

April 5, 2016

Dear fellow members of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts,

The process of creating a new mission strategy is an opportunity for us to check in on the health of our diocesan community by gathering your ideas about what's working, what we could change, and what new visions are emerging for the mission for our diocese. Thank you for engaging in this listening process with such openness and honesty. We heard each other's voices in the listening sessions and through the online and telephone surveys, and now we listen again to our diocesan body as together we consider this **Initial Report**.

Our diocese has a visible center: our pastoral leaders, Bishops Alan and Gayle; the staff who help them serve our ministries and congregations; the budget we support through our gifts and our assessments; and our representatives in the governing bodies of Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, and Diocesan Convention. Like a heart, this inner structure works to connect, support, and enliven the full body of our diocese.

In this Initial Report, we have tried to distill the key themes from the many ideas and insights that were voiced in the listening process. We hope you welcome this chance to notice the places where parts of our body feel pinched or disconnected – a signal that we may need to move to get the blood flowing again. We also invite you to look for the signs that our heart is strong and brings life to our members: when the eyes of our visionaries see, the mouths of our prophets speak, and the hands of our disciples reach out into the many communities of Eastern Massachusetts and the wider world.

We invite your feedback: What do you learn here from your fellow members of the diocese? Is there an important voice or perspective that you think is not represented yet?

We will incorporate your input in a **Revised Report**, which we will publish in early May. This Revised Report will serve as a resource to the Mission Strategy Drafting Team as they begin discerning a response to the challenges and opportunities for our diocese. They will produce a **Draft Mission Strategy** this summer. They will again invite your questions and comments, which will help shape the **Proposed Mission Strategy** that they submit for approval at Diocesan Convention in November.

With gratitude for our shared life in Christ,

**Diocesan Mission Strategy Listening Process Team**

The Rev. Dr. Meghan Sweeney, All Saints' Church in Attleboro (Chair)

The Rev. Libby Berman, Canon for Congregations (Staff Liaison)

Mr. Billy Boyce, Grace Church in New Bedford

The Rev. Dr. Karen Coleman, St. James's Church in Somerville

Dr. Jim Daniell, All Saints Church in Brookline

The Rev. Ennis Duffis, St. Anne's Church and St. John's Church in Lowell

The Rev. Michael Hodges, Christ Church in Andover

The Rev. Thea Keith Lucas, Episcopal Chaplain at MIT

The Rev. Derrick Muwina, All Saints' Church in West Newbury

Mr. John Woodard, St. Paul's Church in Dedham

## **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.

***Glory to God whose power, working in us,  
can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.***  
*(Ephesians 3:20)*

# INITIAL REPORT OF THE 2016 MISSION STRATEGY LISTENING PROCESS FOR THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MASSACHUSETTS

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## PROCESS AND METHODS

**Designing the Process.** In the spring of 2015, Diocesan Council and our bishops responded to the direction in our diocese’s Canon 10, which states in part that:

*The Bishop and Diocesan Council shall (every three years), prepare the Diocesan Mission Strategy for approval of the Convention. The Diocesan Mission Strategy shall identify and prioritize all Diocesan programmatic and administrative activities in sufficient detail to guide the allocation of resources by the Convention, Diocesan Council, and the Bishop.*

The process of Mission Strategy development will take eighteen months, from Spring 2015 to Fall 2016. The process formally began in May 2015 when the Bishop and Council named seven representatives from the Council and our larger diocese to a Mission Strategy Listening Process Design Team. That team was charged with designing a process that would invite everyone to share thoughts about what’s working in our diocese, what we could change, what needs we see in our communities, and what new dreams we have. During the summer of 2015, the team created a brief profile of our diocese’s current ministries and the changing demographics in Eastern Massachusetts as a starting point for conversations.

**Preparing for the Listening Process.** In the early fall, the team engaged the services of a professional consultant, Dr. Ellen Childs of Boston University, who has formal expertise in the sociology of religion and social science research methods. The team also prepared audio-visual and other materials to explain the listening process and encourage participation. The listening process was formally introduced to our Diocesan Convention in November 2015. In order to broaden participation and manage the listening sessions, the Bishop and Council added three

additional members to the team, and named a chair for the Listening Process Implementation phase of the project. The team invited twenty additional listeners from around our diocese to assist in conducting the listening sessions. Dr. Childs trained the team and all additional listeners in December 2015.

