

STANDING COMMISSION FOR SMALL CONGREGATIONS

Membership

Mr. George Wing, Colorado, *Chair*, 2015
The Rev. Canon Katherine Harrigan, *Vice Chair*, 2015
Mrs. Diana Moreland-Moyer, *Secretary*, 2015
Ms. Jane Cislucyis, *Co-Secretary*, 2015
The Rt. Rev. Dan Edwards, 2015
The Rev. Margaret D'Anieri, 2015
The Rev. Nancy S. McGrath Green, 2015
The Rev. Brandon Maui (2012-2013)
The Rt. Rev. Jacob W. Owensby, 2018
Ms. Cindy Smith, 2018
Mr. Jamal Smith, 2018
Mr. James Steadman, 2018
The Rt. Rev. John Tarrant, 2015
Ms. Patrice Walters (2012-2013)
The Most Rev. Katherine Jefferts-Schori, *Ex Officio*
The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, *Ex Officio*
Dr. Kirk Hadaway, *Officer for Congregational Research*
The Rev. Silvestre Romero, *Executive Council Liaison*
The Rev. Cheryl Winter, *Representative of the PHoD* (2012-2013)

Summary of Work

Mandate: To identify and recommend to General Convention policies, priorities, and opportunities to affirm and strengthen the health and development of small congregations.

Meetings: The Standing Commission for Small Congregations (SCSC) has met regularly during the 2012-2015 triennium. We have held three in-person meetings, including the Joint CCAB meeting, November 12-15, 2012, in St. Louis. Most meetings have been held virtually using telephone for voice conferencing and Adobe Connect for video conferencing. Adobe Connect allows us to share documents and videos without having to be together in person.

In 2011, the SCSC began using Adobe Connect for meetings, and this triennium the software has been the principal tool for bringing the members together. One of our members, Ms. Cindy Smith (San Joaquin), has been very effective as our Adobe Connect host. Mr. Brian Murray of the General Convention Office Staff has also been very helpful in training us in the use of Adobe Connect and in organizing our meetings. The SCSC wishes to recognize both Mr. Murray and Mr. Patrick Haizel of the General Convention Office staff for their help and support of our work during the triennium.

October 27, 2012, Teleconference

November 12, 2012 to November 15, 2012, Joint CCAB Meeting, St. Louis, Missouri January 23, 2013, Teleconference

February 22, 2013, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

Presenters: The Rev. Canon John Floberg, North Dakota; The Rev Paul Sneve, South Dakota; Deacon The Rev. Terry Star, North Dakota; The Rt. Rev. John Tarrant, South Dakota – Native American Ministry

April 25, 2013, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

Presenter: The Rt. Rev. Dan Edwards, Nevada -- Liturgy in Small Churches Guest: Ms. Ana Hernández, Dallas, Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music

June 27, 2013, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

Presenter: The Rev. Canon Lou Blanchard, Colorado – Colorado’s Congregational Vitality Study

July 25, 2013, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

Presenter: The Rev. Silvestre Romero, New Jersey -- 2015-2018 Budget Visioning

August 1, 2013, Subcommittee meeting, Teleconference

August 22, 2013, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

Presenter: Ms. Julia Groom, President, Church Building Fund – Small Church Building Issues

September 17, 2013, Subcommittee meeting, Teleconference

September 26, 2013, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

Presenters: The Rev. Canon Patricia Coller, Mr. Frank Armstrong, and Mr. Matthew Price, Church Pension Group – Small Church Pension and Medical Insurance Issues and GC2012 Resolution Do86

October 24, 2013, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

Presenter: The Rev. Canon Katherine Harrigan, Central Pennsylvania – The Future of Small Church Ministries

February 27, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

March 27, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

Guests: The Rev. Canon Dr. Michael Barlowe and Mr. Brian Murray, General Convention Office

Presenter: The Rev. Canon Charles LaFond, Colorado – Stewardship Issues in Small Congregations

April 10, 2014, Subcommittee, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

April 24, 2014, Tele-Web Conference, Adobe Connect

Presenter: Ms. Jane Cislucys (Northern Michigan) – Lay Ministries in Small Churches

May 22, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

Continuing discussion of Lay Ministries and Licenses

June 12, 2014, Subcommittee, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

June 26, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

Presenter: Mr. James Steadman, Esq., Northwest Pennsylvania – Small Church Property-Use Issues

July 2, 2014, Subcommittee, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

July 9, 2014, Subcommittee, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

July 16, 2014, Subcommittee, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

July 18, 2014, Subcommittee, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

July 23, 2014, Subcommittee, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

July 24, 2014, Subcommittee, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

July 30, 2014 to August 2, 2014, Meeting, American Airlines Training & Conference Center, Fort Worth, Texas – Symposium on Formation for Small Church Leadership

Symposium Guests:

