

COMMITTEE REPORTS

COMMUNICATIONS

BACKGROUND

In its 2014-2018 Vision Implementation Plan, Synod set out an ambitious strategic plan to direct the animation of our then new diocesan vision: *Renewed Hearts, Renewed Spirits, Renewed People*. The “Re Package” as it was called, set out a roadmap for us to follow, recognizing that along the way, the way-markers may change or we may need to turn directions if opportunities present themselves in unexpected places.

One clearly identified objective was “Responsive and Effective Communication,” the language we have since shortened to “Effective Communication.” The priority items set for this vision “direction” (as it is now called) included the following:

1. As a body committed to communicating the Gospel and living out principles of transparency, openness and integrity, we dedicate ourselves to open, honest, responsive and informative communications from the bishop’s and synod offices, between and from parishes/emerging communities.
2. Create a clear communications strategy to be implemented by an effective communications team, with both strong conceptual and technical skills, using innovative ways to convey the information and encouraging the use of virtual technology where possible:
 - Improve communication throughout the diocese to share information and reduce feelings of isolation within our far-flung communities.
 - Within the diocese, we need to ensure transparency and ready access to information regarding budgets, structures, functions, mandates, roles and responsibilities, policies and authority.
 - Ensure clear and frequent communication within the synod office and between synod office, bishop and parishes/emerging ministries and all those in leadership.

The actions Synod approved to address these priorities were as follows:

- a) Develop a paid communications officer position, which will have oversight to integrate communications in the diocese, oversee a communications team and re- develop virtual presence and liaise with resource development.

- b) Develop a communications strategy that includes clear policies, procedures and a structure to represent ourselves in various types of media that we may effectively communicate the church's story to the communities on and beyond the islands.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

Since taking this position in January 2016, I along with the clergy, other synod staff, parish administrators, officers of synod, members of diocesan council and lay leaders throughout the diocese have been working hard to live into the spirit of the vision objective regarding effective communications. To fully represent all that has taken place since 2016 at the parish, regional and diocesan level to achieve this objective—this “vision direction”—would be impossible, but here is some of what we've been up to since our last synod (please request a copy of the 2018 Synod communications report for more information dating back to 2016):

1. Maintained a comprehensive and responsive diocesan website and social media presence (Facebook and Twitter) designed to support parish ministry.
2. Continued to publish the *Diocesan Post* 10x/yr. In 2020 we began publishing six digital downloads and four print versions of the paper (circulated in the *Anglican Journal*).
3. Hired a new *Diocesan Post* editor (March 2021).
4. Supported a diocesan-wide website strategy (all but one parish is currently taking part in this program). Annual funding (approx. 50% of parish website costs) is currently included in the diocesan communications budget to support this initiative.
5. Developed and/or updated communications [policies](#) including: Information Security Management, Privacy and Social Media.
6. Implemented diocesan-wide standardized emails (six email accounts/parish) for those fulfilling roles in which sensitive information may be communicated to ensure privacy and data protection for those working on behalf of the church.
7. Discontinued monthly parish mailings delivered via Canada Post (August 2020). Promotional materials now delivered electronically via diocesan and parish websites (through a sharing feature built into our websites) and diocesan “e-news.”
8. Diocesan communications department and bishop's office worked increasingly closely to: reduce duplication, streamline processes and unify messaging.
9. Continued to speak about communications, preach and/or attend worship in parishes across the diocese (curtailed in 2020/2021 due to the pandemic).
10. Developed and published online communications for the 2020 electoral synod and 2021 synod (both of which were conducted online via Zoom and livestream).



11. Supported all 46 worshipping communities of the diocese in transitioning online during the pandemic, including:
 - Purchasing a Vimeo premium subscription and making it possible for worship leaders across the diocese to livestream and record services safely and securely, including establishing a volunteer-based Vimeo admin team to support parishes in these efforts.
 - Negotiating bulk pricing for Zoom licenses (61 total) and purchasing (as part of the diocesan communications budget) one license/worshipping community.
 - Negotiating bulk pricing for anti-virus protection software for anyone in the diocese who wanted one (100 licences in 2020 and 2021).
12. Researched and developed the technological infrastructure and provided delegate training to successfully conduct the 2020 electoral synod and 2021 100th session of synod online. This included live streaming, Zoom conferencing, and SimplyVoting platform integration to produce a synod that would best approximate the experience of an onsite event.
13. Developed a shared electronic synod contact list for use by all synod employees and officers (replacing paper "Telephone Directory").
14. Acted as a consultant for three dioceses (Calgary, Rupert's Land, Niagara) regarding communications strategy.
15. Offered ongoing training for parish website and Office365 administrators and users.
16. Diocesan director of communications serves on the Canadian Christian Communicators' Association executive (2019-present). Elected president March 2021.

DIOCESAN POST

Since 2018, the *Diocesan Post* has undergone significant changes including two editors: Susan Down (September 2018-February 2021), Naomi Racz—(March 2021- present).

As is the case with diocesan papers across the national church, circulation numbers for the *Diocesan Post* continue to drop. Since 2014, the circulation has decreased from 4,150 to 1,200 (due in large part to an administrative overhaul to the national circulation database) representing a loss of 70% of our readership.

It currently costs \$28,000 to produce and distribute the paper each year. We budget \$4,000 in advertising revenue and receive approximately \$4,000 each year in donations (primarily through the *Anglican Journal* Appeal). We also benefit from a subsidy through a Canada Heritage Grant which offsets postage fees. The net costs are \$18,000/yr. In 2021, the terms of the Canada Heritage Grant are changing to no longer reward circulation, but instead to reward editorial content, representing a move away from funding print publications towards digital publications. This is expected to significantly impact the amount granted to the *Anglican Journal*, and in turn, the diocesan papers.



In 2019, General Synod voted to spend the triennium evaluating the efficacy of moving the *Anglican Journal* online in the coming years. A report is expected back to the 2022 General Synod, which will likely recommend gradually moving the *Anglican Journal* fully online in the next triennium. In anticipation of this move and considering year-over-year reductions in diocesan finances and our readership, we have begun to reduce the number of issues we produce in print and are working towards moving the *Diocesan Post* fully online by 2023, with limited print copies being delivered to parishes for those without computer access. Producing content online will involve ongoing costs for editorial but we will realize savings in postage and printing costs.

As members of the Anglican Editors' Association, the diocesan communications staff are part of the ongoing discussions regarding the future of print publications in the Anglican Church of Canada and we will adjust our plans accordingly.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We have become a model of excellence in the Anglican Church of Canada for our systematic approach to communications. We can be proud of how we have worked together to unify and streamline our processes and supported each other so that, from the smallest to the largest communities in the diocese, we are able to tell the good news in new ways that extend our reach far beyond our front doors.

Education and training continue to be a primary focus of my work. Over the next two years I will work to:

- Support parishes (training, consulting) in maximizing technology to improve communications.
- Embed, at every level of the organization, a common language and understanding around our shared vision.
- Educate lay and ordained leaders and staff in communications best practices and principles to advance their efforts in meeting the needs of their communities.
- Share with the general public what our diocese of islands and inlets is doing to help in God's work to transform the world.

I continue to be grateful for the opportunity to serve in this diocese and to do my part in helping our vision become a reality.

Submitted by:

Catherine Pate

