



**Diocese of Toronto**  
Anglican Church of Canada

# *Policy on Sustainable & Strategic Ministry*

Approved by: Diocesan Council  
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# *Policy on Sustainable & Strategic Ministry*

## Introduction

In the fall of 2002, a commission was formed under Canon 24 to review the parish of St. Chad's. The Commission had looked for, but did not find, a set of definitions or policies that encapsulated our Diocese's shared understanding of parish viability.

Much work has been done on this topic over the years. The most recent work was brought to the Diocesan Council by the Parish Viability Task Force chaired by Bishop Ann Tottenham.

Notwithstanding the work that has been done over the years, our Diocese has not adopted and implemented a set of working definitions and principles to form a consistent basis for assessing, and making recommendations on, a parish's ministry. The commission on St. Chad's, as part of its findings, recommended to Council that such definitions, principles and policies be developed to support the work of the Diocese in the future.

Therefore, in March 2003, Diocesan Council asked the Chief Administrative Officer to form a working group to develop a policy on "parish viability" and to report back to Council.

## The Working Group

- A working group was formed under the leadership of David Robinson, Lead Congregational Consultant. The working group includes the following people:
- The Right Rev. Michael Bedford-Jones, College of Bishops and Link Bishop to Planning and Development Board
- Ms. Myrlene Boken, Consultant to Planning and Development
- The Rev. Canon Dawn Davis, Director of Ministry Resources
- Mr. David Horrocks, Volunteer Congregational Development Facilitator/Consultant
- The Rev. Isaac Kawuki-Mukasa, Congregational Development Consultant
- Mr. Brian Mills, Director of Planning and Development
- Mr. Eric Pollard, Treasury Board representative and Volunteer Congregational Development Facilitator/Consultant
- The Rev. Janet Sidey, Co-Chair of Ministry Resources Board and Incumbent of St. Monica's and St. Matthew, First Avenue
- The Rev. David Warren, Planning and Development Board representative

## The Mandate of the Working Group: Intended Outcomes

The working group is named the Strategic and Sustainable Ministry Working Group. Its mandate is to explore the key dimensions of sustainability in parish ministry and the relationship between financial sustainability and vitality of ministry and mission. As such, it will engage in a consultation and discernment process to create a common language and a common approach that our Diocese will be able to use when assessing parish mission and ministry.

The primary intended outcome is this: We shall build trust throughout our Diocese when we operate from a basis of shared intentions and within an agreed-upon process, using commonly accepted assumptions, categories and definitions.

In addition, clergy and laity will work more effectively together in addressing the reality of limited resources, and expanding and decreasing ministries.

## Scope and Application of Definitions, Principles and Policies

The definitions, principles and policies will be used as a basis of communication and analysis when we, as a Diocese, make decisions about parish ministry. Such decisions or situations will include:

- When we discuss the use of parish strategy in our Diocesan planning processes
- When a parish is suffering financial shortfalls and people are called together to assess the appropriate response to the situation
- When demographic shifts raise the question of how many churches a certain geographic area can sustain
- At a critical milestone in the life of a congregation when decisions are needed to map the future of the local parish

This policy document will give us a common approach to interpret the strategic priorities of our Diocese using information from demographic studies to ensure that we have vital, mission oriented parishes and ministries, equipped and empowered to minister to the communities that make up the diocese.

This policy document will give us the means to re-deploy any surplus assets which will be identified and realized by the above policies and to apply those assets to support new ministries, initiatives and structures that will help achieve the strategic goals of the Church in our diocese.

Whenever we come together to solve a problem or to plan for the future of a parish or a group of parishes, we will use the definitions, principles, policies and processes developed by this working group as the foundation for the work together.

## What is prompting us to do this right now?

The Diocese of Toronto has experienced a profound increase in population and shift in demographics like no other area in Canada. This has resulted in dramatic changes in the size and make-up of local communities. We have seen shifts in location, ethnicity and religious affiliations of people, changing needs and changing expectations of people in many communities.

