

# Diocese of New Jersey

## Accountability and Fair Share Task Force

### Report to the 229<sup>th</sup> Convention

*“But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” Ephesians 4:15-16*

Appointed in late February of 2012, the Accountability and Fair Share Task Force (AFSTF) was charged and challenged by Bishop Cuncill and the 228<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Convention with re-envisioning the existing formula and process under which our Diocesan Fair Share Asking was being administered. We ask you to join us in giving thanks for the members of our committee who accepted the call: Rev. Paul Van Sant, Sr., Chairman; Cheryl Browne, Paul Cooper, Paul DeSarno, Esq.; Rev. Canon Pedro Guzman; Rev. Dr. Frank Hubbard, Chaplain; Rev. Ted Moore, Dcn.; Rev. Canon Don Muller; Paul Murphy; Canon Chuck Perfater; and The Hon. Robert Scott; and for our staff liaisons, Canons Phyllis Jones, CFO and Connie White, Recording Secretary. We further ask you to join us in giving thanks for the 2003 Task Force, whose work has sustained us for 10 years, and for the 2009 Restructure Task Force whose work also provided much that was good, wise, faithful and useful for us to carry forward.

Meeting regularly every month from March, 2012 through January, 2013, the AFSTF sought to model what it meant to address this challenge as a matter of spiritual growth and response to the grace of God in our lives. That meant listening, praying and, learning.

So we listened: to the Word of God revealed in Bible passage reading and reflection before each meeting; to each other with respect for our diverse backgrounds and experience; and most of all, to you, through surveys, clericus meetings, conversations and convocational presentations. And we learned: not only from all the above, but from investigating our neighboring dioceses of similar size, demographics and history, and from convergent and concurrent work with our own Viability and Vitality Task Force.

And we prayed. On our own, with our congregations, at every Task Force meeting, every clericus meeting, and together with many of you at convocational worship. Prayer was so important to us, in fact, that we asked the Right Onward Visioning Committee for help with a framework to present our proposals in the context of worship at the Fall Convocations; as a part of growing up in every way into Christ and as an offering to Him. As with most new approaches, it was a work in progress from beginning to end. We are grateful for the collaboration, patience and engagement of everyone who joined in the process – most especially Bishop Cuncill, who met this extra demand on his nonexistent time and boundless creativity with constant grace and faithful support. We pray we may have learned through this approach how to better promote our Diocesan body’s growth in building itself up in love.

What, then, did we learn? Well, our preliminary data and our survey taught us the following:

- Almost half of our congregations have Operating Income (as indicated by Parochial Report Line A) below \$150,000; a level below which even basic mission and ministry becomes seriously impaired.
- Although many accept the Fair Share calculation as reasonable, financial constraints often make pledging difficult to fulfill.
- The Biblical tithe is seen as the minimum standard for giving towards which all of us should strive.
- Several calculation options would be acceptable to many; e.g., deductions, rolling averaging, graduated rates
- Combined minimum/additional (i.e. “mandatory/voluntary”) option is favored.
- Broad support exists for major elements of accountability.
- The need for change is broadly acknowledged and welcomed.

One area of our work that we recommend to this Convention as being ready for implementation is a revision to the Fair Share formula, which is shown below in comparison to the existing formula:

Current Formula				Proposed Revision		
Rate	Applied to portion of Income Base Between			If Income Base Is		Rate Applied to Entire Income Base
				Greater Than or Equal to	But Less Than	
10%	\$ -	and	\$ 50,000	\$ -	\$ 150,000	10%
PLUS				\$ 150,000	\$ 175,000	11%
13%	\$ 50,001	and	\$ 100,000	\$ 175,000	\$ 190,000	12%
PLUS				\$ 190,000	\$ 210,000	13%
16%	\$ 100,000	and	above	\$ 210,000	\$ 230,000	14%
				\$ 230,000	\$ 250,000	15%
				Above \$250,000		16%
Income Base = Parochial Report Line A for Most Recent Applicable Year				Income Base = Average of Parochial Report Line A over Most Recent Applicable 3 Years		

The primary feature of this revision is the expansion of the range of income base to which the lowest rate of 10% applies; raising the upper income limit from \$50,000 to \$150,000. This was to directly relieve more of those congregations whose Income Base is below \$150,000; the level at which even basic mission and ministry has become at risk. Another significant feature is the change of the income base itself, from being solely based on one year to being an average over three years, to help even out the effects of economic changes. Comparing the impact of the new formula on each of our congregations using 2012 data showed that 75 of them (50%) would have their asking reduced, 28 would remain unchanged, and 47 would increase; with the maximum increase for any individual congregation being \$4,500. As a step towards fairness, simplicity and viability for our shared ministries as a Diocese, we have recommended canonical change this year to implement this formula for the 2014 Fair Share Asking.

When it came to issues of accountability, however, our convocation meetings taught us that, even after a year of dedicated effort, discernment and deliberation, more work remains to be done. We further realized that, under the present system, we have no way to know the true range of reasons behind the struggles our congregations face, and how our Diocesan resources (both human and financial) might be better accessed and directed to address them. So the canonical change we request this year includes no provisions related to accountability, in order to allow us more time to do deeper work and refine our original proposal.

A key component of that original proposal that we believe will inform that deeper work is the concept of a group formed specifically to enhance and improve communication between those working with vitality and viability at the diocesan level and our congregations. We believe this communication is vital to our congregations in gaining and maintaining a better understanding of resources available to them, as well as to our diocesan leaders in understanding the situations our congregations face. In both cases, the goal is a better matching of resources to needs in order to ensure that our whole body is knit together and working properly in order to build ourselves up in love.

So rather than implement this as part of a systematic process using a “board of consultation”, we ourselves will become that group for the next year, engaging congregations on a voluntary basis to discuss these issues in greater depth. We encourage you to join with us in this by either accepting our request to meet with you or, better yet, inviting us to do so.

To that end, we recommend to Convention the following Resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the term of the Accountability and Fair Share Task Force be extended for another year, to continue to discern appropriate measures to promote deeper communication and mutual accountability regarding the Fair Share Asking process and report back to the 230<sup>th</sup> Convention in 2014.