

Diocesan Dean white paper: forward movement after annual design examination—December 2020

Before you read my letter, here's a little historic context of how we rolled out the plan in the fall of 2019. Here's a video synopsis and a letter for some detail: <https://vimeo.com/358362895>
<https://www.episcopalrochester.org/sites/default/files/Bishop%27s%20Writing%20September%20Reallocation%202019.pdf>

Dear saints,

I invite you to look at a new way to frame the priesthood as we examine this evolving leadership model in our Diocese. When we launched this in the fall of 2019, we were focused on it as a distributed model of leadership in construing Diocesan Deanships. However, since then, I have come to believe that the spirit of this model is applicable to all priestly leadership across the board. The core purpose of priestly ministry is about empowering each person to thrive in the movement and promise of Christ's Body, the church!

I am grateful to the Vestries and Diocesan Deans for engaging this iteration of a distributed model of leadership over the past year and am humbled by the trust the Diocese has shown in launching this design to make us a better and more nimble church. Each Dean is a very gifted and creative leader. From my vantage point, overall, we have made good progress. We have numerous accomplishments since the inception of the model, and you can get a glimpse of these in the [official reports from our Deans to the 89th Diocesan Convention](#). Each Dean is aware of the growing edges in their approach to focused areas, especially as they get their bearings after the first year. As you know, getting off the blocks and out of inertia is understandably tough, especially when you also factor multiple pandemics in the mix. We are grateful to the Rev. Canon Carrie Schofield-Broadbent for richly facilitating our continued discernment of this leadership model. With Carrie, we assessed where we have been and where we dream to go with candor, curiosity, and new insights. I will outline some of our learnings and hopes that emerged from this Appreciative Inquiry with the Deans.

The Deans are helping us fulfill our mission and vision by growing and developing congregations spiritually, numerically, and in missional leadership. Since we are dealing with a “new thing,” I ask for your continued curiosity and attention. I also want to acknowledge that the Deans and I have been working to balance expectations with the commitment we collectively made to vestries for this design to work. We now have clearer mutual understanding so that each *Dean will monitor the scale or scope of her or his role*. Please bear in mind that templates of comparison with fulltime positions will not fit this model.

We take our cue for shared ministry leadership from Jesus, who taught and practiced collaborative leadership. The church—Christ's living body—has been learning to embody his teaching throughout history. The Holy Spirit broke through in Acts 10, where we read about Cornelius and Peter. The early Christians launched a mission to gentiles, engaging leaders who were not Jewish. The church, for the first time, nurtured shared leadership with those who were considered different and even “heathen.” It was obedient to the movement of the Holy Spirit. It was during this time that the church affirmed the fruit of the Spirit in “foreign” leaders as evidence of God's authentic presence. That movement continues today as we blend thresholds with women, LGBTQ persons, people of color, and all others in leadership. The church is constantly evolving in this iterative process and this shared leadership model is enabling us to move with the Spirit in new ways.

Empowering the laity is a growing edge for the church. Any model of shared leadership depends on an empowered and healthy laity. Some of Christianity's close association with individualism calls for rebalancing since even in the Baptismal Covenant we affirm “I do” and “I will.” While it is good that our Baptismal covenant affirms individual agency, the invitation to communal stewardship is often overlooked. Nevertheless, the “I will” of the baptized is inseparable from the “we will” of the community. For example, the controversy

we face with wearing masks may be rooted in an extremely individualistic assumption of piety and a departure from core evangelical associations with communal grace. Personal piety expressed as “my personal salvation” or “my right” can easily remove me from my communal responsibility to and for my neighbor’s wellbeing. Such piety stems from a “me and my Jesus/God” spirituality. Individualistic notions of piety are contrary to an understanding of cherishing a trinitarian God and, therefore, loving and being a neighbor to all persons, especially those wounded by injustice. The priesthood has the potential to bless and nurture shared leadership. At the same time, it also has the propensity to corrupt the gift of shared leadership when it yields to the temptation of self-absorption or promotion. This may very well be a theological stumbling block for the church that stems from a form of discipleship and leadership that is not distributed in the church. The impact of such a malady may be evidenced in the fact that we have not been an effective instrument making major inroads in Racial Justice and Climate Change, not to mention evangelism. The dream of God for salvation, sanctification, and re-creation is local and global, and it is always communal. As a Diocese, as a church, and as followers of Jesus, we are constantly called to the holy work of rebalancing our practice of shared leadership. This is what it means to be part of the living, breathing, and loving Body of Christ.

Learnings: One of my primary takeaways from our design review was the friction with scope/scale in this design for most of the areas—the exception is Dean Johnnie’s role, which has moved slowly, due to his new Rector/Deanship.

Let me address the question of optimal time commitment by clarifying the why behind this design, especially for a Diocese our size.

