

FROM RISK TO OPPORTUNITIES:

CONGREGATIONAL RENEWAL IN THE DIOCESE OF BETHLEHEM

I. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discern the standards, practices, and resources that will foster **faithfulness of ministry** in every congregation of the Diocese. The object is that the Committee will become the catalyst and agent for a multi-year program to shepherd all congregations of the Diocese to renewal and transformation, and to move from risk to opportunities.

We suggest that the mission and instrumentality of the Committee is to:

- Strengthen all parishes, especially those that have exhibited vitality;
- Inspire and provide resources to those congregations “at risk”; and
- Provide self-realization and eventuality to those congregations that have lost their sense of purpose or vitality.

II. Background

The mission of the Congregational Development Committee in the past has been to support dependent congregations through financial grants; to support congregations in long-range planning; and to foster the development of new congregations. Over the past several months an ad hoc committee of interested persons in the Diocese has met concerning the role of congregational development in the Diocese. A drafting team was tasked to develop a report. It convened four mini-consultations with representative groups from across the Diocese to provide information, background and suggestions to a reconstituted Committee. This report is the result.

III. Mission and Naming

The Catechism in the Prayer Book states that: *The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. The mission is pursued as it prays, worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love. This mission is carried out through the ministry of all its members.* This proclaims that our

first and primary relationship is with God; the second relationship is in the worship and proclamation of the church; and the third relationship is with the community and the world. We suggest that this should be adopted as the Mission Statement of the Committee.

The second suggestion is that the Committee be renamed **The Committee on Congregational Renewal**. This aligns the Committee with the mission statement, and with both the goal and process.

IV. Assumptions

1. The bedrock of Christian action is a spiritual life, which must start, direct, and sustain all congregational life.
2. Congregations must focus on their strengths rather than on their weaknesses.
3. Congregations can greatly strengthen their witness when they link up with neighboring congregations in cooperative ventures.
4. Congregations do better when they do not become dependent upon outside sources.
5. Many clergy are ill-prepared to lead a small rural or village church.
6. Every congregation in the Diocese must be included in the renewal and transformational process at the appropriate level.

V. The Process

We suggest that the Committee adopt a process that has these elements and stages:

1. **PRAYER** We suggest that a context of prayer be established as follows:
 - A. The preparation of a prayer that can be used at services of worship, for private prayer, or prayer groups.
 - B. A day of guided prayer, meditation, and reflection for all clergy.
 - C. A Diocesan-wide meeting to begin the process with prayer and invocation of the Holy Spirit.
 - D. Establishment of a prayer group in every congregation to pray for the renewal and transformation of all the congregations of the diocese.

2. **CONGREGATIONAL DISCERNMENT** Congregations should engage in a process of discernment which focuses on their strengths rather than on their weaknesses. One way to do this is through asset mapping, which is not only creates a positive process, but also provides clear data and relational opportunities and unleashes the creative imagination of people and congregations to what can be.
3. **STRATEGIC PLANNING** Each congregation should be involved in strategic planning, which has goals, objectives, and benchmarks. There is a need to have a common Diocesan strategic planning instrument that would reap a common baseline of information and data, as well as be systemic and unify the Diocesan effort.
4. **PARTNERSHIPS**
5. **MUTUAL MINISTRY**
6. **COVENANTING**
7. **REVIEW & EVALUATION**

VI. Implications and Recommendations

1. There needs to be a full-time Diocesan staff person.
2. There needs to be a budget for a multi-year program.
3. There needs to be a Coordinating Committee that regularly brings together the various Diocesan Committees, with the staff person for the Committee on Renewal as the convener.
4. Those congregations not capable of faithfulness to ministry should be subject to the action of the appropriate Diocesan instrumentality for closure;
5. There needs to be attention given to pastors of small congregations on how to live and work in rural culture; how to understand the nature of the small church; how to administer in a small church; how to develop church programs with limited resources; and how to manage conflicts. Ways to address these issues might include clergy days on the dynamics of ministry in small and/or rural congregations; regular meetings of clergy and congregations predicated by their location and size; a course in the Bishop's School on ministering in

the small and rural parish; and workshops at Training Day on issues that affect the small congregation.

6. We need to rethink clergy leadership in parishes. Given both the lack of availability and the cost of clergy, there may be a need to provide greater emphasis on training for lay leadership for worship.
7. We need to establish linkage to the National Church's Strategic Planning, especially in the area of strengthening congregations;
8. We need to make available greater resources for leadership training, especially for those in rural and small communities;
9. We need to have a common instrument for strategic planning for congregations to establish mission statements, goals, objectives, and benchmarks;
10. We need to reestablish a relationship with Percept for assistance with demographic data; and,
11. We need to study those parishes identified in the State of the Church Report showing significant growth.