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Dear Sisters and Brothers:

Greetings in the name of our Living Hope, Jesus Christ!

We have been asked by the Diocesan Executive Committee to communicate with all of the members of the diocese with respect to a particularly sensitive part of the Strategic Plan – the rationalization of ‘buildings and resources within Algoma’, as it is called in item 1.5. While the process involved in ‘developing plans, resources and schedules for Parishes that fall below the established benchmarks’ is the responsibility of the Deanery Officials, Bishop and Executive, and thus stands outside our mandate, the Strategic Plan Implementation Team has a huge investment in this process, since it caps the development of the benchmarks and the assessment process that we have nurtured and monitored over the past three years. And so it is in our broader mandate of ‘implementing’ the Strategic Plan that we offer these reflections and plans to the Church.

We are aware of a growing anxiety in the diocese around the matter of ‘rationalization’ and there is a misperception of the benchmarks and assessments as a ‘report card’ that renders a pass or fail grade. We feel that these perceptions, while understandable, are counterproductive to the development of sustainable, healthy and vital congregations in our diocese, which is actually the aim of the assessment process. We would like, therefore, to offer some reflections on what ‘rationalization’ might mean in the context of the assessment work underway.

The choices we face

The responsible stewardship of our resources will require us to make some hard choices in the next couple of years. In some instances, it may seem meet and right to merge, suspend or conclude the ministries of some congregations. In other instances, faithfulness may require bold steps, such as pioneering fresh ministries, planting new congregations, or reshaping current ministries in new and imaginative ways.

In making these or any other choices, the guiding question must not be ‘Which churches pass and which fail?’ but rather, ‘How can we as the body of Christ in this area most faithfully and joyfully share in the mission of God, providing ministry and making known the good news?’ Foundational to this question is the resolve to ensure that all that we do deepens our love of God, our faithfulness in Jesus Christ, and our vibrant life in the Spirit.

It is clear to us that creative thinking, godly care for one another, and new models of ministry that express our unity in service to God’s common mission will all need to be considered. We must ensure that we continue to support thriving congregations. We must, to the best of our ability, expand strategic ministries where inadequate resources presently exist. We must identify and support emerging missional

opportunities. We must look to avenues through which those in unsustainable or static situations may transition into situations of missional vitality in whatever way is possible. In every instance, our goal must be to inspire the faithful in this diocese to live as healthy and vital congregations.

Post-assessment process

How can this happen? At its last meeting of the Executive, the following post-assessment process was endorsed:

- 1) Once all congregations in the deaneries have completed their assessment process, deanery 'mission-effectiveness' teams will be established. These teams will function under the leadership of the territorial archdeacons and include individuals that are good and trusted facilitators. Deanery Officials will be involved either through direct membership on deanery teams or in a consultative capacity.
- 2) The mandate of the deanery teams will be to consider how what is happening in each congregation contributes to (or, possibly, detracts from) the effectiveness of the mission and ministry we share as parishes, deaneries or regions within the diocese, and then make appropriate recommendations to the Bishop and Executive.
- 3) Any recommendations arising from the work of these groups will not be based simply on whether individual congregations 'measure up', but rather on how God's mission and vibrant Christian living are best served overall. Considerations might include new models of ministry and other creative initiatives or partnerships across parish, or perhaps even deanery lines.
- 4) The voices of congregations and deaneries will be heard in this process. These voices will provide input through preparatory work at deanery council meetings.
- 5) The Congregational Development Officer has been asked to oversee the development of a draft process for deanery teams. The draft process will be presented for consideration by the Executive at its November 2013 meeting.
- 6) In the meantime, we encourage congregations, as they complete their assessment process, to act upon the assessment insights; for the ultimate purpose of the process is to nurture 'joyful Anglicans, serving, growing and proclaiming Christ's love in Algoma and beyond'.

Common questions

While there are many questions that cannot be definitively answered until the process has been approved, here are some brief answers to common questions:

Q. Are the deanery teams different from the assessment teams? How big will the deanery teams be and how will they be selected? Will they receive training?

A. The deanery teams will be made up of a small group of lay and ordained individuals, led by the territorial archdeacon and selected by the Bishop in consultation with parish incumbents and the deanery officials. They will receive training and be resourced by the Congregational Development Officer.

Q. Will there be more parish visits (from the deanery teams, CDO, bishop, etc.)?

A. The consultation process might well require informal visits.

Q. How objective will the process be?

A. While total objectivity is not possible in an evaluative process like this, it will be important that members of the deanery teams view the results of the assessment process fairly and are prepared to make recommendations based on how the diocese can best be responsive to and responsible for the mission God has given us.

Q. How will the recommendations of the deanery teams be evaluated in order of priority?

A. These matters will be determined by the executive bodies of the church.

Q. Who will make the final decisions?

A. Many decisions can be made at the local level. Decisions that affect the livelihood of clergy or the organization of the structures of the diocese, including the establishment and dissolution of parishes and congregations, rest with the Bishop, in consultation with the parishes, as per our canons, and the Executive Committee.

It is our hope that you will devote thought and prayer to what we have shared above as we prepare for the November 2013 Executive meeting. Please direct any comments or questions to a member of the Implementation Team. We truly believe that, shaped by a living hope and acting boldly on God's promises, we can be a compelling reflection for the world of what life is like in the Kingdom of God. We will need to take deliberate and concrete steps, however, to make this aspiration a reality in the decades ahead.

We thank you for your partnership in the work of renewal. We eagerly anticipate what God will bring to pass if we continue on the path God has set before us!

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