

# THRIVE

# Assessment Report



The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont  
September 2025

**Table of Contents**

*Introduction*..... 2

*Summary* ..... 3

*Theme 1: Clarify Canon 6 (The Executive Council)*..... 4

*Theme 2: Increase communication between different bodies*..... 5

*Theme 3: Define "mission vitality."* ..... 7

*Theme 4: Clarify the roles and relationships*..... 9

*Theme 5: Constellations are a net positive* ..... 10

*Final Reflections from Our Bishop*..... 11

*Appendix – Reports from Diocesan Bodies* ..... 16

    Executive Council ..... 16

    Standing Committee..... 19

    Trustees ..... 20

    Commission on Finance..... 25

    Committee on Ministry..... 30

    Diocesan Entities..... 34

## **Introduction**

The THRIVE canonical changes enacted through the 2022 Diocesan Convention and revised at the 2023 Diocesan Convention created new ways to help us develop structures and steward resources to participate more fully in God’s mission in our communities and the world.

These THRIVE canons are set to “sundown,” or end, at Diocesan Convention on October 30th. Using the THRIVE Assessment process in spring-summer 2025, diocesan leadership—committees, commissions, boards, and entities--assessed how this structure has worked and made recommendations for moving into the future. Our focus is our sustainability so we can continue to participate in God’s mission.

With thanksgiving for all leaders in our diocesan household who convened special meetings for this THRIVE Assessment and for all members of the various committees, commissions, councils, and boards who experimented during these three years.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Shannon MacVean-Brown

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannon MacVean-Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Assessment data was compiled by the Rev. Canon Susan Ohlidal and Mx. Sophie Kitch-Peck. Two members of the Executive Council, Ms. Jenny Knowles and the Rev. Jeremy Means-Koss, consulted on the drafting of this Report.

## **Summary**

Six leadership groups performed assessments: Executive Council, Standing Committee, Trustees, Commission on Finance, Committee on Ministry, and the Commission on Diocesan Organizations (Brookhaven Treatment Center, Mission Farm, Rock Point Commons, Rock Point School). Each group held special meetings for the Assessment and used the THRIVE Assessment resource created by Bishop Shannon.

Five dominant themes recurred across the groups:

- Clarify Canon 6 (The Executive Council) as it pertains to the roles of the Standing Committee and Executive Council
- Increase communication between different bodies
- Define "mission vitality"
- Clarify the roles and relationships within and between the different bodies
- Constellations are a net positive and an opportunity to invest in lay leadership

The above themes have been broken down into three movements: their qualitative feedback based on THRIVE reflections; a global perspective or "balcony perspective" from the Bishop and overarching diocesan feedback; and recommendation(s) based on the feedback.

**Theme 1:** Clarify Canon 6 (The Executive Council) as it pertains to the roles of the Standing Committee and Executive Council.

*Qualitative Feedback:*

The narrow scope of the Council's work has allowed for focus; the division of labor and relationship between the two bodies remains unclear, especially to Executive Council; roles need to be complementary between the two; balance of "business" and "mission" is uneven; the Standing Committee believes their role is outlined by TEC Canons and Executive Council should focus on mission or program implementation.

*Balcony Perspective:*

Members of most of the various diocesan committees and commissions were and continue to be present at Executive Council meetings so that the Council can live out its intended mission to support the health and thriving of the diocese and its varied ministries.

Level of details being requested in some conversations are not the purview of diocesan canons. No further clarity can be achieved since Council's work shifts and changes as needs and goals in the diocesan household change.

Council may need more formation and support in the high-altitude practices of adaptive leadership and training about expectations of board members on a successful and effective board. This would be in addition to the annual onboarding orientation and reorientation led by the Bishop at the first meeting of incoming committee and commission members which outlines general information about the canons; expectations; connections between each body, the bishop, members of the diocese; and introduction of members.

Council needs to increase its focus on strategic planning, goal setting and assessment and the development and use of resources.

Racial Healing and Justice Committee is a direct expression of our diocesan mission and values. The group has continued over 3 years of THRIVE to offer regular formational opportunities and to develop as a Committee. A de facto situation currently exists with the chairperson of the Committee having a seat on

Council as the convener of the Advisory Commission on Diocesan Organizations; this will not always be so.

Care for Creation is one of the three foundational values and missional expressions in our diocesan household. Although there is not a single “Creation Care Committee,” as was anticipated at the onset of THRIVE, we are seeing active expressions of this mission in the work of the Zero Emissions Task Force and the currently developing Eco-Region in Province One.

*Recommendations:*

1. Canon 6 needs to be explored by the Executive Council and recommendations made to clarify their role and responsibilities. It is significant that although this body calls for definition and clarification, they offered no suggestions.
2. Create new seats on Council for the chairperson or a representative of the Racial Healing and Justice Committee and for representation of the leadership involved with Creation Care; add these to the list in Canon 6.1. These groups were identified as members of THRIVE’s Commission on Missional Vitality. Of these, the Committee on Ministry has a seat on the Council, but the others do not. The Racial Healing and Justice Committee and the Zero Emissions Task Force (aligned with Creation Care) have become energized and are currently very active. They need incorporation, support, and a reporting mechanism that integrates them with other leaders in the diocesan household. Although the Task Force may be time-limited, the work of Creation Care, as a foundational value of the diocesan household, should continue in varied expressions.

**Theme 2:** Increase communication between different bodies.

*Qualitative Feedback:*

“Silos” were broken down by new THRIVE canons; improved collaboration between bodies; growing relationship between Bishop and Executive Council; inactive Committee on Congregational Development and Formation (CCDF)

negated the existence of the Commission on Missional Vitality and resulted in a lack of communication between “sibling committees” of Committee on Ministry, Racial Healing and Justice Committee, Creation Care, Ecumenical Ministries.