1. Our design for Diocesan Deans is built out of a desire to make space for **collaboration**. I called these particular Diocesan Deans to their respective positions because they have demonstrated passion in areas of leadership where they could tackle big and current questions for a three-year period. This innovative opportunity is meant to enhance their leadership locally as Rectors, while providing synergy with their lay leaders and other deans. The goal is to collectively inspire thought leadership that encourages coaching each other as a community of Diocesan Deans—to engage the *learning circle model*. This design depends on such crucial synergy. The heart of trinitarian theology is collaboration in service of love. Of course, COVID’s disruption sent collaboration on a tailspin.
2. **Replication** is another key aspect. It is about *boundaries*. This design has to be replicable with a limited time commitment for priests who serve in full-time positions both as a weekly discipline and as a three-year term commitment. Time has to be stewarded with *discipline* as required by the vision within boundaries. Any vision has to discern scope or scale that is focused enough for short-term and long-term transformation. The attraction to this model is for gifted fulltime clergy to thrive when they stretch within pastoral laboratories that are also their boundaries. The image, here, is of a tree that is rooted and yet sways and dances to the winds of the Spirit. In a way, this is central to a locally rooted discipline of *epi-scope*—oversee/near (episcopal/bishop)—as opposed to *kaleido-scope*, which is constantly changing and shifting. Of course, free-flowing creativity is good and has its place, but this model is best suited for slow, patient discernment. Spiritually, this model pushes stewarding our limitations in enriching ways that give way to the Spirit’s creative movement in our midst.
3. This design has the potential to work well for Diocesan Deans when they are intentional about **empowering** other leaders, both clergy and lay, trusting them, and trusting God. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” (Psalm 127:1). Empowerment is at the heart of every aspect of this model, which is an extension of trusting God and trusting neighbor. Strategically, this model helps us to retain and train leaders with the gifts to grow and thrive in ways beyond parochial or congregational engagement as a priest. It trusts and equips local leaders to address local issues instead of making the Deans to become gatekeepers who inadvertently create codependent relationships always seeking clergy guidance. This may run against the grain of “traditional” expectations of a Rector and hence may need some radical shifts through coaching local leaders. An empowering leadership approach in our model assumes that the Deans will discipline their time commitments by not taking on every

creative possibility or challenge that comes their way. The discipline is to discern and delegate to District Deans, other Diocesan Deans or address it strategically with the Bishop. This design strives to flatten ministerial and organizational hierarchy and is best suited for clergy who want to be in the parish and engage in strategic diocesan ministry simultaneously. This model is not suited for a “full-time” mindset by design. Of course, if a dean finds that they are called toward that model we can help them find such a leadership position in a larger Diocese.

Let me now share a few insights in the spirit of getting realigned because we may be doing some cutting-edge leadership development in our Diocese through this model. As I alluded, this is *not an expansion project*. One of the difficulties of this design is that it is “new” and does not have natural peers available right now. Most of its equivalent positions in the Episcopal Church are full time with little or no parish engagement. Therefore, we have to create the mind space necessary to make this model work. This is a model for the church we are becoming and not for the that church we are or may have been. Due to this fundamental difference, it doesn’t translate well currently for coaching and mentorships from outside our diocese. We could use coaching from a Team of Sustainability (TOS).

Changes and Recommendations:

- We will increase the hours from 350 to 400 annual hours for Deans Virginia, Debs and Billy, still keeping it to one day a week starting January 2021. Dean Johnnie continues at 600 annual hours to honor his salary package until 2022 since he transitioned from being Canon to the Ordinary in 2019.
- The Deans revised their scope of work and attached them to their letters of agreement, keeping in mind that they will responsibly steward their time commitment.
- Deans will discern, in consultation with me, teams of sustainability for Discernment, Transition, Rural/Small Church, and Formation for each Diocesan Deanship. The purpose is sustainability and continuity of vision to help monitor scope and enliven this model to be lifegiving for the ongoing health of the Diocese; I will appoint three to five wise lay and clergy leaders for a five-year term.
- We met with all Deans and their Wardens on December 09, 2020. I will invite all the vestries for a conversation in February of 2021.
- That the deans meet as Diocesan Deans, without me, regularly and reach out to individual District Deans as needed. Building trusted leadership with each other is essential.
- Regarding design issues, a Dean should contact me directly, as we are stewarding this design together in this iterative process.

Thank you for helping us do ministry in refreshingly new and biblical ways through a distributed model of leadership that is relevant to our context in our Diocese for this season.

Prince G Singh
VIII Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Rochester,

December 10, 2020

Diocesan Deans

Who should contact the Dean for Transitions:

Dean Virginia Tyler Smith, Diocesan Dean for Transitions 585-315-6604 transitions@episcopalrochester.org

- Search chairs and Wardens of churches in transition
- Anyone who knows of innovative clergy who may be interested in coming to the Diocese of Rochester

- * Clergy considering a change of cure or retirement: contact the Bishop
- * Ordination candidates: contact the Dean for Discernment and Bishop

Who should contact the Dean for Liturgy and Formation?

Dean William O. Daniel, Jr., Diocesan Dean for Liturgy and Formation 585.358.8338 formation@episcopaldrochester.org

- Any who seek to lead, collaborate or share best practices on Children, Youth and Young Adults ministry at a Diocesan level.
- Churches seeking to initiate a program for or better understand ministry with and to children, youth and young adults.
- All who seek assistance designing liturgical opportunities or liturgy server programs that extend beyond the ordinary offerings of a local parish.

Who should contact the Dean for Discernment:

Dean Deborah Duguid-May, Diocesan Dean for Discernment 585-729-3231 discernment@episcopalrochester.org

- Those who are feeling called to explore diaconal or priestly ministry, or a calling to religious life in the real world as lay saints.
- Rectors who are needing to set up a parish-based discernment team.
- Those who would like to be involved in the ministry of discernment in our diocese such as serving on the Commission on Ministry, as Diocesan Catalysts, and Circles of Support.

Who should contact the Dean for Small Church and Pastoral Development?

Dean Johnnie E. Ross

Diocesan Dean for Churches in small towns and Rural communities, & Pastoral Development (859) 285-9361
smallchurch@episcopalrochester.org

- Leaders from Churches in small towns and rural communities whose congregation:
 - struggles with conflict, emotional stress, grief, or low morale
 - is interested in strategic planning for sustainability of ministry in their community
- Canonically resident retired clergy, their spouses, partners, or children who find themselves in need of chaplain services.

Revised December 2020