

Report of the Areas and Area Councils Working Group to Diocesan Synod

November 2025

History and Mandate of the Working Group

The Areas and Area Councils Working Group (AACWG) was formed in May 2023 and tasked with juxtaposing the former Episcopal Area structure - which included Area Bishops and Area Councils - with the new episcopal leadership model, which features five territorial archdeaconries, and with recommending changes.

The Previous Episcopal Model of Areas and Area Bishops

CANON 43 (AREAS AND AREA BISHOPS) states that the Diocese shall be divided into geographical "Areas." It also states that the Diocesan Bishop may designate Suffragan Bishops (called Area Bishops) to exercise episcopal office within these Areas. In recent years, the Areas included York-Credit Valley, Trent-Durham, York-Scarborough, and York-Simcoe. *Canon 43 was suspended at Synod 2023.*

CANON 44 (AREA COUNCILS) states that each Area shall have an Area Council. Among other things, Area Councils acted in an advisory capacity to the Area Bishop, offered grants, organized Area events, and hired Area staff (i.e. Area youth ministry and outreach coordinators, etc.). They were to have a minimum of ten members and meet at least three times a year. Each Council had an annual budget of approximately \$100,000. *Canon 44 was suspended at Synod 2023.*

The Current Episcopal Model with Archdeacons

In late 2022, five Archdeaconries were created (East, West, Central, North and South) and four Archdeacons and one Canon Administrator were appointed to serve in them. Archdeacon John Anderson was assigned to the East Archdeaconry (which includes the Durham-Northumberland, Oshawa and Peterborough Deaneries), Archdeacon Theadore Hunt was assigned to Central (Eglinton, Scarborough, York-Central and York Mills Deaneries), Archdeacon Steven Mackison was assigned to West (Etobicoke-Humber, Mississauga, North Peel and Tecumseth Deaneries), Archdeacon Cheryl Palmer was assigned to South (Parkdale-Toronto West, St. James and Toronto East Deaneries), and Canon Laura Walton ODT was assigned to North (Holland, Huronia, Nottawasaga and Victoria-Haliburton Deaneries). Currently, Bishop Asbil oversees the Central Archdeaconry, Bishop Shaw oversees the North and East Archdeaconries, and Bishop Robertson oversees the West and South Archdeaconries.

Summary of AACWG's Work

Our initial efforts focused on forming a team of clergy and lay volunteers to deliberate on potential new structures to replace the former Area Councils. The team engaged in consultations with former members of the Area Councils and other diocesan stakeholders, including the Bishop's Youth Ministry Committee, to assess consensus around a preferred new model for diocesan structure in light of the suspension of the canons on Area Councils and Area Bishops. Throughout this process, the cochairs of the AACWG consulted with the College of Bishops, Synod Council, the Regional Deans, the Diocesan Executive Director, the Diocesan Director of Congregational Development and the Diocesan Executive Assistant. Based on this consultation, we were able to present three alternative models to the Regional Deans and Synod Council in May, 2025, for their feedback.

Recommendations

Following the extensive consultation mentioned above, we submit the following recommendations:

1. Non-Replacement of Former Area Councils:

While recognizing the good work accomplished by Area Councils under the former structure, we recommend that the Diocese not seek to replace these councils with analogous structures (e.g., Archdeaconry Councils, Deanery Councils).

2. Project Funding Structure:

We propose that the Bishops of the Diocese each be provided with a budget to fund parish ministry projects that do not meet the requirements of existing grants, and that may have been otherwise funded by Area Council grants. The focus would be on capital projects like, for example, website design, signage, livestreaming equipment, and other parish initiatives and projects that do not meet the requirements of other existing grants. The funds (\$54,000 in total) should be apportioned to each Bishop based on the number of archdeaconries in their charge (2/5, 2/5, 1/5), and administered at their discretion. In order to facilitate the approval of grant requests, we recommend that the Regional Deans work with applicants to ensure that their requests are reasonable and in accordance with the parameters set out above. We propose that a grant request form be made available

to all parishes and that the completion of this form, together with the Regional Dean's endorsement, be considered necessary steps before the request is forwarded to the appropriate bishop for approval.

3. FaithWorks Funding:

We recommend that the FaithWorks funds previously apportioned to Area Councils for outreach and advocacy projects be folded back into the FaithWorks annual budget and used by the administrators of that program to fund the ministries they have selected.

4. Discretionary Budgets for Regional Deans:

We recommend that Regional Deans each be allocated a budget of \$2000 per year to use at their discretion for fostering collegiality among clergy, and promoting ministry and collaboration within their deanery.

5. Deaneries, led by their Regional Dean and Clericus, will be expected to develop collaborative ministry plans and goals that suit their context. Examples of such initiatives include but are not limited to:

- i. Annual Deanery Meetings: Recognizing the importance of local deliberative bodies and the full participation of all the baptized in the ministry of the Church, deaneries could convene at least one meeting per year to discuss ministry priorities within the deanery, with the goal of fostering collaboration between parishes and groups. This might include guest speakers, open forums, and other forms of fostering creativity and inspiring new ideas for collaborative ministry within the deanery.
- ii. Deanery-wide worship services.
- iii. Deanery Christian Education Teams comprised of clergy and lay faithful.
- iv. Collaborative projects for faith formation and evangelization.
- v. Publication of devotionals.

If practicable and desired, two or more deaneries could pool resources and work together on these or any other initiative.

6. Develop a Job Description for Regional Deans:

We recommend that a clear and detailed job description for Regional Deans be developed that includes all the roles and responsibilities expected, including those detailed in the above recommendations.

Costs

The total cost of these recommendations would be \$90,000 per year. This includes \$54,000 in Episcopal funds, and \$36,000 in discretionary spending for the Regional Deans (\$2000 per Deanery).

Next Steps

Following a period of implementation beginning January 1, 2026, we recommend that this proposal be evaluated in the early spring of 2027 at a meeting of the Bishops, Archdeacons, Canon Administrator and Regional Deans. Following which, changes to the proposal can be made, if necessary.

We recommend that Synod 2027 be asked to consider striking Canon 43 (Areas and Area Bishops) and Canon 44 (Area Councils) from the Canons of the Diocese, and any other references in the Canons to Area Councils, Areas and Area Bishops. We also recommend that Synod 2027 be asked to consider updating Canon 20 (Regional Deans) as appropriate.

Conclusion

We respectfully submit these recommendations for the information of the members of Synod.

Sincerely,

The Rev'd Canon Jesse Parker and the Rev'd Canon Rob Mitchell,
Cochairs of the Areas and Area Councils Working Group (AACWG)