- The Rev. Canon Roberto Arciniega, Latino Missioner, Oregon
- The Rev. Patsy Barham, Texas, Little Church Club, Iona School for Ministry, Texas
- The Rev. Canon Dr. Michael Barlowe, Secretary of General Convention
- The Rev. Canon Lou Blanchard, Canon Missioner, Colorado
- Ms. Ellen Bruckner, Living Stones, Iowa
- The Very Rev. Ronald Byrd, Sr., Episcopal Church Foundation, Michigan
- The Rev. Dr. Thomas Ferguson, Dean of Bexley Hall, Bexley-Seabury
- The Rev. Dr. Andrew Grosso, Director of Distance Learning, Nashotah House
- Ms. Ana Hernández (Dallas, Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music)
- The Rev. Dr. Robert Honeychurch, Bloy House, Claremont School of Ministry, Los Angeles
- Dr. Lisa Kimball, Director of the Center for Ministry of Teaching, Virginia Theological Seminary
- The Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Magill, Episcopal Divinity School, New York
- Ms. Andrea McKeller, Standing Commission on Lifelong Christian Formation, South Carolina
- The Rev. Lori Modesitt, Director of Education, Wyoming
- Ms. Demi Prentiss, Ministry Developer, Fort Worth
- The Rt. Rev. Rayford Ray, Northern Michigan
- The Rev. Kay Rohde, Ministry Development Coordinator, Northern California
- The Rev. Holladay Sanderson, Living Stones, Idaho
- The Rev. Josh Shipman, Student, Seminary of the Southwest, Colorado
- The Rev. Dr. Susanna Singer, Church Divinity School of the Pacific, California
- The Rev. Dr. Sylvia Sweeney, Dean, Bloy House, Claremont School of Theology, Los Angeles
- Ms. Frances Thayer, Maryland
- Dr. Fredrica Harris Thompsett, Episcopal Divinity School, Executive Council, New York
- The Rev. Sam Todd, Dean, Iona School for Ministry, Texas
- The Rev. Chris Yaw, ChurchNext.org, Michigan

Guests from the Diocese of Fort Worth:

- Mr. Walt Cabe, St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Arlington, Texas
- Ms. Patti Callahan, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Texas
- Ms. Marti Fagley, St. Francis Episcopal Church, Willow Park, Texas
- Ms. Peggy Gagliardi, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas
- Ms. Sheri Glaser, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Texas
- Mr. Jack Hardaway, St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Arlington, Texas
- Ms. Pam Hardaway, St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Arlington, Texas

- Ms. Jane Jolley, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas
- Ms. Kimberly Kingsbury, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Texas
- Mr. Field Lange, St. Andrew's Episcopal School, Fort Worth, Texas
- Mr. Theodore Lange, St. Andrew's Episcopal School, Fort Worth, Texas
- Mr. David Lowder, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas
- Ms. Susan Lowder, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas
- Ms. Becky McKneely, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas
- Mr. Floyd McKeneely, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas
- Ms. Betsy Menikos, Christ the King Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Texas
- The Rev. Sandra Michels, Christ the King Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Texas
- The Rev. Tracie Middleton, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas
- Mr. Harold Parkey, Christ the King Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas
- Mr. Bill Reisch, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas
- Mr. Michael Rivard, Christ the King Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Texas
- Ms. Katie Sherrod, Executive Council, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Texas
- Mr. Norm Snyder, Good Shepherd Episcopal Church, Granbury, Texas
- Mr. Brent Walker, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Wichita Falls, Texas

August 28, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

September 25, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

October 21, 2014 to October 25, 2014, Meeting, Crowne Plaza Chicago-O'Hare, Illinois

November 6, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

November 13, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

November 19, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

December 3, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

December 9, 2014, Tele-Web Conference (Adobe Connect)

The Symposium on Formation for Small Church Leadership

The SCSC's principal activity during the triennium was the Symposium on Formation for Small Church Leadership, which took place over the four-day period of July 30, 2014 to August 2, 2014 at the American Airlines Training & Conference Center in Fort Worth, Texas. The event was paid for from a \$43,000 grant from the Constable Fund. Without this grant, the event would not have been possible, as the triennial budget would not have been sufficient for the purpose.

We wish to acknowledge the support and assistance in planning and organizing this event that we received from Mr. Patrick Haizel and Mr. Brian Murray of the General Convention Office. Ms. Demi Prentiss of the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth (<http://episcopaldiocesefortworth.org>) and The Rev. Dr. Robert Honeychurch, Bloy House, the Claremont School of Theology (<http://www.bloyhouse.org>), Los Angeles, helped us to plan the event and make it happen. Many others helped in various ways to make the event a success. The SCSC recommends the AAT&CC facility to the Church as an excellent place for meetings. We were treated very well.

