

**DIOCESE OF EAU CLAIRE**  
**Transition Committee**

**FINAL REPORT**  
**Presented October 12, 2019**

I. Introduction & Background

Resolution 2017-1, which was adopted at the 2017 Annual Convention of the Diocese of Eau Claire, authorized the creation of a Transition Committee to facilitate episcopal transition when Bishop Lambert retires in the fall of 2020. The Transition Committee was to function under the direction of the Strategic Planning Committee, and to report its findings to the Strategic Planning Committee and the 2019 Annual Convention of the Diocese of Eau Claire. This report is presented in fulfillment of the charge of the Strategic Planning Committee, in accordance with Resolution 2017-1.

The Transition Committee was elected by the Clergy and Lay Delegates to the Diocesan Convention of 2019 in early 2019. The Committee was impaneled and met for the first time on June 8, 2019. A list of the members of the Transition Committee is included in the Appendix.

II. Charge and Scope of Work of Transition Committee

The Strategic Planning Committee set out the Charge and responsibilities of the Transition Committee as follows:

Role of the Transition Committee: Until Diocesan Convention 2019

- Canvass the Diocese - who are we and where do we want to go.
- What do we need? Bishop, Rector/Bishop, Retired, Junction, Provisional Bishop, shut down?
- Needs and Identity - where does that lead us?
- The report prepared by the Transition Committee will inform the Strategic Planning Committee and the 2019 Annual Convention of the Diocese of Eau Claire.

Role of the Transition Committee: November 2020

- Assist as needed in the transition period after Bishop Jay's retirement

The work of the Transition Committee is of great importance to the future of the Diocese of Eau Claire, and what the Diocese will look like and be. The Transition Committee will need to do Diocesan wide information gathering, compile that information, and prepare a report for the Strategic Planning Committee and the 2019 Annual Diocesan

Convention, as well as assist in the coming transition after Bishop Jay's retirement.

How you gather the necessary information is up to you, but your methods must provide the opportunity for as much input from around the Diocese as is possible. This can be accomplished through surveys, listening sessions, visioning, or whatever methods you choose to use.

The suggestions made above ... are a few of the options that are open to us, but as you do your work, new and different options may be revealed. The Strategic Planning Committee feels that all options, known and unknown, are on the table and need to be considered.

At its first meeting on June 8, the Transition Committee adopted a work plan and schedule that would lead to a report being available to the Strategic Planning Committee on October 12, 2019. The Transition Committee's report will also be presented to pre-Convention meetings during October 2019. The final report will be presented to the Diocesan Convention on November 9, 2019.

### III. Information Gathering Methods and Findings

#### a. Input from parishioners and clergy of Diocese of Eau Claire

Working within the constraints of a short timeline and the summer season, the Committee developed a set of open-ended questions that were designed to facilitate capturing input from the broadest possible group of people of the diocese (see Appendix). The questions were sent to clergy in charge of congregations with the request to forward the question list to parishioners by means of Sunday bulletin inserts, newsletters, and distribution at worship services and other congregational functions. Clergy were also asked to collaborate with one of the Transition Committee members in scheduling at least one listening session, facilitated by the Committee member, in their congregation. For parishioners unable to attend a listening session in person, written input could be sent via U.S. Mail to the chair of the Transition Committee, or to any Committee member via email. Responses to the questions and other input at the listening sessions were collected and analyzed by regionally defined sub-groups of the Committee members, as well as by the Committee as a whole, in order to reach consensus. The result was a set of characteristics for the future of the diocese that the people of the diocese consider desirable. (See Section III.c.i.)