**Data Collection Strategy.** In January and February 2016, the team held seven open listening sessions in Andover, Barnstable, Beverly Farms, Boston, Natick, New Bedford, and Taunton. Eleven focused listening sessions were scheduled for communities whose voices might not easily be heard in the open sessions. These included youth, young adults, historically black congregations, clergy of color, Haitian-South Sudanese congregations, immigrant congregations, Chinese-speaking and Spanish-speaking/Latino congregations, retired clergy, and the community of the MANNA ministry with the homeless at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston. Dr. Childs also held individual or small-group discussions with the diocesan staff and a conversation with members of Diocesan Council and Standing Committee. Additionally, an online and toll-free, call-in phone survey allowed individuals to respond to questions at their own pace and on their own schedule. The team asked people not to send in individual comments or reports, but encouraged them to complete a survey or come to a Listening Session to collaborate and share in conversation about the life within our diocese.

**Question Development.** In drafting the Listening Session interview guide and surveys, the questions were strategically chosen and organized. The team started with questions that were more concrete, and focused on the local, congregational level to build connection and trust and to share personal, local experiences. The team then gradually shifted the focus of questions from the local level, to a multi-parish level, to the diocesan level, asking questions aimed to elicit both experiences and ideas of areas of need and opportunity. The questions were intentionally open-ended using neutral language to open the conversation to the salient topics in the room, providing space for the broad interests and perspectives of those within our diocese to be equally shared. Similar questions were used across the Listening Sessions and surveys, only slightly varied due to medium and audience. For example, the online and phone surveys only included six questions, whereas the Open Listening Sessions had eight.

**Listening Sessions and Surveys.** The Listening Sessions, which lasted around 90 minutes, were co-facilitated by members of the Listening Process Implementation Team and other trained volunteer facilitators. The sessions were audio recorded, and a member of the study team also took notes. After the sessions, the audio recordings from each focus group were transcribed by a professional transcription service. More than 750 people from more than 120 congregations participated in these open and focused sessions. The team also received more than 325 responses to the online and phone surveys.

**Data analysis.** This process used a Grounded Theory<sup>1</sup> approach to qualitative data analysis, meaning the researchers identify conceptual categories from the data itself, rather than starting from pre-determined ideas or concepts. Five members of the team independently read the transcripts and recorded the themes they noticed as they read. They then met together to compare their categories and strategies for organizing the various themes. Dr. Childs compiled the final list to be used in the data categorization process.

On Transcript Reading Day, thirty-six volunteers from across our diocese came to St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Weston. They were randomly assigned to eight groups, and were given a selection of transcripts from listening sessions and survey responses. Each member of a group was asked to first independently read the transcript and, using the list of theme codes, label each comment within the transcript or survey. Then the group discussed the transcript and attempted to reach agreement about the relevant themes that applied to each passage. During this process, the groups were encouraged to identify new themes as necessary (see the appendix for the full list of codes). This refining process is key to the Grounded Theory approach, which involves an iterative process of refining the themes with the analysis of new data.

The five Listening Session transcripts and six portions of survey questions that had not been read during Transcript Reading Day were each independently read by a member of the Listening Strategy Implementation Team. Dr. Childs collected and conducted the final read of each transcript and survey, putting the files and themes into NVIVO 11 data analysis software package,<sup>2</sup> which allows for efficient report development surrounding the given themes. For example, once all the comments are categorized, the software can develop a report of every comment that was coded as being connected to the "Young Adult Ministries" theme. The transcripts were coded in sections long enough to preserve the context for each comment.

**Writing this Initial Report.** A subgroup of the Listening Strategy Implementation Team identified six broad sections, and each writer was assigned the relevant theme reports for one of these sections. For example, the person who was assigned to write about the Congregation's Role in the Larger Community received the reports for all the codes related to various forms of outreach, community engagement, and social justice issues. Each writer took the relevant reports and distilled the central messages from them, using particularly illustrative quotes to highlight topics.

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<sup>1</sup> Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. 1998. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.

<sup>2</sup> NVivo qualitative data analysis Software; QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 11, 2014.