During the meeting, the SCSC met with representatives of several churches in the loyal Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth. They shared with us the trials and struggles they went through in "reinventing church." Many of

the churches of the Diocese were “seized” by the departing Diocese of Fort Worth, and those members who remained loyal to The Episcopal Church found themselves effectively ejected. These loyal Episcopalians were faced with locating places to assemble for worship, reorganizing their vestries, raising funds, recruiting clergy, etc. They told us how some clergy were called out of retirement to assist with services. Other clergy came from other dioceses to help, as the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth reorganized with the assistance of the Presiding Bishop and staff of The Episcopal Church.

During the Symposium, Dr. Kirk Hadaway, TEC Officer for Congregational Research, gave a talk about small church statistics. One of his statistical studies revealed that small congregations are the norm in The Episcopal Church. The median church has an Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) of 61, and 69 percent of all our churches have an ASA of 100 or fewer.

The Rev. Canon Lou Blanchard, Canon Missioner of the Diocese of Colorado, gave a presentation on small church characteristics, leadership development, and ministry training programs in the Diocese of Colorado. She shared the results of Colorado’s Congregational Vitality Study. The information developed has been used by in providing training for clergy and lay leaders of the many small congregations of the diocese through Colorado’s Church Development Institute.

The Rev. Chris Yaw, Michigan, spoke about online educational websites. He gave a demonstration of his website, ChurchNext, <http://www.churchnext.tv>

Dr. Lisa Kimball, Virginia Theological Seminary, presented a short video regarding questions commonly asked of VTS’s Center for Ministry of Teaching.

The Rev. Robert Honeychurch, Los Angeles, moderated a panel discussion of online education and distance learning. The panel included representatives of five seminaries involved in using the internet for distance education.

The Symposium included an evening presentation for the SCSC and the Symposium Guests by the Diocese of Fort Worth about the struggles it has gone through in reorganizing. The presenters also shared the joy and benefits of reinventing church in the diocese. The presentation was followed by a Eucharist demonstrating “church in a box,” beginning with setting up a portable altar and ending with taking it down. The Rev. Sandra Michels, Christ the King Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Texas, narrated and presided over the Eucharist. The Rev. (Deacon) Tracie Middleton, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Hurst, Texas, served as the deacon during the Eucharist.

Much of the time of the Symposium was used for discussions of small church issues. The guests included ministry developers and persons involved in seminaries and diocesan schools. The SCSC members and the guests divided up into small groups to facilitate discussions of questions and issues concerning small churches. These conversations were immensely valuable to the SCSC. The SCSC regrets that the imperative need to engage in these discussions and conversations limited the time available for speakers and panels and limited the topics that could be presented at the Symposium.

Discussion and Conclusions

Many small churches find it financially difficult to maintain full-time, seminary-trained clergy. As a result, small churches increasingly depend on part-time, retired, and bi-vocational clergy and on licensed lay leaders to keep services going. When clergy are unavailable, lay worship leaders lead Morning Prayer. Some Bishops have also authorized lay worship leaders to distribute previously consecrated sacraments during Sunday services. Without this authorization, the congregants in these churches would be denied regular access to the sacraments.

The traditional, three-year residential seminary model was developed as a way to train young adults, who would go directly from college to seminary. This model does not work well for persons who have families, jobs, and community involvement. Some traditional seminaries provide programs that allow remote studies and then require periods of time to be spent on campus. Over a period of time, students accumulate enough credits to graduate and be ordained as priests. This model is helpful, particularly where distances, seminary availability, and transportation may not permit easy access to the seminary campus.

Some dioceses have developed their own schools. The SCSC has not been able to explore or report on all of them. Diocesan schools may or may not grant academic degrees. Bloy House, Claremont School of Theology (<http://www.bloyhouse.org>) in the Diocese of Los Angeles has cooperative arrangements with accredited seminaries that allow their students to earn academic degrees that are granted by the cooperating seminary.

Four dioceses (Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Western Kansas) sponsor the Bishop Kemper School for Ministry (<http://www.bishopkemperschool.org>) in Topeka, Kansas.

The Iona School for Ministry (<http://www.epicenter.org/iona-school-for-ministry>) in the Diocese of Texas trains students locally to work as bi-vocational, non-stipendiary priests and deacons. It brings students to Camp Allen for weekend programs. Upon ordination, the graduates serve small congregations without pay or for nominal pay only. According to The Rev. Sam Todd, Dean of the Iona School, Iona's students follow an academically rigorous program. When they complete their education, Iona's graduates take and pass the GOE's with marks similar to, or better than, graduates of traditional, residential seminaries.

The Diocese of Colorado sponsors the Anglican Studies Program (<http://www.iliff.edu/learn/the-iliff-experience/denominations/episcopal-church-anglican-studies>) at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. Much of the coursework is done via the internet. Videoconferencing is used to allow classes to meet virtually. The students file their work over the internet and engage in discussions by posting comments on each other's work. Some class meetings are held in person in Denver.

