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Analysis of *Cast the Net* Clergy Day Notes: Supplement on Diocesan Structures

Role of the Diocese

Participants refer to changing existing practices in the diocese regarding property management, the appointment of clergy, the responsibilities of clergy to the diocese, and the culture of relationships among church leaders.

Changing Existing Practices

- Jesus told the disciples to cast their nets on “the right hand side.” How do we discern the voice of Jesus and listen to him? Listening to the voice of Jesus means doing whatever God puts before us and doing it well, trusting that God will reveal the next step. Still, very worried about the future. **Diocese needs to move faster on property development.**
- I love the Church and I love the Anglican Church. If I could wave a magic wand, if there was one wish I had, re: structure/physicality: “fewer churches with more ppl in them.” In my many years of ordained ministry, I’ve noticed **a trend toward greater centralization at Diocesan office**, yet de-population at the parish level. (referenced a UK study): a typical English church (pre Covid) had 30 ppl, 1 child on average. Way they’ve been tackling this is by keeping more churches open but with a team of clergy serving them. My worry/concern: is that we’d go to quick fix of keeping more buildings / will prioritize keeping “physicality” of buildings open > people and what ministry we can do together. Covid gave us a “haircut” as far as ppl coming out. Important question re: how we structure ourselves. Would rather see half the physical buildings but the same or more clergy. We have ample personnel, great people, but can we do this more efficiently? **The bldgs are the big elephant in the room.** He offers these comments in a spirit of lament.
- The model of **how clergy are appointed to parishes is for the owner of the boats and not for the people in the boat.**
- I went through curacy, I was already a priest in another denomination and yet, I struggled. My suggestion is not to make new graduates become curates too soon. I struggled with how do people choose depression as a way out of ministry? I trust that God will show us how to cast the net on the other side. I took time off (1year) then, agreed to be part time. I was serving with an experienced priest and supervised when off site as well. Joy came back at a great cost and I was saved by a Spiritual Director who helped me by not taking my hand off the plough. **Do not make priests-in-charge or curates too soon.**
- Does the diocese need to give us more rope to cast the net? Reduce assessments? Provide actual help—more resources and new ones that are parish centered—**reduce administrative responsibilities**—more help, for example in assisting with ‘safeguarding’ processes.
- Words of comfort were disciples staying with one another, working together, and were ministered to by Jesus. They ministered to one another in their grief and loss and did what they needed to do. And Jesus in turn met them, provided for them, fellowshiped with them, made them a meal. Primary fellowship in hospitality over meal. **I do see shift in the Diocese toward a kindness - e.g., in clericus...a mutual compassion emerging for one another.** This mutual care among clergy feels more visible right now.

New Initiatives

Participants name specific new initiatives the diocese could consider.

- My style is conflict avoidance. COVID has brought interpersonal conflicts to the surface. I have had to learn how to carefully and prayerfully deal with them. When we amalgamate, how do we make our differences something we can name and work on, rather than trying to ignore? With regard to the intergenerational question, there is a universal lament about the lack of young adults. **Could the diocese start a congregation specifically and intentionally designed to welcome young adults?**
- Highlighting the work of deacons. What could that look like in a deanery? **Possibly a “Deanery Deacon role” to keep the deacons in a deanery connected** - to share challenges/ successes/ meet/ discuss/ brain storm/ support – be a point of deacon contact for other deaneries. Position could be for a given term - rotated amongst deacons in the deanery.
- Need healing for clergy - many are dealing with hurt and dis – ease. **Suggestion of need for a regular healing mass in the diocese.**
- Re: Para-church, specialized ministries & diocesan ministries - **How can we get our churches to become more aware of issues, supports?**

Limitations

Participants also recognize the limitations of diocesan involvement and the importance of congregations and local context.

- How do we market ourselves in a way to debunk nonsense about us? We need to listen to Jesus at the local level. What are the needs of the schools, mosques, etc? How can we contribute? **Diocesan resources can help, but change can't be top-down; has to start with the congregation.**

Structures

Participants reflect on various structures, including the physical structures in which congregations gather, the structuring of parishes, and the financial and human resources available. They also question the structures that are used to share and measure success.

Buildings

The dominant depiction of buildings is as a burden and a barrier to ministry, although there are some who see them as a potential resource.

