

## EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF WESTERN MICHIGAN

### MUTUAL MINISTRY REVIEW FOR LEARNING

May, 2007

In reflecting on personal and organizational learning today, it is helpful to set it in a context of systems learning. Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, and his colleagues, are outstanding learning theorists who have contributed mightily to our understanding of how organizations and groups thrive. Their critical research indicates the dynamics that must be present if organizations are to have the best potential for viability.

Integral to organizational learning is the insight that the many individual persons, as well as the multiple parts and elements of an organization, must live and work in the consciousness of the Whole, the System. This means being conscious of the collective, that which is greater than the individual selves. In other words, the more each person can live and work in the consciousness of the vision, mission and values (charism) of the Whole, and its internal and external relationships, the greater is the capacity to thrive. Governance is the organizing principal of furthering vision, mission and values as they call an entity into relationship; as such, it is the practice of authority within the System. Perceiving and understanding the practice of authority, as in "to author life", places greater awareness on how important governance is in promoting interdependency in the System.

In applying this learning theory concept to the Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan, I suggest that the more each individual in the System, be they lay or ordained, lives in the consciousness of the Whole, that is, the Vision Statement, Mission Statement and the charism of the Episcopal Tradition, the more the Whole will be in right relationship, just relationship, internally and externally. And the more governance is understood as the practice of authority, authoring life, the more greatly will all parts and elements lean into furthering the common good of the Whole.

Obviously the personal qualities of the individuals in the System affect the capacity to be a vibrant, maturing System. Research indicates that there are four qualities that bear particular impact on the Whole. They are: capacities to have personal vision, to learn to be dialogical, to hold differences and to actualize personal development. These four qualities are interactive among themselves and impact the Whole.

#### MISSION STATEMENT

*We, with our Bishop, in the Anglican tradition, strive to proclaim and manifest God's love to all persons in West Michigan and the world so that, in the worship of God and service in the name of Jesus Christ, unity may overcome estrangement and hope may overcome despair.*

#### THE VISION OF THE PEOPLE

*We are people committed to our baptismal covenant and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The promises of our baptism create for us our vision of future ministry and provide us with the passion with which we long to live out our faith in Jesus Christ. It is our calling to be known for inclusivity and intentional growth.*

*We seek to serve Christ in all persons,*

- *Desiring to increase the diversity of our Diocese so that it represents the whole population in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and economic status.*
- *We are committed to establishing a strong youth ministry. We will do so by inviting and welcoming all into our midst, nourishing them in their spiritual growth and supporting them as they minister in Christ's name.*

*We proclaim the good news of Christ by*

- *Intentionally developing new models of ministry*
- *Planting new congregations*
- *Creatively supporting existing parishes and*
- *Encouraging responsible stewardship.*

The purposes of the Mutual Ministry Review for Learning (MMRL) are in a Letter of Agreement between the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Western Michigan and the Bishop. The purposes are:

- Assess how well the Bishop, Standing Committee, Executive Council, and other Diocesan leaders are fulfilling their responsibilities to each other and to the ministry they share.
- Establish goals for the work of the Diocese for the future.
- Identify areas of conflict or disappointment that may be adversely affecting mutual ministry.

The following groups participated in the MMRL during April 2007:

- Standing Committee
- Executive Council
- Committee on Ministries
- Finance Committee
- Youth and Young Adults
- Deacons
- Staff members of the Diocesan offices: 5
- Bishop Robert Gepert

#### **MUTUAL MINISTRY REVIEW FOR LEARNING (MMRL)**

The MMRL (2003-2007) review was conducted in a manner by which each group or individual staff member was asked to:

- Identify two or three significant contributions the group has made to implement the Mission of the Church and the Diocesan Vision.
- Identify two or three significant factors that inhibited the group in implementing the Mission and Vision.
- Identify two or three significant ways the leadership, practices or policies of Bishop Gepert helped the group to implement Mission and Vision.
- Identify two or three significant ways the leadership, practices or policies of Bishop Gepert have not helped the group to implement Mission and Vision.

Bishop Gepert was asked to reflect on the following:

- Identify six of his most significant contributions to the Mission and Vision
- Identify six major frustrations or impediments to his ability to effect Mission and Vision
- Identify three ways of supporting priests
- Identify three frustrations in working with priests
- Identify support of deacons
- Identify three frustrations in working with deacons
- Identify three ways of supporting parishes
- Identify three frustrations in working with laity
- Identify three ways of supporting committees, commissions
- Identify three frustrations in working with committees, commissions

The following material includes the assessment of the groups and Bishop Gepert's reflections.