Central Pennsylvania's Stevenson School for Ministry (SSM) is a diocesan program that forms lay leaders, deacons, and priests. There is also a discernment component, "Exploring Your Ministry," which seeks to guide discerners in asking, "Who and what am I called to be and to do?" The discernment component is both an entry into the ordination process and an opportunity to explore lay ministry. A Lay Training Institute, T.H.R.I.V.E., focuses on formation for lay ministry. The SSM program has been developed as a hybrid program, which uses both in-person meetings and meetings and internet-based coursework using the Moodle platform. Students can converse, post work, and reply to both the instructor's and each other's work via the internet. The program is used both synchronously and asynchronously. In-person sessions take place either in daily sessions or on weekends. The Stevenson School for Ministry can be found on the diocesan website, <http://www.diocesecpa.org>.

Fourteen Dioceses (Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Eastern Michigan, Hawaii, Mississippi, Navajoland, North Dakota, Northwest Texas, Texas, The Rio Grande, West Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming) have joined together to form the Iona Initiative (<http://www.ionainitiative.org>), which takes the Iona School's model and uses its materials to train their non-traditional students.

In the Diocese of Wyoming, for example, students meet on weekends in Caspar, Wyoming to study together and watch taped lectures prepared by the Iona School's faculty, which provides local training of candidates for the diaconate and priesthood and training for the various licensed lay ministries.

In the Diocese of South Dakota, the Niobrara School for Ministry (<http://www.diocesed.org/ministries/niobrara-school-for-ministry>) provides local training of candidates for ordination and for licensed lay ministries. Several of these dioceses (Alaska, Montana, Navajoland, North Dakota, and South Dakota) are

involved in the Bishops' Native Collaborative (<http://www.bishopsnativecollaborative.com>), which is working to adapt the Iona School's model to the needs of native communities.

In Canada, the Indigenous Studies Centre at the Vancouver School for Theology (<http://vst.edu/#vst>), Vancouver, BC, provides local training and education for Canada's Indigenous population. Some TEC dioceses have had students in the Vancouver program. The Vancouver model sends tapes and written materials to the students, who study locally with mentors. Students then spend part of their summers studying in community on the Vancouver campus.

The effect of the internet is to make distributed education widely available. Coursera (<http://www.coursera.org>) and the Khan Academy (<http://www.khanacademy.org>) are leaders in the secular world. Their students can download lectures and participate interactively as in webinars. Users of Coursera and the Khan Academy come from all over the world, wherever internet access is available. Some universities have started to use this model. Coursera presents high-quality classes on various subjects from colleges and universities around the world. This model is disrupting higher education, and it may threaten the financial viability of some "bricks and mortar" institutions. They are faced with adapting or closing.

Seabury Western Theological Seminary saw the future of higher education as increasingly virtual. It sold its campus and merged its operations with another seminary, Bexley Hall. Bexley-Seabury (<http://www.bexleyseabury.edu>) is committed to making courses available over the internet. Virginia Theological School (<http://www.vts.edu>) has extensive resources that can be access over the internet.

Other seminaries have varying levels of involvement with the internet. The Church Divinity School of the Pacific (<http://www.cdsp.edu/>) offers courses online. The Episcopal Divinity School (<http://www.eds.edu/distributivelearningoption>) has a distributive learning option for non-traditional students). Nashotah House (<http://www.nashotah.edu/>) has a distance-learning option. Sewanee's Education for Ministry (<http://efm.sewanee.edu/efm-online/about-efm-online>) program has an online component. There are others that the SCSC has not located or reviewed.

Seminary materials available over the internet are primarily intended for the use of the seminaries' own students, but some also offer continuing education for clergy and courses for laity. The ability of the seminaries to commit to making educational courses and resources is constrained, however, by their financial realities. As "bricks and mortar" institutions, they have to find ways to pay their expenses, which means that they have limits on their abilities to provide their offerings free or at low cost to the public.

Many dioceses have also developed training programs for both clergy and lay leaders of congregations. A number of dioceses participate in Church Development Institute programs providing training for clergy and lay leaders of congregations, and others are planning to start CDI programs in 2015. Dioceses that hold or have held CDI programs include Atlanta, Colorado, Eastern Michigan, Georgia, Long Island, Milwaukee, Northern Indiana, Rochester, Southwest Florida, Southwest Virginia, Utah, Western Michigan, and Washington. Colorado's CDI program was recently extended to include joint programs with Utah and the Rocky Mountain Synod. Parts of Colorado's CDI programs have been specifically tailored to the development needs of its small churches.

Making quality lay education and training widely available continues to be an imperative need that The Episcopal Church must address. The modern way that this can happen is for seminaries and schools to make programs available to the public, either on institutions' own websites or on other sites following the Coursera model.

