

The Ontario Provincial Commission on Theological Education

(OPCOTE)

The Commission was created in 1995 and generally meets twice a year, spring and fall, with the meetings alternating between Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges in Toronto. The Commission is made up of members representing the four Colleges (programmes) in the Province involved in Anglican theological education and representatives of each of the seven dioceses who are knowledgeable about the theological needs and postulancy processes in their diocese .

The Colleges represented on the Commission are Huron, Canterbury, Renison, the Anglican Studies Program at St. Paul University, Thorneloe, Trinity, and Wycliffe. In addition, to aid in theological education in the Province, our dioceses contribute about \$140,000 a year to the OPCOTE General Fund. This money is then distributed among the Colleges according to a formula agreed on by the Commission members.

The Commission's Mandate:

- a) promote Anglican theological education, including post graduate studies;
- b) foster cooperation and mutual accountability among and between dioceses and theological institutions;
- c) encourage identification and sharing of resources in the theological institutions and the dioceses to meet specific and on-going needs for theological education;
- d) identify and coordinate research resources, available through the theological institutions and dioceses, required to investigate and address issues of common concern;
- e) assess the financial needs of the colleges and seek the financial support of the Church in the Province for them;
- f) assess the financial needs of students and seek the financial support of the Church in the Province for them;
- g) monitor individual and total diocesan funding of theological education;
- h) provide continuing annual financial support to the colleges, distinct from direct student assistance, through the General Fund;
- i) encourage provincial bishops to direct students preparing for ordination to provincial Anglican institutions of theological education;
- j) seek out opportunities to recognize theological education and the role of the theological institutions;
- k) monitor, encourage and report on discussions regarding the state of theological education in the Province, including curriculum and spiritual formation;
- l) monitor theological education initiatives and modes of delivery, including theological education by extension, distance education, diocesan, provincial or national programmes and aboriginal and multi-ethnic initiatives;
- m) encourage periodic meetings of heads of colleges in Ontario, directors of field education, faculty, bishops, along with other diocesan personnel involved in theological training and ordination preparation;
- n) work for ecumenical cooperation between Anglican theological colleges and other theological education institutions; and
- o) engage in ecumenical discussion with respect to provincial government funding of theological education.

One of the major initiatives in the last triennium has been the work on Calling and Forming Priests for Tomorrow's Church

Calling and Forming Priests for Tomorrow's Church

Pathways to Partnership

Report on the Provincial Priority on Calling and Forming Priests for Tomorrow's Church, June 2022 – May 2024

Archbishop Anne Germond, on behalf of the Provincial Executive Council, issued an invitation in March 2022 to the provincial bishops, and the diocesan and institutional leaders responsible for formation and education of priests, to a multipart, facilitated conference on *Calling and Forming Priest for Tomorrow's Church*, sponsored by the Ecclesiastical Province. There is a perceived urgency to respond in faith and in action to this matter. Particularly amid significant changes in demographics, attitudes, practices, and culture, especially since the COVID pandemic, in society and particularly in the church, along with a marked decreased number of vocations to priestly ministry.

The Metropolitan wrote, "We have so much to do, and it is absolutely critical that every voice be heard. The Mission of the Church continues in hope and promise. We must ensure that capable leadership is in place to guide and encourage us in this work."

The goal was to foster conditions for **"Provincial bishops, dioceses, and colleges to work collaboratively to discern vocations for priestly ministry for the church of tomorrow, and together prepare them effectively for ordination and life-long formation."**

The first of three gatherings, co-chaired by Bishops Susan Bell and John Chapman, was held at the Nottawasaga Inn, Alliston on June 21-23, 2022| attended by 34 bishops, diocesan administrative officers, deans or designates of the theological colleges representing every diocese and college in Ontario, along with three Lutheran partners.

In advance, participants received Bishop Todd Townshend's paper on the historical and theological context for formation and training of clergy today, and current statistical data on theological education prepared by Professor Chris Brittain. Dr. Brittain preached the opening

homily challenging us as we “set out to plot a fragmentary but faithful way as we respond to the initiative of God.” Throughout, the conferences were grounded in liturgy and prayer. How do we play our part in identifying and fostering the vocations of those whom God is calling?