## KEY THEMES FROM THE LISTENING PROCESS

### SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Many people name **spiritual development** as a first priority for our diocese. The most common reasons given for engaging in spiritual development are:

- To build a strong foundation for our outreach and justice efforts in the world
- To understand the church's traditions and adapt them to a changing world
- To deepen relationship with God and learn how to be disciples of Jesus in our daily lives

*"We will not be fit to do any of this work in the world, or will not do it in the proper spirit if we do not first nourish our spirits." (Survey response)*

Respondents offer several specific types of **formation** they would like to engage in:

- Prayer that uses the senses (such as labyrinths, prayer beads, art, dance)
- Contemplative practices (such as Taizé, meditation, centering prayer)
- Bible study and educational programs (such as Alpha, Cursillo, Education for Ministry)

*"How many of our faithful folks could tell someone else about what their baptismal covenant means in their daily lives? ... How many know where to begin with the Bible? How many feel comfortable talking about their own faith with their own children?" (Survey Response)*

Members of our diocese value the rich traditions and music of the Episcopal liturgy and look to **worship** as a source of unity. Respondents want worship to be:

- Energetic, creative, and supportive of lay participation and leadership
- Accessible to people of all ages and abilities, and available at alternate times
- Offered in places outside of the church building (shelters, nursing homes, offices, parks)

*"We don't have a liturgical commission in our diocese or a place where we gather to discuss and create liturgical change and innovation together. I think that could be really helpful." (Andover Open Session)*

When asked what is getting in the way of spiritual formation, respondents cite too much focus on other programs, too many other responsibilities for clergy and staff, and too many time commitments for lay people, especially low-income workers and busy families.

Members of our diocese express a particular concern for the spiritual development of the next generations: **children and young families, youth, and young adults**. When asked about strong programs in the church, respondents frequently mention ministries to children: the Barbara C. Harris Camp, B-SAFE and B-READY, and other youth enrichment programs run by parishes and Mission Hubs. Respondents express the desire to:

- Better support families in all their diversity
- Create afterschool opportunities that meet the needs of their local communities
- Provide intergenerational opportunities to connect children with elders

*“We’re trying to figure out ways to do that better, to take [families] in the palm of our hands and work with them as they bring up their little ones, which we know is taxing.”* (Beverly Farms Open Session)

Members of our diocese value the successes of diocesan youth programs (Youth Leadership Academy, Diocesan Youth Council) and young adult ministries (college chaplaincies, The Crossing, Life Together, and other service programs and intentional communities). At the same time, respondents see many opportunities to expand the economic, racial, and geographic diversity of our outreach to youth and young people.

*“Help the churches to keep young people coming in. When you look at what attracts young people to [Diocesan Youth Council], it’s because of what’s being offered there... how do we create that in our communities?”* (New Bedford Open Session)

*“I would like to see the church trying to reach a lot of the young adults who have never experienced church before... [We need] young adult fellowships and young adult discussion groups or things that are not scary for young adults to walk into, if they’ve never experienced church, and kind of gives them a way to start exploring.”* (Young Adults)

Members of our diocese also express concern for the growing population of seniors. Particular needs that are noted in this population include:

- Social connection, including transportation to church and other events
- Housing, food, and health care programs for seniors with fixed incomes
- Resources, emotional support, and respite for caregivers

*“I would create an aging brigade whose mission was to go out from our parish or from a cluster of churches ... to provide pastoral visits far beyond our current capacity ... With focus and resource investment, DioMass could love and minister to people beyond our traditional Sunday experiences.”* (Survey Response)

## LEADERSHIP AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN CONGREGATIONS

In the listening sessions and surveys, respondents underscore the importance of **fostering healthy relationships** within our congregations. According to members of our diocese, strong, healthy congregations have members who are deeply connected to one another, both personally and spiritually. Their members:

- Share deep, spiritual community in the presence of the Holy Spirit
- Care for one another, especially in times of need
- Attend to those who may be isolated
- Offer regular events that build community and feature food, creativity, and fun
- Develop rich relationships with one another and share personal stories genuinely
- Seek intergenerational harmony
- Explore differences and seek a common vision

*“We totally believe that unity is crucial for us, particularly [as] we are from different backgrounds; we have different educations. Therefore, we would like to have the same purpose and same goals, in order to create a more functional and warm place.”* (Chinese Community)