ChurchNext (<http://www.churchnext.tv>) is a very interesting website developed by The Rev. Chris Yaw, Michigan. Similar to the Coursera model, it presents courses by established teachers and theologians.

ChurchNext initially started out to meet a need in the Diocese of Michigan to provide and share adult-education programs, which could be viewed and discussed during adult Sunday Schools. ChurchNext has since developed into a forum where individuals, churches, and dioceses can pay a small fee for access to a broad range of church-related courses and programs.

Churches and dioceses can also use ChurchNext's site to support their own educational sites, either on their own websites or as a sub-site on ChurchNext's website. Many of the programs are specifically oriented to The Episcopal Church. The site has much potential to grow and to become very useful as an educational forum for The Episcopal Church. Some materials on the site are free; others are offered at a nominal cost to subscribers. The SCSC recommends this site to General Convention as worthy of a visit.

With access to the internet, even the smallest churches can put their information out to the public at a minimal cost. Clergy and laity can access educational and training programs from anywhere in the world, however remote, as long as a connection is available. The connection may be only a "hot spot" accessed through a smartphone on the North Slope in Alaska, a reservation in Arizona or the Dakotas, or in a village in Haiti or Ecuador Central, but it is access. The effect is to provide small congregations in remote, rural areas access to tools and information that were previously available only for much larger, English-language congregations in metropolitan areas.

A central listing of all programs available over the internet is needed. The Episcopal Church Library (<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/library>) is the closest resource the SCSC found to such a listing. Some members of the SCSC have commented that The Episcopal Church Library is hard to find, difficult to use, and not well-maintained. Using a Google search engine could improve the site. Well-maintained links, easy access, and a good search engine are essential elements of a central resource site.

There is no easy way to locate or distribute all the information and program materials that have already been created. Throughout The Episcopal Church, the lack of easy access to information has contributed to duplication of effort as the wheel is reinvented. As connectivity increases over the internet more and more, the need for access to existing and future educational resources likewise increases. Available information should include links to materials in all the languages in use in The Episcopal Church. Providing such access is a matter of equality and social justice.

Children, Youth, and Young Adults in Small Congregations

In small churches, there is often a two-sided coin regarding children, youth, and young adults. Their numbers tend to be small. It is often a challenge to organize youth groups or Sunday School classes for the small number of children who may show up on a given Sunday, or to have a viable community of young adults. At times, this small number may discourage single young adults, young couples, and families with children from attending smaller churches. It can even discourage volunteers from putting time into the programming for these groups.

The other side of this coin is that there are often more opportunities for people in these age groups to be involved. Youth often serve as acolytes, but they may also be encouraged to be readers, ushers, or members of the choir; and to participate in a wide variety of ways in liturgy. Sometimes a small Sunday school class can even give children and youth more one-on-one time with leaders, which the children may not receive in their daily lives. This can serve to strengthen their Christian faith in unseen and amazing ways. In addition, there are opportunities for youth and young adults to take on leadership roles, serve on vestries, and participate as delegates to diocesan conventions.

Small churches often provide youth greater opportunities for intergenerational and ecumenical interaction. This can lead to valuable and vital mentoring relationships. Smaller churches also find that provincial or diocesan youth events, such as EYE, can expand the youth ministry of the small church.

What attracts children, youth, and young adults is not only the internal, “inside the walls” ministries — worship, preaching, coffee hour — but also the external, “outside the walls” ministries — outreach, feeding programs, and working ecumenically. Friendships developed in youth programs can span school boundaries and lead to lifelong relationships. Small, close-knit congregations have a unique advantage in fostering close relationships with youth, setting the stage for them to become active adult participants.

When adults find worship to be life-giving and spiritually fulfilling, it can transfer to children, youth, and young adults. What is important is being a good example of Christ in the community. When the church community is seen as active and engaged, children, youth, and young adults will want to participate more fully in its life.

Ecumenism and Small Churches

Thoughtful Christians have wondered about Jesus' intention when he told the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25.14-30). The Master delighted in the five- and two-talent slaves who doubled their talents and who, as a result, were welcomed into the Master's joy. But the one-talent slave, who had something to share but was fearful of risking it, buried the talent, returned it in its entirety, and as a result, was heavily rebuked.

The Master's rebuke seems to be centered on the problem of fear. Jesus' point seems to be that the disciples, having received the teaching and mission of Jesus, were not to be fearful of the road ahead, even though they might feel small before the challenge of the early Gospel mission. This parable has implications for small church congregations.

Statistics quoted in this *Blue Book* report tell us that small congregations are the predominant model of congregational life in The Episcopal Church, and that they are here to stay. Many have vibrant ministries, doing the work God has given them to do. While their size may be small, they are fearless, as Jesus would have them be; and they bloom where they are planted, confident they are making a difference.