The Conference addressed the issue under three headings:

- Discipleship and Vocational Discernment
- Intensive/Accelerated Education and Formation
- Lifelong Learning & Vocational Development

For each of these topics, the participants considered:

- what is (the current context and culture)
- what could be (aspirational alternatives and improvements)
- what will be (implementing practical steps to move us closer to the desired outcomes)

From the many proposals identified (and recorded for future development), the group chose **five specific areas of interest to develop immediate action steps** to move toward the goal for the province. (The Lutheran members determined a set of priorities for themselves, in addition.) While these are not the only priorities possible, we thought they might be the ones providing the greatest leverage opportunities to make a difference.

Participants self-selected to form teams to draft action plans on their topic, and designated a contact person to initiate follow-up with the team post-conference.

The five immediate action areas are:

1. **Structural integrations/governance** (advocacy and structural/cultural change)
2. **Incubators** (the role of places/people in identifying and nurturing vocations).
3. **Vocations conference** (promoting vocations)
4. **Mentorship** (in school and post-ordination support)
5. **Lifelong Learning** (on-going formation)

Initial actions were proposed, key next steps identified, and responsibilities assigned.

Two subsequent, half-day gatherings with a smaller group from the same participants (bishops, executive officers and theological college heads, but not the Lutheran partners) took place – September 2023 at Christ’s Church Cathedral, Hamilton and March 2024 at the Toronto Diocesan Centre. These were scheduled to coincide with meetings of Provincial Executive Council and Ontario Provincial Council on Theological Education (OPCOTE). These consultations used the same process to refine and advance work on the five action areas.

Between the plenary gatherings, each working group met virtually to develop strategies and

begin to implement their plans.

We consider this to be an iterative learning process that will take time and include plan modifications in order to implement both the practical and cultural changes necessary to achieve the goal. There are numerous, interdependent and independent stakeholders in this process and the Ecclesiastical Province's authority to implement the goal is limited to its ability to convene, persuade and support them in making the needed changes. This influence is not, however, insubstantial even though it is indirect.

Outcomes and Learnings

- Vocations and the forming priests were identified as the leading priority for the Council's attention during the triennium.
- Some of the initiatives were not the direct result of the action groups' plans but were shoots growing in individual diocesan contexts from seeds of ideas planted during the conversations at the conference or from joint projects developed out of contacts made at the conference.
- We have identified points of leverage and barriers to implementation of changes. Some outcomes were determined to be overly optimistic in the short-term, e.g., a province-wide vocations conference would be too expensive, and not focused enough to address the specific contexts of diocesan ministries. Diocesan and joint regional vocations conferences are being considered.
- The constraints of theological college accreditation and historic institutional cultures mitigate against quick changes in educational curriculum and delivery. On the other hand, a spin-off of these consultations has been the networking that has linked some diocesan training programs to theological colleges with course work accreditation (such as the Niagara School for Missional Leadership) that aligns with conference proposals. This will supplement, rather than replace, traditional Master of Divinity requirements. The recent advances in technology allow for greater flexibility in accessing training. This also supports life-long learning opportunities.
- Terms of Reference for a Life Long Learning Panel as a sub-group of OPCOTE were developed and members of the working group will work with OPCOTE to promote: curating a "suite" of post-ordination educational or training offerings, to be publicized regularly to clergy across the province; identifying gaps between existing offerings in colleges or other institutions and the learning needs of clergy as determined by OPCOTE in consultation with the House of Bishops; and, as required, creating needed offerings by engaging college or other providers.
- A new resources page for mentoring has been set up on Provincial website.
- Several dioceses are experimenting with assigning coaches/mentors to experienced rectors

moving into new appointments (as well as the newly ordained) to support life-long formation. Different models have been collected and posted on the webpage. We hope to create a network of mentors within the province to share best practices, normalize mentoring, access mentor training, and monitor learnings.

- Incubators: the conferences identified the phenomenon that certain parishes, people, youth ministries, colleges, play exceptional roles in identifying and encouraging vocations. Several dioceses have begun to consult with those key people to glean some best practices and see how this might be replicated more widely. A survey is being conducted across the province to identify commonalities and make recommendations.
- A Vocations Sunday, to highlight the need and the gift of vocations and to pray for them, has been identified (Easter 3) and initial resources prepared for circulation, with full implementation across the province next year with the support of the bishops.
- Upgrades for the provincial website to make it more engaging are planned.

We thank Synod for the opportunity to work with you on this critical initiative to serve the mission of Christ through our beloved Church.

Respectfully submitted,
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Co-facilitators