

Becoming More Missional: The Episcopal Church in Vermont
An Invitation to be part of a Year-long Journey of
Visioning, Discernment and Planning for Tomorrow
The Right Reverend Thomas C. Ely - May 24, 2014

Part of my ministry as your Bishop is to take the “long-view” for the benefit and well-being of the diocesan community we know as the Episcopal Church in Vermont. I do this in partnership with others involved in the leadership of congregations and with those serving in leadership roles on behalf of the wider church community.

This document describes and invites your participation in a year-long journey of assessment, consultation and discernment now underway to help the Episcopal Church in Vermont explore and respond to the question: *“What do we need in order to support and sustain a more missional Episcopal Church in Vermont for the next 5-10 years?”* Or, asked another way: *“How will our diocesan structure and our combined resources best support our common efforts to be a missional church today and tomorrow?”*

By Missional Church, I mean a body of people equipped through worship, study and fellowship, to go into the world of our daily life to live and participate in God’s reconciling mission. “The Mission of the Church is to restore all things to unity with God and each other in Christ.” (BCP Catechism, p. 855)

God’s Mission has a Church. The Church has no Mission apart from its participation in God’s Mission. This is not a “new” direction for the Episcopal Church in Vermont. This is part of our continuing journey!

Missional Church is not a program, but represents an evolutionary shift in thinking about the church, with strong connections to the themes of baptismal ministry and baptismal living that have been so central to our understanding of what it means to be Christ’s body in the world. “Being More Missional” is less about being understood as a gathered community and more as a sent community. The dynamic in this shift might be described more as a “go to them” dynamic rather than one of waiting for folks to “come to us,” what is often described as the “attractational” model.

God is already at work in our neighborhoods and communities. Becoming Missional is about going into those neighborhoods and communities to discover what God is up to. Becoming Missional is about deepening our understanding and practice of what it means to be the “sent” people of God. Becoming Missional is about embracing the notion that *“every believer embodies the life of the church in their neighborhood, in their school, their place of work; telling (and living) God’s story in the context of compassionate and genuine relationships.”* (See Jeff Maguire’s YouTube presentation on Missional: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arxfLK_sd68)

Throughout this conversation, important spiritual questions guide our thinking, including:

“How shall we, the people and congregations of the Episcopal Church in Vermont, best steward the human, financial and property resources God has given into our care, with a focus on abundance, in order to engage most fully in God’s reconciling mission for the foreseeable future?”

“How and in what new ways are we being called to participate in God’s reconciling mission today and what do we need in order to be best equipped for and responsive to that call as part of our ongoing commitment to baptismal ministry and baptismal living?”

Along with the many things we need to discover and learn about “Becoming More Missional,” there are also these questions for us to consider together:

- How do and will the Stirrings of the Spirit Initiative, our Strategic Plan, and the vision and future mission of Rock Point, help guide our conversation toward finding those places of convergence?
- How will the 2014 Diocesan Convention with its theme of “Equipped for the Journey,” and our long standing diocesan commitment to baptismal ministry and living inform our conversation?
- Where, if at all, does the prospect for a capital campaign fit in?
- How do we best communicate this work and its results throughout the Episcopal Church in Vermont?

Phase One: May to October

May: Three Consultations underway:

1. **Christine Graham**, of CPG Consultants and the person who conducted our 2011 Capital Campaign Feasibility Study, is helping us take the pulse of the diocese with regard to the issues raised in that study, which were then presented and discussed at the special Diocesan Convention in June 2011. She is doing this in two ways. The first is a general survey to as many folks as we can reach electronically. The second is by way of phone interviews with those who were personally interviewed as part of the 2011 Capital Campaign Feasibility Study. Christine will complete most of her work between Easter and the middle of June. Her preliminary report will be part of a larger conversation with Diocesan Council and everyone who attends the *Becoming More Missional* gathering (open to all) to be held on Saturday June 28th at Trinity Church, Rutland from 9:30-12:30.

2. **Craig Smith**, “retired” diocesan clergy, President of the Rock Point Board and the newly appointed Rock Point Development Minister, is focusing his efforts on the future mission and ministry of our Rock Point property in Burlington. Craig began this ministry in January 2014 under special agreement with me and funded through a grant from the Virginia Hunt Trust. This work is currently underway and will continue through the time of my sabbatical, and beyond. This is a process into which all are invited and I hope you will take up that invitation.

The Rock Point Board's working vision for Rock Point is: *"To be a welcoming center of Christian spirituality, community, education, training and environmental stewardship."* Craig's position description calls upon him to:

- Implement the vision for Rock Point;
- Assess current ministries and property uses;
- Establish relationships with potential partners and stakeholders;
- Hold conversations around the diocese to generate ideas and support for the vision;
- Bring stakeholders, potential partners and diocesan leaders together for a World Café session to imagine Rock Point's vision being lived out in 5-10 years;
- Develop plan/action steps to move closer to realization of the vision;
- Support the development of a Rock Point summer camp alumni data base;
- Support the Alleluia Fund efforts to raise funds for Rock Point;
- Identify potential donors and grant sources for implementing the vision;
- Support efforts to bring clarity to the ministry of the Bishop Booth Conference Center (BBCC), both short term and long term, all in harmony with the vision.