### **STANDING COMMITTEE**

#### **STRENGTHS**

- No rubber stamp approvals
- Call Diocesan/working groups to accountability
- Cultivate collaborative relationships
- Value and act on speaking truthfully

#### **LIMITATIONS**

- Turnover on SC, committees, commissions
- Failure to follow guidelines by all groups
- Shortage of Diocesan staff with resulting challenges

#### **STRENGTHS in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop**

- Works with SC in developing relationships
- Fiscal accountability
- Gospel centered

#### **LIMITATIONS in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop**

- Tends to move quickly without securing support
- Instances of lack of empathy/pastoral presence
- Needs to acknowledge his role in Diocesan picture

### **EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

#### **STRENGTHS**

- Committed to Diocesan Vision
- Significant work given to financial health
- Diversity grown—racial, age, social, economic

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- A survival mentality, a reactive stance
- Apathy of people in serving on the EC
- Continued lack of fund resources

Issues of the Cathedral

STRENGTHS in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop

- Candor/openness about his personal faith journey
- Insistence/support for total transparency
- Bible study and consciousness of being Gospel people

LIMITATIONS in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop

- Communications
- Difficult to discern leadership in administration at Diocesan offices
- Some inability to take responsibility for his actions
- Decreased administrative capabilities

**COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**

STRENGTHS

- Improved communications
- Work with lay ministry
- Training of discernment teams in parishes

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of full working groups—people participating and turnover
- Lack separate process for ordination of young people
- Lack relevant documents available for committee work

STRENGTHS in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop

- Collaboration/support of COM with Sudanese church/applicants
- Presence of Canon Bill Spaid on COM
- Initiative for deacon school/Vocational Discernment Process (VDP)

LIMITATIONS in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop

- Lack of preparation and detail to manage change
- Appear to be mixed messages
- Lack of clarity of roles between COM and VDP

**OAKERHATER SCHOOL AND DISCERNMENT GROUP**

STRENGTHS

- Defined open process for deacons to be educated for ministry
- Implemented processes for discernment and ordination process
- Provide opportunities for baptized for vocational discernment-Christian formation

WEAKNESSES

- Budget constraints due to lack of School participants
- Prevalent misunderstand among clergy/parishes about role/ministry of deacons
- Presbyteral attitudes toward deacons: resistance to encourage movement toward deaconate if potential loss of person as parish leader

**STRENGTHS** in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop

- High value on Spiritual Direction; excellent model for personal/communal discernment
- Leadership/commitment by not “caving” re: discernment process and School

**WEAKNESSES** in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop

- Lack of organizational capacity at Diocesan offices—confusion/last minute
- Personal history of negativity regarding deacons affects the DWM
- Clear directives lacking at School and discernment process when forming

**FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**STRENGTHS**

- Greater fiscal accountability/control
- Transparency
- Commitment to restore/not routinely use Endowment Fund

**WEAKNESSES**

- Lack of organizational structure for all financial entities
- Lack of Treasurer
- Limited financial resources

**STRENGTHS** in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop

- Committed to operate in a fiscally responsible manner
- Relationship of the Gospel and finances
- Encourages/supports financial transparency

**WEAKNESSES** in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop

- Can fail to follow through with actions taken at meetings
- Some discomfort with people of power, influence, financial means
- Time lag on critical appointments—Treasurer, Finance Committee, others

**YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS COMMITTEES**

**STRENGTHS**

- Young adult fellowship more inviting/welcoming
- Beacon for Youth/young Adults
- Raising parish awareness for ministries to Youth/Young Adults

**WEAKNESSES**

- Previous conceptions/perceptions
- Communications: lack of information/dialogue about Diocesan decisions

**STRENGTHS** in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop

- Supports Young/Young Adults in variety of ways
- Holds people accountable
- Supports and lives the Mission and Vision

**LIMITATIONS** in ministerial collaboration with the Bishop

- Some tendency to knee jerk reactions
- Some hesitancy to ask questions because of fear
- Bishop's articulated hopes/dreams have not been fulfilled

### **STAFF**

#### **STRENGTHS/BG**

- Rooted in prayer; desire to serve Jesus as "overseer"
- Studying the Gospel as part of meetings grows my sense of my work in Christ
- Passion for the Gospel
- Unflagging support, encouragement and confidence
- Respect for staff and the work of staff
- Supports personal and spiritual well being of staff
- Willing to give and receive feedback
- Clarity about knowing where you stand with him
- Weekly meetings and investment in staff
- Sees the big picture
- Invested in knowing the finances of the Diocese; gives it time

