Harvesting Hope

A strategic plan for the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming
The Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming is poised to be a leader in Wyoming and the world in bringing the Gospel to all of God’s children. During the past decade, our diocese has become financially stable, has implemented a process for forming, educating and ordaining bi-vocational clergy and has invested in leading technology to enhance our communication and community. And yet, we are often concerned about the future of our congregations, our diocese and the Episcopal Church as a whole. The strategic plan is designed to build confidence and overcome these concerns.

During the beginning of his episcopacy, The Rt. Rev. John Smylie, the IX bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming, challenged us to look to the future, for us to look past the now and identify what the church of the future could look like. At the 2010 Convention, he announced that he was forming a group to help create a strategic plan that would steer our churches and the diocese in the years to come.

This committee was made up of six regional representatives, six Bishop appointees and Bishop Smylie. The regional representatives were elected at the 2010 Convention. They used work sessions at the 2010 Convention followed by a combination of informal and formal meetings within their regions to identify strengths and challenges within our diocese. The Bishop’s appointees represented areas of expertise that included finance, ministry delivery, communication and technology, project management, youth and young adults, and the Cathedral.

The Process

This group gathered regularly during the winter of 2010 to share and evaluate the information they had gathered. As they processed this information they were able to identify themes that our churches and diocese are facing. In no particular order, these themes are:

- Education for both clergy and laity
- Finances
- Building an attractive church
- Relationship building and communication
- Ministry Delivery
- Using our institutions to their greatest level

After identifying these key areas, work sessions were held at the diocesan center to explore and address each issue. These work sessions were made up of committee members as well as individuals throughout the diocese who had passions and gifts specific to the issue. In these work sessions, the group explored the issues specific to each theme. They then focused on how to address each issue and a plan was created.
Communication

Goal: Create a system of communication that empowers a relationship of trust with God and community.

The desire to improve communication within the diocese is more than informational; it's relational. We use these relationships in sharing the Gospel, sharing our Lord's love and in serving each other. Without effective communication, individuals and groups often feel left behind and they may even feel hurt. The communication goal seeks to build trust and a sense of connection with one another and with God, while also affirming the good news of our faith and the presence of Christ with us on our journey. The goal of communication seeks to address communication within congregations and between congregations, within regions and between regions, within the diocese and from the diocesan office, as well as being well informed about and in communication with the larger Episcopal Church.

Objectives and Tasks

1. Support and develop communication in each of the individual congregations
   a. Offer mini-empowerment events at Convention.
   b. Implement Digital Faith websites.
   c. Offer Communication workshops—web, multimedia, newsletters, etc.
   d. Use print/web after Convention to announce the strategic plan and communicate Convention.

2. Support and develop relationships between congregations through communication
   a. Continue to use video conferencing and other technology to link congregations to each other.
   b. Implement website and social media for each congregation (Facebook and twitter).
   c. Take and share pictures with everyone.
   d. Identify and share contacts from each ministry within each church (website, preaching, godly play, newsletters, etc).

Create a common language (dictionary, glossary).

Publicize and continue to celebrate the communication that is currently happening.

3. Support and develop relationships through communication within a Region
   a. Identify what is needed in each Region and what is wanted from each Region.
   b. Evaluate and restructure, if necessary, current regional structure.
   c. Encourage and implement a regional communication piece (from a ministry developer? Rector? Lay?).
5. Support and develop communication between all churches, institutions, and the diocesan office.
   a. We will continue to offer a dynamic web presence.
   b. We will continually evaluate and implement new technology and communication avenues that will support and enrich relationships.
   c. We will feature a region each month in the eSpirit to celebrate and share what is going on in that region. Regions may choose their method of sharing: video, pictures or narrative.
   d. We will support churches in using communications skills now and in the future.

6. Support and develop communication with the greater Episcopal Church
   a. Maintain connection with The Episcopal Church through news feeds and links on diocesan website and in eSpirit. (some avenues will be the Episcopal News Service, Episcopal Café, and Episcopal Relief and Development).
   b. Continue to support in-person interaction at regional/provincial/The Episcopal Church events and create a process for attendees to share and report what they experience.
   c. Enhance our ability to share the good work of the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming with the greater Episcopal Church.
The Attractive Church

**Goal:** Present attractive and engaging communities alive with the Holy Spirit.

We often talk about making our churches more attractive. The thought is that if we can do this we will see increased attendance, which will lead to increased monies, which will lead to increased outreach. However, the concept of an attractive church is subjective and its meaning can vary from person to person. Does it mean improved facilities? Stronger preaching? More outreach? More youth and young adults? More inclusion? The subcommittee in addressing this need dealt with all these questions and more.