*Balcony Perspective:*

The Commission on Missional Vitality was to be the umbrella body of the diocese with two committees meeting the requirements of Episcopal Church Canons pertaining to Commissions on Ministry:

*Episcopal Church canons require each diocese to establish a Commission on Ministry. A commission on ministry’s purpose is not only to assist the bishop in recruiting and guiding those called to ordained ministry, but to provide for the support, development, and formation of all the baptized, and to determine the present and future ministry needs of all the baptized. (III. 2.1)*

The Committee on Congregational Development and Formation (CCDF) was established to complement the work of the Committee on Ministry (COM). Under the THRIVE canons, the COM was to focus on persons aspiring to and in the process for ordained ministry. The CCDF was to attend to the formation of other persons in the diocese, ensuring every member of the diocesan household was getting formation that would strengthen the missional vitality of the diocese:

*The CCDF is to foster an environment of innovation and experimentation for congregations and groups to explore life as God’s gathered people in our communities and to create ways of life that will continue into our future. The CCDF will work to ensure that congregations and groups have the resources they need to experiment and create, to be equipped and connected, and to be engaged with their communities.*

*(Bishop’s Charge to & Purpose Statement of the CCDF, 10-23)*

Creation Care should have been a committee of Diocesan Council after the 2020 Diocesan Convention instituted the free of fossil fuel by 2030 resolution, but

there was no capacity at that time to form a committee. The Zero Emissions Task Force formed in 2024 and is one expression of the Care of Creation. There was an assumption by participants of the Assessment that there was a Creation Care group from which they had not heard over the past few years.

There is not an Ecumenical Ministries group; rather, an individual clergy person is our diocesan ecumenical and interreligious officer, representing the diocese on the Vermont Ecumenical Council and connecting us with The Episcopal Church's Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations.

One of the major realities revealed in the Assessment was that even with efforts to break down silos and improvements in that effort, the retention of information shared in meetings, minutes, announcements, and diocesan communications is weak. This challenge often results in a lack of participation in important formation opportunities or follow through in committee work and efforts.

*Recommendations:*

1. Delete references to the Commission on Missional Vitality and Committee on Congregational Development and Formation (CCDF) from the diocesan canons.
2. Rename Canon 27 "The Commission on Ministry," returning to this body all the attendant responsibilities of a Commission on Ministry as required by Episcopal Church canons.

**Theme 3:** Define "mission vitality."

*Qualitative Feedback:*

A need for defined goals and mandates or priorities of shared life in diocesan household; reinvigorate formation opportunities for lay people; waning participation both locally and diocesan—fewer people involved, fewer people to fill committees; inactivity of the Committee on Congregational Development

and Formation (CCDF) resulted in lack of definition and goals and impacted existence of Commission on Missional Vitality.

The Committee on Ministry and Executive Council noted a desire to be useful in supporting the work of lay ministry formation.

*Balcony Perspective:*

The work to ensure missional vitality has been taken up by the Bishop's Office. It was hoped that this work would be shared by other diocesan leaders.

Continued questioning of what "missional vitality" means or energy spent defining it and goals is not necessary. The accompanying document for the Assessment, "Healthy Congregations," gave a good picture of what is needed to be missionally vital. Rather, the difficulty with this term is the lack of capacity being experienced across the diocese and not coming to terms with this reality. It is clear that in many instances we do not have the capacity to be missionally vital. There is a general lack of imagination as to how to be vital, a lack of energy and engagement with possible new paths.

*Recommendations:*

1. Realistic goals will require first acknowledging our inability to continue as is.
2. A resolution sponsored by Executive Council to the 2025 Diocesan Convention pertaining to Canons 14 and 15 is an effort to face into the reality of congregations that are no longer vital, when mission is no longer active in those places, and/or there is no longer capacity. The work leading to these recommendations included 1) approval by the Council of the characteristics of a healthy-vital-congregation and 2) and stressing the need for some congregations to engage in a renewal process. Support of and engagement with these efforts and processes is necessary.

**Theme 4:** Clarify the roles and relationships within and between the different bodies.

*Qualitative Feedback:*

Attention is needed to Standing Committee and Executive Council—clarity of roles and responsibilities; removal of “expanded Standing Committee” was a positive step; breakdown of the Committee on Congregational Development and Formation (CCDF) resulted in no connections between the sibling committees, structure of Commission on Missional Vitality, and others, thus impacting opportunities for lay ministry; Advisory Commission on Diocesan Organizations, newly created in the THRIVE structure, did not meet in the three years except for the Assessment Meeting, per the convener.

*Balcony Perspective:*

The opportunities for most lay ministry development continues to be absorbed by Bishop’s Staff. The development of CCDF was to address the need for the development of opportunities for lay ministry to be shepherded by people other than the Bishop and Bishop’s Staff.

Additionally, a grant from the Lily Foundation funds the Community for Spiritual Vitality. This effort of lay leader formation is directed by The Rev. adwoa Wilson, Vicar for Discipleship and Formation.

Of note, the Advisory Commission on Diocesan Organizations did not meet because of the continuing turmoil of the conflict which began in 2023 between the bishop and the Standing Committee. The chairperson of the Advisory Commission did not feel comfortable navigating the dynamics of the situation with the leaders of the member organizations. After conferring, the chairperson and bishop both decided it did not make sense for the Commission to meet due to the awkwardness of things not being resolved.

*Recommendations:*

1. Only two structures were perceived as not working or failing: the Committee on Congregational Development and Formation (CCDF) and the Commission on Missional Vitality.

Delete all references in canons.

2. The Advisory Commission on Diocesan Organizations did not meet during the three-year period. When they met for Assessment, their focus was more on the canons related to their individual entities, and they submitted requests for canonical changes. A canonically-established committee is not needed as they can—and do—communicate and collaborate among themselves as needed. Delete all references in canons.