This, in turn, has affected how we carry out the mission of our Diocese through the local congregation. We have many examples of a congregation or parish established years ago, that no longer fits the local community's needs. The symptoms of this often show up in shrinking Sunday attendance and shrinking financial resources. It can also be seen in the deterioration of buildings and church fabric as the local congregation is unable or unwilling to maintain the "beauty of holiness".

On the other hand, we also have emerging and growing communities where we have no local or adequate expression of our mission and ministry. The demand for space in the pews or in the church school outstrips the resources which we allocated to that community years ago.

Therefore, because of the population increase and demographic shifts in our Diocese, we find ourselves frequently being called upon to make decisions about:

- Building up congregations where none exist.
- Expanding ministries where there are inadequate resources.
- Scaling down or even closing ministries where there are too many resources for the local community.

When we begin to tackle any one of these situations, we find ourselves struggling with the concepts of financial viability, healthy congregations, mutuality of interest, mission field etc., etc. As the Commission on St. Chad's found, their work would have been easier and their stewardship of resources greater and more satisfactory, if they could have focused on applying definitions, principles and policies to a particular situation, rather than starting from scratch.

Because we know that we are facing many similar situations and many similar decisions, now is the time to start adopting a common language and common approach and stop reinventing the wheel.

## Strategic and Scriptural Context

The mission of our Diocese of Toronto is to worship God and proclaim Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and to embody – in word and action – God's reconciling love, justice, compassion and liberation, through which knowledge of God's reign is extended.

This is our collective purpose and quest which we bring to life throughout our Diocese in many ways. At the core of our work together is the local mission and ministry of the parish – our way of organizing ourselves to realize our mission as Anglicans, both collectively and individually.

In the Diocese of Toronto in the year 2004, we are building communities of hope through three distinct but complementary strategies:

### **Making our Anglican life seeker friendly [Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 5:38, Luke 14:28-30]**

Being, and being seen to be, welcoming to and supportive of all individuals in our communities that seek spiritual, social and/or physical nurturing.

Being seen as a beacon of light, of good news and celebration, of friendship and of caring, to all who look for a source of affirmation and joy amidst the noise of a modern world.

### **Creating distinct and supportive ministries which respond to and reflect the diversity of our society [Matthew 28.1, Galatians 3:28]**

- Sponsoring and encouraging ministries which are, and are seen to be, supportive of diverse cultural communities.
- Sponsoring and encouraging new ways of ministry which resonate with young people and speaks to young seekers.
- Renewing our ministry around that which is sacred to reflect the key segments of our society.

### **Advocating Christ's message to influence social policy and social realities [Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 4:17-19, Micah 6:8]**

- Being, and being seen to be, a courageous and persuasive voice for the homeless, the poor and the marginalized.
- Creating and carrying out ministries which address the needs of the homeless and the poor across our Diocese as living examples of Christ working among us.

Inherent in both our mission and our strategies is the reality of change – the need to grow, the need to continuously change, the need to renew ourselves in order for our ministry to have life and to give life.

## **Underlying Definitions and Principles**

The mission of our Diocese calls us all to use the gifts God has entrusted to us for the benefit of the church's work and to the glory of Christ throughout our Diocese.

We are “members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him, the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord”. (Ephesians 2.19) Our Anglican understanding of Church is expressed in article 19 of the Book of Common Prayer. Church is defined as “a congregation of the

faithful in which the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments duly ministered". This definition affords greater flexibility in ministry forms than is currently practiced in our Diocese.

We share a collective obligation of stewardship that requires us to work together to ensure that our ministry is as healthy and vibrant as possible. This obligation arises not only from our shared collective mission but also from scripture and from our vision of extending the kingdom and building communities of hope. It is core to our collective organizational purpose.

By virtue of our baptismal covenant every Christian is obliged to engage in ministry and to become a member of the household of God. Primary to the mission of a local congregation is the mandate to build up the body of Christ so that Christians are equipped for mission work in the parish community.

As an episcopal church, we acknowledge that our Bishop has ultimate responsibility for the mission and ministry of the Diocese. However, our Bishop does not work alone. As a synodical church, wherein authority is shared amongst the clergy, the laity and the Bishops, we work collaboratively to support the mission of our Diocese, each using the gifts given by God to extend the kingdom.

