not going to be a matter of fixing a broken leg, removing a gallstone, prescribing heart medicine and sending it home for recovery. It is a matter of recognizing that the institutional structure of the Anglican Diocese of Kootenay is dying and has now entered a palliative state. For those of us journeying with the dying institution and still rising every morning to attend to the practical realities of daily living, there is grief, fatigue, worry, the joy of reliving shared memories, laughter, and tears all set against the sure hope that God is right there with us. We need to recognize this, too.
- 2) Lack of clarity around the Diocesan vision is an impediment that leaves us centered on nostalgia and legacy issues versus new approaches and blazing new paths or methods. A clear vision is imperative to guide all decisions made in the Diocese at all levels (parish, regional, missional, diocesan). A vision does not need to be the ultimate destination, but point us in the same direction so we can move forward in a cohesive manner together. A shorter term vision may be exactly what is needed.
- 3) On a related note to the need for a clear vision, in our Constitution, p.7 (referring to Synod as being constituted for administration of the various affairs of the diocese, and specifically “the inculcation and maintenance of a sound doctrine, and true religion in the Diocese, to the glory of Almighty God, and the edifying and increase of the Church of Christ”), there seems to be no person or group specifically charged with developing, acting on, evaluating, and renewing the Vision, Mission, and strategic plans for the Diocese. Thus, decisions are often made ad hoc and on a one-off basis.

2. Cultivating Partnerships and Property -- tied for second

3. Diocesan Vision and Communications -- tied for third

4. New witnessing communities and Administrative efficiencies -- tied for fourth

5. Governance renewal

- 4) Many parishes find themselves in a heartbreaking quandary and quest for life as they live the reality of “transitioning.” These congregations, and the clergy who serve as part of these communities need support, mentorship, and new understandings of what parish life might look like in the current context. This current context includes: a) a dearth of Anglican, seminary-trained clergy available for hire; b) diminishing revenues that will not support full-time employee(s); c) aging buildings; and d) declining ability to contribute to the wider (diocesan, national) church. In crisis mode, they need this help now. What do they need to thrive, and how do we support them?

- 5) And yet, and yet...the paradox as we face decline, dwindling resources, and clergy burnout, is that “the Diocese of Kootenay is blessed with rich resources. We have an abundance of property throughout our Diocese, we are in a healthy financial position and we are rich in faithful people” (Synod Resolution 2021). We would add to the phrase “rich in faithful people” a further descriptor: our clergy who are unstinting in their care of the people and Christ’s mission in their locations and a hardworking laity.

We come back to the original question which was put to this group at Diocesan Synod in 2021: How do we transform the structures that are preventing the Diocese from thriving — even with all this abundance — and move and act nimbly in response to the call of the Spirit?

This question is based on certain assumptions that no longer hold. Instead, this Working Group proposes that the two most urgent questions requiring attention at this time are:

- *How might we allow our old structures to die well so that energy can be released and reconfigured in ways that support life for future generations?*

- *And at the same time, how might we support God's beloved people and congregations throughout the Diocese of Kootenay at a time of crisis and/or uncertainty?*

Recommendations and Matters for Further Work

There is much work to do at both the Diocesan and congregational levels. Because this work takes place in nested interrelated systems, the Structures Working Group suggests that this work be undertaken in parallel. Work at all levels of the system ought to inform work at other levels along the way.

Recommendations for the Bishop and Diocesan Council

Vision and Mission

- To develop a provisional vision and mission that will shepherd the work of the Diocese for the next two years, grounding it in a guiding theological framework that allows members and leaders of the Diocesan community to hold and honour the realities of both death and life amongst us.
- To guide all of us through the storm, with resources that hold the anxiety and unease people will be/are experiencing.
- To develop in conversation with scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, narrative, a compelling Diocesan story that allows people to see that God is with us now in the dying, and that life will come out of death.
- To assist in the development of said provisional vision and mission, the Diocesan Council, together with the Structures Working Group, imagine that the Diocese has indeed died and lies in the tomb. What are we mourning? And also, now what? What is God telling us about the resurrected Body of Christ we are being asked to live into? What does a resurrected Diocese look like? What will that “body” need to thrive? (Timeline: During Lent?)
- To commit to, use, and model language that does not equate church with a particular institutional model and management structure, but rather emphasizes the living faith of individuals and communities who are members of Christ's very body.