Twice a year, the directors of the diocesan entities will be invited to update Executive Council.

3. Canon 27 Commission on Missional Vitality: retain references to Committee on Ministry and rename the Committee to Commission; rename the canon for that Commission (same as Theme 2 Recommendations)

**Theme 5:** Constellations are a net positive and an opportunity to invest in lay leadership.

*Qualitative Feedback:*

Trustees observed that the Constellations invigorated smaller and larger churches in a new way. Other groups noted the connections between congregations as positive but that more time was needed to see the effectiveness of the Constellation model. The COM discussed constellation positions (either as priests who have a parish and also work for the diocese or even staffing that is paid by a constellation of dioceses) might be a way to provide additional diocesan staffing to assist with needs.

*Balcony Perspective:*

We currently have 6 constellations with 16 congregations involved in these partnerships, a mix of parishes and mission congregations. Eight priests and 4

deacons lead the constellations along with the senior wardens of the congregations.

Constellations have provided settled clergy leadership, drawn clergy into our diocese, kept newly-ordained clergy in the diocese, and are developing and supporting lay leadership. Although conceived and implemented in part to offer FT positions to priests, providing equitable and just income and agreements, constellation models now include PT positions due to a lack of financial resources among these congregations.

We have 8 congregations without settled priests, none of which are involved in constellation exploration. Some of these have geographic challenges for partners and some are not interested in forming partnerships.

Leadership formation particularly concerning adaptive leadership was to be included in the offerings for both lay and ordained leadership of constellations. In this time of navigating uncertainty and the necessity of adopting new ways of being, leaders are not only called to manage their anxiety but also to remain open and helpful in leading others to do the same. We continue to look for formal resources to support this need.

*Recommendations:*

1. More time is needed to see the overall effectiveness of the Constellation model.

***Final Reflections from Our Bishop***

From this three-year period of experimentation and the committees' responses, we can conclude that overall, the THRIVE structure and canons seem to be working for our diocesan household. There is very little that the diocesan bodies and leaders recommend we revise in the canons.

No group participating in the Assessment recommended that we allow the THRIVE canons to sundown, intoning a continuing commitment to moving forward, to living into “ways of being and governance that would help find a path toward a sustainable future”<sup>1</sup>. We need people to do this work, finances to do it; moreover, *the people we already have need to participate in our shared work. It is not enough only to say what has been said.*

A critical finding is a through line of challenges and questions regarding “missional vitality” that can be traced from the early days of the THRIVE Task Force to the Missional Vitality Group (a working group of the Task Force), then to the Committee on Congregational Development and Formation (CCDF), and now to the Executive Council. The same characteristics of “missional vitality” articulated as being amorphous, a nebulous term, not understood, lacking clarity, being too wide in scope or overwhelming to approach were spoken by the Missional Vitality Task Force, then the Missional Vitality Group, echoed by the CCDF, and are being demonstrated again by the Council in requesting more information to guide them—goals, definitions, (more) clarity.

An offshoot from the through line was the Executive Council’s Task Force on Distressed Congregations which had the same challenges of discussing and stating how missional vitality is specific to congregations: what does missional vitality look like in congregations, how do we measure this, what to do when there is no longer vitality present in a congregation?

However, the Task Force was able to engage with these questions, to answer them, and recommend action. They created the “Vitality Characteristics” – criteria of a healthy congregation—which the Executive Council adopted in Spring 2025 and will be used in assessing congregations. The Task Force’s work led to renewal in support of the “Congregational Discernment Process,” bringing forward this 2022 resource as the renewal and assessment process. Further, the Task Force recommended to the Executive Council a set of revisions to Canons 14 and 15 pertaining to parishes and mission congregations; if enacted, these canons lay out the steps for assessing congregations and determining their future.

---

<sup>1</sup> (“Building a Bridge to the Future: A Letter from Bishop Shannon,” 2021; “THRIVE Evaluation Now Underway,” *The Mountain*, April 2025.)

Some of the diocesan committees, task forces, and groups were more successful in answering their charge as it pertained to missional vitality—congregational and diocesan health--and then completing their portfolio of work; some failed forward, underscoring the challenges and leaving steppingstones for use in future explorations. We can read about this work and their findings in the reports of committees in the *Pre-Convention Journal*.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a widespread lack of engagement across various sectors of our societies, by disrupting social connections, fueling burnout, and eroding a sense of purpose. The Church was no different in experiencing this dwindling of participation.

We knew that prior to the pandemic, church participation and membership had been declining in the U.S. In the recently-released 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study (RLS) from Pew Research Center,<sup>2</sup> statistics continue to bear this out.

The dwindling of members in our congregations combined with the lack of engagement stretches our diocesan household, especially the clergy and lay leaders and the Bishop's Staff. The health—the vitality—of many of our congregations is lacking, and this is a very difficult situation to face. The THRIVE Assessment states that diocesan leaders do not know what “missional vitality” is and need it to be more defined. Could it be that we are articulating this because we do not want to engage with what this means in our congregations and diocesan household? Providing only a definition or the new criteria, as noted above by the work of the Task Force on Distressed Congregations, will not solve the situation. We have the information; some we have had since 2022. We now need to use it.