Parish boundaries have been created by our Bishop in Council, and congregations have been established with the permission of our Bishop, to provide a gathering place for worship in the community and to serve the local community as a local expression of ministry and mission. The parish church is tangible evidence of our mission and of God's reign here on earth. The parish gives local expression to the mission and priorities of the Diocese.

Although our parishes have a fairly autonomous form of governance and management, the parish always exists in the context of the mission of the Diocese. It delivers ministry to the local community on behalf of the whole Diocese. In that respect, our parishes and our Diocese always exist and work together in mutuality of interest.

Parishes and congregations are not permanent structures. They have a life cycle. They are planted; they grow; sometimes they die; sometimes they transform. There is a mutual stewardship responsibility, shared between the local ministry and the rest of our Diocese, which obliges us to work together through all stages of the life cycle. It goes beyond congregational self-designation and self-determination. This responsibility includes a discernment of what to do when a ministry has insufficient resources and when it can call upon the resources of the wider church.

## Proposed Policy Statement

Note that the policy is in *italics* and explanatory information or guidance is in regular font.

*Many parish ministries will be able to provide all the resources they need to grow and prosper in their work. These parish ministries will be considered financially self-supporting or "sustainable". However, not all parish ministries are sustainable. When a parish ministry is found to be unable to sustain itself financially, representatives of the parish ministry and the Diocese will work together under the direction of the Area Bishop to bring about a resolution.*

A Sustainable Parish Ministry is defined as a congregation, cluster of congregations or parish ministry initiative that has many of the following observable characteristics:

- It has clergy and active lay leadership with the skills to manage the programs and property of the parish ministry to meet its own sense of mission.
- It has the energy and resources to meet the challenges of the community it serves.
- It relies mainly on the freewill offering of its members for its core financial support.
- It has the resources and appropriate leadership necessary to carry out its calling.
- It can provide for the future well being of congregational or parish life.
- It generates financial resources from its members and those it serves, and does not deplete its capital reserves or capital assets.

There are certain parish ministries that are strategic to the mission of the Diocese and can be designated/recognized as such. It is ultimately the responsibility of the Area Bishop in consultation with others to make such a designation.

Those whose parish ministry is strategic to the mission of the Diocese have a right to call upon the wider church for help if they lack sufficient resources to sustain themselves. Although there is a promise that the needs will be prayerfully considered, there is no assurance that such help will be available.

A Strategic Parish Ministry is defined as a congregation, cluster of congregations or parish ministry initiative that has several of the following characteristics:

- The activities of the parish ministry make a discernible difference in individual lives and in the larger world around it.
- It is mission-focused and in alignment with the vision and priorities of the Diocese.
- It is outward-looking, geared to mission and active in extending God's reign in their community.
- It is strategically located in the context of the Area ministry strategy.

Where a local parish ministry is no longer strategic and not financially self-supporting, it cannot be supported indefinitely and absorb resources that would otherwise go to ministries in our Diocese that are strategic. Such a parish ministry will be considered to be "unsustainable".

An Unsustainable Parish Ministry is defined as a congregation, cluster of congregations or parish ministry initiative that exhibits these characteristics:

- It is not designated a strategic ministry.
- It is not mission-focused and unable to come into alignment with Diocesan strategic priorities.
- It is inward-looking and makes little difference in its surrounding community.

and exhibits some of these characteristics:

- It is depleting its capital assets to pay for its current expenses.
- It is unable to maintain its property and have sufficient capital reserves for its longer term property needs.
- It cannot cover current operating expenses without cutting back on important ministry.
- It is unduly reliant on sources of funding outside the freewill offering of its members.

## Acknowledgements

The Working Group wishes to acknowledge its debt to the work on viability of parishes shared by the Diocese of Melbourne, the Diocese of Niagara and the Viability Working Group of the Diocese of Toronto chaired by the Rt. Rev. Ann Tottenham in 1999. Their in-depth and faithful work on this critical subject formed the foundation of our efforts, without them our work would have been greatly impoverished.