

Elements of a Successful Diocesan Mission Plan
Based on Church Growth Research
DRAFT

1. Vision

- a. Strong and clear biblical/theological basis.
- b. Describing a kingdom of God paradigm.
- c. Larger than current resources.
- d. Focused on the unique contribution of this Christian faith community.
- e. Focused on mission rather than maintenance.
- f. Speaks explicitly of growth.

2. Strategy

- a. Grounded in the Vision.
- b. Grounded in Reality. Based on solid church growth research and demographic data.
- c. Grounded in Experience.
 - i. Listen to your church planters. Learn from their experience.
 - ii. Learn from other denominations' (or even faiths') successes and failures.
- d. Grounded in Authenticity.
 - i. Cannot merely import strategies from other denominations (or even dioceses).
 - ii. Must invest the time, effort, and resources in developing an authentic strategy
 - (1) Authentic to Episcopal theology and polity
 - (2) Authentic to Diocesan vision, mission, and ethos
 - (3) Authentic to local Congregational visions and missions.
 - (4) Authentic to local and regional community needs and life.
- e. Grounded in a Common Measures of Congregational Health.
 - i. Must define in the criteria that are indicative of a healthy church.
 - ii. Must include both measurable and value-based criteria.
- f. Broad Based & Comprehensive.
 - i. Addresses growth of both kinds:
 - (1) broad
 - (2) deep
 - ii. Addresses growth at all points of the church life-cycle
 - (1) New Plants
 - (2) Established Churches
 - (3) Declining and Dying Churches
 - iii. Addresses growth in both kinds of organizational status
 - (1) Congregations
 - (2) Outreach Missions
 - iv. Addresses both kinds of permanency status
 - (1) Permanent
 - (2) Transitional
 - v. Addresses roles and responsibility for growth at all organizational levels.
 - (1) Local: Parish or Multi-Parish
 - (2) Regional: Regional (or appropriate sub-regional groupings)

3. Missing Pieces/Needing Attention

- a. A Mission Vision
- b. A Mission Strategy
- c. A common biblical/theological understanding of mission.
 - i. Research & Data
 - (1) An thorough understanding of church growth research.
 - (2) An in-depth understanding of the characteristics of our congregations and how they compare to the characteristic of their communities.
- d. Resources
 - i. An reliable source of funding for investment in mission.
 - ii. An understanding of non-traditional/entrepreneurial funding sources.
- e. Structure
 - i. Regional structures for suitable to support mission.
 - ii. Canons
 - (1) No canonical way to revert congregations to mission or aided parish status or to initiate a necessary closure (without the full-cooperation of the parish).
 - (2) No canonical way for the diocese to request the ceding of bounds for new plants (so the new plants would understand their service area).
 - (3) Inadequate canonical standards for establishing new parishes.

4. Unresolved Issues.

- a. Historic Black Churches.
 - i. On the one hand, we want to support them.
 - ii. On the other hand, we can't just prop up congregations that by all other measures, ought to be closed.
 - iii. What is the appropriate balance?
- b. Ethnic/Language-Based Congregations.
 - i. We want to minister effectively to and meet the needs of ethnic and language groups
 - ii. We don't want to create "ghetto" congregations. Ethnic/language based congregations often expand rapidly as they attract the first waves of immigrants, but over many generations, they plateau and then shrink as later generations acculturate (e.g., Slavonic-rite Eastern Churches, Byzantine Rite Catholic, etc.)