

A Comprehensive Strategic Review Executive Summary

The Diocese of Olympia has completed a comprehensive strategic review process in anticipation of a strategic planning effort in 2014. The review process engaged nearly 2,000 persons who provided input on their perspectives, experiences, and aspirations for the Diocese at the local, governance, and staff levels. This process did not review Diocesan facilities, staffing rationale, or functions and processes, nor their alignment to the current strategic priorities.

Respondents across the Diocese from every role indicate a high level of satisfaction and energy compared to a peer group of middle judicatories across the country. This suggests that the Diocese is positioned for strategic options that include growth, expansion, replication, and external impact. While members mention a variety of ways that congregations are contributing to the vitality of the Diocese, the most significant factors that emerge regarding the Diocese as a body are the leadership and vision of the current Bishop combined with Diocesan support to congregations.

There is a clear desire for the Diocese to build on these critical strengths and to focus additional energy on developing healthy, vital, growing congregations. Members also indicate that the church they envision will need to be significantly different from the current state. Key in their thinking is a church that is more diverse, younger, and welcoming. At the conceptual level, there is broad understanding that this will require a significant rethinking of what it means to be Episcopal churches in the region. Members respond positively to the assertion that a cultural shift will be required, a change process that goes much deeper than developing new programs. However, when they speak of how their congregations contribute to the vitality of the Diocese, programs are one of the words they most frequently use.

The organizational culture of the Diocese appears to be flexible and progressive with strengths in the capacity to reflect, advocate, explore, and include. However, members may be challenged in their ability to anticipate the emotional and spiritual impact of the changes they imagine. Church members in denominational systems across the country share a common vision for the congregations they desire in their future. Embracing a set of strategic values, rewards, and penalties, and the adoption of fresh tactics and practices is what that they find most daunting.

For a cultural shift to be realized, communication will be critical to the enterprise. This communication system will not only need to be two-way, it will need to be horizontal as well as vertical, that is, connecting congregations to one another for the sharing of best practices and organizational learning. In addition, communication will need to be multi-channeled, face to face, face to group, print, and digital. The Diocese has made significant strides in this direction with its video sites, but members indicate that a reliable and comprehensive communication system is yet to be achieved.

Finally, the priorities articulated by respondents in the process are outcome-based. This will require a shift from process measurements, for example, descriptions of events and procedures, to outcome measurements, for example, changes in demographic data for church populations and changes in church climate. At present, the Diocese does not have a system of organization intelligence in place sufficient to support to an outcome-based strategic plan.