But what happens when, due to death or a physical moving away to a new location, small congregations become smaller, and these vibrant ministries are imperiled because fewer shoulders try to carry the same weight in ministry? Exhaustion? Burn-out? Onslaught of fear?

Every effort should be made to help small congregations come together for fruitful ministry, both within Called to Common Mission and beyond it. Some of our congregations have envisioned new ways to be effective and have joined hands with other denominations to serve together as a richer Christian family. Jesus would have approved of that unity.

In the Diocese of Eastern Oregon, 5 congregations out of 23 have ecumenical partnerships that serve their communities faithfully and broaden Christian presence. In one congregation, half of its members come from Episcopal and Lutheran (ELCA) Churches, while the other half is composed of many other denominations — Christians serving their neighbors, learning from their different traditions, and eating together at the Lord's table. Is this a new idea? Not so much. This congregation has served its community, particularly the lower-income area to its south, for more than 15 years.

New models are working, and small congregations have roles in this ongoing Kingdom of God. It is time for our Episcopal Church to offer wider affirmation and support for ecumenical ministry in which small congregations have an honorable place in God's economy and, in combination with others, remain fearless of their future.

Parochial Report — New Ways of Measurement Needed

The Parochial Report has served to examine the life of The Episcopal Church over the years — a life that in the recent past has been declining in numbers of members. As the wider Church has diminished in size, its Parochial Report has not changed in tone or content. It remains a document of numbers of members, confirmations, deaths, transfers, receptions, services, and dollars budgeted.

As the number of small congregations has grown to be the prevalent model in The Episcopal Church, the Parochial Report gives no space to speak of the life-giving ministries that many of these vibrant small congregations are offering. These ministries often are the life-blood for themselves and for their community. It is holy work that should be noted. Instead, what their Parochial Reports show are smaller numbers of members and fewer dollars, which imply a diminution of their ministries. They do not capture the growth in depth of faith, breadth of mission, or the vital presence in small towns of a tradition that really does welcome everyone. It is not the total picture by any means.

“Membership” is still reflective of the days when one joined an Episcopal Church by being baptized, confirmed, or transferred. Yet more and more, we have those who want to stay on the fringes, who attend more than one church, who connect via social media, and so on. Ministry is happening but doesn’t show up in the numbers.

Moreover, ecumenical congregations struggle to make sense of the questions asked. The best they can do is note the number of Episcopal members and dollars in contrast to the number of “others” who may be a far larger group. As a result, the data reported do not accurately reflect the reality of the congregation. The Parochial Report gives no space, or seeming importance, to the holy work done in the community and the world by those who intentionally are “one in Christ.”

While we recognize the desire to have longitudinal data sources that depict financial and membership trends, we suggest giving some thought to what the real value is of the trends being measured. Intended or not, the effect is often that small congregations can become discouraged because their numbers are getting smaller, regardless of the ministries and formation that is happening. We suggest that the Church give some thought and consideration to what we really need to know in this “new age” of the Church, and then to develop ways to measure it.

Real-Property Issues

Small congregations are the norm in The Episcopal Church, with the median church having an Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) of 61, and with 69 percent of all our churches having an ASA of 100 or fewer.

Some congregations have always been small. Others, particularly in the industrial heartland, were at one time much larger. Many of these churches, which were constructed during an earlier era, are architecturally and historically significant structures that were built to accommodate large congregations with multiple programs. The Episcopalians were at the top of the social order, and their churches reflected that stature.

Today, churches with aging congregations and dwindling numbers find their energies focused on maintaining a building that they do not need and cannot use to its fullest capacity. The financial and human resources needed to keep such buildings going hinder congregations from being able to engage in outreach or to make a real difference in their communities. It is difficult to attract new congregants to these churches when their worship space is so oversized compared with the worshipping congregation, when the outward face of the building seems more like a fortress than a place of joy, and when every new face is seen as a volunteer to keep the bills paid and the building in repair.

The Episcopal Church Building Fund has offered some innovative ideas to these congregations through its Recasting Assets program. These ideas encourage congregations to think outside the box in reimagining the use of buildings to reach the people of God. We know that the Church is the people, not the building. But we also know that the building is, in many cases, what binds our people together, and in many cases, what is preventing our people from stepping forward in faith.

Some congregations have even found it beneficial to leave their buildings — renting them out to other denominations, letting the rental income cover costs, and perhaps using only some office space in the building, but renting alternate worship space. While it may seem a radical idea at first, many displaced congregations in dioceses where strife and litigation over church property continues have found it liberating to be free of the building — empowering the congregations to engage in outreach and forcing (or enabling) them to engage in the world outside the buildings that otherwise might be holding them back.

