

## The Standing Commission on the Church in Metropolitan Areas

### MEMBERSHIP

The Rt. Rev. Ronald H. Haines (Washington) 2000  
The Rt. Rev. Bertram Nelson Herlong (Tennessee) 2000  
The Rt. Rev. R. Stewart Wood, Jr. (Michigan) 1997  
The Very Rev. J. Earl Cavanaugh (West Missouri) 1997  
Mrs. Diana Dillenberger Frade (Honduras) 1997 replaced  
Mr. Donald F. Benjamin (Southeast Florida)  
The Rev. Dr. James B. Lemler (Indianapolis) 2000, *Vice-Chair*  
The Rev. Patricia L. Merchant (Atlanta) 1997  
Mr. Max S. Bell Jr. (Delaware) 1997  
Dr. Mathew Holden, Jr. (Virginia) 2000  
Mrs. Gretchen Jong (Hawaii) 2000, *Chair*  
Mr. Peter Ng (New York) 2000  
Mrs. Gladys C. Rodman (Massachusetts) 1997, *Secretary*  
The Rev. Dr. Winston Ching, *Staff Liaison*

### SUMMARY OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK

#### Introduction

The strength of the Episcopal Church in metropolitan areas depends upon the vitality of its congregations. This was the principle that guided the work of the Standing Commission on the Church in Metropolitan Areas during this past triennium. The Commission built on its previous work in the areas of racism, economic justice, and community development to consider the challenges, development, and effectiveness of metropolitan congregations. We discovered possibilities and hope for congregations and for their presence and effect within the metropolitan communities of which they are a part.

#### Premises

Certain premises are at the heart of the work of the Commission and this report:

1. God calls the church to a mission of reconciliation and renewal in the world which God has created and redeemed. This mission is carried out by all baptized people within communities of faith.
2. God equips communities of faith with grace and power to do the ministry of reconciliation through service, prayer, and proclamation. Indeed, God is in charge and does not abandon the People of God.
3. Effective and vital congregations are integral and essential for the ministry of the church in metropolitan areas. The presence of the church's mission in metropolitan areas depends largely upon congregations in these communities.
4. The development of congregations in metropolitan areas throughout the nine provinces of the Episcopal Church is of paramount importance to the life and vitality of this church. The

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process of urbanization continues. The majority of American people live in metropolitan areas (77.5% - A. Rothage) with half of the nation's population living in 39 major metropolitan areas within the United States. Effective congregational life and ministry in these areas furthers the mission of the church (as it does in rural areas).

5. There are models and resources for the development of congregations in metropolitan areas (both in the United States and overseas). Vital congregations and organizations for congregational development exist and serve the church in significant ways.
6. This is a critical time for the development of congregations within metropolitan areas. At one and the same time, congregations are stretched in terms of their financial and leadership resources even as they possess real assets and abundance for ministry.
7. The empowerment of local congregations for effective ministry is a major purpose and goal for the church at all levels. It is happening at various levels and in creative ways. Stories need to be told and intentional structures developed.

### **The Work of the Standing Commission**

The Standing Commission sought to learn more about the life of congregations and the resources for their development. To that end it met with experts in the field including: Dr. James Wind of the Alban Institute, Dr. Craig Dykstra and Dr. Fred Hofheinz of the Lilly Endowment, Dr. David Bodenheimer and Dr. Monty Hulse of the POLIS Center of Indiana University, Ms. Katherine Tyler Scott of Trustee Leadership Development and the Rev. Ronald Spann of the Church of the Messiah (Detroit). The Commission learned more about the realities of congregational life in metropolitan areas, the challenges which congregations face, and the possibilities for congregational development.