Knowing that each person as well as each congregation has a unique relationship with the living God, it seemed presumptuous to us to come up with an overall plan, thereby assuming that one size–one plan would fit all of our needs. To achieve this goal each congregation will need to be intentional and faithful in seeking to discover what it is that God is calling the congregation to do and be. As we join in our Lord's will and work we can be confident in our attractiveness.

**Objectives and Tasks:**

Assist each congregation in defining what is attractive to their community and empower them to create their own strategic plan for discerning and creating an attractive church.

1. Create trainers to work with the individual churches in identifying where our Lord is calling them and who they are called to be.

2. Build upon the strengths of each community.

3. Partner with the Foundation for the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming to meet stewardship and financial objectives as identified by our churches.
Finances

**Goal:** Provide a transparent financial structure, which allocates Diocesan resources through responsible stewardship to achieve our Ministry goals.

This goal seeks to create an abiding openness and transparency in which there are no secrets concerning the financial resources of the Diocese and the Foundation for the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming. The challenge of having the resources we are blessed with calls for faithful stewardship that includes empowering ministries while not creating dependencies.

Giving is an essential part of Christian life. It is important for our possessions not to possess us. The blessings we have come from God and the source of all our blessings is the Almighty. Towards the end of Jesus’ life, a humble woman anointed him with costly oil. This woman was criticized by one of Jesus’ disciples because of this extravagance, and He reminded his disciples “the poor will always be with you.” There will always be more needs than can be covered by drawing upon our existing endowments, assessments and other sources of income. Nevertheless, let us always remember that our God is not a God of shortage but one of abundance.

**Objectives and Tasks:**

1. Develop financials that are transparent, understandable, communicated and accessible to all within the Diocese
   
   a. Create a system in which Lay/Clergy delegates to convention, Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, Foundation Board, HR Camp Board, Staff will be trained and educated on the financials.
      
      - Those listed above are responsible for taking the information into their own congregations and sharing it.

   b. Use the technology available to communicate the finances to those around the diocese and find a way to reach those without access to technology.

   c. Share and clarify the role of the Foundation and its finances.

   d. Create and share a complete list of financial Diocesan assets.

   e. Encourage congregations to create clear and comprehensive financial reporting, including audits, to share with the Diocesan Office.

2. Budget/Assessment Structure

   a. Create and manage balanced, financially responsible budgets.

   b. Implement an annual review of the assessment structure by Diocesan Council.

   c. Continue the open budget process: asking congregations, individuals and entities for their requests.
d. Budget will support the goals and objectives of the strategic plan.

3. Support for Ministry
   a. Ministry is performed at the congregation level; therefore the diocesan ministry should be in support of the congregational ministry.
   b. The Diocesan staff is here to serve the congregations.
   c. Provide the resources for education of all.

4. Stewardship/Development
   a. Provide stewardship education and training around the diocese.
   b. Share the good news/stories of the life giving ministries that happen around our diocese.

Change the focus from one of shortage to one of abundance.
Institutions

Goal  Steward and create sacred spaces where we encounter the Holy, share our humanity and courageously fulfill our Baptismal Covenant.

In addition to the 49 congregations that comprise the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming, we are blessed with other supporting institutional resources: Thomas the Apostle Center in Cody, Hank Raymond Camp in Easterbrook and our new diocesan center in Casper. In addition, the Wind River Reservation communities and St. Matthew's Cathedral, while part of the 49 Episcopal churches, offer unique opportunities in ministry that are beneficial to the rest of the diocese.

There is interdependency between our institutions and our life as a diocese. Our joy and challenge is to have them work together with our churches, regions and the diocesan center in sharing the good news of the gospel. The visioning subcommittee reflected upon how each of our institutions could be better equipped and integrated within the diocesan strategic plan. The subcommittee also focused upon how our institutions support our diocese as a whole.

Objectives and Tasks:

1. Support and enhance Thomas the Apostle Center (TAC)
   a. Create and utilize intra-diocesan relationships.
   b. Become an educational resource for the diocese.
   c. Create collaboration among TAC, HR Camp and the Cathedral.
   d. Develop and implement fundraising actions.

2. Support and enhance the Cathedral
   a. Establish the Cathedral as a video conferencing site.
   b. Create and utilize intra-diocesan relationships.
   c. Address and decide the future of Hunter Hall in partnership between the diocesan leadership and the Cathedral.
   d. To become a center for liturgy and arts (SHARE and COMMUNICATE).
   f. Develop and implement fundraising actions.

