

Short Paper #3
What Are the Core Issues
We Face As a Diocese?

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This is the third in a series of short informational papers which are being sent to all Convention Delegates. Please keep alert for these e-mails, and be sure to read them in preparation for the work of casting your vote at Convention. The collection of Short Papers is also available on the DESC Workspace, www.edecr.org/desc/.

And now, let's explore:

What Is the Core Issue We Face As a Diocese?

A lot of material has circulated around our diocese over the past two years on the topics of what we do well, what we are learning now to do better, and what we are not doing very well yet. Most of the materials sent to you from DESC this year have focused on the need for a new funding formula and a new organizational structure. But what lies behind these proposals? I believe there are three core issues we need to address.

The first core issue: Each of us needs to live into a higher level of engagement in the mission and programs of the 51 missions and parishes that comprise our diocese. For example, we have heard comments that people don't know what 'best practices' for ministry and mission exist in other congregations across the diocese. That isn't really surprising, since there is only minimal engagement between congregations, even when near each other. Engagement as a *family of interwoven parishes and missions*, motivated to help each other grow in health, must be based on being in relationship with each other. This calls for relationship-building activities that encourage established and healthy parishes to join with neighboring (or remote) newer, less resourced congregations for outreach projects, fund raisers, work days, and other activities.

Comments were made to those serving on the DFRC last year that some people see the diocesan assessment as a tax. The implication of this label is that monies are sent away from local churches for services to be provided, but people don't see that those services are happening. The work of the last two years has helped us all see that the services of the diocesan hub (legislative diocese) should support and empower *the real services*, which are you and me being engaged at our missions and parishes in the work our Lord Christ commissioned us to do. We are to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind; and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt 22:37ff). We are to go into all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching all that Christ commanded us to do (Matt 28:19ff). That isn't a call just to the diocesan staff; it is the call to every follower of Jesus Christ. Christ expects personally engaged followers.

A key component of effective and meaningful engagement is that we are well organized in our work and communications in a way that honors our paid and volunteer workers. Our current diocesan organizational structure has resulted in very dedicated, hard working, God-loving

people feeling unappreciated, and their work devalued, as they struggle with identical work being done by several diocesan groups, or their work never used due to lack of clear definition for the work they have been asked to do, or being unable to accomplish what they were tasked with doing because of lack of required authority. The point is that these situations rightfully frustrate good people, and discourage contributions of time, talent and finances to the work of the diocese. The structural re-designs being proposed by DESC specifically target fixing these inefficiencies: Lines of authority are clearly defined among the major diocesan bodies; overlap in job responsibilities is addressed by merging Council and Corporation; engagement by all is strengthened through ‘encouraging’ or ‘expecting’ local management of programs and mission work; fresh approaches are encouraged through democratic elections of deanery/convocation leadership.

We need to acknowledge that a new organizational chart is only the first step. Other important steps toward working efficiently as a team don’t show up on an organizational chart. Those steps are shown in the way we operate under our new structure and funding. We must ensure that our diocesan bodies work collaboratively towards our common purpose (growth in our embodying the Great Commission); that we support our missions and parishes through shared ministry and outreach; that we maintain open communications channels; that there are regular updates among diocesan leadership on key topics; and that we define, monitor, and report on metrics for healthy programs. We are now discussing ways to enable the follow up on these important procedures.

The second core issue: Besides engagement, we need to grow our critical mass as a fellowship of worshipping Episcopal communities on the central coast of California. Since 1990, the Diocese of El Camino Real has been flat in membership growth, while the general population around us has grown by 16%. Our ability to fund expanding outreach work, to help new church plants flourish, to attract new people to our churches through advertising, well maintained facilities, and top notch clergy, all depend on our having growing membership per congregation, and more healthy churches in our diocese. We need to grow beyond the present marginal critical mass.

We must grow in financial strength as well as in Average Sunday Attendance. From a financial standpoint, as reported in the Rev Canon Keith Brown’s Executive Summary in the Evaluation Report for the Diocese of El Camino Real - 2006, we need to build our non-assessment revenues through endowments, grants, investments, and fundraising, in addition to building the assessment income through healthy growth of member missions and parishes.

The need for growth in critical mass also translates to the number of kids in our Sunday Schools, and the average age of our members. It translates to the number of new people who walk into our churches every year, to the efforts parishioners make to reach out to visitors, and the retention rate we hold for converting newcomers into new members. It translates to growth in the number of new members who begin to support the community’s work through volunteer hours and pledged financial support. It translates to the number of members who commit to the tithe. It translates to the number of members who are newly commissioned as new lay readers, and new acolytes, and new lay servers, and new ministry leaders in our congregations. One of the component pieces for this growth is for us to become students and practitioners of effective evangelism. This is not growth for growth’s sake. This is growth that results from the hard work

of good people, invigorated by effective leadership and well managed programs of ministry and mission, which provide us all with a way to grow in faith, and fulfill our God-given purpose of worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and mission.

The third core issue: We need to transform our image among the un-churched of central California. Surveys by Barna Group and Gallup show that 60 to 80 percent of the residents of the San Francisco Bay Area are un-churched. Do our parishes, our missions, our whole diocese provide a message of transformation to that huge potential harvest of souls for God? The answer is NO if we are still characterized as ‘the chosen frozen’, or ‘Christianity’s best kept secret’. Those are not kind words, and they are not accurate assessments of the Episcopalians I know. We need to market who we are; we need to raise the visibility of the things we hold so dear: liturgy, sacrament, and ‘Scripture, tradition, and reason’. These are our basic tenets, perhaps so much so that we consider them a ‘given’. They aren’t. We are unique within Christianity for our perspective on traditional liturgical worship mixed with personal discernment. If we really honor the responsibility of personal discernment, each of us needs to engage our neighborhoods in the hard work of discipleship and commitment to a faith family.

So behind the DESC proposals for two organizational structure and four funding formulas, the real issue for each of us is how to build personal engagement in the purpose God has for each of us; how to grow in all the ways that build our critical mass and enable us to fulfill the purpose God has for this diocese; and how to transform our image to the un-churched neighbors all around us. They are our greatest mission field.

As you review all the materials in preparation for your vote at Convention, remember what core issues we need to address. May God guide you in the decisions that will answer the subjective goals we have, but also answer the core issues we must conquer TOGETHER.