

## Report of the Communications Task Force to the 221<sup>st</sup> Diocesan Convention

The following report details the recommendations and reflections from the Communications Task Force.

The Task Force was appointed by Bishop Cancell to review the current state of communications in the Diocese of New Jersey and to present recommendations as we move forward. The Task Force believes that the ministry of communications is vital and critical in all aspects of our communal life in Christ—in congregational development, in member retention, in evangelism. Additionally, communications is of paramount importance while the diocese gets to know our new bishop as he begins his episcopacy.

### Task Force Members

The members of the Communications Task Force are:

Bob Bostock  
The Rev. Fran Clark, deacon  
Sandra Cummings  
The Rev. Larry Fish  
Neva Rae Fox, chairperson  
The Rev. John Hansen, deacon  
Anne Hodgens  
The Rev. Bob Legnani

### Gatherings

As a group, the Task Force met three times: at the Diocesan Convention on March 13; April 17; and July 17 for a lengthy, intensive workshop. In the interim, the Task Force communicated via e\*mail.

### Methodology

Task Force members identified major areas of concern, and divided into subcommittees in order to focus on comprehensive research and investigation.

The subcommittees were:

- Print Publication: *Via Media, Episcopal Life*
- Diocesan Web Site
- Other publications produced and issued by groups/organizations within the Diocese of New Jersey
- Researching the work of other dioceses

### Findings

The findings of the subcommittees' work was extensive. In the course of the discussions of the Task Force, findings were classified in main areas:

- *Awareness Issues*
- *"What works?" and "What's not working"*
- *Informational points*

#### *Awareness issues*

- Budget budget budget. Without a strong, long-term commitment to Communications in the budget, all efforts will be useless.

Communications Task Force, continued

- Image is critical and the Diocese of New Jersey is in need of a higher visibility throughout its 14 counties. Visibility is needed not just in the churches but also in the secular press. On one hand, the effort for a higher visibility for the diocese benefited from the consecration of Bishop Councill. Unfortunately, the lack of a repeated, constant effort has proven to be detrimental.
- Both print publication and the web site are part of today's world. Both are needed in an effective communications project. At the moment, more people of all ages remain dependent upon print for news, but there needs to be attention devoted to both for a comprehensive, effective program.
- Communications education is important. There is a need for the churches to understand communications and how to use it for their own benefits. Education is the key for accomplishing this diocesan wide effort.
- The channeling, flow, management and gathering of info for communications – whether for print, web, or e\*mail -- needs a system that is easy and known to all.

#### *What works?*

- Printed materials in the form of newsletters, letters, and flyers are utilized in the diocese. This is a key method for information distribution and sharing.
- E\*mail works for small groups (*please note that this is also listed on the "What's Not Working" list*).
- There is widespread interest in the web at large. Efforts need to be made to transfer this interest into the diocesan web site.
- A separate youth web site for the Diocese exists. This is good as it is targeted directly to the youth, speaking their language and talking to them at their level.

#### *What's not working?*

- Budget is not working.
- The limited size of the current *Via Media* at four or eight pages prevents the inclusion of much news and information, especially in areas where parishes can share their news.
- The Diocese of New Jersey operates with many committees, all of which are doing the good work of the diocese. However, these committees appear not to be communicating with each other. Concurrently there isn't a system to allow easy communicate with each other.
- Emails work for small groups (*please note that this is also listed on the "What's Working" list*).
- Key info is not making its way to the diocesan web site or to a print publication.
- The address of the current web site is an issue as it is long, not easily remembered and does not use the word Episcopal ([www.newjersey.anglican.org](http://www.newjersey.anglican.org))
- TV/ads as they are now being used in the diocese are piecemeal and are not effective.

- The clergy and parishes are not aware of who, if anyone, is in charge of or responsible for communications.

### *Information Points*

- All diocesan committees and commissions were polled to determine what is utilized for their communications. Also the survey was sent to parishes concerning their newsletters. A review of the responses determined that the consolidation of newsletters of commissions and committees into a larger form is not a viable option.
- The people of the diocese are dependent on a print publication in order to receive their news. Although the web site is an emerging technology and communications tool, most still prefer to receive their information through print. Without a regularly distribution publication, the people of the diocese are missing important news and activities.
- The diocesan web site was recently designed and is in great working order. E\*mail lists have been established for quick communications. The web site, however, requires daily care in order to keep it up to date, fresh and interesting. It is difficult to maintain up to date info on the web when the appropriate info is not forwarded to the webmaster.
- Other dioceses are facing the same issues as the Diocese of New Jersey in respect to budget and the ability of communications to expand. Some are doing their communications work creatively, and many are moving to the web in order to save costs on print. However, print is still a necessary component of a comprehensive plan.

### **Recommendations**

The Task Force devoted the majority of the time looking to the future, with an eye on using the tools currently available. The Task Force has developed a listing of recommendations, which have been categorized into two areas:

- Urgencies – recommendations that the Task Force identified as the most critical
- Priorities – recommendations, which were deemed by the Task Force to be of paramount importance.

### URGENCIES

1. A qualified Director of Communications is required in order to implement, oversee and develop a comprehensive communications place. A full time director is needed; however, this position could start as part time as long as there is a director.

2. A print publication in some form is critical. Research has shown that this is the most effective means of communications at the moment.

There is ample budget for two more issues in 2004, and the Task Force recommends the production of two more issue of *Via Media* (the current publication) while concurrently preparing a new diocesan publication.

Communications Task Force, continued

The Task Force recommends:

- New name for the publication
- Rejuvenation of the editorial committee
- Design a new look for the print publication
- Expand the pages so as to allow more room for news.
- Maintain the wrap-around relationship with *Episcopal Life* (it's a good deal, and *Episcopal Life* provides a national voice to the people of the Diocese of New Jersey)
- Maintain the frequency of 11 times a year
- Don't ask for subscriptions
- Establish two new revenue sources: advertising and an annual appeal
- Establish guidelines for advertising

3. Establish a Communications Committee, which annually would report to Convention both verbally and in writing. Other committees should be established (such as a web committee and an editorial advisory board) and would be subcommittees of the communication committee.

4. The Diocese must make a long-term financial commitment to communications. Communications is important for evangelism, for congregational development, for church growth, and for all areas.

### PRIORITIES

1. The web site should be expanded and enhanced. The web is an emerging field and it is important for the diocese to be on the forefront.

#### Recommendations for web

- New web address.
- Establish a committee.
- Enhance the info on web and allow for an easier flow of info to the web

2. A strategic communications plan, encompassing a unified message and with the support of bishop, must be created for short goals and long term objectives. However, a strategic plan in the absence of a director of communication will result in ineffectiveness.

The strategic plan would include the public relations/media relations' aspects of the communication program that are urgently needed and are unfortunately currently missing from the diocese

3. Any image advertising must be coordinated and comprehensive in order to be effective. The advertising program needs to be coordinated by the director of communications. Without an organized approach, an advertising campaign would not be effective, no matter how it is funded or executed. And while advertising is an important aspect of a communications program, the monies expended on the purchase and placement of ads would be better spend at this point in the establishment of other communications vehicles.

4. Educational efforts must be made in order to assist the parishes in their communications efforts as well as to implement the work of the diocese.

### **Conclusion**

The Task Force was honored to serve the Bishop Council and the Diocese in this effort. The members will be pleased to discuss this report further.

Submitted by Neva Rae Fox, chairperson  
Communications Task Force