

Conversations Around Our Diocesan Mission Strategy

Our shared Mission Strategy needs to be refreshed and approved at Diocesan Convention in November 2021 per DioMass canons. In the pages that follow you'll find:

- Guiding Questions that can be used at 2021 Annual Meetings (see pg. 2)
- A way for Vestries or other Leadership groups to engage our Strategy at meetings or retreats (see pg. 3)
- Information on how to share responses with the Mission Strategy Committee and Diocesan Council by March 19

Your community's engagement with our shared Mission Strategy is vital.

Our Strategy isn't just a document for those who work at the Diocesan Offices at 138 Tremont St. It is our shared articulation of how God is calling us to be disciples of Jesus in this time and place.

Join with us as we continue to Embrace Brave Change by Reimagining Our Congregations, Building Our Relationships, and Engaging Our World. And together let us see where the Spirit is leading us in the years ahead.

Background & Overview

At Diocesan Convention in November 2021, a new Mission Strategy needs to be adopted by vote per diocesan canons. In the months leading up to Convention 2016, our Diocese undertook a robust and inclusive process in the crafting of our current Strategy as we listened to where God was directing us. Our work for this year is more of a refresh, a point to check in and see how we've participated in God's call to us, and how that call might be changing since that time.

As the Mission Strategy Committee of Council, we seek your input to help us in our work to refresh and retool our current Strategy. During 2021 we'll be seeking input from a variety of people in different roles throughout our Diocese. We'd like to begin with input from local members of congregations and their leaders.

What follows is two frameworks for conversation at the local level. **First, guiding questions for Annual Meetings. Second, a more significant engagement for vestries or other leadership gatherings.** We hope that you will see both as an opportunity to reflect on our call to engage in the work of Jesus Christ in our Diocese.

Annual Meeting Guiding Questions

Introduction: It's been a disquieting year. A wilderness time. A place in the life of our shared experience that has been unlike anything we have ever known. And still church has gone on: people have been baptized, prayers offered, children taught the stories of our faith. We've lamented and grieved those who've died. We've faced financial challenges and wrestled with technology.

And we've continued to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, bringing good news and words of healing, and reaching out to the poor and disenfranchised. We've also begun to face the long reality of systemic racism in our country, in our Diocese, and in our own lives. It's been hard, necessary work.

While a portion of our Annual Meetings will focus on the hard reality of budgets in an economic downturn, we wanted to provide a framework to reflect on the work that God continues to call us to in order to further bring about the kingdom that Jesus ushered in. We hope that the questions that follow will give you and your community an opportunity to envision what lies before you.

And we hope you'll join with other congregations in our Diocese as we see how God's Spirit has moved among us this past year, and where the Spirit may be leading us in the days ahead.

Questions for Mission Strategy Engagement at Annual Meeting 2021

- 1) The last many months of COVID-19 have forced us as worshipping communities to distill what the essence of our church is for us—what it means to be a particular congregation or community following in the way of Jesus. What essential elements have emerged in your faith community?
- 2) What about your worshipping community are you most proud of? Why?
- 3) What one thing do you wish our diocesan leadership knew about your congregation or faith community? Why is this important to you?

Process for Annual Meeting Engagement

- 1) Begin with A Prayer for Our Diocese and Mission Strategy Process. (see pg. 4)
- 2) Assign a scribe for each break out room/table group or location at which these questions are engaged. Or use the chat function, and save it to send along to us.
- 3) Allow up to 20 minutes for conversation.
- 4) Have scribes report highlights back to the larger group (if smaller groups were used).
- 5) Send documents/scans/photos/chat log of all notes taken to missionstrategy@diomass.org by **March 19, 2021**

Leadership Gathering/Retreat Guiding Questions

- 1) The last many months of COVID-19 have forced us as worshipping communities to distill what the essence of our church is for us—what it means to be a particular congregation following in the way of Jesus. What essential elements have emerged in your faith community? What makes your community uniquely St. Swithen's or the Episcopal Chaplaincy at Swithen University or the Mission Organization of Helpful Christians?
- 2) Our Mission Strategy builds on the idea that we need to embrace brave change as God calls us to look beyond our current horizons. Besides the emergence of virtual worship and the use of technology, what brave change has your congregation embraced? What further change may your congregation or community be called to embrace? How can you give thanks for and grieve that which has ended while also looking for the emergence of new life?
- 3) Our shared Strategy commits us to 9 specific goals (see the attached summary). How has your faith community engaged two of these goals? How has this changed in the last year?
- 4) If you could add to, clarify, or expand one of the goals, what would you say? Why? Or, what do you think is missing from these goals? Why should this be included?
- 5) Much of our Mission Strategy centers on connections with others. How are those connections being built—or not—during this time in the life of your worshipping community?
- 6) What one thing do you wish our diocesan leadership knew about your congregation? Why is this important to you?
- 7) What might Diocesan Council do to help support you in living out our shared Mission Strategy in the years ahead?

Process for Leadership Gathering Engagement

- 1) Send out a link to the Mission Strategy prior to the gathering for participants to review. (<https://cutt.ly/DioMassMission>)
- 2) Begin with A Prayer for Our Diocese and Mission Strategy Process. (see pg. 4)
- 3) Assign a scribe for each break out room/table group or location at which these questions are engaged. Or use the chat function, and save it to send along to us.
- 4) Allow ample time to participate in the questions.
- 5) Have scribes report back to the larger group (if smaller groups were used).
- 6) Send documents/scans/photos/chat log of all notes taken to missionstrategy@diomass.org by **March 19, 2021**
- 7) Questions? Contact us at missionstrategy@diomass.org

Next Steps

Over the Winter of 2021, **a member of our Mission Strategy Committee will be reaching out to you** to discuss your engagement with these questions and to see how we can best help you. Our Mission Strategy is all of ours. We, as the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, together are living members of Christ's Body. Your voice and the voices of the people in your community are vital to our process.

