

COMMITTEE REPORTS

VISION IMPLEMENTATION

THE TALES IN VISION IMPLEMENTATION: WHY IT IS HARD, AND WHY THAT IS A GOOD THING

In the process of determining and naming our diocesan vision it was decided that the overarching theme of renewal would best describe our shared vocation in these islands and inlets. It is a compelling and lofty theme, one that is always before us and not something that is easily satisfied with tasks completed, or measurables attained. Renewal and the related work of transformation (Transforming Futures is vision implementation, but we will get there below) is hard to do, and it is hard to measure, but in many ways, that means we are on the right track.

I have said before that I think one of the greatest strengths of our vision is that it provides us with common categories and language to understand and express what God is calling us to on these islands and inlets. A united lens to view our vocation provides a more united ministry. To use an insight from Neuroscience, Hebb's rule, says that "Neurons that fire together wire together". Meaning that the more we do something the stronger and more natural it becomes. In the context of the vision, we have seen that it has been a journey for the language of start to feel natural, but through the intentional use of it, we are noticing it becoming more a part of our identity.

There is an argument to be made, because of this line of thinking that we are just at the beginning stages of implementing our vision. The adoption of the vision – not from the top down, but an acceptance of the vision as being a description of who we are as a collective, has taken longer than we hoped or expected, but it has happened. In large part, this seems to have been stalled or expedited by the participation of the clergy (this can be similarly said of Transforming Futures).

Renewal, which is the central theme of our vision, is a task set, more than it is a state to be achieved. It is a commitment to a process, or a journey, rather than a destination. It intentionally invites us into the ongoing problem of discovery, understanding and application of our faith and of our context within the six key areas we have determined. By design we have built for ourselves moving targets.

Even if we set firm targets for ourselves to meet, (e.g., we want to plant 4 new emerging communities, and develop a discipleship program) that is only the surface level of what renewal is intended to achieve.

As with most things that involve our faith, what we are really talking about is not the quantifiable, but what is going on in the hearts and spirits of our people; the inner life of soul and how from those deep places we are discipling folk to respond to the world as witnesses to God's love, mercy and justice. Our vision is a way of expressing not only those things that are important for us to "do" as an organization, but the areas in which we are seeking to renew ourselves and be who we are called to "be."

One of the most significant barriers I have noticed with implementing the vision is when it is seen as an added extra or additional task to do and worry about, rather than an expression of what we are all involved in already. When I have heard people express the vision as a synod office initiative, or a side of the desk type of extra care beyond the usual daily work of life and church, that is when the implementation falters.

The primary site for vision implementation is within our communities. The parishes, and congregations are the most natural and outlet we have for giving life to our vision. The local initiatives, and projects where folks are responding to the gospel in the context of neighborhoods, and watershed ecosystems, are where most of the opportunities exist for us to live into the faithful work we have named together.

Localized training for lay people, Engaging God's world through environmental and social justice initiatives, developing liturgies and worship resources, and so on, are where the vision finds its life. Small initiatives grounded in community and responding to local need are the first home of our vision.

Given the strength of our structure, there will always be initiatives, needs, and dreams that will be best pursued collectively rather than individually. Over the last few years, we have had teams dedicated to guiding our collective implementation in each of the directions of Faith in Formation and Faith in Action.

Functionally, these teams were akin to standing committees with meetings called by the co-chairs, and they mainly were tasked with leading the collective effort in each of their domains. Some of the groups have used this format to effectively organize events, and initiatives for the good of the diocese. The 94 calls to action workshops offered in numerous locations across the diocese including one for DC is an example of the effective use of this format. Standing committees in general and these implementation teams specifically are prone to waning energy in light of overly broad mandates, and lack of self-propelling agendas and tasks, and often unclear sense of direction and leadership (often waiting to hear from the bishop before acting). Connected to the observation above namely that much of these groups were considered an additional extra to the work that folks are regularly involved in.

Another unforeseen implication of this implementation structure was that it was difficult to have inter-group collaboration. Each group functioned independently with relatively few occasions for team leaders to connect. This led to simultaneous and at times conflicting timelines, schedules, and priorities. We know that each of the team's directions and mandates are interlocking and overlapping with each other, but this has been difficult to reflect in the current implementation model.



With Covid-19 putting a pause on many initiatives, the vision implementation teams have been for the most part, in a pause. Given that vision implementation is a key priority of Diocesan Council, and we have this moment of pause, we took this opportunity to reflect on how we have structured our implementation and consider if a revision of some sort is appropriate. Are standing committees the best way to structure the ongoing implementation for our collective action? Are there ways to increase the adaptability of the collective actions we see as important? Are there ways to encourage more collaborative efforts across multiple vision areas?

An insight that continues to grow in its appeal, is that nimbleness, the ability to respond to changing contexts, is increasingly a virtue that we ought to develop. One lesson that we have learned in these months of COVID-19 is that we are perhaps nimbler than we thought we were. Standing committees, however are not the most nimble structure to implement the vision.

In March 2021 we had this conversation with Diocesan Council and it was decided that we would reorganize to have one vision implementation team (meeting 4-6 times per year) with action groups for specific tasks and more overlap between vision directions. This is in some ways a return to the original implementation model that was proposed with the vision, and should allow for a more nimble and collaborative approach to implementing the vision.

Transforming Futures is and will remain our primary Vision Implementation Strategy for the time being. Transforming Futures invites us to discern what each of our parishes are being called to that will form our church of tomorrow. To consider our assets, our collective heart, the needs we see in our communities, and respond with faithful action. It is an invitation into the ongoing process of renewal and revitalization, and we anticipate in faith the good harvest that will come from this sowing.

So, where are we with Vision Implementation? As an organizing conceptual framework and linguistic tool -- the Vision is a successful tool for our diocese. As a catalyst for action and ministry innovation -- it has had mixed results. There have been many seeds scattered, and some have fallen on good soil.

Renewal is not easy nor is it often a pleasant experience, there are trials and stumbles, but all that is the necessary process of becoming. In that light, I think we are in the midst of our renewal journey, and we must continue to walk forward being careful with each step.

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¹ A version of this report was presented to Diocesan Council in March 2021