### **The Importance of Adaptive or Depth Work**

The Standing Commission learned that it is critical for congregations to do adaptive or depth work as a foundation and basis for their development. The adaptive or depth work involves a congregation and its leadership going beyond usual daily issues of congregational management and life to the deeper issues of mission and purpose. This work is a process which involves substantial discernment of the core beliefs and actions of a congregation. It does not become captive to the moment but probes the history, mission, and context of a congregation. Adaptive and depth work is a strategic approach, viewing the larger picture of a congregation's life. It is proactive rather than reactive. The adaptive or depth work has a very beneficial effect for the congregation and its life. It contributes to the transformation of the congregation and results in vision and hope for the future.

The church cannot continue to do "business as usual," seeking and providing occasional and technical assistance to congregations. It needs to seek and provide structures and processes to do this adaptive and depth work. It is also necessary for the church to realize that vital congregations are not a form of parochialism. Instead, vital congregations contribute to the wider church and its capacity for ministry.

### **Elements of an Adaptive or Depth Approach to Congregational Life**

The Standing Commission heard about the same elements of an adaptive or depth approach (although with different emphases) throughout its learning and reflection process. We learned that careful consideration given to these elements by vestry and other leaders assists the

transformation of the congregation and its ministry. For the purposes of this report the four elements will be named (per the work of Trustee Leadership Development) as history, mission, publics, and future.

### **History**

Congregations need to understand their history as an important part of taking the broad view of the congregation's life. A serious review of and engagement with the history of the mission, people, and events of a congregation's life give a broader perspective for present decision making. It helps the congregation to read reality accurately out of a wider historical context, understanding an identity that has been shaped over time. This historical reflection is important for any congregation, but especially for metropolitan congregations, many of which possess long histories with exceptional turning points and changes.

### **Mission**

Congregations need to know why they exist and (as Dr. Craig Dykstra put it) "whom the congregation worships." An important responsibility of congregational leaders is to examine the purpose of the congregation in the context of the wider purpose of the church. Mission definition is the congregation's process of discovering its self-understanding and internal integrity. The effective congregation is one that understands its purpose and is truly mission driven. It has reflected on its identity and is able to manifest this identity in word and in practice. Metropolitan congregations of all sizes and types are doing effective ministries in the rigorous and challenging circumstances of metropolitan settings throughout the nine provinces of the Episcopal Church. Clarity in identity, purpose, and mission strengthens their effectiveness and allows them to be "mission driven."

### **Publics**

Leaders and congregations need to connect with the wider environment in which the congregation finds itself. This means probing and engaging the local context and discovering just where the congregation lives. A congregation cannot serve people whom it does not know, nor can it meet adaptive challenges unless it is aware of changes in its external environment. A congregation needs to identify its publics and reflect on their needs and hopes. There are many community assets for metropolitan congregations. However, congregations are often unaware of those assets for mission, because they have not engaged the wider context in a considered and intentional way. Partnerships are also essential to the mission of congregations in metropolitan areas. To form partnerships, congregations need to know their context, their potential partners, and their fellow sojourners in faith. Metropolitan congregations often exist in communities with considerable diversity. In this setting the congregation needs to understand and relate to that diversity by engaging its publics and context.

### **Future**

A congregation is responsible for the discernment and visioning which enables it to move into the future. Leadership has a special responsibility in this area. A vision for the future is developed out of the leaders' work with history, identity, and context. Congregations that envision a future contribute to the spirit of hope and possibility within the wider community. They are able to articulate the faith that our God is the God of the future who brings people and communities of faith into new hope and new ministry. A congregation with a vision for its future has a positive

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and transforming affect on the community in which it finds itself. This is particularly important in metropolitan areas where congregations can be one of the few entities with vision and hope for a community.

### **Challenges to the Adaptive or Depth Work**

The Standing Commission learned and was able to identify challenges to this adaptive work and to the depth consideration of the elements which have been identified in this report. One challenge is the daily financial and practical stresses faced by congregations in metropolitan areas. The threshold of financial viability for a “traditional” congregation grows higher all the time. This too is part of a wider reality. According to the Lilly Endowment’s extensive research in the funding of American religion, “All institutions of American religion are judged to be in financial trouble” (Dr. Fred Hofheinz). Congregations that live under such financial pressures find it difficult to move to the adaptive work and depth considerations.