Similarly, the Assessment finding of the need for more lay formation may also point to this lack of engagement and participation. We have offered a number of opportunities over the past three years, some grant-funded and others in collaboration with another diocesan or provincial group: trainings for the lay

---

<sup>2</sup> L. Smith et al. “2023-24 Religious Landscape Study, Executive Summary,” Pew Research Center, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/religious-landscape-study-executive-summary/>

licensed ministries of preaching and Morning Prayer leading; Education for Ministry/EfM; pastoral care training in constellations and other congregations; racial reconciliation and healing trainings and the experiences of the Sacred Ground Circles; adaptive leadership and communications trainings; formation about experimentation in our congregations and with other church models; retreats and spiritual formation for wardens and other lay leaders; Safe Church trainings. Also available are the formation opportunities offered by the Province of New England/Province One, including the offerings of the Indigenous Peoples Justice Network and the Formation Network. We have the opportunities; we need to make better use of them. A pattern of low numbers of participation and groups not being able to sustain themselves point to the lack of engagement, not the need for more offerings.

In the face of declining membership and shifting demographic patterns, we need to work more on “rightsizing” our diocesan household and so, too, do local congregations. We can no longer afford the staffing and committee models that “we have always had.” Rightsizing means going through an intentional process to make sure we have the size and the formed participants who will enable us to respond to our changing understanding of what God is calling our diocesan household to do and become. THRIVE was an effort at rightsizing, enabling us to make changes in our diocesan structure and on the Bishop’s Staff.

Congregations must also do this work of rightsizing. For some, the models we have inherited may have served the church well in years past but are not aligned with the call and mission the church is now experiencing. Some leaders are no longer able to offer gifts and skills as they once did, some over many decades of service and ministry. Some leaders are asked, required, or expected to do the tasks of two or more positions combined. Of course, finances are a part of rightsizing, and good stewardship is a form of rightsizing. This is not only revising budgets but also how we use our buildings and properties and how we maintain them or choose to repurpose them in our communities.

Along with the governance structures, we now must do the necessary work of aligning our staff groups, properties, budgets and programs with our membership, resources, and missions.

There is pruning and re-shaping to do in and of our diocesan household. Some of this work is canonical, some involves structures and systems, and some will be in creating the pathways for continuing development and support of leadership.

We are continuing to hear the call of Jesus to “step out of the boat” (Matthew 14:22-34) and to respond. May we continue to have faith that His hand steadies us, holds us up in the waters.

Peace and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Shannon". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Peace and Blessings,".

## **Appendix – Reports from Diocesan Bodies**

### **Executive Council**

The Executive Council met on May 28, 2025 to discuss the revisions to the diocesan canons in light of the three questions which were posed in the THRIVE assessment document.

#### **1. What has worked? Why did it work?**

Council members generally agreed that the "new" Canon 6, which created Executive Council, has generally worked as intended. Canon 6 essentially created a body which would support certain aspects of the Standing Committee's work, as well as to serve as an extra support to the bishop. The Council has done a great deal of the work which the canon lays out, particularly in support of budget priorities, clergy compensation, and so-called distressed parishes. The Council has also helped break down what one member described as information silos which the THRIVE task force identified. That has happened in part through the Council's function of receiving updates about what is happening with various diocesan bodies, such as Rock Point, Mission Farm, the Commission on Finance, and the Committee on Ministry. Finally, the Council also played a key role in setting the diocese on the path to recovery from the conflict which arose in 2023.

The "why" behind these successes is twofold. One is the relatively clear, and narrow, scope of the work the Council has been asked to undertake since its inception. The second is the relationships which form the backbone of the group. That includes the bishop's relationship with the Council as a whole, as well as members' relationships with one another and the various governing bodies they represent.

#### **2. What hasn't worked? Why didn't it work?**

Specifically in reference to Executive Council, what has not worked well is a lack of role clarity within the existing Canon 6. The relationship between Executive Council and the Standing Committee is not clear, nor is the division of labor between them.

Several Council members expressed concern with the balance between the need to do business-related things and the imperative to focus on the diocese's mission. While the intention of THRIVE was clearly to support mission through the realignment of the diocese's governance structures, it seems that is not exactly how the process has unfolded. There was much discussion among Council members to the effect that the so-called "missional vitality" piece of our common life has at times been lacking a defined mandate and/or set of goals. We wonder, collectively, if the "failure to launch" of the Committee for Congregational Development (CCDF) is directly related to the overly broad mandate the current canons give to it. We also wonder if there is a way to focus that work more narrowly on formation and relationship building among all members of the diocese, and whether that narrower focus would be best served by having a dedicated diocesan staff position, perhaps as part of a constellation, to support it.

### **3. What have we learned?**

First and foremost, we have learned that clarity and clear goals are important factors in accomplishing the tasks that we believe we are called to do. Those two things are evident to Council members' reflections on the most successful pieces of the THRIVE effort. We also recognize that some of the larger picture includes a lack of human resources to carry out the work. The diocese itself is far from alone in that challenge.

We have also learned that managing change is a difficult proposition, even with a high level of buy-in and involvement from clergy and lay leaders alike. The Holy Spirit has to be allowed sufficient time to move and work within a group as it's forming – that is, allowing people to build perspective, relationship, and to engage more fully with both one another and God's work.

### **4. Suggestions and Recommendations**

We recommend keeping Canon 6 as currently written, with the following clarifications:

- What is the relationship of the Council to the Standing Committee, and how do both groups complement each other in terms of oversight?
- What specific duties assigned to the former Diocesan Council before 2022 are a part of Executive Council's mandate?

- Pertaining to Canon 6.4 specifically, what is the Executive Council's function when there is no bishop – i.e., when the Standing Committee holds ecclesiastical authority under the General Convention's canons? Currently Canon 6.4 states that governance in those circumstances is a joint venture of both bodies, though it leaves specific responsibilities unassigned. The ambiguity creates an opening for dysfunction and even abuse, as well as the fracturing of relationships that results.

