

**“SEE, I AM MAKING
ALL THINGS NEW”
(Revelation 21:5)**

**REPORT OF
THE TASK FORCE
ON
RURAL AND/OR STRUGGLING PARISHES**

ADOPTED BY THE DIOCESAN SYNOD

June 2009

Members of the Task Force

The Ven. Pat Drummond, Chair

The Rev. Rod Black and Louise Whalen – Archdeaconry of Chatham

The Rev. Dr. Ranall Ingalls and Shara Golden – Archdeaconry of Fredericton

The Rev. Chris Hayes and Martin MacMullin – Archdeaconry of Woodstock

The Rev. Eileen Irish and Robert Cormier – Archdeaconry of Saint John

The Rev. Canon John Matheson and Doug Goss – Archdeaconry of St. Andrews

The Rev. Chris VanBuskirk and Cheryl Young – Archdeaconry of Moncton

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Executive Summary of the Report on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes

As a result of a motion that was approved at the 2007 Synod, Bishop Claude Miller set up our task force to prepare a report in response to the question of "... how best to continue this Synod's historic commitment to rural and struggling parishes."

As the task force consulted with parish leaders it became clear that most of the 85 parishes in the diocese are struggling in one way or another, not just those in rural areas. Our people share a deep concern about our future, and there is a growing recognition that, if we don't begin doing certain things differently, the very future of the Anglican Church in New Brunswick is at risk.

Certainly there are many, many good things happening across the diocese, thanks to our clergy and people. Nevertheless, statistics and information gathered from our own annual reports from the past 10 years tell us we are a church in decline: for example, Sunday attendance is down 16.2%, there are 17.6% fewer identifiable givers, the total number of individuals and families has decreased 11.2%, in percentage terms the total of parish contributions to the diocese has declined about 2%, for most parishes and the diocese income is insufficient to meet budgetary requirements (despite a 35% increase in annual giving), approximately one third of our parishes cannot now afford a full-time priest, our 85 parishes have a total of 312 properties and leaders report that costs associated with maintenance are becoming a real burden, there are 34% more funerals than baptisms, over half of our baptized children do not go on to become confirmed, and we (especially our elderly members) do not seem to have the time, energy, skills or commitment to do youth work or engage in mission/outreach/evangelism.

It is important to understand that societal changes over the past 30-40 years have contributed to what is happening at the parish level. For example, New Brunswick's overall population has been declining for the past 11 years, in part because the provincial birthrate is 66% less than what it was 40 years ago. Our rural communities are in decline – many rural residents, especially young people, are moving to urban areas and many NBers are leaving the province in pursuit of job opportunities elsewhere. And as we know only too well, fewer people go to church on Sundays.

There is little value in looking in the rear view mirror and saying 'we should have done this or that differently'. We must look forward with confidence that God will lead us ... if we will let Him ... and we must embrace the idea that systemic change is needed if we are to grow spiritually, numerically and financially and become a stronger and healthier church.

Following many hours of discussion and much prayer, the Task Force has concluded that we need to go back to basics and begin a new phase of our Christian journey. We need a period and a program of personal learning and self-examination to see more clearly what God is calling us to be and to do now. This will help us to rediscover our Anglican identity and relearn how to live out our Christian faith in today's culture. We are recommending that every parish enter a period of self-examination. Further, we are suggesting they use tools such as our "10 marks of a healthy parish" document (see appendix 2). Similarly our diocesan leaders need to reassess current administrative structures, programs and budgets to ensure we are efficiently and effectively contributing to the attainment of our stated mission ("to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the making of disciples") and our vision ("a diocese of healthy, mission-focused, welcoming and growing parishes").

Our task force has embraced the ideas and principles that Bishop Edward Salmon shared with our clergy and diocesan council. His wise counsel is that the diocese is the fundamental unit of the Anglican Church, and it must be strong organizationally in order to fulfill its primary role – that of supporting and encouraging parishes in their efforts to become self-sustaining, strong and healthy. Indeed, the diocese and its parishes are inter-dependent. Both need to be strong.

Given our current situation, systemic change is called for. As we begin this process, we need to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as we consider what to do next and we need to use the gifts that God has given us. As individual parishes and as a diocese we are at the proverbial fork in the road. We have a choice – will we venture down the road trusting in God and supporting each other as we seek change, growth and renewal, or will we stay on the road we know, the road on which we have been travelling for the last many years? The Task Force believes we need to make an intentional decision to take a new road, in the hope and expectation of positive change, growth and renewal, according to God’s will for His church.

These recommendations are made with the belief that they will strengthen us as parishes and as a diocese, and help synod continue its historical commitment to rural and struggling parishes. (*Note: the rationale for these recommendations is included in the full report that follows*):

Recommendation 1 - Renewed as Christians & Unified as Anglicans

1. That we turn again to the principles of our Anglican Christian identity, especially through learning and self-examination, and a renewal of our minds and hearts; and that we begin with (a.) the study of, and adherence to, the “Rule of Life” (see appendix 3 - p. 555 of the BCP) and (b.) daily Scripture reading and daily prayer. (*Note: when possible and practical this should be through public Morning and Evening Prayer – wherever two or three can come together in His Name.*)

Recommendation 2 - Change needed at diocesan and congregational levels

2A. Now and on a regular basis, that the diocese and every parish conduct self-assessments to evaluate current ministries and ensure on-going organizational health.