#### **LIMITATIONS/BG**

- The "becoming" years of taking on role of Bishop and the learning curve can yield inconsistency
- His clarity of thought can cause him to not perceive that there is more than one way to perfection
- The tendency to feel he must fix everything
- Sometimes it is best to let go
- Fails to make critical appointments on a timely basis
- Can resist making a tough decision, tends to form a committee and fails to monitor it
- Lack accessibility to the Bishop due to his other ministerial commitments
- Can get stuck on the problems, letting them become the focus of daily work
- Some inconsistency with holding staff accountable and there can be cracks without repercussions

## **BISHOP GEPERT'S REFLECTIONS**

### **Significant contributions to the Diocese**

- Faithful to spiritual direction practice and prayer life, and it affects Mission and Vision decision- making
- Encouraging Gospel studies before all meetings/gatherings..."real thing"
- Demanding full financial discourse and dealing with rumors in open, public way
- Changing the Diocesan culture through deployment
- Incorporating Vision and Mission accountability into the Diocesan systems
- Emphasizing "holy habits" of prayer, tithing and service

### **Frustrations in ministry**

- Lack of willingness to be accountable to one another in community; lack accountability via Diocesan canons
- Some have unreasonable expectations and make false assumptions, impacting mutual trust
- Inability of some to follow decisions made in community or by appropriate bodies, thereby creating extra work and loss of energy or focus
- Reductions in Diocesan staff yields inability to accomplish work
- Negativity of some clergy, beyond disagreement, into active sabotage
- Many fail to live into the decisions of Diocesan convention, causing mistrust of decisions/persons

### **Support of priests**

- Regular monthly clergy council meetings/bible studies/available on request
- Implementation of systems leadership with willingness to coach, mentor, model
- Encouraging priests to seek spiritual direction for personal accountability to prayer life and leadership

### **Frustrations in working with priests**

- Priests interpret the Bishop to parishes and some block communications with resulting ripples in the system
- A few priests refuse to "buy" the Vision of the Diocese
- Lack full participation in Diocesan life and in college of presbyters yielding a chasm in the college

### **Support of deacons**

- Educating the Diocese about role and ministry of deacons
- Gathering deacon community for retreat for prayer, study, their ministry
- New ways of assigning deacons to best use gifts for the People of God

### **Frustrations in working with deacons**

- Some deacons addicted to living into old models; impedes ministerial capacity for placement
- Some deacons not wanting to live into the customary for deacons
- Some deacons lack understanding of their relationship to the Bishop in ministry

**Support of parish and laity**

- Leading leadership and vestry retreats, formation and education, warden consultation
- Availability for visitations to present a teaching, being open to answering questions
- Inculcating a sense of the laity as valued

**Frustrations in working with the laity**

- Assumptions made without checking on validity of the assumptions yielding misinformation
- Some prejudice based on experiences of the episcopate or interpretation given by rectors
- Many do not offer their gifts and talents for sake of Diocese's Mission and Vision

**Support committees, commissions**

- Encourage beginning all work with bible study, formation
- Send people to training event of national church to heighten personal formation
- Allow committees and others to die where energy or passion is absent

**Frustration in working with committees, commissions**

- Leadership development lacking and therefore groups are not up to speed.
- Success of parishes supersedes success of the Diocese; difficult to get parishes to nominate appropriate people for Diocesan mission and ministry
- Geography can be an excuse for nonparticipation

### **TENTATIVE LEARNINGS FROM THE LENS OF THE CONSULTANT**

1. Bishop Gepert's significant strength is in nurturing the spiritual life and formation, aligning daily life, at the personal and communal levels, with the Gospel.
2. Bishop Gepert is recognized for valuing relationships and having strong people skills: Youth/Young Adults Ministry and Staff reports are examples.
3. The Bishop's leadership in structuring the Diocese to be financially accountable and transparent is valued as well as efforts to develop a more transparent culture.
4. There appears to be a lack of ownership of the Diocese, the Whole, by a number of priests, deacons and laity. This, in turn, impacts the capacity of the Whole to thrive and be proactive in addressing the future.
5. There appears to be an internal culture that sustains a heightened sense of the individual at the expense of the common good of the Whole.
6. There is a lack of trust between the Bishop and the Diocesan Convention on at least the part of the Bishop.
7. Communications patterns between the Bishop, priest, laity and committees and commissions are clearly wanting and likely contribute to a level of mistrust.
8. The Diocesan Staff has a sense of well being in their relationship with Bishop Gepert. The Staff is keenly aware of lacking capacity to perform their responsibilities well.
9. There is a critical lack of capacity at the level of Diocesan offices: This is related likely to the number of positions not in place and perhaps the present personnel not having the desired competences and capacities. Very likely this places undue demand on the Bishop's time and talent. Is a strong Office Manager or Administrator needed to coordinate the multi-faceted realities of administering the Diocese?