Under the broad category of "experiments", we suggest:

- Lifting up missional vitality as THE overarching theme for the shared life of the diocesan household; setting clearly defined areas and goals for this work; and making sure that our governance structures support it.
- Discerning how to reinvigorate formation for lay leaders in such a way as to focus on building relationships among them as much as it encourages learning. We recognize there are challenges posed by time, geography, and weather, even as we have collectively learned to use Zoom to our advantage for learning and conducting business meetings. We also recognize that some work has already been done in this area, particularly through the Green Mountain Abbey's programming and Diocesan Convention itself. More activities intended for both education and community building would be greatly beneficial. Examples of prior events shared by Council members included the former "diocesan study program," Education for Ministry (EfM), and diocesan-wide events such as hosting the speaker Tom Brackett.
- To these ends, establishing a paid clergy position – either within the current staffing structure or as part of a constellation (i.e., to be paired with either a half- or three-quarter time parish position) – to support formation for all, including but not limited to the training of lay worship leaders, continuing education for all adult members of the diocese, and coordinating with the Committee on Ministry to develop a robust program for ministry discernment for both lay and ordained orders.

Respectfully submitted,  
 The Rev. Amy Spagna  
 On behalf of Executive Council

## **Standing Committee**

The Standing Committee recommends that, as a diocese, we do not change the new canons as they were amended in 2023, but that we refine their implementation, particularly in light of current realities of ministry needs and our collective capacity for carrying out our ministry. With regard to clarifying roles of the Standing Committee versus the Executive Council, we recommend that the Standing Committee's roles be those normally assigned to Standing Committees in The Episcopal Church's canons and as an advisory body to the Bishop, and that the Executive Council's roles be those of a more pastoral nature associated with carrying out the work of the Diocese between Conventions.

The Standing Committee also recommends that, in order to have a good retention rate of people serving on committees, commissions and task forces, there be a functioning Nominating Committee. Likewise, members of the Standing Committee sense that the structural issues that remain are: complexity, communication, capacity, and clarity (what is the scope of the task assigned to distinct entities). Addressing the latter issue might bring clarity to the other issues.

In summary, the Standing Committee proposes:

As an experiment, we might try to improve the new canons to tighten things up, streamline them, revise what is not working but not change the whole set of canons. No matter what we do to adjust the canons, we need to get creative to fire people up to want to stand for election for these bodies. We do not see ourselves as going back to the pre-2022 canons with the previous structures.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Fred Moser

On behalf of the Standing Committee

## **Trustees**

### **Quick Recap**

The team discussed the effectiveness of the 'Thrive' initiative, the need for clarity on authority within the organization, and the dynamic nature of the church's processes. They also discussed the challenges of filling certain positions within the diocese, the current structure and its effectiveness, and the importance of community, trust, and legacy giving in strengthening their diocese. The conversation ended with a commitment to complete their work by the end of the month. A quorum of trustees was present.

### **Next Steps**

- Sarah and Canon Susan: Review and provide feedback on the proposed changes to Canon 15 regarding mission transitions before it goes to Executive Council
- Trustees: Identify potential candidates for the vacant Diocese Treasurer position
- Diocese Leadership: Review and clarify the authority relationships between Trustees and other entities Create flow charts to visually define relationships between different entities within the diocese structure
- Trustees: Review and update the quarterly distribution process documentation to reflect actual practices
- Diocese Leadership: Work on building and strengthening trust among diocese members and parishes
- Trustees: Work with the committee on distressed parishes to develop and implement best practices
- Trustees and Diocese Leadership: Develop and implement a more visible legacy/planned giving program
- Becky: Review current canons for consistency with removing trustees' DUT recommendations to Commission on Finance
- Diocese Leadership: Improve communication and celebration of significant events happening across parishes
- Executive Council: Review comments from various diocese entities by May 30

- Diocese Leadership: Develop strategies to increase awareness of collaboration between diocese and parishes
- Diocese Leadership: Work on implementing and expanding understanding of new canons in practical ways
- Diocese Leadership: Continue to work on the developing aspects of the diocese's relationship with the broader non-Episcopal community. One example: the need to address changes in Rock Point Commons as it is a collaborative Diocese and Community entity now, given the permanent Conservation Easement.
- Trustees: Continue building relationships with external organizations like land trusts to address property challenges

### **Prayer and Devotional Discussion**

In the meeting, Sarah opened with a prayer, followed by Dave leading a devotional exercise based on Acts 2:42-47. The group discussed the passage, focusing on what they saw God doing, such as creating community, empowering people, and unifying them. They then took a moment of silence for personal prayers before moving on to a unison prayer. The conversation ended with Sarah's prayer for guidance and wisdom in the diocese of Vermont.

### **Thrive Initiative's Impact on Diocese:**

In the meeting, Ann Guillot, who had been a member of the original Thrive committee, led the discussion on the effectiveness of the 'Thrive' initiative. The team agreed that 'Thrive' has improved communication and collaboration across different councils and leadership groups in the diocese. They also acknowledged that the initiative has clarified roles and responsibilities, making it easier to understand who is responsible for what. However, they noted that the initial implementation of the Standing Committee structure was bumpy and not as collaborative as it could have been. Of note, some members thought the THRIVE changes made management broader and more accessible, while others thought the changes made diocesan management look more "top down".

The team also discussed the importance of the financial aspect in driving the changes

brought about by 'Thrive'. They ended the conversation with a discussion on what they have learned from the 'Thrive' initiative.

### **Clarifying Authority and Governance**

Ann and Sarah discussed the need for clarity on authority within the organization, particularly for trustees dealing with real estate issues. Ann noted the differences between the various entities within Rock Point, including their maturity and governance, and the need for these to evolve. Becky emphasized the importance of documenting changes and clarifications to work towards organizational goals. Sarah also mentioned that the canon on missions is being rewritten to address parish transitions and succession, and encouraged trustees to review the suggested changes.