Respondents emphasize the importance of **personal stewardship** as a way of life. Signs of a flourishing congregation include:

- Responsible stewardship of financial and other resources
- Encouraging parishioners to offer their talents in addition to tithing
- Challenging parishioners in generous giving

Respondents state that strong, healthy congregations display **responsible governance practices**. Their leaders:

- Place a high value on transparency and make sure all members feel informed
- Share responsibilities and trust the Holy Spirit to lead them into new places
- Hear one another’s needs and challenging questions
- Engage conflict and uncertainty in a healthy way

*“Healthy conflict is going to be really important.... So how do we build people’s strength around using emotion in healthy ways to guide us to the places where things are broken, and also to energize us and fuel us in places that are hard?”* (MANNA Community)



Another key theme is that strong, healthy congregations **recruit and form diverse leaders**.

They:

- Constantly raise up new volunteers and form them as Christian leaders
- Develop volunteer engagement strategies and succession plans that prevent burnout
- Enable members to participate easily in ministries
- Encourage and mentor youth and young adults as leaders
- Allow newer members to help create new ways of being church
- Invite each member to find his or her own ministry, without always requiring a priest to be at the center

*“I would start by pulling together the brightest and best that we have to talk about leadership...if we could come up with new ways of helping to form lay and clergy leaders...they would have a sharp sense and appreciation for the unknown, [be] willing to risk, [be] willing to be entrepreneurial and willing to understand that, for every five or six things they try, four or five of them will fail and it’s going to be okay.”* (Diocesan Staff)

Many respondents believe that our diocese has a responsibility to **assist congregations in forming Christian leaders and developing effective ministries**. They suggest that our diocese could:

- Expand lay leadership development programs
- Continue to encourage diversity in leadership
- Help congregations and individuals learn how to discern their gifts and calls
- Provide more support for planning, implementing, and evaluating ministry projects
- Catalogue the kinds of ministries and initiatives around our diocese that are working
- Offer training for people to use technology to communicate better
- Assist congregations in partnering with local colleges and universities

*“Many times congregations want to do something in the ministry, but they don’t know how to get it moving forward...”* (Barnstable Open Session)

*“So make a lot of resources available for the people that actually lead the church. Then we’ll learn how to grow in the role of leadership...”* (South Sudanese/Haitian Congregations)

*“[We lack] time to discern from a spiritual perspective who you are, and the capacity to find who in that parish has fire in the belly, and once you have discerned what the call is on that church, then to take that and turn it into a [ministry] on the ground.”* (Beverly Farms Open Session)

## CONGREGATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

**Sustainability** or **financial viability** is a major challenge for members of our diocese, with many congregations struggling to meet basic expenses, including upkeep of large or old buildings and the compensation and benefits of clergy and lay staff. Many respondents point to the merger and closing of churches, and call on our diocese to help revitalize struggling parishes.

*“In the last hundred years, we’ve closed about a hundred churches, and in the last five we’ve closed thirty. It means that there is a reality check – these [ministries] are no longer viable, but there’s also the question of how well congregational development is working as a tool if we can’t catch some of these things a little bit ahead of time or do something more creative.”* (Diocesan Staff)

**Building issues**, including maintenance costs, repairs, and underutilized space, are identified as a major distraction from a congregation’s spiritual development and engagement in creative ministry. Suggestions for addressing these issues include:

- Creating a resource forum for parishes to consult about building issues
- Continuing support for environmental sustainability
- Viewing buildings as community resources and encouraging new uses of space by outside organizations or other denominations
- Merging churches and moving into modern buildings with lower overhead
- Using alternative spaces instead of traditional church buildings
- Restructuring and renovating buildings in creative ways

*“One of the things that’s keeping us from being able to focus on things like [justice] is we spend ... an inordinate amount of our resources just trying to keep our building standing. And I cannot tell you how important it is for us to get some help dealing with the bricks and mortars issues.”*  
(Barnstable Open Session)

*“The Green Grant program has been really instrumental... for our community, that’s a huge move, a huge connection with the wider church and the local environmental organizations.”*  
(Andover Open Session)

**Clergy and staff costs** are a significant challenge for many parishes. Respondents express particular concern for congregations with less than full-time clergy and little lay staff, and for clergy who are unable to find a full-time position.