- **In a review of parish ministries the “10 Marks of a Healthy Parish” could be a useful tool (see appendix 2), and the results could be used as a springboard to change and risk-taking;**
- **In a review of diocesan ministries there could be an assessment of current diocesan ministries (programs, budgets, staffing levels, outcomes, etc.) as well as administrative processes and structures to ensure they are making solid contributions to our mission and vision**

2B. That struggling parishes be encouraged and assisted as they examine different models of shared ministry, and that financial support be offered by the diocese to those that are ready, willing and able to change and take risks in order to grow spiritually, numerically and financially.

Recommendation 3 - More people involved in community outreach and mission
(**& fewer people involved in “parish administration”**)

3A. That the diocese immediately establish a Congregational Development Fund to support congregations (alone or in a shared ministry context) that make a decision to focus on growth through mission and community outreach; that funding for this program come initially from an annual appeal to every Anglican in the diocese; and that this whole initiative be overseen by the Parish Support and Development Team of Diocesan Council, whose membership would need to be expanded to include representatives from each of our nine deaneries;

3B. That parishes, regardless of size or location, be eligible to apply for financial support from this fund for a specific number of years – according to a clearly defined and time-limited plan;

3C. That all parishes in the archdeaconry/deanery of these risk-taking parishes, proactively and without hesitation, offer them as much support as possible in order to help them grow, become healthier and sustain themselves in the long term.

(Note: this concept of the diocese and neighbouring parishes actively supporting congregations grow has been an important part of our heritage and tradition. It began in the 1700’s and became stronger through Bishop Medley’s episcopate. The Task Force senses that it is time to reintroduce this concept.)

Recommendation 4 - Our leaders need support and new learning opportunities

4A - That diocesan council oversee the establishment of a five year clergy and lay leadership development program focused on systemic change;

4B - As part of this plan, that a “Leadership and Learning Weekend” be held on the same weekend each year and feature a variety of workshops and learning events for clergy and lay leaders (wardens, treasurers, Sunday School superintendents, mission/outreach coordinators, youth leaders, etc); and that these learning weekends be rotated among the archdeaconries;

4C - For the next several years, that the focus of the diocesan Clergy College be on growth and systemic change within the church, and the important role that clergy have to play in that process;

4D – That the efforts of the Parish Support and Development Team be supported so they can recruit and train (using existing budgets) a group of experienced and willing Anglicans capable of helping congregations and parishes deal with local challenges related to such topics as congregational growth, change, stewardship, visioning and planning.

Recommendation 5 - Money and teaching what the Bible says
about ‘giving’ and stewardship

5A. That we begin immediately in every parish – using a variety of methods – to teach and discuss what the Bible says about faith, money, ‘first fruits’ giving and the generous offering to God of our time, talent and treasure;

5B. That, within the existing budget, diocesan council ensure knowledgeable and experienced people are available to support and guide parishes in their stewardship and congregational development efforts;

5C. That synod be encouraged to endorse the 10-10-10 model of financial sharing used in the Diocese of South Carolina, and that we immediately start working toward it.

5D. That Greater Chapter representatives on Diocesan Council be charged with explaining the annual diocesan budget to parish representatives and then gather input that can be brought back to Council before the budget is formulated.

Recommendation 6 - Improved communication to help build a culture of caring & support

6A. That every parish vestry name a person, preferably a vestry member, as “the parish communications officer” with responsibility for (a.) ensuring its DIMS information is kept up to date, and (b.) gathering and sharing important parish, deanery, diocesan and national church information with the vestry and the congregation, and that this person be ‘technologically capable’ if at all possible;

6B. That the diocese continue to monitor and keep current the DIMS information as well as its various communication mechanisms such as the N.B. Anglican and e-news, and use them to effectively, efficiently and economically provide timely and important information to Anglicans across the diocese.

THE COMPLETE REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON RURAL AND/OR STRUGGLING PARISHES

February 12, 2009

Introduction

The following resolution from the 2007 Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton led to the formation of our task force and guided us as we prepared this report and its recommendations:

“Be it resolved that this Diocesan Synod respectfully request the Bishop:

- 1) to appoint a committee to deal with the question of how best to continue this Synod’s historic commitment to rural and struggling parishes;*
- 2) to charge this body to undertake a wide-ranging diocesan consultation with rural and struggling parishes on his behalf, in order to gain the best knowledge possible of their circumstances, hopes, aspirations, and needs;*
- 3) to charge this body to draw up recommendations or proposals about how best to continue this commitment as soon as possible after this consultation, including cost estimates and suggestions as to where the monies might be found to cover costs; and*
- 4) to ensure that this body is charged with no other business, so that its members can devote themselves to this good work.*

It is suggested that another individual or group of archivists or historians might help this committee by drawing up a brief history of the forms this commitment has taken from our eighteenth-century beginnings up to the present.”

Very early on it became apparent to the task force that many, if not most, of our 85 parishes are struggling – regardless of their location. It also became evident that many of our clergy and lay leaders are worried about the health of our congregations, parishes and the diocese, and concerned about our future. We also learned that our parishes are seeking support and guidance as they try to maintain their presence and grow church ministry in times of economic and social uncertainty, and spiritual confusion.

Given all of that, we have tried very hard to produce a report that is Biblically grounded, consistent with Anglicanism and our faith traditions, realistically achievable, and beneficial to our parishes - both now and in the future. In order to do this we have considered synod’s historical commitment to rural and struggling parishes from the eighteenth century to the present. As well, the task force invited a number of people to share their knowledge and experience on such topics as: demographic/population trends, the layreaders program, the diaconate, and shared ministry/inter-parish cooperation. We have read and discussed the merits of several books (see appendix), examined various web sites to gather information on “turning around” ministry in rural and/or struggling parishes, and gathered research data. Three of our members attended an Atlantic conference on the subject of “Leading the Church Through Change”. We conducted a statistical analysis of the annual reports and financial statements of our parishes. And, most importantly, we held a series of regional consultations, which gave representatives of our 85 parishes a chance to tell us about their circumstances, hopes, aspirations, and needs.