### **Dynamic Church Processes and Flexibility**

The meeting focused on the dynamic nature of the church's processes and the need for flexibility in response to changing times. The participants discussed the importance of flexibility and the need for a more adaptable approach. They also touched on the idea of "less is more" in terms of writing canons, suggesting that not everything needs to be locked into a rule. The conversation also highlighted the need for resource identification, collaboration, communication tool development, and education. The participants were asked to comment on the proposed canonical changes, including the three-pillar structure.

### **Clarifying Roles and Relationships**

Sarah, Ann, and Becky discussed the need for clarification on the roles and relationships between the trustees and other entities within their organization. They agreed that a visual representation, such as a flow chart, could help clarify these relationships. They also discussed the need to define the authority and decision-making processes within the organization, particularly in relation to the distribution of funds. David added that the organization's connection with outside organizations could be beneficial, but also raised concerns about the difficulty of filling committees. The team agreed that defining these relationships and roles would take time.

### **Diocese Treasurer Position Challenges Discussed**

In the meeting, Sarah and Ann discussed the challenges of filling certain positions within the diocese, particularly the role of the diocese treasurer. They noted that the current vacancy has been ongoing for a year and suggested that a treasurer could be appointed from the Commission on Finance. Ann also highlighted the difficulties in managing the diocese's finances due to organizational issues. The team agreed to make changes to the document to reflect their actual responsibilities and processes, with Becky taking on the task of updating the document.

### **Improving Parish Communication and Collaboration**

The team discussed the current structure and its effectiveness. They agreed to keep the canonical changes of the thrive as they were amended in 2023. There was a discussion about the need for better communication and collaboration among different groups. The team also expressed gratitude for the performance of the investment committee and the management of the unit trust. They agreed to continue the work on developing best practices for parishes that are not healthy. The team also discussed the need for more work on defining what makes a vibrant parish. They agreed that the work on distressed parishes should continue and include updating canon 15-16.

Members of the team expressed enthusiasm about the successful development of the constellations, which were noted to have invigorated smaller and larger members.

### **Strengthening Diocese Through Community and Trust**

In the meeting, the team discussed the importance of community, trust, and legacy giving in strengthening their diocese. They reflected on the text from Acts 2, emphasizing the apostles' commitment to teaching, fellowship, and generosity. The team agreed on the need to think outside the box and build trust within the diocese. They also discussed the importance of evangelism and the need to openly share their beliefs. The team acknowledged the need to support legacy giving and create a foundation for it. They also discussed the importance of collaboration and coordination among the parishes and the diocese. The conversation ended with a prayer and a commitment to complete their work by the end of the month.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sarah Cowan  
On behalf of the Trustees of the Diocese

## **Commission on Finance**

### **Quick recap**

Members addressed challenges such as workload distribution, the need for additional members, and the importance of becoming more proactive in their approach to tasks. The group concluded by discussing potential changes to the commission's structure, including the creation of subcommittees and improved communication strategies, as well as the process for filling vacancies and expanding membership.

### **Next steps**

- Determine a mechanism for appointing new members and filling vacancies, working with Executive Council (Canon Linda may have found something in the Canons that would address this.)
- Develop a clear structure/procedure for handling audits, parochial reports, and grants/loans oversight
- Create subcommittees to better distribute workload
- Document and formalize the grants and loans review process
- Evaluate and establish clear guidelines for annual expenditures and awards
- Create a system to track and follow up on missing parish audit and parochial reports
- Review current commission size and make recommendations about expanding membership
- Review and update internal procedures to reduce reliance on chair position
- Develop a clear process for reporting non-compliant parishes to Executive Council
- Work with diocesan staff to set up administrative support for tracking reports
- Develop a plan to stagger terms of office for commission members
- Begin budget preparation process for the upcoming year
- Look for potential new members to fill vacancies. Post commission vacancies in "The Mountain" publication

## **Summary**

### **Thrive Assessment Review Discussion**

The participants discussed the Thrive assessment report and their role in reviewing it through the lens of the Commission on Finance.

### **Early Church Growth and Devotion**

The group began with prayer and scripture reading from Acts 2, focusing on themes of community, generosity, and growth. They discussed how the early church's devotion and actions led to expansion, with Melanie describing it as an open circle that never closed. The conversation ended with prayers for those on the margins and those speaking truth to power, emphasizing God's presence and guidance in their work.

### **Finance Commission Implementation Review**

The meeting focused on reviewing the history and current state of the Finance Commission, which was created after the Thrive report in 2022. Members discussed the transition from previous committees (ie. Grants & Loans, Audit & Oversight, Diocesan Budget) and the implementation of various financial recommendations, including changes to accounting software and budget cuts. The group identified that while some recommendations had been implemented, such as repurposing funds and evaluating accounting software, there was still work to be done, particularly in evaluating the grants and loans structure and issuing guidelines for annual expenditures.

### **Commission Term Planning Discussion**

The group discussed their current reactive approach to tasks (due to their small size compared to workload) and the need to be more proactive in planning and making recommendations. They addressed concerns, particularly noting that Greta (and previous Chair) had been carrying a significant portion of the burden. The conversation then shifted to the process of filling unexpired terms on the commission, with Canon Linda explaining that appointments typically go through a diocesan council or, in some cases, the bishop. The members realized they needed to determine the length of the recently resigned Chair's unexpired

term and consider whether to recommend someone to the Executive Council for appointment. (Note: Chair recently resigned and a member appointed as Chair effective 5/1/25.)

### **Parochial Reports and Grant Oversight**

The Commission on Finance discussed their responsibilities regarding parochial reports, audits, and grants/loans. They clarified that their role is primarily oversight and review, with the authority to recommend actions but not to directly enforce requirements. The group noted that grant applications already require financial documentation and current status of assessments, parochial reports, and audits, though they debated whether to condition grant awards on complete documentation or accept promises to submit. Collins and Becca mentioned their work on a task force regarding distressed parishes and proposed changes to canonical requirements.