3. **Delbert C. Glover (Del)**, a retired DuPont executive who has also served in many key leadership roles in The Episcopal Church, will work with us throughout this process. In phase one of his work, Del will consult with me about issues related to funding our mission, the personnel needed to support that mission and the institutional structures that shape and direct our common life. Del will provide consulting services, including engaging with knowledgeable persons whom I identify, in order to provide information leading to recommendations on income and expenses, organizational restructuring and personnel configurations needed to help the Diocese of Vermont realize and sustain a balanced budget and organizational structure for 2016 and beyond as we seek to be the "Missional Church" God is calling us to be. Del will also hold group conversations with at least three groups of people:

- **Diocesan Council** on August 9th at Trinity, Rutland;
- **Canonically Resident and Licensed Clergy** on September 9th at St. John's, Randolph;
- **Wardens and Treasurers** (or their designees) Saturday date and location to be determined.

The Budget and Finance Committee agreed there will not be significant personnel or budget changes in the 2015 budget, but rather will use the information gained from this year-long process in developing the 2016 budget. This will take some of the anxiety out of the system while I am on sabbatical (July 1 - October 30, 2014) and, hopefully, signals that we are serious about these matters going forward. We will have some contingencies in place to address possible shortfalls in the 2015 budget.

June, 2014

June 28 - "Becoming More Missional" Gathering at Trinity Church Rutland, 9:30-12:30:

For several years the Diocesan Council has hosted a wider conversation as part of its budgeting process. This year, the gathering will be the place where we continue the wider conversation about what is needed to support and sustain a more "Missional" Episcopal Church in Vermont for the next 5-10 years.

All are invited to this gathering and I hope many will choose to participate. Information shared and discussed on June 28th will include Christine's preliminary report, an update from Craig on the Rock Point vision process, Del's work to date and a fuller sharing of the year-long discernment process that is outlined in this document: **Becoming More Missional: An Invitation to be part of a Year-long Journey of Visioning, Discernment and Planning for Tomorrow**. Other items presented on June 28th will include: an update on the Alleluia Fund, the Diocesan Budget process for 2015, the Stirrings of the Spirit Initiative and my sabbatical plans.

July 1 to October 30, 2014:

While I am on Sabbatical, various aspects of this year-long process will continue under the leadership of Canon Lynn Bates. The goal is to have most of the preliminary work done by October 30, 2014, so that I can review it all upon my return from sabbatical.

Phase Two: November, 2014 to June 2015 (Begins after my return from Sabbatical)

The details for phase two will become more precise based on the reports received from Christine, Craig and Del. What follows here are some key elements and a summary of how I anticipate this phase will unfold, along with some dates for you to note in your calendars. This phase in particular seeks to engage the broadest constituency from around the Episcopal Church in Vermont as possible, so that everyone's voice might be heard.

Del Glover continues his consulting role as we begin to form recommendations and engage the people of our congregations more widely in a discussion of those and in this overall process of discernment and visioning. Christine Graham will be available for further work as needed. Craig Smith will continue to lead the visioning and planning process for Rock Point.

October 31-November 1, 2014

Diocesan Convention: "Equipped for the Journey: Formation for Mission." This theme with a focus on re-orienting, re-imagining and re-tooling for the future is seen as part of the conversation about **"Becoming More Missional"** for the people and congregations of the Episcopal Church in Vermont. The Convention Planning Team and our Convention guests all have this document and are being attentive to it in their planning for Convention.

November and December 2014:

I return from sabbatical and receive the “fruit” of this discernment process to date. The material is shared with key leaders and a summary presentation with initial draft recommendations is prepared for further and wider diocesan engagement. The plan for wider engagement is finalized; materials are prepared, brought to Diocesan Council, distributed and posted on the website.

January-March 2015:

January 9-10 - Diocesan Council receives and reviews the material and draft recommendations during its overnight meeting and any edits are made.

January 19th - A summary presentation, including draft recommendations is distributed to the people of our diocese, and on line, along with final details about the “Town Meeting” forums.

February - March (TBD) “Town Meeting” Forums are held in Mission Districts, for discussion and engagement of the report and draft recommendations. Here is one of the important and excellent opportunities for people throughout the Episcopal Church in Vermont to participate in this work. Please consider this YOUR INVITATION!

March - May 2015:

The Feedback from “Town Meeting” forums is considered and a final report is prepared for Diocesan Council and then for wider circulation in advance of a Diocesan-wide Celebration to be held on June 13, 2015.

June 13, 2015 (Save the date NOW):

There will be a Diocesan Celebration to conclude the year-long discernment process and receive/discuss the fruit of that journey. The location is yet to be determined.

The successful completion of this year-long journey will be measured by these hopes:

1. Clarity of vision and direction about our future.
2. A deepening awareness, understanding and embrace of “Missional Church.”
3. Congregations see benefits for their local ministry emerging from this work.
4. A high level of engagement by people from throughout the Episcopal Church in Vermont in response to this invitation to help shape our future together.
5. A clear vision, mission and plan is set in motion for Rock Point.
6. Diocesan leaders gain clarity about future direction in the areas of mission funding, institutional structure and personnel needs.

I hope people see in all of this an invitation to help shape what it means for the Episcopal Church in Vermont to be a more “Missional Church,” increasing our awareness and participation of God’s reconciling mission in new and deeper ways. This process is not only about the “bottom line” of a budget, or a structure, or a staff, or a capital campaign. It is about what WE need to do, what WE need to make the focus of our attention, what WE need to do to position the Episcopal Church in Vermont to faithfully participate in God’s reconciling mission, both today and tomorrow. My hope is that you will join in this shaping of our common life as the Episcopal Church in Vermont, with all the uncertainties and possibilities that are part of this journey. *+Thomas*