Throughout the process we tried to “look deeper” to determine why so many parishes are struggling and also “look forward” to propose new directions that will help us reverse the trends that are causing us to struggle. We want our report to be positive in both outlook and focus –

concentrating, not on what may have gotten us where we are now, but on what needs to be done to strengthen our local parishes so that, in turn, our diocese will be strong as well.

We write our report with a belief that our diocesan vision is most appropriate: “a diocese of healthy, mission-focused, welcoming and growing parishes.” But how do we become such a diocese? This quote by the Rev. Dr. Herbert O’Driscoll, a recognized and respected Anglican Church leader, seems appropriate: “Many parts of today’s church need very badly to be addressed in this way (*see Isaiah 40:1-11*) not with condemnation or the laying on of guilt trips. People need to hear a voice that is comforting and tender but is also inspiring. There is no need to deny that much has been lost and much needs to be re-built. There is no need to deny that both leaders and people are weary and even despairing. What does need to be said again and again is that God is with us, whatever the situation. We possess everything that any former age possessed. We possess the word of God, the sacramental food and drink of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit of God, and the presence of the risen Christ. The Jerusalem we must build will not be the same as the Jerusalem we remember, but the point is that we should re-build it.”

Our Past & Our Present Situation

The synod of the Diocese of Fredericton has had a long-standing commitment to Anglican Church ministry in rural areas. From the late 1700’s, through the Loyalist period and the episcopacy of Bishop Medley, and on into the 20th century our smaller, often struggling and rural churches have benefited from the support of sister churches and the people of the diocese.

Some very important societal and cultural changes have taken place in New Brunswick over the last 40 or so years – and these changes have affected our church in a major way: for example, fewer people regularly attend church, our birthrate is declining, our average age is increasing, the population in rural communities is shrinking, local institutions are disappearing (local businesses, banks, schools, hospitals, grocery stores ... even gas stations) and many costs have risen quite dramatically (eg gas and oil, insurance, property maintenance, etc). Virtually all of these changes and trends are beyond the control of our local parishes, but they are having a dramatic effect on each one’s health, strength and future viability.

During the regional consultations the Task Force heard about many, many good things that are happening around our diocese. Our congregational representatives told us that we are blessed to have vibrant and active groups within our congregations – the ACW, youth groups, puppet groups, Mothers’ Union, Guilds of St. Joseph, mission/outreach committees, prayer teams, and so many more. Our Sunday worship services are a blessing to so many of us. Congregations and individuals are helping to care for those in need: we support the Rev. Paul Jeffries and the Bishop McAllister School in Uganda, we send money to PWRDF, we go on international mission trips and we are active in many community outreach ministries, just to name a few. Our church buildings, especially those built in Bishop Medley’s time, are important to us, and we are diligent in their care and maintenance, despite increasing costs.

While all that is positive, our consultations and our research has told us that all is not well for us as individual parishes and as a diocese. We are indeed struggling. Among the challenges and concerns raised during our consultations were these:

- Although retired clergy and layreaders are available to officiate at their Sunday services, many of our parishes are without full-time clerical leadership
- Many congregations see the rapidly rising cost of property maintenance and parish contributions to the diocesan budget as two particularly heavy burdens

- Our congregations are aging – there is often a notable absence of children, youth and middle-aged adults. Faithful Anglicans are concerned that their children and grandchildren are not worshipping with us on Sundays.
- We value our small community churches. Often our Sunday morning congregations are small. Those who love those churches seem reluctant to travel too far to worship with other congregations, even those within the same parish
- The traditional liturgies, patterns of worship and music that are loved by so many of us may not touch everyone’s hearts and minds the same way. This seems especially true for younger generations. Making changes in our worship patterns is often difficult and upsetting, especially for our long-serving members. Nevertheless, more and more congregations are using new liturgies and new worship music with positive results.
- Our parishes often feel alone and isolated – this is especially true of those in rural areas where so many community symbols (schools, businesses, banks, etc) are disappearing.
- Many smaller congregations know they need help – financial help to maintain ministry, improved partnerships with other congregations and more diocesan care and concern – but often don’t know to whom they can turn
- The church is no longer part of mainstream culture – Christians and regular church-goers seem to be in the minority. This is one of the main reasons our attendance is declining.
- Given today’s cultural reality, our people want to know how to “guard the faith” that has been given to us by the generations who have gone before
- Evangelism and encouraging people to “come to faith” or even to “come back to church” are seen as a difficult challenge for many of our people and congregations
- Communication, within our congregations, with other congregations and with the synod office, is a real concern. This ‘lack of communication’ seems to have resulted in fear and distrust, an isolationist approach to ministry and reduced personal/parish commitment to support ministry beyond the local level
- People are asking if the traditional leadership roles and duties assumed by clergy, wardens and vestry members are still appropriate in our current situation. Training for clergy and lay leaders is seen as a growing need.

Our Congregational Leaders Offered These ‘Main Messages’

Our task force asked congregational representatives this question: “What are the ‘main messages’ that you want the task force to hear?” Here is our summary of what we were told:

1. Communication needs to improve

We need to share information more transparently and openly, within our congregations and parishes, across our diocese and in our personal relationships with others. Neighbouring parishes need to talk with each other more often. Improved communication will help ensure that our clergy and lay leaders are aware of congregational needs and expectations.