### **Audit Process Redesign Discussion**

The group discussed the previous audit process, where Greta played a central role in managing audit reports and tracking their completion. They identified that the diocesan office could handle administrative tasks like monitoring deadlines, and discussed the need for a system to follow up on missing reports. Concerns were expressed about the commission's workload, noting that the previous Chair had been doing too much work; and suggesting the need for subcommittees or a redefined process to handle audits, grants, and loans more effectively.

### **Strengthening / Expanding the Commission's Workforce**

The Commission on Finance discussed its challenges, particularly the heavy workload on the chair, who had handled financial reporting, audits, and other tasks. The group agreed that the commission needs more members to distribute responsibilities effectively. They also noted that Greta's departure leaves a void, but the commission should focus on becoming more dynamic and less reliant on the chair. Emphasized the need to improve communication and task distribution. And the need to expand the Commission on Finance, Canons currently state 6-8 members, to better handle its responsibilities. The group discussed the commission's role in overseeing financial matters, developing the diocese budget, and providing education on annual parochial reports and audits.

It was explained that while the commission doesn't build the budget, it reviews and questions it, ensuring it aligns with the diocese's needs. The participants agreed that the commission needs more members to handle its workload effectively, suggesting the creation of separate committees for audits and financial statements to meet quarterly.

### **Commission Restructuring and Task Distribution**

The group discussed challenges with the Commission and its workload, noting that current members lack capacity to complete all assigned tasks. They agreed to recommend breaking the commission into subcommittees with 8-10 members total, with Collins suggesting that the Commission on Missional Vitality could take over the education piece. Melanie proposed advertising commission vacancies through the diocese's job posting system, while Canon Linda clarified that the Bishop has authority to appoint members to unexpired terms. The conversation ended with Sophie agreeing to compile an AI-generated report of the discussion for review by the group and potential submission to Executive Council.

The Commission on Finance has recently experienced a noticeable change in the group dynamics. This means future discussions to realign the workload and slowly work through the tasks and processes assigned to it since its creation (Convention 2022). The Commission needs to continue creating and adjusting its internal structures in order to be of optimal benefit to the Bishop, and the entire diocesan household. It will also need a larger membership in order to have a healthy approach (proactive vs. reactive) to its tasks.

### **Recommendation(s):**

- Amend by Canon that, the maximum number of members to be ten (10) (hoping that more people will come forward to volunteer/serve)
- Amend by Canon that, the terms of four years shall be staggered (currently 3 expire 2026 convention [3 lay], 2 expire 2027 convention [1 lay, 1 clergy])
- Amend by Canon that, vacancies of unexpired terms may be filled between annual diocesan conventions by recommendation of the

Commission on Finance to Executive Council and appointment by the  
Bishop.

Respectfully submitted,  
The Rev. Melanie Combs, Chair  
On behalf of the Commission on Finance

## **Committee on Ministry**

After thoughtfully reviewing the THRIVE documents that were circulated, the Committee on Ministry (COM) met on May 3, 2025 and had a rich and productive conversation in response to the questions that were posed in the instructions. Below is a summary of our responses to those questions:

### **What has worked? Why did it work?**

There was a change to the Canons that affected the COM (Title I, Canon 27): the former Commission on Ministry became the *Committee* on Ministry within a newly formed Commission on Missional Vitality. Our “partner committee” within the CMV was the newly-formed Committee on Congregational Development and Formation (CCDF). This worked in a way by narrowing the focus of the COM. Although, as laid out in the THRIVE report, oversight of the lay discernment process was added to the duties of the COM, it seemed as though there was an opportunity to work toward that *with* the CCDF, and we were hopeful that that would be the case. This, thus, allowed the COM to narrow its focus for a time and do a significant amount of work to clarify the path to ordination for both those discerning for the diaconate, and those discerning for the priesthood: we produced full revisions of the handbooks for both ordination processes.

Another way of putting it might be that what worked for the Committee on Ministry was a slight narrowing of our work that allowed us to focus intensely on the specific tasks that were required to clarify the path to ordination in the Diocese, and to thoughtfully refine the protocols we use when interviewing applicants.

### **What hasn't worked? Why didn't it work?**

While we are very happy with the clarity the newly revised handbooks bring to the process of ordination, and happy as well with some of the changes we have brought to our work with applicants (longer in-person interviews, for instance, and a clearer structure to those interviews), it is the case that the more concentrated focus of the Committee on Ministry (together with the failure of the CCDF to get off the ground) has led to a lack of scope in the COM's work.

While we function exceedingly well as a committee and with applicants when we have them, we have not succeeded in making our work—the work of ministry discernment--visible to the whole diocese. We have, for instance, fewer applicants for Holy Orders than we would like, and particularly, we have very few applicants who are discerning a call to the Vocational Diaconate. It is our sense that the relative insularity of our work is impeding our mission to extend a wide and welcoming invitation to folks who might want to *explore* a call to ministry, including lay ministry (as opposed to seeing them only after they've *committed* to a discernment process that is aimed at ordination).

### **What have you learned?**

We've learned that a Committee/Commission on Ministry that is genuinely involved in the formation and development of *lay* ministry/leadership, and not only in the formation of folks seeking Holy Orders, would contribute more broadly to the important construction of ministry support structures within the diocese. Particularly given the constellation model of ministry that we are developing in the more rural areas of the diocese, where lay leaders are needed to lead worship - conducting Morning Prayer and preaching, for example – it feels very important for the COM to be able to provide formation opportunities like discernment retreats, worship and preacher training, and courses (such as EFM used to be) for folks who are considering (or already hearing) a call to *lay* ministry. We note that a set of diocesan-wide formation opportunities allowing folks to explore their call to lay ministry might very well lead to further calls for some of those people, calls to the diaconate or the priesthood.

