

Report of the Strategic Planning Task Force
May 9, 2013

In his pastoral address to the Diocesan Convention in October, 2011, Bishop Miller called for “a new season of strategic planning” to guide the diocese and the Bishop in the coming years. A strategic planning task force was called together in the Spring of 2012 and has met over the last year to discuss the current state of the diocese, the geographical context in which we live, and the larger cultural context that is shaping the future of Christianity in the United States.

As we worked together, we began to ask some hard questions of ourselves, of each other, and of Bishop Miller and diocesan staff. These conversations helped to deepen our understanding of our particular religious and cultural context. We began to delineate a series of values that we thought characterized our shared commitments as the Body of Christ in Southern Wisconsin and honored our Anglican and Episcopal roots. These conversations culminated in a values document that is included here.

There are significant challenges facing Christianity in twenty-first century America. The Episcopal Church, like other denominations, has seen significant decline in all numerical benchmarks, from membership and average Sunday attendance to financial support. In the wider context, survey after survey shows that increasing numbers of Americans no longer claim any religious affiliation (the so-called “nones”), with that percentage of the population rising to 20% in some recent polling. The number of young people without any religious affiliation is much higher, nearing 40% in a recent survey. Equally dramatic, the number of Americans claiming to be Protestant has fallen below 50% for the first time in the history of the US.

The trends in the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee reflect these larger national developments. Since 2001, total membership has declined from nearly 14,000 to around 10,000; average Sunday attendance from nearly 6,000 to 4,000. A number of our parishes are struggling financially. As population continues to shift within our region, churches that were built in 19th or 20th century population centers may not be well-positioned to connect with current areas of population growth that reflect contemporary lifestyle patterns.

Our tendency is to interpret these trends as a narrative of decline from a glorious past. But the history of our diocese teaches a different lesson. The Episcopal Church in Wisconsin began with the heroic efforts of Bishop Kemper to plant churches on the frontier. Lay people shared his vision and sacrificed time, energy, and financial resources that built many of the churches and institutions that now make up the Diocese of Milwaukee. Along the way, many other churches and institutions (schools, mission efforts, and the like) were founded. Some thrived for a time and died; others were transformed to meet the needs of new situations and communities. Our history is a story of innovation, creativity, and mission. It is a story of success and failure.

Our greatest challenge in thinking about the future is simply this: we lack signposts and maps that lead us forward. It is fairly easy to read the “signs of the times.” It is much less

clear how we might venture into the uncharted territory of the future and create an Anglicanism that is faithful to the gospel and to our tradition and that speaks an authentic gospel clearly, convincingly, and compellingly in our new context.

This is the reality in which we live. We may mourn the past and worry about the present, but ultimately we are called to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the context in which we find ourselves. What that may mean will look different in urban, suburban, or rural environments, as we respond creatively and faithfully to the call of Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations.

It is our hope and prayer that the work we have done together as a task force may serve as a inspiration for congregations across the diocese, and for the diocese itself, as we seek to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Our Journey Together

Convened by Bishop Miller in the Spring of 2012, our group consisted of the following members: Bishop Miller, David Pfaff, Andrew Jones, Jonathan Grieser, April Behrends (Lisa Saunders participated for several months before moving to the Diocese of Texas); Mike Hagon, Jill Heller, Rob Mortensen, Meredie Scrivner, Janet Finn, and Kathy Flood. We met regularly throughout 2012 and the early months of 2013 and agreed in April, 2013 that we had accomplished what we could and needed to share the gist of our conversations and our learning with the broader diocese.

The charge that Bishop Miller gave the task force reads:

To assess where we (the Diocese of Milwaukee) are, to understand the challenges before us, and to discern how God is calling us to be Church in the years ahead through a process of listening to God and each other in prayer and holy conversation.

In addition, early in our time of working together, Bishop Miller highlighted several goals he hoped the strategic planning process would help clarify and inspire:

1. Increase knowledge and understanding of Holy Scripture and the faith of the Church for all members of the diocese.
2. Increase membership and deepen discipleship especially among those under 30 years of age
3. More effective diocesan communication with congregations and with clergy and lay leaders
4. Continue to provide Episcopal Church presence in small communities
5. Reduce parish assessments to 10% without reducing current programming and support.

“The Diocese”

We discerned in the initial stages of our conversation that the idea of “diocese” is itself a matter of considerable confusion. When we say “diocese,” do we mean the Bishop and Staff? The congregations, ministries, and entities that are the institutional forms of our life as Episcopalians? Do we mean the clergy? The lay people? Do we mean the geographical borders within which we live? Do we mean all the people who live in our area, or only the Episcopalians? Often, we use the term “diocese” to refer to Nicholson House, Bishop Miller and his staff, and use the term to distinguish between those structures and people and the local congregation.