2. Congregations need help – both resources and expertise

In most parishes income isn’t keeping up with expenses. Congregational leaders need help reversing this trend. There is a sense that parishes are being forgotten. People are willing to discuss “shared ministry”, but first people need to understand what that means. There is an openness to change – for example, new models for ministry, congregational visioning processes

and congregational growth initiatives. Our congregations often don't know whom to call when they need help "figuring things out".

Not surprisingly, given the tight economic circumstances, some are questioning the amount of money that leaves their parish to support ministry at the diocesan and the national church levels. As was the case at the 2007 synod, the idea of South Carolina's 10-10-10 formula was raised by several parish representatives. There were also suggestions that the diocese should re-establish a program of financial assistance for parishes that are struggling.

3. We need full-time priests and stronger lay leadership

Some small parishes seem content with part-time and fill-in (often retired) clergy. Others very much want full-time priests but do not have the resources at this time. There is confusion regarding the amount of money a parish must be able to raise to support a full-time priest. There is a growing recognition that our lay leaders need to play a greater role. To help that happen, Bishop Salmon has recommended clergy need to 'give up' some of the things they've traditionally done and 'raise up' lay leaders to new levels of responsibility. Lay people seem increasingly ready to accept this new role, but clergy first need to 'let go'. New leadership training and commissioning programs are needed.

4. Value small churches

Many small congregations are barely hanging on and want to know how they can maintain an Anglican presence – a footprint – in their (rural) communities. There is a fear that 'someone' (perhaps the Bishop?) is going to close our small churches. Many of our people have said they don't want to become part of what they call would call a 'mega-church'. Many small church congregations have indicated a willingness to look at new models of ministry, new programs and new organizational structures if that's what it takes to maintain local churches.

5. If it will strengthen local-level ministry there is a willingness to reorganize and restructure

While it may be difficult, many of our congregations seem ready and willing to change in order to grow. The regional consultations seem to have opened the door to parishes discussing common problems. Following these regional consultations there has been a renewed interest in archdeaconry and deanery gatherings to share ideas and look at shared solutions to common problems and challenges. The goal has to be to strengthen local congregations and parishes.

6. Let's act now!

Our congregations do not want their ideas to be lost, and do not want this report to gather dust. There is a sense of urgency and a desire to act on problems. Parish leaders cautioned our task force that "a one size fits all" approach will not work. People want to be involved in the processes that lead to solving problems and meeting challenges.

Facts That Help Us Understand Our Present Situation

The Task Force felt that it was important to gather factual information so we could understand the present situation and the trends that got us here ... before we formulated our conclusions and developed recommendations. So we examined New Brunswick's overall population trends and gathered data from the past 10 years of parish annual reports.

Here is some basic information:

- we are a diocese of 85 separate parishes in seven archdeaconries and these nine deaneries: Woodstock (10 parishes), Chaleur-Miramichi (10), Fredericton (9 – including the Cathedral), York (8), Shediac (12), Kingston/Kennebecasis (14), Saint John (9), St. Andrews (8) and Lancaster (5)

- we have 59 priests who work full time and five who work part-time in parish or diocesan positions; we have seven retired clergy who are in part-time, stipendiary parish positions
- at this time approximately 30 of our 85 parishes (approximately 35%) are not able, on their own, to raise enough money to have their own full-time priest
- collectively our 85 parishes have a total of 312 properties (162 churches, 76 rectories, 68 halls and 6 other buildings)

From research done on parish reports for the 10 year period from 1997 to 2006 we became aware of the following facts and trends:

- Total parish offerings increased from \$5.9 to \$7.4 million (+35%)
- Total parish income increased from \$8.5 to \$13.6 million (+60%)
- Total parish investment income increased from \$590,000 to \$928,800 (+57%)
- The contribution requested of the parishes to the diocesan budget, as a percentage of total parish income, has decreased about 2% (i.e. parishes are retaining a larger portion of income)
- Total parish expenditures increased from \$8.6 to \$11.9 million (+38.6%)
- Total expenditures on mission and ministry increased from \$2.5 to \$4.1 million (+61.6%)
- Total expenditures on clergy stipends and allowances decreased from \$2.98 to \$2.88 million (-3.4%)
- Based on reports from five of the past 10 years, the average combined annual expenditure on capital projects and property maintenance by parishes is \$3.2 million. (Note: recent fuel price increases have significantly increased annual maintenance costs for all parishes.)
- The total number of families and individuals in our parishes decreased from 17,297 to 15,367 (-11.2%)
- The total number of identifiable givers decreased from 8184 to 6741 (-17.6%)
- Average Sunday attendance decreased from 7697 to 6449 (-16.2%)
- Annually, on average, there were 34% more funerals (509) than baptisms (379)
- Annually, on average, the number of confirmations (169) is only 45% of the number of baptisms (379)

As part of its work the Task Force learned about various demographic trends that are affecting our whole province, and therefore our churches. Among them are the following:

- In 1960 New Brunswick mothers averaged 4.5 childbirths. In 2006 the average is 1.4 childbirths (i.e. there are 69% fewer births), just below the national average of 1.5
- New Brunswick's population peaked at 752,500 in 1997. It has since fallen to 749,200. Canada's overall population is up 1% over the same period.
- In the 1970's births outnumbered deaths by 7000 each year. Today births outnumber deaths by only 250.
- Births in 2005-06 (6800 per year) are just more than half of what they were in the early 1970's (12,000)
- Since the early 1990's there has been a steady increase in the number of New Brunswickers who are leaving our province, especially our young people.
- In 1976 the median age of our population was 25.7. 30 years later, in 2006 it is 40.8. On average we are two years older than people in the rest of Canada.
- In 1976 our young people (i.e. between 0-19 years) made up 39% of the population - today they make up 22%.