3. Support and enhance HR Camp/ Youth Ministry
   a. Create and utilize intra-diocesan relationships.
   Create a year round youth ministry presence with the individual congregations (kids, teens and college age.
   d. Develop and implement fundraising actions.

4. Explore relationship with the Wind River reservation
a. Invite American Indian population to share their gifts with the diocese.

b. Discover what we have to offer to engage their community.

c. Explore returning the Edith May Adams collection.

5. Support and enhance Diocesan Center

   Fulfill the goal of being a resource for all churches.

   Become a center for technical support (web, video conferencing, exploring and implementing new technologies.

   Become a center for leadership development throughout the diocese.

   Develop and implement fundraising actions with the Foundation for the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming.
Ministry Delivery

**Goal**  Support and equip the life and ministries of each congregation to further the kingdom of God in Wyoming and beyond.

The introduction of mutual/shared ministry to many of our congregations around the diocese over the last decade has been a tremendous benefit in providing new opportunities and an increase in ministry. This process that began several years ago is still continuing today, and though the needs within our congregations are constantly changing, the need for ensuring the vibrancy and vitality of each of our congregations remains a pivotal and central concern.

This goal seeks to address the concerns of worship, discernment, and equipping congregations to ensure that our Lord's desire for caring and loving communities/churches are being demonstrated and lived out throughout the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming.

**Objectives and Tasks:**

1. Become an Eucharistic church.
   - Celebrate Eucharist every Sunday.
   - Develop and offer predictable schedules.
   c. Gather data regarding desires and needs of each congregation.
   d. Identify where we need resources to address shortcomings.

2. Identify and discern additional priests, deacons and lay leaders
   a. Develop and utilize a consistent process for gift discernment.
   b. Create and implement a process for identifying and calling the next generation.

3. Support a culture that embraces different styles of ministry (rector, shared, yoked, other, etc.).
   a. Tell the story of “my” church.
   b. Encourage communication and interaction among congregations.
   c. Encourage congregations to explore various types of ministry.
   Support and celebrate what’s working.

4. Support and ensure that the following ministries, listed in no particular order, are being met in all congregations:
   a. Sacraments
   b. Pastoral Care
   c. Outreach
   d. Administration
   e. Christian Education
   f. Liturgy/Preaching
Education

**Goal**

Provide attractive, quality educational opportunities empowering laity and clergy to share and live the Gospel message!

We are all ministers and we all have gifts. Each one of us is necessary to the success of God's vision for the congregations and diocese. It is not enough to have one or two people in each congregation educated in how to share the life we are all called to demonstrate. Instead, this goal invites every member of the diocese to be strengthened, empowered, encouraged and made confident through the gift of education.

The world has become a busier place than it was one or two decades ago and it seems we grow busier each day. Participating and sharing in educational opportunities while inviting others to share and use their gifts will lessen the issue of burnout for both laity and clergy. The educational opportunities offered to both lay and clergy will be an invitation to live more deeply and intentionally into the covenant we made with God. The focus of the educational goal is to support both the laity and clergy in enriching their gifts/our gifts and sharing them with the world.

**Objectives and Tasks:**

1. **Establish Wyoming School for Ministry**
   a. Discern the needs for laity, clergy and people in process for Holy Orders.
   b. Identify and collaborate with local resources/Dioceses/Provinces/The Episcopal Church/Seminaries and other resources.
   c. Create programs and curriculum.
   d. Deliver in various formats.
   e. Evaluate.

2. **Support and offer engaging Christian Education opportunities for all ages**
   a. Identify and catalog existing/historical resources.
   b. Build on programs/educational opportunities that are working or have worked.
   c. Utilize HR Camp as Christian formation and leadership tool for youth ministry.
   d. Identify and offer new and exciting programs.

3. **Provide education and training for lay leadership**
   a. Discern the needs.
      i. Survey communities for needs and interests
      ii. Develop appropriate response
b. Offer educational opportunities on a regular and consistent basis in a variety of formats/media
   
i. Vestry
   
ii. Assessment forms
   
iii. Parochial Reports
   
iv. Licensed leadership roles
   
v. Safeguarding
   
vi. Anti-racism training
   
vii. Parish administrators
   
viii. Accounting
   
ix. Technology

4. The COM will continue to provide continuing education/EFM etc. grants.
   
a. Clearly define and communicate expectations of/for clergy in continuing education.
   
b. Ensure our training and education meet the canonical (national) requirements for ordination.
   
c. Develop evaluation process to ensure core competencies are being met.

Ensure continuing education requirements are met.