



An Introduction and Rationale

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
By his great mercy he has given us a new birth
into a living hope through the resurrection
of Jesus Christ from the dead...”*

God gave birth to the New Creation and inaugurated the fulfillment of all things in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since the first days of the church, Christians allowing this living hope to shape their perspectives, priorities and practices have realized renewed vision, vitality and viability in their communal life. As a result, they have experienced personal transformation, and exercised a compelling and influential presence in the world around them.

Shaped by a Living Hope is a process unfolding in the Diocese of Algoma that is fostering and forming gospel-centred faith communities comprised of such people. Its aspiration is to equip our congregations to live vibrantly today in the light of God’s promised tomorrow.

Offered in response to the Strategic Plan adopted by Algoma’s Synod in 2009, *Shaped by a Living Hope* is consistent with the Mission, Vision and Governing Values we share as a Diocese. Through this initiative, our

congregations are provided a propitious opportunity to experience revitalization as we deepen our communion in the Holy Spirit and make known the good news of God in the crucified and risen Christ.

Shaped by a Living Hope aims to raise the sights of Algoma’s congregations. It exhorts us to look beyond the far-too-common objective of simply trying to maintain or attract enough members and money to preserve a building, pay for an Incumbent and “keep the church open.” Instead, it redirects our gaze in such a way that God’s presence and purposes, promises and activity become central to our conversation, goal-setting, decision-making, and actions.

Acting on this latter focus can animate the life of joy and service, proclamation and growth to which the Anglicans of Algoma aspire.



Foundational to *Shaped by a Living Hope*, are the following convictions:

Vibrant and faithful congregations are deliberately and consistently...

Immersed in Baptismal Living

“The theological foundation for baptismal living is grounded in the expectant hope God holds out for us.”¹ Streaming from the deep well of God’s generosity, holy baptism is a foundational and defining event in the Christian’s life. Passing through its waters, a person becomes part of God’s New Creation. The life of the whole church, and thus all of its ministries and authority, flows from baptism. Therefore, at the Font, a person is also made a full member of Christ’s one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, and is empowered and commissioned for ministry. Ultimately, baptism celebrates what unites Christians: the Passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the life we share in his Spirit. Healthy congregations, then, are made up of people striving to “live into” this reality, the reality of their baptism...

*...which means **Shaped by a Living Hope** assumes that all facets of its process must support baptismal living.*



Patterned by a Particular Story

The Passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ together form the lens through which we best comprehend the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and the meaning of our lives as those marked with the sign of the cross. Christianity is about so much more than making good people better, self-preservation or other self-serving spiritualities. Indeed, Christian faith is primarily about God, not us. Throughout Scripture we trace the story of a God who liberates people from every form of bondage. In the fullness of time, this God sent his beloved Son to “shatter the chains of evil and death and banish the darkness of sin and despair.” Both the Bible and the Liturgy claim Christians “have been buried with Christ in baptism so that we may rise with him to a new life.” It is those surrendering their lives for Christ’s sake and the sake of the gospel who find true life! Healthy congregations allow themselves to be patterned by this story. They recognize that we faithfully flourish when we offer not only a commitment, but also “ourselves, our souls and bodies”...

*...which means **Shaped by a Living Hope** promotes the imitation of Christ over congregational survival or church growth.*

¹ Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook and Fredrica Harris Thompson, [Born of Water, Born of Spirit: Supporting the Ministry of the Baptized in Small Congregations](#). (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010.) 3.

Vibrant and faithful congregations are deliberately and consistently...

Shaped by Active Hope

“Those who build in the Lord do not build in vain.” There is fresh freedom and vigor to be discovered when Christians decide to live confidently in the present because the future is secure in God. We can trust that our actions today have meaning and will bear fruit because God’s promises can be depended on. Healthy congregations engage in worship, formation and service believing that these reflect and participate in the future God has in store for all creation...

...which means Shaped by a Living Hope encourages congregations to act boldly on the promises of God.

Transformed as a People

The gospel is not something we take hold of as one of our many possessions. Rather, the gospel must take hold of us, shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, transforming our identity and relationships, drawing us into a new order of belonging and behaving. Programs may have their place in the life of the church, to be sure. However, unless people’s lives are changed, no true renewal or lasting growth can happen in a congregation...

...which means Shaped by a Living Hope pursues people-development over program-development.

Caught up in an Ongoing Mission

Congregations do not need to determine if they have a mission or work at generating one for themselves. Our God remains active in the world, already engaged in mission. Therefore, the real question before congregations is, “What is God up to and how can we participate in that?” Healthy congregations engage in mission joyfully because they understand themselves to be caught up in what God is already doing in and for the world...

...which means Shaped by a Living Hope equips congregations to identify how they can share effectively in God’s mission.