Our current, perhaps unstated, model of the diocese is based on the life of Corporate America, with Nicholson House as the “home office” and Bishop Miller as our CEO. That model is more a reflection of twentieth-century American institution building than it is of Episcopal history, the history of the Christian Church, or indeed, of Scripture. Are there other models that are more faithful to our tradition and to scripture, and more adaptive to our current context? How can we all, clergy and laity, in all of our congregations, claim our shared identity and shared responsibility to be the Diocese of Milwaukee?

Our conversations about what we mean by “diocese” coalesced in the following mission statement:

As the body of Christ in Southern Wisconsin, the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee witnesses to the love of God in Jesus Christ through faithful, effective, and innovative ministry, carried out by congregations, clergy and laity, worshipping communities and other mission-focused ministries.

The Values of the Diocese of Milwaukee

Our conversations and shared engagement culminated in a document that seeks to identify core areas of mission and ministry. Each congregation and entity in the Diocese of Milwaukee should seek to incarnate these core areas in some way in their particular context. We intend this document to be a way for congregations, clergy and lay leadership, and diocesan leadership to focus their energy and effort. They are a reflection of our distinct Anglican ethos, our response to God’s call to us, and ways in which we participate in the Mission of God.

The Way Forward.

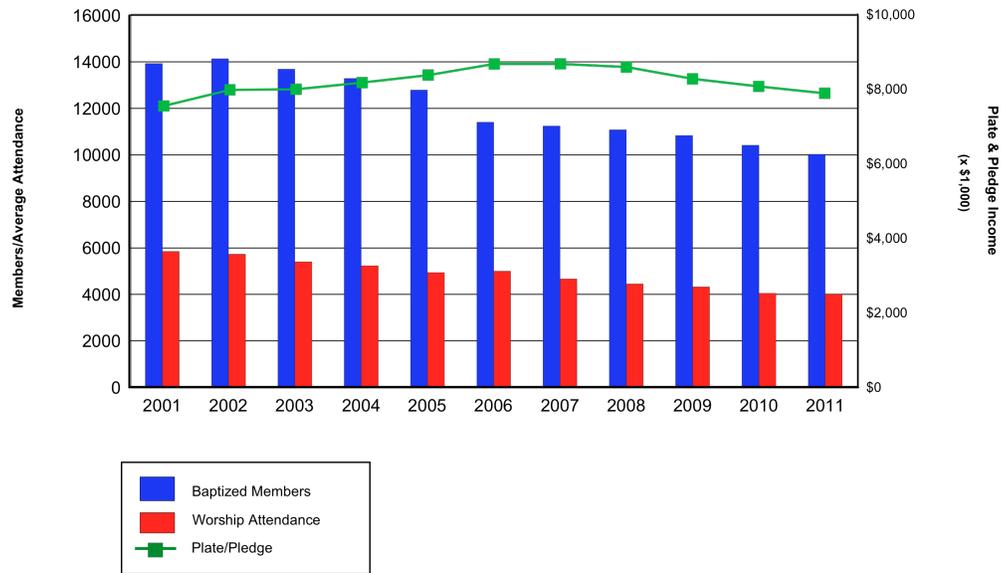
We are truly at a crossroads. The path that has brought us here is clear but we cannot turn around and retrace our steps. Looking ahead, in one direction lies a clear road, a journey of decline, irrelevance, and ultimately death. We have resources adequate to oversee quiet and comfortable internments of most of our congregations and ministries, in five, ten, or twenty years. Some may be able to hold out longer but their ends are assured as well.

But we have a choice. In another direction lies an uncharted path, full of possible dangers and completely unknown. The Christian Church, Anglicanism, the Episcopal Church have all faced such crossroads in the past. We are here today because our fore-parents chose the path into the unknown, leaving behind the comfort and certainty of past and present for an unknown, uncharted, and challenging future. We are faithful to their legacy only if we repeat their choice. If we do so, we will be like Jesus' first disciples who instead of wallowing in fear and sadness when he departed them, obeyed his command to

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (*Mt. 28:19-20*)

Current trends in the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee

Participation & Giving Trends Diocese of Milwaukee (1180-4986)



from: <http://pr.dfms.org/study/Charts.aspx>

Shared Values and Characteristics of Vital Ministry in the Diocese of Milwaukee

As the body of Christ in Southern Wisconsin, the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee witnesses to the love of God in Jesus Christ through faithful, effective, and innovative ministry, carried out by congregations, clergy and laity, worshiping communities and other mission-focused ministries.