#### b. Information on alternative functional and organizational models being used in other dioceses of The Episcopal Church

Concurrently to the listening sessions in congregations, information was collected from two key individuals who have been involved in the development of collaborative arrangements between dioceses that share episcopal oversight and

some other diocesan services and functions. The two individuals were Canon Vanessa Butler, Canon for Administration, Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania (sharing a bishop with the Diocese of Western New York), and Canon Bill Spaid, Canon Missioner for the Southern Region, Diocese of Western Michigan (in process of developing a shared bishop model with the Diocese of Eastern Michigan). Canon Butler and Canon Spaid each agreed to an extensive telephone interview by the Transition Committee chair, and subsequent to that, to participate in the August 10 meeting of the Transition Committee via videoconferencing, to answer the Committee's questions about what their respective dioceses were doing and what they had learned from their experiences. (see Appendix) Both Canon Butler and Canon Spaid also shared numerous reports and tools used in their shared episcopate initiatives, and offered to be available to the Diocese of Eau Claire as we proceed with exploration and implementation of the model that the Convention endorses.

c. Analysis

i. List of Desirable Characteristics of Model for the Future

- + A diocese that feels small - where **personal connections** among parishioners and clergy from different congregations flourish.
- + A diocese that delivers a **high value in access to services and resources**, both from diocesan office to congregations and through collaboration among congregations, while maintaining the current level of apportionment.
- + A diocese that has **mechanisms in place for communications** about congregational activities and resources to flow freely throughout the congregations.
- + A diocese made up of congregations that have the **capacity to attract and incorporate people of all ages** into their fellowship.
- + A diocese that is **flexible and innovative** in anticipating and addressing the current and future challenges of a mostly rural, isolated geographic area where distances between congregations are large.
- + A diocese that has a **firm, stable, and sustainable fiscal foundation** that positions it to thrive and not just survive in the future.

ii. List of Alternative Models

1. Maintain current organizational structure as **fully independent diocese, with part-time bishop diocesan.**

Action Steps: Establish a Bishop Search Committee; solicit applications and referrals of candidates; conduct application reviews, interviews, walk-about; elect next Bishop Diocesan of Eau Claire at 2020 Diocesan Convention, or at a special convention to be scheduled at another time.

2. Maintain independent diocesan status and seek to establish a working relationship (to be defined) with one or more other dioceses for **sharing a bishop and selected other programs, ministries, and resources** between the dioceses.

Action Steps: Establish a Bishop Search Committee to work with the Office of Pastoral Development to recruit a Bishop Provisional for the Diocese of Eau Claire. The Bishop Provisional will be contracted to guide and represent this diocese in the identification and development of resource sharing relationship(s) with other dioceses. The Bishop Provisional will be engaged on a contractual basis for one year, with the option to extend the contract on an annual basis, with agreement of both parties.

3. Seek to establish a working relationship with one or more other dioceses for sharing a bishop and selected other resources with the intent of **moving toward a closer organizational affiliation** (to be defined) between or among the dioceses over the course of the next few years.

Action Steps: Establish a Bishop Search Committee to work with the Office of Pastoral Development to recruit a Bishop Provisional for the Diocese of Eau Claire. The Bishop Provisional will be contracted to guide and represent this diocese in the identification and development of long-term affiliation relationship(s) with other dioceses. The Bishop Provisional will be engaged on a contractual basis for one year, with the option to extend the contract on an annual basis, with agreement of both parties.

4. **Continue process of exploration** through intensive conversations in and among local congregations to determine the best model for the diocese in the future. Strategic Planning Committee to oversee and facilitate continuing discussions, with consultation from staff and leadership in dioceses that have experience with sharing arrangements for bishops and other diocesan functions, and from resources available through the Office of Pastoral Development.

Action Steps: Strategic Planning Committee to establish and implement a plan, including timeline and resources needed, for the extended exploration process.

At the conclusion of the exploration process, the selection of a model of episcopal oversight to pursue will be made. Depending upon the decision, the Diocese of Eau Claire may establish a Bishop Search Committee to work with the Office of Pastoral Development to recruit a Bishop Provisional to facilitate negotiations with one or more other dioceses.

- iii. Implications of each model with respect to desirable characteristics

Following is a summary of Advantages, Disadvantages and Unknowns associated with each of the alternative models, based on the desirable

characteristics of the diocese that were collected from the input of parishioners and clergy. It should be understood that **all four of the potential models for the future of the diocese involve significant change at both the diocesan and local levels** if the desirable characteristics of the future diocese are to be realized.