Alternate uses of our buildings are often possible and appropriate, but churches considering alternate uses must also consider the potential legal effect of changing a building's use. Such actions will certainly affect potential tax exemptions. They may violate provisions of bequests or trusts, may result in scrutiny by the IRS, and may invite the imposition of federal, state, and local codes and regulations regarding the building accessibility, whereas continued use solely for religious purposes very often is exempt from those very same codes and regulations.

Reorganized Dioceses

As members of The Episcopal Church join in conversation about "doing church a new way," we encourage other dioceses to look to those dioceses that have faced the challenges of schism and reorganization. The efforts of the Dioceses of San Joaquin and Fort Worth were examined as they continue their work toward sustainability. As schism occurred, those remaining Episcopalians were faced with radical changes. Displaced from buildings and properties, they were faced with reduced availability of clergy and drastically decreased remaining congregation sizes that resulted in very limited funds available to address these issues. Even with all these challenges, people of these revived dioceses looked forward with great hope and anticipation to their amazing opportunity. In many locations, it was a new understanding of their call to mission. It became an opportunity to direct more resources and finances to ministry, outreach, and education rather than to facilities and their upkeep.

In the Diocese of San Joaquin, the proposed path to sustainability is through the regional Ministry Hub concept, where collaborative, extended faith communities are formed around large, stable parishes. Mission support becomes more robust as it provides the local regional hubs that provide the people-to-people relationships and collaboration needed to foster the smaller faith communities, stimulating their growth into self-sustaining congregations.

Faith communities both large and small benefit from a multiple staffing concept — both lay and clergy — within the mission hub. Resources are no longer fragmented by supporting many isolated faith communities that need more support than can be provided by a central diocesan office. A modern communications infrastructure and conferencing center is planned in each of the far-flung regional Ministry Hubs to enhance participation in governance meetings, and formation and education presentations. Returning properties are evaluated through the lens of the Ministry Hub-vision of the reorganized diocese. Those in poor repair or that are poorly suited to the new vision may be sold with proceeds used to support the continued rebirth of the diocese.

Episcopalians in both dioceses spoke of moments of profound realization after the initial shock and struggles of being displaced had passed. For some, being without a building allowed them a refocusing of purpose and reallocation of limited funds toward outreach and ministry, instead of property ownership with the

accompanying responsibilities of maintenance and upkeep. In the Book of Acts, although private ownership is acknowledged, shared ownership is encouraged. (Acts 4:32-37). In the early Church, the emphasis was on *ekklesia* — the gathering, the assembly, the congregation of the faithful who came together to share in the sacrament. It is with this understanding that a theological perspective on building ownership and stewardship might be influential. The early apostles shared what they had in common for the benefit of the whole community. The questions we ask are whether property ownership may be detrimental to the community, and how we can best be good stewards of our resources. Others in the reorganized dioceses experienced the shared benefit and grace of worshipping with newfound ecumenical partners or sharing ecumenical spaces.

The Episcopal Church as a whole may not be as blessed with the near-disaster “opportunities” that prompted the reorganized Episcopal Dioceses of San Joaquin or Fort Worth to seek and claim a new vision. What is explored in those places may be very appropriate as a model for many dioceses within The Episcopal Church: it is a more efficient model, it focuses limited resources on mission, and it ultimately can be a more realistic model for evangelism and formation.

Resolutions from GC2012

The SCSC was tasked with reviewing Resolution Do86: Explore Pension and Medicare Supplemental Health Benefits for Retired Non-Stipendiary Clergy, which reads:

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 77th General Convention of The Episcopal Church direct the Standing Commission on Small Congregations and the Office of Congregational Vitality in consultation with the Church Pension Fund, the Church Medical Trust, and the “Bishops of Small Dioceses” to explore and develop plans by which retired non-stipendiary clergy serving small congregations may receive Medicare Supplemental Health Benefits, establish a minimum pension benefit based upon years of service and report to the 78th General Convention with findings and specific recommendations for implementation of said benefits.

It should be noted that the Office of Congregational Vitality was eliminated shortly after the 2012 General Convention concluded. The SCSC used one of its meetings to meet with The Rev. Canon Patricia Collier, Mr. Frank Armstrong, and Mr. Matthew Price of the Church Pension Group. Their presentation made clear the difficult legal and practical problems involved in attempting to provide benefits for persons who do not qualify for their existing plans.

There are fiduciary problems and legal issues under the federal statutes governing pension funds (ERISA, etc.). The SCSC’s general conclusion is that under the existing pension system, clergy who are otherwise non-stipendiary should be paid the minimum amounts required to qualify for credit toward pension benefits and Medicare Supplemental Health Benefits. This is a matter of equity and justice. Paying into the system would not solve the problem of providing for current retirees, but over time it would address the situation of future retirees.