The Task Force’s Conclusions and Recommendations: Six Strategically Important Areas for Systemic Change

We have reflected on what the Bible tells us and we prayed for God’s guidance. We have analyzed all sorts of information and data, and listened to many gifted and dedicated people who have shared their ideas and experiences with us. We have thoroughly discussed our present situation and looked at different things that could be done to strengthen ministry in our diocese.

Despite the good things that are happening, as a diocese and as individual parishes, we are facing a number of very serious problems and challenges. What will we look like in 10 years? Without systemic change aimed at spiritual, numerical and financial growth, our task force has concluded there will be a slow and steady decline of the Anglican Church in New Brunswick

We cannot change demographic trends, but neither can we be spectators as the Anglican Church in our diocese continues to decline. We can pray and seek to act obediently and faithfully, always trusting God. We can use the gifts and talents He has given us to help transform ourselves into a stronger and healthier church. Despite the difficulties we face, our shared Anglican heritage gives us a depth of faith and an organizational strength that comes from unity. We have always had respect for diversity of opinion and we are willing to wait on the Spirit. On these foundations we can develop new strategies and plans that will lead to a brighter future.

The Task Force believes there is a new sense of urgency among our clergy and lay leaders and an openness to change. Even with this openness, we believe it will take several years to fundamentally turn ourselves around. We must all be involved, we must begin now and we must be strategic in what changes we make. And, of course, through prayer we need to seek God’s will and ask Him to help us in all we do.

Following are the six strategically important areas our task force has identified as being most important for us right now, along with recommendations that will launch us into a systemic change process:

1. Renewed as Christians & Unified as Anglicans

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 15 v 5

For over 200 years the Anglican Church in New Brunswick has grown and flourished on a foundation of unity, tradition, trust and mutual support. However, it seems that, of late, our collective sense of who we are has been in gradual decline. There is a morale problem within the church, and we seem to have lost our identity as Anglicans. There are those among us who are dissatisfied with decisions made at diocesan, national or international levels. This has caused individuals and congregations to question their membership in, and their commitment to, the larger Anglican Church. As a result of all this many local congregations have retreated unto themselves, often putting congregational needs first.

It is important to remember that we are not a “congregational” church – we are an “Episcopal” church that holds many things in common – our Bishop, our liturgies, our sacraments, our creed, our articles of religion, and so much more. Beyond our basic beliefs, our many shared programs and services allow us to do, together, what few of us could or would want to do alone. We are also a “synodical” church – always guided by the will of God, spiritually led

by our Bishop and governed by our three houses (the Bishop, the clergy and the lay people – each represented on diocesan council). “The diocese” is the parishes, and “the parishes” are the diocese. If we are to do God’s will and prosper in the years to come, then we need to reaffirm our commitment to each other as we grow and rebuild our church, starting at the parish level. If we have parishes that are strong, healthy, welcoming and growing then we will be able to reach more people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Strong and healthy parishes will, in turn, lead to a strong and healthy diocese.

The Task Force believes that we need to begin this process by taking deliberate steps to reclaim, renew and relearn what it means to be “Christian” and “Anglican”. We can start by looking closely at the deeper meaning of various sections of the Book of Common Prayer, and we need to pray for God’s guidance.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends:

1. That we turn again to the principles of our Anglican Christian identity, especially through learning and self-examination, and a renewal of our minds and hearts; and that we begin with (a.) the study of, and adherence to, the “Rule of Life” (see appendix 3 - p. 555 of the BCP) and (b.) daily Scripture reading and daily prayer. *(Note: when possible and practical this should be through public Morning and Evening Prayer – wherever two or three can come together in His Name.)*

2. Change is needed at diocesan and congregational levels

*The One who was seated on the throne said: “See, I am making all things new”
Revelation 21 v 5*

The Task Force believes that our current situation points to the need for significant change at both the parish and diocesan/synodical levels. Despite the difficulties associated with change, we cannot afford to shy away from it because it might be unpopular or upsetting to some.

Almost all of our 85 parishes are struggling. Some are near dissolution. Because our parishes are struggling, our diocese is struggling. At the heart of it, there seem to be two main reasons: 1. we have aging and shrinking congregations, and 2. income levels for both parishes and the diocese are short of what is needed to maintain present ministries and programs. It is now time to answer the key question: “What should be done and who should do it?”

Each parish has its own set of circumstances and issues. The Task Force has concluded that “top-down” and “one size fits all” approaches will not work and could well be a source of disunity. The Task Force believes that individual congregations have to first accept the need for growth and change, and then develop strategies and plans that address local situations and challenges. While the Bishop, the diocesan staff and the synod can play a certain support role, local congregations need to take charge of their own futures.

Many parishes will be able to make changes on their own. Others, especially the smaller ones, will need to actively explore opportunities for cooperation and the sharing of ministries with other parishes or the diocese. We need to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to new forms of shared ministry – for example: two or more congregations/parishes sharing clergy or youth leaders, clergy sharing leadership with lay readers and deacons, clergy working simultaneously in both diocesan chaplaincies and in parishes, Anglican congregations sharing clergy, buildings, programs and services with sister denominations, and so on. Within each of our deaneries and archdeaconries there are people and processes already in place that can help

parishes and congregations explore various options. We need to see it as our individual and collective duty to help and support each other as we seek growth through change.

As parishes conduct self-assessments and change, the task force believes that our diocesan leaders need to do likewise. There is a sense that programs, budgets, structures, administrative patterns and staffing levels that were put in place during a different period need to be re-examined. Given current financial realities, our collective expectations of the diocesan office and its budget may have to change. Of particular importance to parishes is the retention of a greater percentage of their income, a subject that has been more fully examined by the Task Force on Budget Support to the Diocese.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends:

2A. Now and on a regular basis, that the diocese and every parish conduct self-assessments to evaluate current ministries and ensure on-going organizational health.