Addressing Systemic Dysfunction through Adaptive Change

- To ensure that any proposed new or adapted structures address the following interrelated challenges as part of the process of addressing the systemic issues at play in the diocese, the Bishop and Council will need to consider all of:
 - Personal Discipleship
 - Clergy Health
 - Individual congregants' spiritual and mental health
 - Missional Renewal
 - Congregational Vitality
- To support work with the college of clergy to identify the symptoms and causes of burnout being experienced, and to cocreate plans of action at individual, parish, regional, and diocesan levels that will effectively and measurably develop or adapt systems, structures, and networks in ways that enable them to thrive.
- To assess whether the Diocese has the capacity to undertake this work or if it will need to bring in a person or people with experience in leading organizations through adaptive change. If such a person or people are needed, to determine where the funding for this will come from.

Supporting Congregations in Crisis

- That Diocesan Council in collaboration with the Bishop and Executive Officer draw together a small group of people who can intervene in congregations currently experiencing crisis, by offering facilitation and support in this transitional period.
- That the Bishop and Diocesan Council provide an intentional discernment tool to these communities of faith, which will enable them to hold up an honest mirror to their current situation so that they may reflect on the state of ministry in their parish, bravely face the core issues, and discern their next faithful steps. Through this process, the tool will be evaluated for its efficacy, improved as necessary, before using the refined tool with all congregations in the Diocese.
- To hire or redeploy a skilled facilitator to assist both in the immediate interventions needed and in the development and refining of the intentional discernment tool to be used by all congregations.
- To ensure a basic approach/model is developed that congregations that are closing and the Diocese can use, to ensure all aspects (i.e. people, property, process, and legacy) are carefully and pastorally attended to.
- Allow congregations / parishes to have pastoral, spiritual space to grieve, and that closing a parish be done with dignity.
- That the whole Diocese be taught how to 'come alongside' congregations as they are dying, perhaps by praying for them at Sunday services, etc., so we experience that we are all in this together.
- To commit to, use, and model language that does not equate church with a particular institutional model and management structure, but rather emphasizes the living faith of individuals and communities who are members of Christ's very body

Developing, Equipping & Supporting Lay Leaders

- Lay (or non-seminary, non-stipendiary) leaders do now and will in future provide core leadership to many Christian communities in the Diocese of Kootenay. These leaders require further support both in the sense of training, but also in the sense of a new diocesan vision and imaginary for what leadership looks like.
 - For legacy congregations, much work needs to be done to learn, believe, and act as though lay, non-seminary, and non-stipendiary leadership is not second or third best.
 - For new and emerging congregations, different work will be necessary to orient people to an Anglican spirituality and practice
- Leaders of all sorts will need to be identified from existing congregations and beyond, who can help lead into God's emerging future.

Carrying the Work Forward

- That Diocesan Council create a task force to carry out these recommendations. This task force may be SWG, if SWG is willing, or it could be a new group. There should, however, be overlap so that the research that SWG has done does not need to be repeated. To hire a coordinator to support this task force and the implementation of the recommendations.

Recommendations for Existing Congregations

- For all congregations in the Diocese to go through the refined intentional “honest mirror” reflection exercise so they too may bravely address core issues, determine a path forward, and also, provide the Bishop and Diocesan Council with more accurate data about the issues they are facing. (Timeline: Pentecost?)
- As part of the exercise, for congregations to consider and suggest ways in which they could better care for their leaders so as to inform the work by the Bishop, Diocesan Council and the clergy to effectively and measurably develop or adapt systems, structures, and networks in ways that enable clergy (and lay leaders) to thrive.
- To commit to, use, and model language that does not equate church with a particular institutional model and management structure, but rather emphasizes the living faith of individuals and communities who are members of Christ’s very body

Recommendations for All Members of the Diocese of Kootenay

- To pray for the Bishop and Diocesan Council and all congregations in the midst of change , that the Prayer for Renewal may be the prayer of our hearts.
- To pray for discernment of the ways in which God is leading us—as individuals, and as members of Christian communities—to embrace the mystery of death and resurrection in our common life.

Recommendations for the Structures Working Group

- Based on the work and direction from Diocesan Council over Winter/Spring 2023, develop new Terms of Reference for approval by Diocesan Council by Summer 2023.
- For the Structures Working Group to look at the clear shift in perspective and its impact on the Primary Focus Areas and their “Bug Collection” and then work through the concrete actions needed to be taken in each of these areas to move the Diocese through the last stages of dying, through death itself and into resurrection. Also, to reevaluate the idea of “shepherds.”