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

The SCSC has prepared and submitted three resolutions to address the most critical needs of small churches: (1) *Maintain the Centrality of the Eucharist*, (2) *Provide Lay Leadership Formation Resources*, and (3) *Appoint Task Force for Clergy Leadership Formation in Small Churches*. The resolutions follow:

AO44: MAINTAIN THE CENTRALITY OF THE EUCHARIST

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th General Convention provide and authorize ways in which small congregations can receive the sacrament at the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day in the absence of a deacon, priest, or bishop; and be it further

Resolved, That the licensing of lay ministers be expanded to allow distribution of previously consecrated sacrament in the context of Sunday public worship in the absence of a deacon, priest, or bishop; and be it further

Resolved, That a liturgical rite be designed for the distribution of communion by such licensed lay ministers in the congregation at Sunday public worship in the absence of a deacon, priest, or bishop; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations provide education regarding distribution of communion by such licensed lay ministers.

EXPLANATION

At the Institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ said, "Do this in remembrance of me," and The Book of Common Prayer states that the Holy Eucharist is "the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day" (p.13). We strive to sustain the witness and Eucharistic charism of Episcopal congregations when the frequency of the presence of a priest or bishop to celebrate the Eucharist is not regular, given the difficulty of small congregations to be able to have a priest every Sunday.

Taking into account the Eucharistic character of the Church, we seek to provide for ways in which congregations can receive the sacrament weekly in the absence of a regular priest or bishop. (For example, a deacon or licensed Eucharistic minister could attend an early service at a church with a priest and then take the Sacrament to a congregation to be distributed, or the Sacrament could be consecrated at a central church on a given Sunday to be given to a deacon or licensed Eucharistic minister to be distributed on subsequent Sundays.)

A045: APPOINT TASK FORCE FOR CLERGY LEADERSHIP FORMATION IN SMALL CHURCHES

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th General Convention appoint a task force consisting of no fewer than 10 nor more than 20 representatives including, but not limited to, representatives from local diocesan programs, representatives from seminaries, ecumenical representation, or representatives who are engaged in advanced theological education; and that the task force be made up of bishops, priests, deacons, and laity to explore quality programs for formation, for expanding education opportunities for clergy and laity, for collaboration between local diocesan school programs and seminaries, for ecumenical collaboration, and to explore a wide range of delivery methods. The task force shall report back to the 79th General Convention with a plan to provide quality formation for clergy in small congregations that is affordable, theologically reflective, and innovative; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget, and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$150,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

EXPLANATION

It is the obligation of the Church to provide all persons with equal opportunity and access to quality lifelong formation. The majority of churches in TEC are small churches (69 percent of Episcopal congregations have an ASA of 100 or fewer people, with the median average Sunday worship attendance of 61 people).

Many churches are being served by part-time clergy, both priests and deacons, many of whom are non-stipendiary. Many who feel called to serve small congregations, and many of those who are serving small congregations, cannot afford the cost, in terms of either time or financial resources, of full-time seminary

formation. A Constable Grant may be applied for to cover costs for task force meetings and preparation of its report.

AO46: PROVIDE LAY LEADERSHIP FORMATION RESOURCES

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th General Convention mandate that the Office of General Convention and/or the Executive Council establish and make easily accessible a regularly updated and maintained online resource list and library of materials and programs for licensed lay leadership in small congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That every diocese be interviewed to determine if there are any local internal resources that may be appropriate to be included in the resource list so that each diocese may provide leadership formation for all licensed lay ministries through a variety of methods appropriate to the need of the diocese; and be it further

Resolved, That a report by the Executive Council be made to The Episcopal Church by June 30, 2016 so that access to information may be distributed to the wider Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget, and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$100,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

EXPLANATION

It is the obligation of the Church to provide all persons with equal opportunity and access to quality lifelong formation. The majority of churches in The Episcopal Church are small churches. Sixty-nine percent of Episcopal congregations have an ASA of 100 or fewer people, with a median average Sunday worship attendance of 61 people.

The Episcopal Church affirms the validity and vitality of lay leadership, and many small congregations are being served primarily by lay leadership. Title III.4.3-9 provides for licensed lay ministries in a variety of leadership capacities; and there is a need for appropriate, accessible, and affordable training and formation for these licensed lay ministries.

Budget

Funds in the amount of approximately \$15,000 remained from the 2009-2012 triennium budget. These funds allowed us to attend the joint CCAB meeting in St. Louis in November 2012. The Executive Council granted the SCSC a budget for 2013-2015 of \$16,000. This triennium, the SCSC also received a grant from the Constable Fund in the amount of \$43,000, which allowed us to hold the Symposium on Formation for Small Church Leadership at the American Airlines Training & Conference Center in Fort Worth, Texas. The Constable Grant funds and the 2012-2015 budget were used to hold an additional in-person meeting at the Crowne Plaza Chicago-O'Hare, Illinois. Approximately \$11,900 of the triennial budget remains available for use in 2015. The SCSC requests that it be granted a budget of \$32,000 for the 2016-2018 triennium.