- **In a review of parish ministries the “10 Marks of a Healthy Parish” could be a useful tool (see appendix 2), and the results could be used as a springboard to change and risk-taking;**
- **In a review of diocesan ministries there could be an assessment of current diocesan ministries (programs, budgets, staffing levels, outcomes, etc.) as well as administrative processes and structures to ensure they are making solid contributions to our mission and vision**

2B. That struggling parishes be encouraged and assisted as they examine different models of shared ministry, and that financial support be offered by the diocese to those that are ready, willing and able to change and take risks in order to grow spiritually, numerically and financially.

3. More people involved in community outreach and mission (& fewer people involved in “parish administration”)

*The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth,
whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'
Matthew 25 v40*

While most of our parishes are involved to some degree in evangelism, community outreach and mission we need to do more – we need to share ideas and programs, and train our people. We especially need to develop specialized local ministries that give us opportunities to share our faith by showing our love for our neighbours. Not only is this what God expects of us, but our mission and outreach initiatives can also be the catalyst that will lead to spiritual and numerical growth. As Bishop Edward Salmon told our clergy, it is what we do as Christians, not what we say, that will be noticed and emulated by others. This was reinforced by our own Anglican young people who said, during our diocesan Year of the Youth in 2001, that they want to be part of congregations that have an active outreach ministry.

But with aging and declining congregations ... who will do this work? At present, between five and seven hundred of our most gifted congregational leaders in our 85 parishes devote a good portion of their volunteer church work to the affairs of vestry – attending meetings, seeing to property management and finances, etc – and it is becoming more difficult every year to get people to fill key vestry positions. Many of our priests also devote a significant proportion of their time and talent to administrative functions. While people’s time and talent is

willingly offered and gratefully received, perhaps it is timely to ask ourselves: “Is this the best use of some of our best people?” The Task Force believes it is not.

The Task Force believes it would be a positive step if we were to reduce the number of “parish corporations” and therefore vestries. Reducing the requirement for so many vestry members would free up more of our best and most committed people for God’s work in the vineyards of our communities. In saying this, the Task Force wants to make it very clear that this is **NOT** a backdoor means of recommending a reduced number of churches or congregations. On the contrary ... we believe a realignment of administrative structures and requirements, and a new emphasis on mission and outreach, will help us “grow” our congregations and parishes, spiritually, numerically and financially.

The Task Force knows it would be a difficult decision for a parish to relinquish parish status and become a “congregation” within a multi-point parish. Parishes willing to take that step would have to have the support of the whole diocese and especially its neighbouring parishes.

As parishes and individuals, we need to be more mission- and outreach-minded. Many of us support foreign missions, which is a good thing. The Task Force believes that it is also appropriate, especially in our current situation, that we individually and collectively give new priority to financially supporting those of our own parishes that make a decision to grow and become stronger through mission and community outreach.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends:

3A. That the diocese immediately establish a Congregational Development Fund to support congregations (alone or in a shared ministry context) that make a decision to focus on growth through mission and community outreach; that funding for this program come initially from an annual appeal to every Anglican in the diocese; and that this whole initiative be overseen by the Parish Support and Development Team of Diocesan Council, whose membership would need to be expanded to include representatives from each of our nine deaneries;

3B. That parishes, regardless of size or location, be eligible to apply for financial support from this fund for a specific number of years – according to a clearly defined and time-limited plan;

3C. That all parishes in the archdeaconry/deanery of these risk-taking parishes, proactively and without hesitation, offer them as much support as possible in order to help them grow, become healthier and sustain themselves in the long term.

(Note: this concept of the diocese and neighbouring parishes actively supporting congregations grow has been an important part of our heritage and tradition. It began in the 1700’s and became stronger through Bishop Medley’s episcopate. The Task Force senses that it is time to reintroduce this concept.)

4. Our leaders need support and new learning opportunities

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.
There are different kinds of service but the same Lord.
There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men.
1 Corinthians v 4-6*

For the next 10 years our number one priority has to be restoring our parishes and our diocese to good health – spiritually, numerically and financially. To do this we look to our Bishop, diocesan council, parish priests, wardens and vestry members for vision and leadership.

The process of significant change is very difficult for people. We often want to “go back”, or just “carry on”. It is equally difficult for those in leadership roles. (Think about the Israelites’ criticism of Moses on their journey to the Promised Land.)

There is no easy way to go through change in the church. People have ideas and want to be heard, and leaders are often challenged. Clergy can fall into the trap of taking on too much responsibility and dominating the decision-making process. This can lead to discontent and a lack of support by the congregation. On the other hand, some lay people actively resist change or avoid responsibility and leadership roles. Others may become too strong and try to ensure certain things happen or don’t happen.

As a diocese, for the next several years, we need to give our clergy and lay leaders support and help them take advantage of learning opportunities and resources that relate to systemic change. The framework for this lies in two programmatic initiatives: a stronger and more formalized training program for both clergy and lay leaders; and finding talented people who provide ‘outside help’ to congregations and parishes.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends:

4A - That diocesan council oversee the establishment of a five year clergy and lay leadership development program focused on systemic change;

4B - As part of this plan, that a “Leadership and Learning Weekend” be held on the same weekend each year and feature a variety of workshops and learning events for clergy and lay leaders (wardens, treasurers, Sunday School superintendents, mission/outreach coordinators, youth leaders, etc); and that these learning weekends be rotated among the archdeaconries;

4C - For the next several years, that the focus of the diocesan Clergy College be on growth and systemic change within the church, and the important role that clergy have to play in that process;

4D – That the efforts of the Parish Support and Development Team be supported so they can recruit and train (using existing budgets) a group of experienced and willing Anglicans capable of helping congregations and parishes deal with local challenges related to such topics as congregational growth, change, stewardship, visioning and planning.