In the coming months, we plan to:

- Share the summary results of responses we receive
- Engage in conversation with other constituents in our Diocese.
- Make other forms of feedback available for members to engage.
- Draft changes to our Mission Strategy for Diocesan Council in May
- Share the provisional revised draft with our Diocese as a whole for feedback over the Summer
- Complete the revision of our Mission Strategy for Convention 2021

Please feel free to contact us at missionstrategy@diomass.org if you have any questions, comments, or additional feedback.

Members of the Mission Strategy Committee: Ms. Martha Gardner, Staff Liaison; The Rev. Hilary Greene; Ms. Claudette Hunt, Co-Chair; The Rev. Phil LaBelle, Co-Chair; Mr. Tom Marson-Ryan; The Very Rev. Amy McCreath; & The Rev. Andi Taylor.

A Prayer for Our Diocese and the Mission Strategy Process

Lord Jesus Christ, we come before you as a people of God, seeking to join your transforming work in the world.

Open our eyes to see the movement of your Spirit.

Open our minds to imagine new possibilities.

Open our ears to hear the voices of all your children.

Open our mouths to speak with honesty and love.

Open our hands to share all that we have.

Open our hearts to receive all that we need.

Thank you, Lord, for calling us as your disciples and friends.

Give us courage to follow where you lead. Amen.

Mission Strategy for the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Adopted by the 231st Annual Diocesan Convention

November 5, 2016

Find the full mission strategy document at www.diomass.org/our-mission

PREPARING THE WAY

1. Undertake an open and thorough review of our gifts, resources, and programs.

- a) Establish a clear structure and transparent process for regularly evaluating all programs and ministries that receive diocesan funding based on their contribution to the spiritual, relational, and practical goals of our diocesan mission strategy.
- b) Assess the ways our current use of resources and governance structures support or impede the goals of our mission strategy, and make appropriate changes.

REIMAGINING OUR CONGREGATIONS

2. Share the Word of God and our own faith stories with greater confidence.

- a) Invite all members of our diocese to deepen our relationships with Jesus and strengthen our formation as disciples so that we can live our faith in the world.
- b) Support all members of our diocese in cultivating the skills of evangelism, so that we can all learn to share more readily how God is working in our lives.
- c) Reimagine our ministry with children, youth, and families, so that our young members receive the foundation they need to claim their faith into adulthood in an increasingly secular culture.

3. Address the fact of numerical decline boldly and creatively.

- a) Create a public, transparent, representative body of our diocese to support all congregations through visioning and discernment.
- b) Designate a funding stream to assist congregations to engage brave change through creative models of leadership development, discipleship, and Christian community.
- c) Expand opportunities for lay and clergy leaders to build connections with one another and to develop skills in spiritual formation, pastoral care, sound governance, financial stewardship, and building use, with attention to the needs of the nearly half of our congregations that employ part-time clergy.

BUILDING OUR RELATIONSHIPS

4. Initiate new relationships across our diocese.

- a) Develop opportunities for teams from congregations to visit other congregations, sharing worship and learning about one another.
- b) Create time and space for building relationships at all diocesan-wide events.

5. Support stronger collaborations among congregations.

- a) Initiate new partnerships and strengthen existing collaborations with other Episcopal congregations, ecumenical and interfaith partners, and community organizations.
- b) Connect and equip networks of lay people, clergy, and diocesan staff members who share a passion for particular forms of service and public advocacy (such as feeding the hungry, supporting veterans, caring for elders, ending sex trafficking, eradicating gun violence, or responding to addiction and substance abuse).

6. Incorporate regions outside of Boston more fully in the life of our diocese.

- a) Create opportunities for diocesan staff members to be present in congregations and ministries around our diocese and to gather with lay leaders and clergy in order to share and learn best practices, develop closer partnerships, and know all of our communities.
- b) Invite members from all regions of our diocese to engage in leadership roles in all diocesan project teams and governing bodies.
- c) Ensure that meetings and training opportunities are accessible to members from all regions of our diocese.

7. Fulfill the Gospel command to love one another, particularly across difference.

- a) Work to respond to Jesus' call to fully include all persons in the life of the church.
- b) Enter into a large-scale, authentic, and committed conversation about racism and other forms of oppression with the support of effective facilitators and training programs, in order to move us further into the essential work of racial justice and reconciliation.
- c) Invest in ministries with communities of color and immigrant communities, drawing upon their unique strengths and supporting their health.

ENGAGING OUR WORLD

8. Deepen our relationships with our neighbors in order to work side-by-side for a more just and peaceful world.

- a) Work together to help all of our congregations to engage more deeply with their neighbors and local communities.
- b) Further strengthen our relationships with neighbors around the world through partnerships in global mission.

9. Strengthen our relationship with our Earth and our commitment to caring for Creation.

- a) Continue to foster a meaningful long-term conversation about caring for Creation in order to inspire all our members and congregations to be more faithful stewards of our physical world, reduce carbon emissions, respond to the effects of climate change, and advocate sound climate policy.
- b) Designate a funding stream to support congregations that initiate or continue significant efforts in their local contexts to restore Creation and respond to the moral crisis of climate change.