**Model 1:** Maintain current organizational structure as **fully independent diocese, with part-time bishop diocesan.**

Advantages

The challenges of maintaining the status and structure of an independent diocese with a part-time bishop diocesan are familiar to us, because we have been addressing them for the past several years. Examples of these challenges include:

- a preponderance of small congregations, which makes maintaining a strong, stable financial base difficult; and
- limited diocesan staff and resource capacity, which constrains time available for constructing and maintaining mechanisms for information sharing across the diocese.

The primary advantage of being familiar with such challenges is that we have already tested some potential solutions and have experience with strategies that were effective and those that were not.

Disadvantages

As noted above, present challenges arising from limited finances and diocesan resources and our overall small size would continue:

- Only three congregations are fully self-supporting, and they are only medium-sized in comparison with parishes in other dioceses. That means that the health of diocesan finances is heavily dependent on the financial health of those three congregations. If any one of them experiences a fiscally adverse period, the financial stability of the diocese is compromised.
- Recruiting a bishop for a part-time position may be difficult if the pool of qualified people interested in a part-time position is limited. A part-time bishop's salary is significantly less than that of a full-time person. Bishop Lambert's current compensation package does not include benefits such as health insurance because he has those by virtue of his military service. A new part-time bishop may not have such benefits from other sources, and the additional cost for the type of package s/he would need may be prohibitive.
- Maintaining independence limits the diocese to its present level of resources, unless substantial unforeseen growth occurs. This diocese would not have access to resources available through a sharing arrangement, and would not be exposed to alternative approaches and ways of doing things that we do not do well (for example, attracting and incorporating into congregations new parishioners of all ages).

Unknowns

- It is unknown at this time how long the current fiscal position of the Diocese of Eau Claire would allow it to remain solvent as an independent diocese.
- The potential for growth of congregations in communities where our churches are currently located has not been assessed.
- Whether there is an adequate pool of potential part-time bishop candidates from which to recruit is unknown.

**Model 2:** Maintain independent diocesan status and seek to establish a working relationship (to be defined) with one or more other dioceses for **sharing a bishop and selected other programs, ministries, and resources** between the dioceses.

Examples of this structure that the committee explored were the relationships that have been established between Northwestern Pennsylvania and Western New York, as well as Eastern and Western Michigan. In both examples, each diocese remains their own diocese but they share the services of one Bishop. The length of the agreement in Northwestern Pennsylvania and Eastern New York is one year. The other agreement has not been ratified yet. (See Summaries of Interviews with Canon Vanessa Butler and Canon William Spaid in Appendix for more detail.)

#### Advantages

- The Diocese of Eau Claire would be able to keep its identity, including its name, and maintain the existing diocesan structure.
- The diocese could potentially gain resources with services that are shared with another diocese.
- There would be more opportunities for joint events and activities with other congregations.
- A sharing arrangement could be less expensive and more sustainable for both dioceses.

#### Disadvantages

- Geography may be an even greater concern than it is now, as distances to diocesan offices as well as other churches becomes greater.
- Negotiating with another diocese to reach a mutually acceptable agreement on this type of arrangement may take a significant period of time.
- Establishing a trust level and comfort level between the people of this diocese and those in another diocese would also take time.

#### Unknowns

- The impact on apportionments (increase, decrease, or remain the same) is not known.
- It is unclear if separate representation of the Diocese of Eau Claire at General Conventions would continue.
- Details of the organizational structures of the two dioceses are unknown (e.g., would there be two diocesan offices each with a staff, or a single combined diocesan office, or two offices with a shared diocesan staff split between the two locations?)

**Model 3:** Seek to establish a working relationship with one or more other dioceses for sharing a bishop and selected other resources with the intent

of moving toward a closer organizational affiliation (to be defined) between or among the dioceses over the course of the next few years.