5. Money and teaching what the Bible says about ‘giving’ & stewardship

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop ... I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones ... But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.

Luke 12: v 16-21

Many of the problems and challenges that our congregations and our diocese face have their roots in the fact that we do not have enough money to meet the cost of the ministry and operations that we want. Bishop Salmon told our clergy that we live in a culture where money is often a false god, and reminded them that many of Jesus’ parables and teachings were about money. Yet many of our clergy have been reluctant to talk about money, proportional giving and tithing. Similarly many Anglicans make it clear they do not want to be challenged by or listen to sermons about tithes and offerings. Across our diocese we seem to focus more on our budgets and spending patterns rather than on establishing personal giving patterns based on Biblical principles. Most of us make decisions on giving based on a false principle: we assume that all

that we have is ours and we have to decide what we will give back to God. In fact, in the Bible and in the BCP we are taught that all we have is God's. Our decision should therefore focus, not on 'what amount is appropriate to give?', but on 'what amount is appropriate to keep?'

If we are to deal with this problem we first need to acknowledge that money is an issue, and that it requires teaching and discussion. We need to understand why it is important for us to live out, in our daily lives, what we are taught in the Bible about giving and stewardship. We also need to ensure that our emphasis is on 'offerings for ministry', and not on 'balancing the budget' or 'keeping the church going'.

On a different level, the Task Force is aware that misunderstandings and misconceptions often surround parish and diocesan revenues and expenses, and decision-making processes. Open and honest communication is needed as we address difficult questions – to ensure people have the correct information and to offer a chance for meaningful input into parish and diocesan budgets.

The Task Force makes special note of two things: (a.) the need for a greater understanding of the diocesan budget and the importance of each parish's support of it and (b.) the need for increased congregational giving (sometimes referred to as 'the first 10%') so that more money is available to parishes for local ministry, to the diocese and to the national church.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends:

5A. That we begin immediately in every parish – using a variety of methods – to teach and discuss what the Bible says about faith, money, 'first fruits' giving and the generous offering to God of our time, talent and treasure;

5B. That, within the existing budget, diocesan council ensure knowledgeable and experienced people are available to support and guide parishes in their stewardship and congregational development efforts;

5C. That synod be encouraged to endorse the 10-10-10 model of financial sharing used in the Diocese of South Carolina, and that we immediately start working toward it.

5D. That Greater Chapter representatives on Diocesan Council be charged with explaining the annual diocesan budget to parish representatives and then gather input that can be brought back to Council before the budget is formulated.

6. Improved communication to help build a culture of caring and support

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, the Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.
Ephesians 4 v 15-16

The Task Force believes that, if we can increase and improve communication in our diocese, we will be better informed, more trusting and more helpful to each other. We need to give priority to improving three types of communication: first – communication between and among parishes; second – communication between parishes and our diocesan leaders; and third – communication with congregation members throughout the diocese.

More than ever there is a need for clergy and lay leaders from neighbouring parishes to know each other and to share ideas. We are a church family, but we are not acting as a family. This is hurting us in these difficult times. The Task Force believes that many of our parishes have become "silos"... standing alone, doing what they have always done, and wishing things were better. Congregations remain unaware that many, if not most, parishes are going through

the same things and are anxious to share ideas and support each other through difficult times. A top-down approach that forces meetings and discussions among parishes won't work. The Task Force believes it is up to our locally-based clergy and lay leaders to use archdeaconry and deanery processes to share information and ideas, and tackle common problems. To do so will build a bond of mutual caring and support and, hopefully, lead to stronger congregations.

The Task Force also believes that poor communication is contributing to unhealthy and unchristian relationships on many levels. In some parish-diocesan relationships, there seems to be a sense of distrust and a “we-they” attitude. Our collective morale has been adversely affected. If this is true, how do we address it? Bishop Salmon has suggested to our clergy that ‘speaking the truth in love’ and ‘the presumption of goodwill in others’ are essential ingredients of Christian communication. Frequent, honest and kindly communication is a critical need right now and each of us has to take personal responsibility for doing our part.

In the church and in secular life we elect leaders to act on our behalf, but we are often critical and questioning of their decisions. Within our church it seems many of our clergy and people have been second guessing the plans and decisions of our diocesan leaders. On the other hand our leaders may not have gone to sufficient lengths to gather input prior to decision-making or to explain why certain decisions have been made. Perhaps this is because leaders find it time consuming and difficult to inform and become informed.

The Diocesan Information Management System (DIMS) has to be at the centre of our diocesan communications ‘system’ and we need to take greater advantage of the opportunities that technology provides. DIMS needs to be up-to-date at all times and used more effectively by diocesan leaders. At present it is not being used to its potential – partly because too many parishes fail to provide up-to-date names, positions and contact information and partly because diocesan leaders aren't in the habit of using it. If we don't have a culture of frequent and transparent communication, then apathy, ‘we-they’ attitudes and misinformation will continue.