We've also learned that the coordination of those sorts of development opportunities is more than a volunteer member of a committee/commission can handle. Our learning has come from the experience of the more concentrated focus of our work over the past few years, which has been very time-consuming for the members of the COM, and particularly its leadership, even with the narrowed focus on the ordination process.

### **Suggestions/recommendations for next steps**

#### Recommendation #1

A change to the canons of the diocese, and specifically Title IV, Canon 27: Commission on Missional Vitality. With the demise of the CCDF, we would recommend that the Committee on Ministry revert to its former role as the Commission on Ministry. This would require a reworking of Canon 27.

### Recommendation #2

That the COM fully commit to its role in the formation and development of those who feel the call to lay ministry. There are two specific suggestions that fall under this recommendation:

- 1) That a priest be “in constellation” with one or two parishes *and with the diocese as a staff member* to serve in a role that we might call something like “Diocesan Coordinator of Lay Formation and Leadership Development.” That person could plan and coordinate diocesan-wide formation and development/training events for lay folk (as well as folks already in the discernment process). We are imagining things like weekend discernment retreats and worship training for lay ministers. They could also coordinate a Diocesan Study Program, somewhat akin to EFM, that would be focused on formation. It’s quite possible that this person could coordinate some of those events with our neighboring dioceses of New Hampshire and Maine. (Note: in larger dioceses, work of this nature sometimes falls within the mandate of the position called Transition Minister).

This person would be an *ex officio* member of the COM, participating in the same manner as the President of the Standing Committee.

- 2) That the membership of the COM possibly be increased by two members to be able to accommodate a sub-committee that would work with the clergyperson in the above position on issues related to the discernment of lay ministry/leadership. This would help support the structural coordination/management of lay formation within the house of the COM.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Schnell  
On behalf of the Committee on Ministry

## **Diocesan Entities**

### **Quick Recap**

The meeting covered various topics, including discussions on canonical changes and their impact on organizations, and the importance of collaboration and relationships in their work. Participants shared insights on their respective organizations' missions, challenges, and future plans, with a focus on community engagement, environmental stewardship, and adapting to changing circumstances. The group also addressed the need for updating canons, improving organizational structures, and maintaining meaningful connections within their shared goals and initiatives.

### **Next Steps**

- Rocky to make edits to the Brookhaven-related sections of the canons and submit them to Tom and the Canons Committee, CC'ing CJ, by the end of June.
- Kelly to work with Ken, Linda, and Tom on revising the Rock Point canon by the June deadline for consideration at the upcoming convention.
- CJ to consider organizing an annual in-person meeting for the group, rotating between Rock Point, Mission Farm, and Brookhaven.
- CJ to review and update Rock Point School bylaws to align with the current canons.
- Rocky to email or share the Gary Landreth quote about goodbyes with the group.

### **Summary**

#### **Canonical Changes Impact Mission Farm**

The group discussed the impact of recent canonical changes on their organizations. Lisa shared that the changes have been beneficial for Mission Farm, helping to invigorate their programs and align with their 1895 mission to engage the local community. She noted that the changes allowed them to transform their 180-acre space and integrate worship, learning, and farming. The group agreed to continue discussing the effectiveness of the changes and potential adjustments needed.

### **Mission Farm's Sustainability and Community**

Lisa discussed Mission Farm's mission and challenges, emphasizing their focus on community, ecology, and environmental stewardship. She highlighted the uncertainty of long-term sustainability due to financial constraints and rapid local development. Lisa recommended adopting the canons as a permanent part of the diocese and suggested a stronger commitment to environmental issues, including limiting AI use due to its environmental impact. She also stressed the importance of in-person connections over virtual platforms to foster community bonds.

### **Collaboration Insights and Future Plans**

Lisa and Kelly expressed their commitment to collaborating and connecting offline to discuss further collaboration opportunities. Rocky shared his experience working with faith-based organizations and highlighted the importance of maintaining communication with the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont. The group agreed to continue discussing what has worked and why in their collaboration, with each participant taking turns to share their insights.

### **Brookhaven Canon Revision Updates**

Rocky presented updates on the need to revise the canons related to Brookhaven, highlighting outdated references such as the Brookhaven Home for Boys and the presence of a priest in charge, which no longer align with the organization's current identity as the Brookhaven Treatment and Learning Center. He proposed cleaning up these references and submitted an action item to update the canons by the end of June, with C.J. confirming that the Canons Committee would review the changes in July ahead of the diocesan convention.

### **Rock Point Governance Restructuring**

The group discussed the Thrive report and its reflection of institutional support for Rock Point's spiritual mission without expectation of religious practice alignment. Kelly highlighted the need for a clearer organizational chart to show reporting lines and suggested streamlining to one or two bodies for better coordination. C.J. acknowledged the increased involvement of Rock Point staff in diocesan activities and proposed annual in-person meetings at different sites to

foster deeper connections and collaboration. They also discussed updating the canon and aligning bylaws with current governance structures, with C.J. expressing a desire to reengage more fully with diocesan initiatives.

### **Building Meaningful Connections at Work**

Rocky shared insights on the significance of relationships in their work, quoting Gary Landreth to emphasize that meaningful connections with children are enduring and continue beyond scheduled interactions. C.J. read a poem by Kwame Alexander, highlighting the importance of beauty in work and the value of transitions, encouraging continuous learning and adaptation. The group discussed the importance of supporting each other and staying committed to their shared goals, with C.J. mentioning the need to review meeting notes.

Respectfully submitted,

C.J. Spirito

On behalf of the leaders of Diocesan Entities