Advantages, Disadvantages, Unknowns

- Largely the same as for Model 2.
- One additional unknown factor at the outset of such an arrangement, is whether a closer organizational affiliation will offer added advantages beyond those that are able to be realized through a shared services agreement without organizational affiliation (Model 2).

**Model 4:** Continue process of exploration through intensive conversations in and among local congregations of the Diocese of Eau Claire to determine the best model for the diocese in the future. Strategic Planning Committee to oversee and facilitate continuing discussions, with consultation from staff and leadership in dioceses that have experience with sharing arrangements for bishops and other diocesan functions, and from resources available through the Office of Pastoral Development.

Advantages

- Continuing exploration of a best model for collaboration through the remainder of the tenure of Bishop Lambert and potentially beyond will involve more intensive discussions at the congregational level, both within and across congregations of the diocese. The Transition Committee has made a good beginning, but because of time constraints, most congregations held only one listening session. The listening sessions were also held in summer, when people who may have wanted to participate could have been away or otherwise unable to attend. Continuing the process will provide opportunities for those who did not participate in a listening session to be engaged in the discussion.

Extensive conversations with two Canons with current experience in diocesan transitions revealed that involving people in local congregations is essential for the success of any model of episcopal oversight. No matter which option is selected at the diocesan convention in 2019, significant time should be devoted to expanding discussions at the local level to include more people and address their issues of concern as the process unfolds.

- Holding further conversations at multiple levels and across multiple groups in the diocese can potentially strengthen feelings of familiarity and identification, and would also fulfill the request expressed by a number of participants for more opportunities to join with other congregations. The feeling of smallness and familiarity was one of the most consistently mentioned desirable characteristics of the diocese during the listening sessions.

Disadvantages

- Extending the exploration phase does not address directly the concerns about not being able to attract and incorporate people of all ages into the fellowship of local congregations. It may be possible to broaden the scope of the conversations across congregations focus on such issues, and/or to potentially create a mechanism for sharing and testing ideas to address this concern.

Unknowns - essentially the same as for Models 2 and 3

Neutral Factors

- This option is basically fiscally neutral through the end of Bishop Lambert's tenure. There may be some modest expenses incurred with travel within the diocese or acquisition or development of materials. Additional expenses may be incurred if the Strategic Planning Committee chooses to engage consultants from outside the diocese.
- Structural/organizational implications are not a factor in the option to continue the evaluation of potential models because the diocese will not change its status as an independent diocese, nor will it act on an organizational change at least through the end of the analysis period. One of the major areas for the Strategic Planning Committee to address during an extended evaluation phase is the structural and canonical implications of all of the options after 2020.
- The fourth option neither enhances nor detracts from the diocese's ability to fulfill or expand its mission. There is a theoretical possibility that focusing on the model of episcopal oversight may distract attention from mission and ministry; on the other hand, it is also theoretically possible that continued discussions will raise issues of local mission and ministry to a more prominent position, and result in some additional attention and energy being directed toward them through this process.

Implications for Positioning for the Future

Model 4 represents a more intensively deliberative approach to identifying the best way for this diocese to move into the future. Eventually, decisions will need to be made about maintaining an independent diocese or joining with one or more other dioceses in one form or another to move ahead into the future. Option Four presents an opportunity for parishioners and clergy to be more informed and involved throughout the process of moving forward after 2020.

IV. Findings beyond the scope of the Committee's charge

During the course of the Listening Sessions in congregations, and also via emailed responses from people who were unable to attend a session in-person, several comments were made about issues that are outside the scope of the Transition Committee's work. They are summarized here so that they may be captured and forwarded by the Strategic Planning Committee to the appropriate diocesan body or individual.

- i. The Diocese of Eau Claire has experienced a dramatic decline in programs for youth. At this time we lack any individuals or groups in the diocesan structure whose charge it is to champion youth work. The Diocese cannot build a church that spans generations without intentional and organized programs for youth.
- ii. We do not have a plan for ministry to the people in our congregations who are aging and under financial constraints.

iii. We do not have a plan or focus on church growth.