Recommendations for supporting clergy and congregations include:

- Making diocesan staff more available for consultation on congregational matters
- Expanding the Urban Resident Program
- Fostering the growth of the diaconate
- Training and equipping clergy and lay leaders in evangelism, innovative models of ministry, and entrepreneurial approaches

*“There are only two full time priests in the entire [Taunton River] deanery. Everybody else in the deanery is less than full time. And many of those parishes have no support staff, like no secretary, no sexton, no ongoing support staff...That is the biggest thing holding us back to do anything more.”*

(Taunton Open Session)

Members of our diocese see declining **attendance** at worship services as a significant challenge for the health and vibrancy of many congregations. Respondents encourage our diocese to consider new strategies for maintaining or growing parish membership.

*“Our purpose as a Church is to make a meaningful and transformative relationship with God a possibility for an ever-expanding group of human beings...Without parishes at every socio-economic level we cannot make God’s dream a reality.”* (Survey Response)

Throughout the listening session and surveys, respondents emphasize the need for **more cooperation among congregations**. People note that there are many cases where parishes are close together but have not engaged in any joint ministries or shared projects. The Mission Hubs program is also held up as one successful way in which to do collaborative ministry.

Existing collaborative ministries and new models of working together are seen as ways to bring our diocese together. People also express a desire for diocesan leadership to help facilitate deepened relationships among congregations not only for the purpose of learning from each other, but more deeply so that competition, isolation, and suspicion can give way to mutuality, interdependence, and trust.

*“Now we’re trying to work together, we’re doing the hub project to work together. We’re communicating with each other. We’re doing things together. And so those things are happening, but historically they have never happened.”* (Historically Black Congregations)

*“Anything we do together is stronger than anything we do separately. We should be investing ourselves in education and spirituality and outreach by the way we inform congregations around the diocese, [and] there are other things we ought to be doing together as well.”* (Boston Open Session)

## THE CONGREGATION'S ROLE IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY

In almost every forum, people discuss a need for more effective **evangelism**. Approaches to strengthen our evangelism include:

- Gaining confidence to tell our faith stories
- Inviting friends and neighbors to participate in our faith communities
- Offering intentional hospitality and following up with newcomers
- Being an active presence in the community and on social media
- Offering a clear voice on current events and countering negative images of Christianity
- Planting congregations to reach neighborhoods and groups that are not yet connected to the Episcopal Church

*"I think that our church needs to do, like Jesus did, go out and look for the people, not just wait for the people to come to church."* (High School Retreat)

*"[We should be] bringing in programs to...break down social stigmas about church. ...I think people don't understand that...the Episcopal Church is open to everybody and anybody."*  
(Diocesan Youth Council)

Many respondents suggest building **stronger connections to diverse communities**. While each community is distinctive, some shared strategies for evangelism emerged from the conversations with our primarily African American, African Immigrant, Chinese, Haitian, and Latino congregations:

- Engaging with rapidly changing neighborhoods
- Opening dialogue about theological differences
- Attending to the challenges of congregations that share space
- Accompanying people as they navigate the complexities of immigration
- Supporting programs for children and parents in a variety of languages
- Planning meetings with consideration of cultural differences and varied work schedules
- Participating as a full diocese in events that mark our diverse history, such as the Absalom Jones service
- Intentionally inviting all our congregations and leaders more fully into our diocesan life

*"We really should have an evangelism commission that is focused [on the question]...'how can we make the church relevant to the people from the perspective of their own social, cultural factors?'"*  
(Spanish-Speaking Congregations)

Members of our diocese feel pride in their congregations' outreach efforts and desire to **expand their relationships in the local community, the nation, and the world.** The central ideas that our members express about **outreach** include:

- The importance of parish-based or local food pantries and meal programs
- A concern for vulnerable populations such as children, people who lack housing, people who are mentally or physically ill or disabled, refugees, and seniors
- A need for a more proactive approach to addiction, particularly opioid abuse
- A desire to go beyond direct service to build mutual relationships, sharing bread and stories with neighbors no matter who they are
- An engagement with the underlying issues that create poverty and injustice, such as income inequality and the lack of affordable housing

*"[A healthy church is one] that realizes that it exists for the people that are not part of the membership. In other words, it is always facing outward." (Retired Clergy)*