These convictions provide the guiding principles by which all aspects of *Shaped by a Living Hope* should be understood, interpreted and engaged. It must always be remembered, however, that we depend entirely upon God’s grace to realize the intended outcomes of this process. Transformation and growth are the work of God. The benchmarks, activities and resources of *Shaped by a Living Hope* are simply proven avenues through which we can open ourselves and cooperate with the work of the Spirit in, through and around us.

To act upon these convictions and work toward its desired outcomes, *Shaped by a Living Hope* consists of three interrelated components:

1. Benchmarks for Congregations

In business and the social sector, “benchmarking” is widely understood as a process of measuring an organization’s practices, methods, inputs and/or outcomes against those of outstanding organizations in the same or a similar field. In our context as church, benchmarking serves a comparable function. It also serves to call us back to the values and disciplines that arise from the gospel, even when these run counter to the norms or presuppositions widely held by our society.

The benchmarks articulated in *Shaped by a Living Hope* reflect many of the best practices evident in vibrant and faithful congregations across North America, particularly those of Anglican/Episcopal or similar traditions. They describe and “measure” characteristics and activities that indicate and foster health in a congregation. They also respond to our strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, aspirations and needs as these have been expressed by so many people across this diocese.

The benchmarks enumerated in *Shaped by a Living Hope* are not advanced as an exhaustive catalogue. Neither are they meant to serve as a prescriptive or burdensome checklist. Rather, taken together, these benchmarks indicate emphases that, while always necessary for the vibrant and faithful church, seem particularly requisite for our congregations at this time. They



provide qualitative metrics by which parishes and their leaders can orient congregational life, identify priorities, set objectives and devote resources.

For more information on the Benchmarks, please see [How Congregations Thrive – A Prelude to the Benchmarks](#); [A Listing of the Benchmarks for Healthy Congregations](#); [Benchmarks Related to Vision \(with Commentary\)](#); [Benchmarks Related to Vitality \(with Commentary\)](#); [Benchmarks Related to Viability \(with Commentary\)](#).

To act upon these convictions and work toward its desired outcomes, *Shaped by a Living Hope* consists of three interrelated components:

2. Congregational Assessment

The purpose of this component of *Shaped by a Living Hope* is to explore key aspects of each congregation's life in order to better assess its health and sustainability, and to determine how effectively we are forming disciples and engaging in God's mission in local communities throughout the Diocese.

Over a period of a little more than two years, the assessment process will be undertaken by each congregation in cooperation with its Deanery Assessment Team (A-Team), supported by the Diocesan Congregational Development Officer (CDO) and your deanery's Program Associate (PA).

In most instances, this exercise will provide congregations an opportunity to experience new life by identifying concrete steps toward becoming healthier, stronger and more missionally oriented. Overall, the assessment process is also designed to help parish, deanery and Diocesan leadership, to...

- make wise, faithful decisions toward the fulfillment of our Diocesan mission;
- lead us toward the vision we have identified as a Diocese;
- rationalize buildings and resources within the Diocese - particularly to ensure we continue to support our thriving congregations, expand strategic ministries where there are inadequate resources at present, and identify and support emerging missional opportunities



- encourage us to live and serve joyfully as signs of God's Kingdom, better reflecting the dignity and destiny that Christ has won for every human being.

For more information on the assessment process, please see [What's Assessment All About?](#)

To act upon these convictions and work toward its desired outcomes, *Shaped by a Living Hope* consists of three interrelated components:



3. Workshops, Consultations, Training and Resources

Shaped by a Living Hope offers a suite of workshops, consultations and other resources to help inspire, equip, promote and enhance vibrant and faithful congregations in Algoma. Drawing upon relevant “real world” examples, these offerings are responsive to the benchmarks and convictions of *Shaped by a Living Hope* in particular, and to the objectives of Algoma’s Strategic Plan overall.

Workshops and consultations, training and resources for congregations and deaneries are being developed, revised or acquired on a continual basis to cover key principles, tools and best practices in a variety of areas, including:

- the discernment of congregational vision and missional purpose,
- understanding congregational dynamics and cultivating imaginative innovation,
- principles and practicalities for fostering uplifting, transformative worship,
- engaging in biblical hospitality,
- exploring new models for creative and effective ministry,
- introducing and incorporating inquirers and newcomers into life in Christ through worship, formation and service,
- building sustainability through a disciplined process of discernment and planning, and the acquisition and allocation of resources.

All of these offerings can be customized to address the particular situation of a congregation or deanery and its context.

Please contact your deanery Program Associate or the office for Congregational Development for more information or to make arrangements for a workshop, training event or consultation.



Congregational Development
The Diocese of Algoma
Anglican (Episcopal) Church of Canada
P.O. Box 1168
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario
P6A 5N7 Canada
705-256-5061 x22
congdevelopment@dioceseofalgoma.com

Copyright © Diocese of Algoma.
Portions copyright © D. Jay Koyle and Eighth Day
Perspectives.
For those outside the Diocese of Algoma wishing to
copy or adapt this resource, please contact the
Congregational Development office for permission.