Likewise, at the parish level, our clergy and parish leaders need to do a better job of sharing both parish and diocesan information with their congregations. New ways need to be found to do so. While acknowledging that a large percentage of our older members do not have computers and must continue to receive written and verbal information, the Task Force believes parish and diocesan communications will steadily become technologically based.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends:

6A. That every parish vestry name a person, preferably a vestry member, as “the parish communications officer” with responsibility for (a.) ensuring its DIMS information is kept up to date, and (b.) gathering and sharing important parish, deanery, diocesan and national church information with the vestry and the congregation, and that this person be ‘technologically capable’ if at all possible;

6B. That the diocese continue to monitor and keep current the DIMS information as well as its various communication mechanisms such as the N.B. Anglican and e-news, and use them to effectively, efficiently and economically provide timely and important information to Anglicans across the diocese.

A Final Word

Given our current situation systemic change is called for. As we begin this process, we need to be open to leading of the Holy Spirit as we consider what to do next and we need to use the gifts that God has given us. As individual parishes and as a diocese we are at the proverbial

fork in the road. We have a choice – will we venture down the road trusting in God and supporting each other as we seek change, growth and renewal, or will we stay on the road we know, the road on which we have been travelling for the last many years? The Task Force believes we need to make an intentional decision to take a new road, in the hope and expectation of positive change, growth and renewal, according to God’s will for His church.

Appendix 1
BOOKS, WEB SITES AND PUBLICATIONS EXAMINED

These books were read and discussed by task force members:

- “Preaching and Worship in the Small Church” by William H Willimon and Robert L Wilson
- “Entering the World of the Small Church” by Anthony G. Pappas
- “Mission Shaped and Rural” by Sally Gaze
- “The Healthy Churches Handbook” by Robert Warren
- “Signs of Emergence” by Kester Brewin

Statistics Canada’s Census Data concerning religion and population from 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 was obtained, analyzed and summarized for the task force

The content of this workshop was reviewed by members of the task force:

“Leading the Church Through Change” by the Alban Institute

The information on these websites was accessed by the task force:

“Missional Mapmaking” a web-based series by Allelon, a Movement of Missional Leaders

“Fresh Expressions of Church” an off-shoot of the Church of England website

“Vital Congregations” by the Diocese of Massachusetts

Diocese of Fredericton Map & List of Parishes - <http://anglican.nb.ca/links/didir.html>

Appendix 2

10 MARKS OF A HEALTHY PARISH

What are the marks of a healthy parish or congregation? Following a great deal of thought and discussion members of the Task Force on Rural and/or Struggling Parishes developed the following. It is offered as a description of what a “healthy congregation” in our Diocese might look like. We offer it as a guide, hoping it will be used as a self-assessment tool by parishes striving for growth and renewal:

We Are Christ-Centred

We are Christ-centred in who we are and what we do as Anglicans. We know Jesus is always in our midst. We continually turn to Him as the Way, the Truth and the Life, and we work together as the Body of Christ.

We Make Disciples for Christ

As a church congregation and as individuals, we are deliberately active in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ through the witness of our words and our daily lives.

We Offer Our Best In Our Worship Of God

Our worship services are to the glory of God and are the best that we can offer Him. Our worship touches our hearts and is personally meaningful. Respecting and building on our Anglican tradition of worshipping God “in the beauty of holiness” we seek not only to glorify God, but to encourage and edify those who worship with us.

We Are Intergenerational and Multi-Cultural

We recognize that the future of our church depends on bringing new members into our congregation. In worship and in parish life we invite, welcome and engage people from all age groups and cultural backgrounds. We are especially aware of the importance of attracting young families, children and youth.

We Share Leadership and Responsibility

We use all the gifts that God has given to us as we strive to build up the Body of Christ, which is the church. To that end our clergy and our lay members share leadership responsibilities, and work well together.

We Give Generously For The Work Of The Church

We recognize the need to give of ourselves and our resources, each according to our means, so that our church may prosper and grow in the service of God. We accept and teach what the Bible tells us about faith, money, ‘first fruits’ giving and the generous offering to God of our time, talent and treasure.

We Share What God Has Given Us As We Reach Out To Others

God's love in Christ is shown in our compassion for those in need, spiritually and materially. As a parish we reach outside our local church(es) to help those around us and in our community(ies). Through our contributions to the diocese and the national church, as well as other missionary and aid organizations, we show that love to the world.

We Want To Grow Spiritually and Numerically

We are addressing our members' desire to know and love God more deeply through prayer, study and encouragement. We are also striving to add to our membership both for our benefit and the benefit of those who are not yet active members of the Body of Christ.

We Communicate Positively & Live in Harmony With One Another

We accept the Apostle Paul's guidance that we "speak the truth in love." Presuming good will in others, we respect and see value in views that may differ from our own. We listen carefully and sympathetically to one another, and we regularly share information and ideas within our diocese, archdeaconries and deaneries as well as in our own parish/congregation.

We Know What It Means To Be Anglican and We Share Our Diocesan Vision

We know what it means to be Anglican, and we know we are part of a larger church family. We do all we can to support others within our diocese, through encouraging words and the sharing of our resources. As members of the Anglican Church of Canada in the Diocese of Fredericton, we affirm our commitment to work together to accomplish our shared mission, which is "to proclaim the Gospel for the making of disciples."

Appendix 3
The Rule of Life
(from page 555 of the Book of Common Prayer)

“Every Christian man or woman should from time to time frame for himself/herself a RULE OF LIFE in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel and the faith and order of the Church; wherein he/she may consider the following:

The regularity of his/her attendance at public worship and especially at the Holy Communion.

The practice of private prayer, Bible-reading, and self-discipline.

Bringing the teaching and example of Christ into his/her everyday life.

The boldness of his/her spoken witness to his/her faith in Christ.

His/her personal service to the Church and the community.

The offering of money according to his/her means for the support of the work of the Church at home and overseas.”