

Why a Mission Action Plan?

Because Niagara was ready for renewal! During the first nine months of Bishop Susan's episcopacy as she walked with us, a rich picture emerged of a diocese ready to embrace a renewed mission; a people ready to engage in deep and faithful listening; a community ready to hear the still small voice of the Divine...ready for a mission that builds on Niagara's strengths and gifts, and invites us to grow into our challenges. Bishop Susan describes a missional church as one "...that is always becoming... nourishing the inherited church as our firm foundation and our well to draw from...a church that intentionally turns itself outward toward the *non-churched and the de-churched*...always offering the gift of faith in Jesus Christ the way that he himself called his disciples to 'Come and see.'"

What was the picture that was emerging for Bishop Susan – and for us as she reflected on her observations? It began with a sense of continuing to move from an institutional focus to a Christ focus...to following Jesus' Way.

There was a renewing of our shift from a settled church (a destination) to church as a movement in which we go where people are. The bishop noticed that we were beginning to live into an understanding that buildings are an asset for God's mission. Alongside that, the bishop heard a continuing journey from faith as security and comfort to faith as risk where we encourage one another to see a fresh perspective, and the new mission fields with the unchurched and dechurched that the Holy Spirit is calling us to engage.

The expectation that we strengthen our faith communities with a primary focus on relationships and faith formation knowing that a search for authenticity and affirmation is at the centre of people's yearnings was another key piece of this picture of Niagara that was unfolding. The bishop also noticed an awareness that the world around us must see Anglicans as authentically living our faith at home, at work, in our decision making; visibly being followers of Jesus' Way.

Finally the bishop lifted up for us a picture of a diocese longing for a renewed leadership where current leaders are spiritually fed and nurtured, where new training opportunities are offered to help our leaders meet the challenges of responding to the spiritual hunger we see in the culture around us. This longing is complemented by a deep desire for new leaders; committed followers of Jesus who will lead with the heart knowing that no one is argued to faith, people willing to risk new ideas and resiliently learn from failure.

How to infuse those hopes and early undertakings with intention and energy became the pressing question. The response was to develop a mission action plan! Bishop Susan describes a mission action plan as a practical document that identifies our active seeking of God and God's mission for our church or diocese, and lays out priorities for the next three to five years; actions that reflect an intersection of our spiritual yearnings, strengths and challenges in such a way as to move boldly deeper into God's mission. "It's a statement of what we want to become by the

Grace of God over the next 3-5 years,” observes the Bishop. And she continues, “...it is a living document – constantly in use and developing organically with the inevitable and much prayed-for developments in the life of the parish/diocese.”

You’ll note that the Mission Action Plan is simple and easily understood. It holds up three primary objectives; a distillation of four months of consultations, spiritual grounding, and research by the MAP Leadership Team in concert with M&M International, our consultants in the process. The plan is not highly prescriptive but allows for actions to evolve out of our work and our continuing discernment of the movement of the Spirit. This Mission Action Plan(MAP) aligns our priorities and our actions with much space for creativity, innovation and prayerfulness. Where does the MAP speak to you and to your parish?