In a time of rapid change and growing challenges to our financial and human resources, the Diocese will actively explore new forms of ministry and mission, using new models of worship and governance, while continuing to honor traditional forms of parochial life. We anticipate and are excited by a broadening array of approaches to being one body in Christ, knowing that, guided by the Holy Spirit, we will find limitless ways to do God's work.

Grounded in our faith in Jesus Christ as experienced in scripture and the Anglican tradition, ministry in the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee will be characterized by our common values of ***discipleship, relationship, stewardship*** and ***worship***.

Discipleship, responding to Jesus' call to follow him, is integral to Episcopal life. Members and ministries of the Diocese will work to equip members to live, learn and share our faith that it might grow.

- Active evangelism to invite and develop new disciples is a mark of every committed Episcopalian
- We will develop and share resources for Christian formation for all ages among congregations and across the diocese
- We recognize that each and every member, ministry and worshiping community has equal value and potential to serve as a disciple of Jesus

Relationship reminds us that together we are the body of Christ and together we will do His work.

- We share our belief in the Incarnation, that God gave us his Son, as a human, to do God's work on earth. God has asked us to do the same, not as individuals or parishes, but as one body of Christ.
- Effective, intentional and accessible communication is at the heart of any successful relationship.
- We commit to collaboration and cooperation, to replicate and improve successful models for ministry throughout the Diocese
- We will share our successes throughout the Diocese, not hoard them for our own control or accolades
- We believe that we all are stronger when each one is stronger

Stewardship honors God's abundance and cultivates God's blessings to assure the future of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee. Effective stewardship is required to assure our ability to answer God's call to us.

- All ministries, programs, parishes, worshiping communities and entities within the Diocese commit to effective and responsible stewardship of all resources in their care
- Tomorrow is at least as important as today. Yesterday may be celebrated or mourned, but tomorrow is vital to carrying out God's call to us.
- Our primary call is to do God's work on earth. Sometimes responsible stewardship requires us to do that work in a different, but perhaps even more effective way than current practice.
- The Diocese will seek innovative ways to fund ministries and worshiping communities in order to maximize their impact and minimize their use of limited resources

Worship is at the center of our common life. Our liturgy and tradition of Anglican openness set us apart from other Christian groups. Whether traditional or non-traditional, wherever and whenever it is practiced, worship defines us as Episcopalians. It is an essential dimension of our mission; it shapes our common life, and forms us as disciples of Jesus Christ.

- We value Episcopal presence wherever it is and we seek to grow that presence in new people and places within the Diocese
- We honor our liturgical foundation and incorporate it into all ministry
- We believe worship may be as simple as a prayer before a meal or as elaborate as a majestic Eucharist in a spectacular cathedral. Each is equally valuable.

Some Recommendations

Given the recent downward trends in attendance and membership as well as the unsustainable financial reality facing the diocese and many of our congregations, we cannot afford to continue “business as usual.” If we do, in a few years, decades at most, the last Episcopalians in the Diocese of Milwaukee will be turning off the lights and locking the doors of our last churches and diocesan offices.

Our polity, diocesan constitutions and canons, limit the power of the Diocese to intervene in congregations. That means we must identify and implement creative models for ministry. Only this will ensure not just the survival of the Diocese of Milwaukee, but that it will be a vibrant, faithful, and effective witness of God’s love in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends that the Executive Council explore and implement ways for those in authority to make some decisions about the future. While some parishes may not find a way to participate constructively in such decision-making, we believe most parishes will accept support and engage with the Diocese and with their fellow Episcopalians to work together for a stronger future.

The Task Force recommends the following:

- Every member and entity of the Diocese must recognize that together we make up the Body of Christ in this area. As Paul writes in I Corinthians 12:20-21: “As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’.” The strong must support the weak, and the weak should not reject help that is offered to them.
- The Executive Council will accept responsibility for working with challenged parishes to identify current problems and begin thinking about more effective approaches. The financial stability of some congregations increases the urgency of this task.
- The Bishop, Diocesan staff, and leadership will encourage and engage in innovative and creative new ministry initiatives.
- The Executive Council, with the assistance of Diocesan staff, will develop and promote methods by which two, three or more parishes and entities may join to do ministry in a collaborative fashion.
- The Bishop, Diocesan staff and Executive Council will to creating an atmosphere of trust, collegiality and teamwork as it works with all parishes on these issues.
- The Diocese will commit to developing effective communications between Diocesan offices and congregations and among congregations, clergy, and laity.

- The Bishop, staff, lay and clergy leadership will commit to learning from, sharing with, and encouraging conversations with other dioceses engaged in re-imagining and innovating ministries in our changing cultural contexts.