

Task Force on Communication
The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan

*But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?
And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?*

*As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'
But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?'
So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.*

*But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for
'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'
—Romans 10:14-18*

A Task Force on Communication met three times in February and March to discuss the increasing importance and shifting terrain of Episcopal Church communication. The goals of the task force were to:

- evaluate how the Diocese of Michigan currently communicates, and
- explore how communication can be enhanced over the coming years.

The members of the task force were:

- the Rev. Canon Lisa Gray (canon to the ordinary),
- Herb Gunn (editor of *The Record*),
- the Rev. Linda Northcraft (president of Diocesan Council),
- the Rev. Jonathan Sams (member of Diocesan Council), and
- three members of *The Record* Editorial Board—Bruce Donigan, Rachid Hatem, and Jenny Ogline

Communication as Calling

Communication is part of everything the church does; it is not so much a distinct operating function as it is the web that, when working well, holds all else together. During a period when the Diocese of Michigan is wrestling with how to do our many ministries with dwindling financial and human resources, it is crucial that the whole diocese—bishop, council, staff, congregations, and communication professionals—communicate better.

Effective communication is more than a responsibility or an opportunity— it is part and parcel of our calling as people of God. As an essential ingredient of mission and ministry, communication is not a task that can fall to one person or one department. To be effective, communication must be intentional—coordinated carefully with vision and forethought and shared broadly among the whole body. It is through this care and sharing that our communication can be credible, authentic and of high quality, and our community can grow in faith.

The challenges to effective communication within our diocese are serious. We must articulate how communication lives and breathes life into the diocese as well as how it supports, highlights, and enhances the ministries of all Episcopalians. Good communication will enable us to inspire and evangelize.

This document, which is the result of the task force's exploration of the overarching ministry of communication, provides the following:

- An outline of the communication needs of the diocese;
- An assessment of areas where communication is working well, as well as areas where it could work better; and
- Our recommendations for improving communications diocese-wide— seeking the best and most effective outcomes while using resources efficiently.

Communication Needs
The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan

- Oversee the design and maintenance of a functional, user-friendly, interactive web presence;
- Support communication needs and encourage communication abilities of senior staff responsible for each diocesan level function (e.g., finance, mission, stewardship, YAYA) to help ensure EDOMI messages are clear, accurate and pleasant – from letters to brochures to internet to press;
- Support communication needs of bishop— letters, briefs, speeches;
- Develop relationship with news media; find ways to get free, positive coverage as an effective facet of church evangelism;
- Oversee PR, promotions and publications (both print and electronic)
- Support development and fund-raising initiatives;
- Nurture not only top-down communication, but just as importantly, bottom-up communication;
- Support communication within and among deaneries—empower cooperative ministry, shared liturgies/resources;
- Support communication needs of individual churches—empower and equip;
- Support and empower evangelism;
- Oversee and nurture a communication lifeline to people who attend church irregularly;
- Continually develop new ideas and modes of communication, help people and congregations communicate through emerging technologies—blogs, Facebook, Twitter, even smoke signals.

Assessment of Current Communication
The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan

“Communications in The Episcopal Church has been in a state of significant flux for the past three years. ... due [in part] to the rapidly changing nature of way in which communication is being done....

While there are significant cost savings that can be realized by using electronic and online communications, the reality ... is that using electronic means only is not feasible and would not be effective.... [R]eaching Episcopalians in economic distress or for whom computers are not available requires that we continue [to] use paper and print.

The issue for The Episcopal Church is to find the most cost effective balance.”

“Effective communication in multiple media requires both training and experience. ... Using different media forms well...requires ongoing training and some significant experience.

In a time of financial stress, cutting oneself off from the skills needed to effectively communicate the challenges facing the institutions of the church seems particularly shortsighted.”

—Excerpts from the Blue Book Report for the 76th General Convention in Anaheim by the Standing Commission on Episcopal Church Communication

The good news is that the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, confronted with the same challenges as the whole Episcopal Church, is working to meet those challenges.

What Is Working Well

We have in place a strong communications presence in *The Record*—as a print publication, as a weekly email news brief and as a Web presence—managed and edited by the highest caliber of Episcopal communication professionals.

Since 1951, *The Record* continues to serve as the diocesan newspaper and to highlight the mission and ministry of the Diocese of Michigan as well as the specific ministries of the person in the pew. *The Record Weekly* is quickly becoming the flagship for communication and information and is helping to shift the most active Episcopalians into reliance on electronic media instead of newsprint.

The power and validity of *The Record* in its various manifestations are demonstrated through the awards of excellence it perennially earns and by the regular financial support it wins from the congregations and individuals of this diocese.

What Could Work Better

Evidence from a recent deanery meeting suggests that many of the needs identified by the people of our diocese could be met through better communication. Below are excerpts from a long list of challenges and opportunities cobbled together by clergy and laity:

Challenges	Opportunities
Distance, connecting	Bridging distance
Developing ideas, building enthusiasm	Multi-church outreach
Bringing in community	Involvement in community activities
Connecting, touching people's lives	Getting to know each other
Lack of training in church culture	Explain stewardship/tithing
Success of minor voices (small groups)	Host church-wide celebrations
Keeping/appealing to youth	Radical hospitality/worship
Building enthusiasm	Shared mission/ministry
Limited budget/resources	Share/exchange tools, talents, resources
No one knows we are here	Web sites, advertising

The distinction between challenge and opportunity blurs with the recognition of what all these items hold in common: connecting...sharing...getting through...reaching out...community...communicating. These expressed needs cry out for guidance and support from a responsive center—a communications hub.

*Piazza: a place of culture, charity, conversation, and collaboration—
a common space to make connections, worship, celebrate, create, and hang out.*
—The Very Reverend Tracey Lind
Dean of Trinity Cathedral in Cleveland

Currently, the diocesan Web site falls far short of the electronic hub—the virtual piazza—that it has the potential of becoming. If it is possible, in these challenging times, to breathe life and purpose into our Web site, we can offer a space that will:

- invite and welcome top-down and bottom-up communication;
- provide forums for connection among the many small(er) groups of our diocese; and
- support our congregations in their ministries and evangelism.

Task Force Recommendations
The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan

Below are the recommendations of the Task Force on Communication:

Diocese of Michigan Web site

Enhance and improve our diocesan Web site to provide:

- a model for other diocesan users to emulate;
- easy and quick accessibility;
- accurate and useful information for people inside and outside of the diocese;
- virtual spaces where groups can connect, collaborate, create and just hang out.

The Record, The Record Weekly, The Record Web site

- 1) Complete shift of priorities from **monthly** news and information sharing in **print** to **weekly** news and information sharing through *The Record Weekly*, *The Record Web site* and the Diocese of Michigan Web site.
- 2) Establish a quarterly news magazine that will be mailed to every household with the expressed purpose of education and evangelism. The magazine will:
 - reach those in the Diocese of Michigan who are not routinely reached through electronic media;
 - provide a forum for information about the Episcopal Church for people who are casual Episcopalians in order to strengthen their Anglican and Episcopal Church identity and to encourage a deeper level of commitment to their church; and
 - create a resource for information, education and evangelism that has a longer shelf life than a monthly newspaper.

Every-household distribution of a print journal continues to be important, particularly for many long-standing Episcopalians who do not turn to their computers for news and information.