

A Five-Year Review:
The Diocese of Fond du Lac
January 1st, 2004 to December 31st, 2009

Past reviews have focused upon the individual work of the Bishop. It is the belief of the Evaluation Committee that the work of the Church is arguably a corporate work of the Body of Christ. Consistent with this, the following is a simple review of diocesan activities and initiatives, rather than an evaluation of one individual's contribution, although the role of the Bishop as leader cannot be minimized. The approach is based upon the work of Luther Snow¹, who adapted the concept of asset mapping for congregational use. The general areas reviewed include: Communication, Finances, Programs, Clergy Development, and Ecumenical and Larger Church Activities.

Communication

Communication is an essential part of any organization. It is especially true for the Church, with so many congregations in so many different settings. In these past 6 years many challenges have faced our Diocese, our Bishop, clergy and people. Issues in the Anglican Communion and The Episcopal Church have presented themselves in such a way as to drive people apart. Our diocese remains one of the few where a feeling of collegiality continues among the clergy. While deep differences of opinion exist, both among clergy and among laity, relationships remain cordial and open. This is a testimony to our Bishop's efforts to live out his consecration vow to "guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church," and to a spirit of friendship and mutual concern that characterizes the laity and clergy. In the Bishop's own words: "To make the diocese broad enough for all to feel comfortable as members, no matter what your leanings." We continue to work together to

1 Luther Snow. [The Power of Asset Mapping](#). The Alban Institute, 2004.

realize our diocesan Vision Statement. Use of the Internet and print media has improved to the point where information is shared freely and in a timely manner. One caution to be respected is that there are still some who are unfamiliar with the Internet, and others who do not think of using it for church information.

Development of a Website for youthwork will provide much support to those in parishes charged with this ministry. The addition to our diocesan prayer cycle of the names of those serving in the armed forces has engendered a feeling of common concern, as has the use of the diocesan prayer for revival.

Finances

Financial matters are probably of a greater concern at this point than they have been any time in the past fifteen years. We struggle at the diocesan and congregation levels to make ends meet. The introduction of the 10-10-10 approach to stewardship (whereby the individual is expected to contribute 10% to the parish, the parish 10% to the diocese and the diocese 10% to the National Church) remains a major commitment of the Bishop, Finance Committee and Executive Council. Audit reports for the past five years of record indicate careful and considered stewardship of funds at the diocesan level. While we have yet to achieve a perfect 10-10-10 result, this approach recognizes the reality of our situation and allows more funds to stay at the level of ministry closest to the people. Increasing insurance costs are a reality the diocese and congregations face. Efforts continue to provide an acceptable level of coverage to clergy at a responsible cost.

Development and use of the Financial Review Team has aided congregations by providing a cost-effective alternative for meeting audit requirements. Periodic workshops for parish treasurers are another successful example of diocese aiding local congregations.

Finding new ways to steward diminishing resources remains a necessary focus for diocese and congregations. Conference Call meetings of the Executive Committee, Trustees and other bodies, together with use of the Internet, have saved a great deal of expense and continue to invite expanded use of those approaches.

Programs

At the heart of much we do as a diocese is the work of committees, commissions, and task forces. They underscore that the “diocese” is not some monolithic enterprise, but a true community of disciples. Space does not allow a lengthy listing of the work of these bodies. Their annual reports for each diocesan convention provide a living history of the involvement of dozens of people, clergy and lay, in the work of the diocese.

Abuse Prevention Training has been an on-going program for many years. It has been made more accessible recently by the use of an on-line element which saves both time and money.

The Commission on Aging developed and distributed to every congregation an extensive workbook featuring resources to be used at the local level. This same group compiled an update to the diocesan history.

The Christian Social Witness Committee has heightened awareness of social issues within the diocese. The members have also brought speakers to the diocese, and helped to focus attention on the many feeding programs at work in our congregations.

Christian Education and Formation has developed a network of those responsible for these ministries in local congregations. Working with the ELCA Resource Center, we now have available many more resources than ever before.

All of these efforts illustrate the accomplishments possible when we adopt a mindset of “we as the Diocese,” as opposed to “the Diocese as provider.” Untold volunteer hours make our diocese a place where ministry at the local level is supported and enabled at a significant level.

Youthwork in the diocese has always been a largely volunteer effort. While the Diocesan Youth Coordinator is employed on a half time basis, accomplishing a successful summer camp program and exchange of youthwork strategies depends upon the work of many. This program has been and continues to be a most important work.

The work of helping parishes grow has been a function of the Deans' Task Force and, more recently, the rural Deans in concert with the Bishop. Outside speakers and consultants have been brought to the diocese to help parishes learn what they can do to help spread the message of the Gospel to those yet unreached.

Clergy Development

Clergy Development continues to be addressed through the use of an annual retreat, and deanery or diocesan clergy meetings. A recent workshop on diversity training is but one example. A clergy meeting before the last General Convention helped address apprehensions of the clergy. A program of mentoring clergy new to the diocese, begun by the Bishop, has helped to orient new clergy. Opportunities for clergy continuing education are promoted on an on going basis.

Ecumenical and Larger Church Activities

Ecumenical efforts have been an important thrust for our diocese. Bishop Jacobus has shown continued leadership with our Ecumenical partners of the E.L.C.A., United Methodists, Presbyterian, Moravian, United Church of Christ, and the Roman Catholic Church. Participation in the Hands

of Christ Deaf Ministry and Iglesia Senda De Amor has brought us closer to our partners in ministry in Northeastern Wisconsin. We also continue active representation in the Wisconsin Council of Churches and its constituent programs.

For a diocese of relatively small size, we demonstrate a commitment to participation in the larger Church. Our Bishop takes an active role in the House of Bishops and has attended the Lambeth Conferences. Our diocesan Episcopal Church Women provide a link to the National ECW, and hosted a meeting of Province V ECW. We continue to support the United Thank Offering program, the Episcopal Relief and Development, and the Church Periodical Club at the national level.

There is much more that could be said about the work of our diocese, both locally and regionally. What is important is that our commitment to the work of the Church has continued to grow, even in a time of financial retrenchment. What we have been able to accomplish has been due to the leadership and cooperation of our Bishop, clergy, and laity. For this we give thanks to God.

Matters of Concern

This report would not be complete without indicating some of the realities which we face as a diocese.

1. The first is a generally declining membership and average Sunday attendance. We cannot afford to ignore this problem on the congregational level. While the diocese has offered workshops dealing with this issue, bold measures need to be taken at the local level.

2. Too many of our congregations are facing severe financial straits. This is in addition to the general financial decline. Some are using endowment funds to meet operating expenses. This could have fatal consequences for congregations and needs to be addressed.
3. Clergy vacancies seem to be cyclical. Possible retirements loom for an increasing number of priests. At the same time, dwindling financial resources could preclude filling some of those vacancies on a full-time basis. Can we entertain ideas which would enable congregations to survive and flourish without full-time clergy?
4. National church issues continue to be divisive, both in congregations and in the diocese. We need to continue efforts to listen to one another with respect and understanding. Our strength has been in our collegiality and we should not surrender it easily.

Submitted by:
Mr. William Gagin
Fr. Ed Smith

Note: While this report was drafted by two people, it has been shared for comment and revision with others, including Fr. Samuel Nsengiyumva, Fr. Brian Beno, Fr. James Conradt, Mr. Tony Walter, Mrs. Nancy Kuhn, Mr. Robert Cleworth, Jr., Mr. James Dickson.