However, the financial challenge is not the only one that was discovered, nor is it the most challenging. Anxiety and a lack of the sense of God’s efficacy and power in the world are even greater challenges. Many leaders are dispirited about the vitality and possibilities for congregations. New forms of leadership and deployment have not been utilized. Attention is not given to the diverse context of metropolitan life and the church’s response to that context’s diversity through worship, music, evangelism, and service. Proliferation of program has been attempted as a replacement for the adaptive and depth work of leaders and congregations in defining mission and envisioning the future.

### **Hope for the Development of Metropolitan Congregations**

In spite of the challenges to doing the adaptive and depth work, there is great hope for the development of metropolitan congregations. A wide body of research and reflection in the area of congregational development for churches in metropolitan areas does exist. There are also several resources and organizations that are assisting in this work of congregational development. Several dioceses in the Episcopal Church are making this work a priority (a partial list includes Chicago, New York, Honduras, and Tennessee). In addition, institutions are emerging within the Episcopal Church which focus on congregational development and revitalization (including the Small Church Institute of the Dioceses of Tennessee, the Parish Development Institute of General Seminary, the Seabury Institute, and the Sewanee Congregational Development Institute). National organizations which provide useful resources for the adaptive and depth work also exist (including the Alban Institute and Trustee Leadership Development). Networks for mutual ministry and new leadership approaches in congregational life are to be found within the Episcopal Church. Very importantly, there are many examples of congregations throughout the church which are models of this adaptive and depth work.

All of the congregational development efforts listed here are attempting to contribute to the revitalization of congregations within the Episcopal Church. They have several areas of common focus. All of them are seeking to shape and equip leadership (both lay and ordained) for the church. They realize that well-equipped leadership and new forms of leadership are essential to the development of congregations. In addition, these efforts are pointing to the necessity of moving beyond the technical to the adaptive; beyond the surface of congregational life to issues of

depth. These efforts are not attempting to provide programs for congregations in a “cookie cutter” fashion, but to provide means for comprehensive congregational reflection and deep discernment.

**FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE 1995-97 TRIENNIUM**

	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>
<i>Income</i>			
Budget	\$16,250	\$16,250	\$16,250
<i>Expenses</i>			
Administrative	0	\$114	0
Full Committee Meetings	9,212	15,311	1,109
Sub-Committee Meetings	0	524	0
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<i>Total</i>	\$9,212	\$15,949	\$1,109

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE COMING TRIENNIUM**

The Standing Commission holds several conclusions and has prepared recommendations relating to those conclusions.

1. The Episcopal Church needs to recommit itself to congregations in the metropolitan areas of all nine provinces of the church. There is a rich heritage and considerable present vitality in the congregations of metropolitan areas. Congregational stories need to be shared widely and historical reflection on the church’s work in metropolitan areas encouraged.
2. The Episcopal Church should increase its awareness of the challenges that congregations face in metropolitan areas. Careful study of the situations faced by metropolitan congregations should be undertaken by local dioceses to assess trends and circumstances. At the same time, all levels of the Episcopal Church need to become more aware of the strengths, resources, and capacities for leadership and service that exist within these congregations.
3. The church is called to the intentional and specific development of metropolitan congregations through the development and utilization of new and existing leadership and congregational educational programs within dioceses and throughout the church. These programs help people to do the adaptive and depth work described in this report, thereby empowering laity and clergy for ministry.
4. The church must continue to raise up models of effective ministry and mission in metropolitan congregations for reflection and learning by the whole church. The Jubilee Ministries model of the Episcopal Church is an important example of this priority.
5. The church needs to encourage and support educational ministries of this church to utilize and develop a “depth” educational approach, training congregational leadership to do the adaptive work of reshaping congregational life and mission.
6. The church should develop financial and educational resources for metropolitan congregational development at every level. These efforts need to be comprehensive in their nature, building collaborations and networks for congregational development.