*"One of the challenges we talked about was... not just responding in a crisis... [so] that you have an infrastructure [and] there is a sustained response." (Beverly Farms Open Session)*

Many respondents express a core value of **inclusion.** They recommend:

- Education and dialogue about experiences of oppression and inclusion
- Strategies to more fully incorporate new and existing members across boundaries of race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ability
- Comprehensive anti-racism training that reflects a variety of experiences (such as those of Latinos, Asian Americans, people of African descent, and Arab Americans)

*"[We should] practice a very radical form of inclusion." (Natick Open Session)*

*"I feel that we're at a stage in our country and in our church where racial justice is really paramount. So I would love for [our churches] to become more adept at dealing with racism within themselves and being a transformative body that is connecting with communities." (Diocesan Staff)*

Our members look to the leaders of our diocese for support in educating and mobilizing members to take part in **social justice efforts.** Respondents would like to build upon:

- The prophetic voices of the bishops and other diocesan leaders who offer faith-informed political positions in the media and at the Massachusetts State House
- An awareness that justice issues have a direct and daily impact on faith communities
- Responses to gun violence and the persecution of Christians in the Middle East
- Creation Care initiatives to address global climate change
- Partnerships with Episcopal City Mission and interfaith and ecumenical groups
- Global mission relationships

*“[We need to] face outward - outward within our neighborhoods, outward within our state & region, and the world.... If through those activities, we shine forth the light of Christ, and teach others how important this faith is to us, then we will have witnessed to our faith.”* (Survey response)

Several respondents express concern that a political focus can detract from or dilute the church’s responsibility to foster worship and Christian formation, and that the church needs a clearer theological foundation for its social and political stances.

*“We need to reemphasize the spirituality that grounds us in the love of God and compels us to political action. If people just want political action, they can join their local political party, cause, or volunteer organization... So, what makes church different?”* (Survey response)

## **DIOCESAN LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE**

Respondents express a strong need for enhanced congregational support from diocesan leadership. More deeply, people express a desire for a relationship in which **diocesan leadership’s primary role is to support and empower local congregations in their ministries.**

*“We know God is pulling us forward. So how does the diocese support individual parishes in being creative and responding to the needs of their community, and being the church?”*  
(Barnstable Open Session)

Suggested forms of support include:

- Assisting with structural challenges in order to help lay and clergy leaders focus on spiritual formation and ministry development
- Addressing the sustainability of congregations in a more comprehensive, inclusive and transparent way
- Facilitating greater cooperation among parishes
- Offering resources to better equip congregations to engage in their local communities

*“I would appreciate seeing the diocese help with structural issues that every parish faces, freeing folks for mission and ministry in their own communities.”* (Survey Response)

*“Struggling parishes do not have the resources to flock to diocesan programming. Programming and diocesan teams should be with parishes in their respective settings--you know that whole incarnational thing: take flesh and dwell.”* (Survey Response)

Members of our diocese express feelings of disconnection and neglect and a sense that diocesan leadership does not recognize their concerns. Respondents believe that our governing structures have lacked transparency, and that decision-making has favored some ministries over others, contributing to a sense of insiders and outsiders within our diocese.

Dissatisfaction is particularly felt by members of congregations that:

- Are geographically distant from Boston
- Do not fit the traditional parish model
- Serve primarily marginalized ethnic or racial communities
- Struggle in regards to finances, infrastructure, and leadership

*"We have a diocesan structure where we have got a lot of wonderful people involved in the diocese, but they tend to be inside [Route 128], they tend to have a limited vision, they don't get out much, and the people of the diocese... we have been largely cut out." (Beverly Farms Open Session)*

Suggestions for increasing **transparency, communication, and equal participation** include:

- Creating entry points for lay people to get engaged beyond the deanery system
- Empowering and mentoring diverse, talented, and innovative lay and clergy leaders
- Recruiting diocesan staff who reflect the diversity of our diocese
- Listening to voices not currently represented in diocesan leadership
- Improving access to resources in our diocese and the wider church
- Using social media and online and printed publications to create a forum for all members to learn from one another, share ideas, and build relationships

*"I need to feel like the Diocese is connected... I need to feel like the priests and other people who work in ministry and churches are being supported, and that there isn't too much bureaucracy in the way. I want the churches to be called to go deeper." (Survey Response)*

