



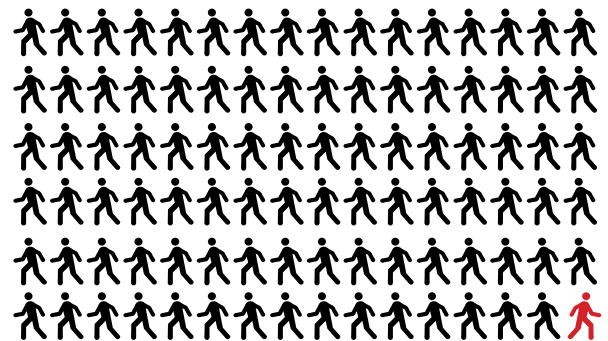
Pentecost 2015

Recent Reports & the State of the Diocese

Dear saints,

Greetings of Pentecost to you and your loved ones! Sunday, May 31, marks the seventh anniversary of my consecration as your bishop. It continues to be an honor to serve you in this capacity. My family and I are grateful for this privilege and responsibility. One of the primary challenges articulated in the diocesan profile that led to you and the Spirit electing me was GROWTH. The recent [Pew Research Center Report](#), as well as the latest report on the [state of the Episcopal Church](#), prompted me to report to you on how the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester is doing with growth. I am happy to tell you that in 2014 we recorded the lowest decline of average Sunday attendance over the last fifteen years – just 1%. Three of our five Districts had positive growth last year, and many of our 31 smallest parishes (Family size churches) also had modest growth. Let me give you a little background of our journey in this part of God’s vineyard.

Over the past two decades, the Episcopal Church, like most of the mainline Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches in Western New York along with most of the Northeast and the Midwest, has been in a state of decline. An important moment in our journey was the discernment process that led to Diocesan Council deciding on our mission *to grow and develop congregations spiritually, numerically and in missional leadership*. Our mission statement, shared at the 79th Diocesan Convention (2010), ran counter to the normalized narrative of managing decline in our context, especially with large iconic local businesses. However, our mission statement resonated with the narrative that several small business ventures and the higher education enterprises in and around Rochester were embracing. The resonance was with the intentionality to innovate and bear fruit. While we are not a “business”, we value growth and sustainability.

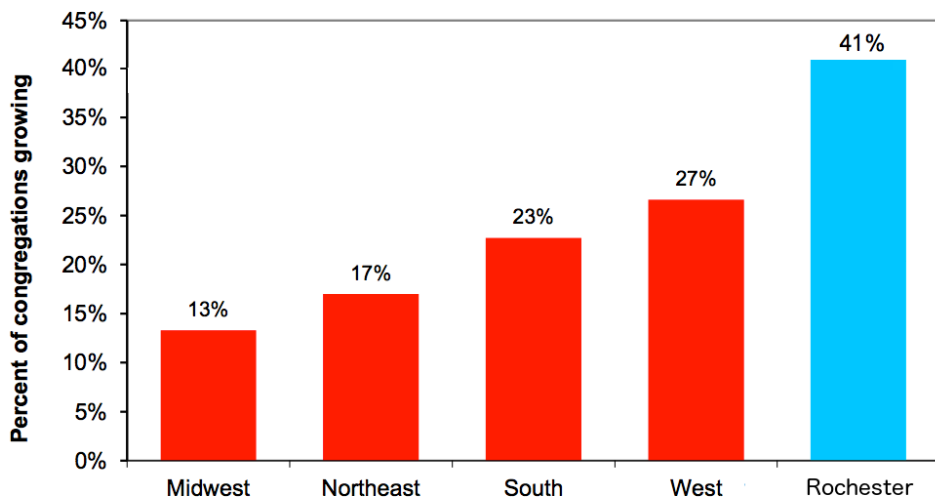


A Decline in Decline: 2014 saw the lowest decline of recorded average Sunday attendance over the last fifteen years - just 1%

For transformative change to occur in our reality, we had to change. Change is hard. Yet, as your bishop, I have embraced change with the long view of our relevance and sustainability in mind. Our Diocese had to change a few practices that worked well in the past. We had to move beyond business as usual. We had to thoughtfully stop doing certain things and start doing other things. After thoughtful processes of discernment, we decided to stop certain practices that were sound at the time of their inception and were not sustainable in the long run. Some examples of practices we changed: giving loans to vulnerable congregations to stay afloat, closed our retail operations of the Good Book Store, and scaled down draw from our endowment. We also started engaging congregational development partnerships that included strategic visioning for measurable growth with annual monitoring and evaluation. We did a similar thing with mission development partnerships.

Growth Highlight: In 2014, three out of the five districts in the Diocese of Rochester grew, with the Rochester City District leading with 4% growth.

Growth in U.S. Regions and the Diocese of Rochester



Bucking the National Trends:

41% of Diocese of Rochester parishes grew last year - much higher than the 17% percent of parishes growing in the Northeast U.S.

What strikes me most importantly is the fact that we stand on shoulders of those who have served before us. We are only building on their faithfulness to share the good news of Jesus in relevant ways. In our changing world and in some cases changing neighborhoods, this work is most clearly experienced through discernment about current identity as a local congregation by faithful lay people and clergy. We are noticing that such ongoing discernment leads to greater clarity of purpose for the local congregation, which has also led to deepening spiritual practices that are about following Jesus in joyful, missional, relevant and creative ways. Since every context is unique, the only way to get clear about identity and purpose is through local discernment.

The narrative of managing decline is changing in our time. Today, we have thriving congregations of all shapes and sizes where the good news of Jesus Christ is proclaimed understandably in word and deed. I want to thank you for your trust and commitment of time, talent, and treasure to your congregation, our Diocese and our Episcopal Church. As of Pentecost 2015, we see signs of thriving congregations in our Diocese. We are bucking the trend of decline experienced by most mainline churches. I invite you to generously and joyfully increase your prayers and support for the spiritual and missional growth of our Diocese. I am happy to tell you that our numbers are trending positively. The only thing trending more positively than our numbers is our Spirit! Please take a moment to give thanks to God, and humbly welcome somebody to a thriving Church. Email me at prince@episcopaldioceseofrochester.org and briefly share what this news means to you.

Go into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit. Alleluia! Alleluia!!!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!!!

Affectionately yours,



The Rt. Rev. Prince G. Singh
VIII Episcopal Bishop in Rochester, N.Y.