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There is a true sense of urgency in these conclusions and recommendations. The time for a focus on congregational life and vitality in metropolitan areas is now. The foundation of the call to do this work is the Baptismal Covenant itself, as it holds a powerful vision of servanthood and faithful ministry within communities of faith before the whole church.

There is substantial hope for the vision and mission of metropolitan congregations. God does empower leaders and provides for the potential transformation of congregations. There are useful structures for the enablement of leaders to undertake the adaptive and depth work regarding the mission and future of the congregations which they serve. The revitalization and renewal of congregations within metropolitan areas enhances the mutuality and cohesiveness which is essential for the church at all levels.

The work of congregational development within metropolitan areas is integral to the future of the Episcopal Church. It will contribute to the strength of the church and to the servanthood within the metropolitan areas where the church does its ministry. It will reflect the power of God at work in the world and will be a witness to "let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made."

### *Bibliography*

- "Leadership Without Easy Answers," Ronald Heifetz
- "The Responsible Self," H. Reinhold Niehbur
- "Upon this Rock," Samuel Freedman
- "Trustee Education and the Congregational Board," James B. Lemler
- "Carries of Faith: Lessons from Congregational Studies," James P. Wind
- "Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform," C.E. Nelson
- "Reshaping a Congregation for a New Future," Arlin Rothauge
- "Handbook for Congregational Studies," J. W. Carroo, C. S. Dudley, William McKinney

### *Congregational Development Resources*

- The Seabury Institute, Seabury - Western Theological Seminary, Evanston, Dr. Arlin Rothauge
- The Parish Development Institute, The General Theological Seminary, New York City, The Rev. Robert Gallagher
- The Center for Ministries in Small Churches and the Congregational Development Institute, St. Luke's School of Theology, University of the South, Sewanee
- The Alban Institute, Washington D. C., Dr. James Wind
- Trustee Leadership Development, Indianapolis, Ms. Katherine Tyler Scott.
- The Cornerstone Project, New York City, Mr. William Craddock

BUDGET APPROPRIATION

	1998	1999	2000
<i>Expenses</i>			
Administrative	\$250	\$300	\$200
Full Committee Meetings	14,900	14,900	14,900
Sub-Committee Meetings	600	600	600
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<i>Totals</i>	\$15,750	\$15,800	\$15,700

RESOLUTIONS

**Resolution A083 Standing Commission on the Church in Metropolitan Areas Budget Appropriation**

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, That there be appropriated from the Budget of  
2 General Convention the sum of \$47,250 for the triennium for the expenses of the Standing  
3 Commission on the Church in Metropolitan Areas.

**Resolution A084 Congregational Development: Provide Staff and Resources**

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, That the Executive Council assure the funding and  
2 staffing of a full-time position in the area of congregational development in the 1998-2000  
3 triennium; and be it further  
4 *Resolved*, That among the responsibilities to be executed by this position shall be to:  
5 - develop, compile, and distribute resources focused on new and imaginative ways of achieving  
6 congregational transformation; and  
7 - assist the formation and nurture of networks among dioceses, organizations, and congregations.

**Resolution A085 Encourage Diocesan Strategies for Congregational Development**

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, That this 72nd General Convention urges and  
2 encourage dioceses with metropolitan areas to prepare overall and intentional strategies for  
3 congregational development that:  
4 - foster networks with other dioceses to learn, reflect and build on mutual experiences;  
5 - utilize effective resources and organization for congregational leadership development;  
6 - discover and affirm existing models of faithful and effective congregational ministries,  
7 including the Jubilee Ministries model; and  
8 - commit to becoming inclusive of the racial and ethnic diversity represented by communities and  
9 individuals within metropolitan areas.