- I am from a recently amalgamated parish, which now serves both wealthy and needy folk. We haven't done well engaging with the needy ones. **Our building is a burden which dominates conversation** rather than providing opportunities for ministry.
- We are a small parish, **weighed down by the burden of caring for an aging building and property.** We'd like to start dreaming, but everyone is so tired. We need to name the truth. Why isn't everyone coming back?
- Simply not enough parishioners right now. Parish is seven funerals away from closing. Trying to live into a structure that isn't serving a small worshipping community well (e.g. **having to spend \$100,000 repairing the building instead of spending even \$25,000 on children's ministry**). Current structure doesn't give the freedom to try anything different. Maybe a “hub” model of partnering in ministry with neighbouring churches?
- Hub-style ministry resonates. Need to work in a more collaborative fashion with one another. **Current parish ham-stringed by mortgage obligations.**
- Experiencing **a dichotomy between meeting obligations of mortgage and doing ministry.**
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- What we measure we value. **We are invested in buildings, and it would be a travesty to lose the community of the buildings.**
- **"The rotting building" loses its sentimentality...**as new life starts to be re-ordered....possibility that that which was held onto tightly can be loosened. Possibility for de-personalizing this...our Lord is out ahead of us.
- In former life, a community development person...for me in church that means 'doing all things new': church planting, reaching out into the community, **finding ways of having our great big building and land be utilized to fullest of its possibilities.** Keep on casting the net...if this program of 6 weeks doesn't work, we'll try something different. Our context is more Anglo-Catholic. Ppl starting to recognize shift, change, and regionalization. Find ppl's grasp of newness very invigorating.
- Just came off 3-day Alpha summit...is there a possibility of reaching out to our neighbourhood? Substantial Asian population in our (church) neighbourhood...there's just been developed the Chinese Alpha series. Idea was to host a Chinese Alpha course at our parish. ... hoping that the Anglicans will be there. Where are the Anglicans?...we asked the same thing about the Children's Ministry conference (i.e., so many other denominations present but not Anglicans). **Movement of the Spirit that her particular church invited conference to come run in its building for no \$\$ rent.**
- Doesn't know the answer. **We need to get outside our church buildings** and evangelize; share the Gospel.
- Our models of church and what happens in church need to change. **When people met in backyards and in people's houses, those were examples of church.**
- It's hard to **get people "back into the building."** We need to pay more attention to this practice of "deep listening."

Institutional Structures

Some participants challenge existing structures or envision new ones.

- Question of the **sustainability of the convent.**
- The **amalgamation** of 3 parishes was scary – required listening to 3 churches and restructuring of mindset before taking dynamic action.
- The **structure of parishes is problematic** with the amount of lay leadership and clergy burnout we are seeing.
- Concern that **when we shut churches down we shut the door on ppl** and ppl DON'T actually pick up with going to another church.
- I am working 20 hours a week, because that's what works in the context of this parish. **What does a sustainable parish look like for us?** It requires helping lay people to "own" more of parish ministry, and equipping them to do so. This is both difficult and exciting for people. We need to make training (e.g. in lay liturgical leadership) more accessible. Also need new models of ministry oversight, in this less "professionalized" model. Jesus told us to make disciples, not church goers — start with cultivating a new consciousness and enjoyment of being a community of disciples; **encouraged by Lambeth's emphasis on small group ministry.** Doesn't know, but agrees with #3: we've over-emphasized institutional structures to the neglect of discipleship and spiritual growth. If we cultivate groups of disciples, outreach will follow.
- I need skills in motivating the congregation—We need to learn what it means to share. We have had good experience with satellite prayer groups—**small groups meeting in homes.**

Finances/Resources and Volunteers

There is concern about financial resources as well as available volunteers.

- Difficult to envision casting the net on the other when the parish is **struggling with insurance and finances**.
- We are in the middle of regional ministry and we are already trying new things with kids. There is a weariness with kids that are coming in but then the kids that are staying away. **There are many traditional ministry pieces that we are still doing and are expected to sustain but with no income.** (the scenario is both/and – both new and old.).
- In many parishes, priests are one person: there's a lot we're responsible for—**harder to get volunteers**. I need to learn about **volunteer management and fundraising**.
- Value of relationship—elderly people are not coming back to worship, **no longer volunteering**. Ministry relationships are not just within parishes but people in other churches, the community.
- “Cast the net on the other side”—we're not being asked to do something difficult: simply to make a shift from where we are now...for example, ‘**coffee hour**’ was becoming difficult to manage—**hard on volunteers**...now we're having it just once a month rather than every Sunday.
- Another speaker can relate to this. Seeing a lot of fear, fatigue, trauma. “I'm practising the ministry of learning to go with it.” We have a Friday drop-in. Yesterday, **no “clients” showed up, but we had 22 volunteers!** It was amazing; we're so keen to be busy organizing things for others, this was a welcome chance for us to just be together.
- **We can easily blame ourselves/ volunteers/ finances**. We have a tendency to be self-condemning rather than using encouraging words to try something else.
- Many feel anxious about ministry in these times—**anxious about whether people will come back**...we have a mindset that our resources are meagre....God has a mindset of abundance. There is plenty. **A shift of mindset from meagre resources to abundance.**

Measuring Success

Participants raise the crucial question of what is considered success and how success is measured.

- What is success in church? – **what is the measurement of success?** Some feel it is numbers. Strength of numbers motivates, energizes. Others felt success is joyful service to the Lord even in small numbers. We should put thought into what success means to our church in these times.
- **Sharing successes** – not as bragging rights but as a way to help other parishes (e.g. not to re-invent the wheel).
- Retirement home/long term care ministry does not translate into signs of success or appreciated in the parish – sometimes **zero recognition, however it is so needed and appreciated by the families** of and those that reside in those places.
- We are already casting the net in many ways. A challenge/problem is that **we are being called to do things in new ways, but are still being assessed and evaluated in old ways**.
- I am enthusiastic about this discussion, but **pessimistic about the call to cast the net in new ways and still being measured in old ways meaning attendance, the money that attendance brings**. Younger families bring less revenue. The parish may be very vibrant, but small in numbers.
- I feel **a transition from concern about competency to focus on prayerfulness**.