Members of our diocese express appreciation for our two bishops and want them to:

- Share their own faith, policies, beliefs, and visions
- Help congregations make the best use of visitations
- Continue to grow in spiritual and moral leadership

Some respondents question whether the current diocesan structures are **equipped to support an innovative mission strategy**. Respondents express desire for our leaders and governing bodies to:

- Consider changes in the number, training, gifts, and organization of diocesan personnel
- Clarify the role of the Cathedral in supporting the life of our diocese
- Evaluate existing programs and shift resources towards more effective programs
- Plan beyond the current three-year time frame for a mission strategy
- Review and potentially revise our diocesan Constitution and Canons

*"Until we are very strategic we can't make changes, [we need to] look at the programs we have. ... We need to change the minds of those with endowments, and refocus that in how to work with the needs here." (Immigrant Congregations)*

Many people express a need to become a more cohesive diocese and suggest ways that members of our diocese could come together to form stronger relationships, including social and cultural events that draw on our diocese's rich diversity.

*"And it's not one [congregation's] mission, in particular, but it's our mission. If you struggle, I struggle. If you succeed, I succeed. [We need] that kind of mindset."* (Boston Open Session)

## VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Throughout this listening process, members of our diocese voice an awareness that the world is changing and that we as the church will need **to embrace creative opportunities, make significant decisions, and accept hard changes**. Respondents express enthusiasm for:

- Discerning the gifts and needs of their local communities
- Creating new forms of Christian community
- Better supporting the strategic ministries that expand our reach
- Strengthening relationships among all our leaders, ministries, and congregations

*"How do we ... grow mission [that] transforms us in the process?"* (Diocesan Staff)

*"We need to... sit down together and talk about what stays and what goes. And I think everything's on the table.... in the midst of this radical reformation which we are right in the middle of."*  
(New Bedford Open Session)

*"I would love to join in a mission with my sister churches, but then have the programming emerge from that mission .... just give me a direction and let me figure out the details."* (Andover Open Session)

*"It's a reflection on what's already happening in our diocese... that people are now ready to say, 'Okay, I get it. Let's go out and do something... Let's start living our faith rather than just going to listen to it.'"*  
(Natick Open Session)

*"I would like to see [us] really think hard about what it means to be church and how to be church. Does church have to be in a building on Sunday mornings?"* (Taunton Open Session)

*"So, what does it mean if you have the people God wants to take care of, but they can't fill a collection plate?"* (Diocesan Council and Standing Committee)

*"[We need] not to say, well, I'll give you a year or two years to be self-sustaining, but to be realistic about engaging that ministry [and what] these communities are struggling with."* (Clergy of Color)

*"We need to not lose momentum around what has been working...the traditional parishes can be transformed by the ministries that are out doing the things on the margins."* (Diocesan Staff)

*"If [an idea] doesn't begin with relationship, and with humility entering those relationships, it has the potential to break down. So I think part of God's dream is, first, building relationships rather than going, doing, fixing, or whatever, but first building relationships."* (Boston Open Session)



## NEXT STEPS

### Please share your response to the Initial Report!

The team will gather your feedback through online and phone surveys from April 10 to April 24. The online link and toll-free phone number will be posted at [www.diomass.org/new-mission-strategy](http://www.diomass.org/new-mission-strategy) along with the initial report. We will also hold four sessions to briefly present the findings of the report and invite further conversation:

#### Sunday, April 10, 2016

Trinity, Topsfield  
124 River Road  
2:30-4:00pm

#### Sunday, April 17th

St. Christopher's, Chatham  
625 Main Street  
3:00 - 4:30pm

#### Saturday, April 16<sup>th</sup>

Trinity, Boston  
206 Clarendon Street  
(parish house entrance)  
10:00-11:30am

#### Saturday, April 23rd

Church of Our Savior, Middleboro  
120 Center Street  
1:00 - 2:30pm

The goal of this listening process has been for everyone to hear the many voices in our diocese and to discover who we are together as diverse people knit together in Christ. You can participate by letting the listening team know:

- if we have overlooked any important perspectives or left out of the report anything you believe is essential
- what connections you see and what new vision you imagine in response to the hopes and concerns that have been raised

The team will incorporate your responses into a **Revised Report**, which we will share with you in May.

### Please look forward to reading and responding to the Draft Mission Strategy this summer!

- The mission strategy drafting group, recently named by Diocesan Council and Bishop Gates, will use the findings of the Revised Report and other information about the strengths and challenges for our diocese and our Episcopal Church to create a **Draft Mission Strategy**, which they will offer for your input over the summer.
- Based on your feedback, they will make any necessary revisions and then present a **Proposed Mission Strategy** in September for consideration by diocesan clergy and your delegates to Diocesan Convention in November. If approved, this plan will become our **Mission Strategy** for the next three years.

## APPENDIX: THEMES USED TO CODE TRANSCRIPTS AND SURVEYS

### Parish-level

- Worship (E.g. Preaching, music)
  - Accessibility of worship
- Adult Formation
- Religious Education (e.g. explaining traditions within parish)
- Spiritual Formation (e.g. Prayer, Spiritual Growth)
- Parish Community Development (small groups; sense of community)
- Congregational Health
  - Relationships within congregations
- Role of Clergy
- Lay people responsibilities (including Lay Leadership development)
- Empowerment/Agency
- Leadership support
- Attendance
- New Members (welcoming to visitors)
- Evangelism (e.g. inviting people)

### Parish Resources

- Personal Stewardship Finances (e.g. parish finances; personal finances and individual donations)
- Congregational Financial Sustainability
- Bricks and Mortar Assets (buildings, use of buildings, age/state of buildings)

### Ministries/Areas of outreach

- Outreach
  - Food/Household Item Ministries (collecting items for another ministry)
  - Partnership with local ministries in community (e.g. engaging with local schools, going out and working with local ministries to do outreach)
- Community/Neighborhood engagement
- Ministries (in discussion of ministries that are actually happening, have happened, or are being proposed)
  - Children's ministries
  - Youth ministries
  - Young Adult Ministry
  - Senior Ministries
  - Intentional Communities
  - Interfaith Dialogue
  - Ministries with Families
  - Social Justice
  - Education Ministries
  - National/Global Engagement
  - Racial Ministries
  - Other

## **Diocese-level**

- Cathedral
- Church Planting
- Clergy Salary/Training
- Diocesan Structure/Organization
- Diocesan Leadership
  - Bishops
  - Diocesan Staffing/Roles
- Diocesan Finances
- Diocesan Office
- Diocesan Resources
- Geography (e.g. Cape Cod, Boston vs. suburbs)
- Struggling/Merging/Closing Congregations
- Economic Disparities between communities
- Support of congregations
- Connection/Disconnection with the Diocese
- Political Engagement (e.g. with the state house)
  - Policy (Diocesan role in policy)
- Programmatic Evaluation

## **Social & Cultural Issues**

- Addictions (e.g. drugs/heroin/opioids/alcohol)
- Affordable Housing (and homelessness)
- Aging population
- Children/Youth
- Class
- Disabilities/Special Needs
- Diversity (inclusion/multiculturalism)
- Economy
- Education/Schools
- Employment
- Environment
- Gender equity
- Gentrification
- Health (physical and mental)
- Immigration
- LGBT
- Overscheduling (e.g. families busy, too many activities)
- Poverty
- Prison
- Racial Equity
- Secularity/ Decline of Organized Religion/ Church Relevance
- Veterans
- Violence/Crime/Guns

## **Relationships**

- Relationship between Diocese and Parish
- Relationship between Vestry and Parish
- Other ministries in Parish
- Relationships between Parishes

### **From Parish and Diocesan Levels**

- Communication
- Language Differences
- Technology
- Transparency
- Inclusion
- Authenticity/Relevance
- Sense of common identity/community/direction
- Safety
- Trust

### **Visioning**

- Long term as well as immediate need planning (e.g. Balancing patience and urgency)
- Openness to what's new (e.g. new ideas)
- New Ways of Doing Ministry
- Fix problems (not just treat symptoms)
- Visioning Steps (Talking about steps in visioning – e.g. Creating the vision, planning how we want to implement the vision; actually implementing the vision)

### **Other**

- Questions/Comments about the Mission Strategy Listening Process
- Implementation of Mission Strategy Listening Process
- Celebration/Excitement about the process/conversation
- Anger with the diocese
- Fear
- Joy
- Other (please specify – what did we miss?)