



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is "Listening in Spirit – Shaping Our Future Together"?

Every so often, whether as individuals, groups or even as a church, it helps to stop and ask some fundamental questions: Where are we going? Where do we want to be? How are we going to get there? At the organisational level, this type of big-picture work is often called a strategic plan. With the support of the Executive Council of the diocese, Bishop Stephen London is asking every member of our diocese to play their part in seeking a clearer understanding of where God is leading us as a church family and what we need to do to respond to that leading. That's what the *Listening in Spirit* process is all about.

We will begin our work together this spring, with a period of wide and careful listening to as many voices as we can about where and how we see the Holy Spirit of God at work in the church and world today, and the challenges and opportunities this presents to our parishes and diocese. All our experiences, perspectives and reflections are what form our collective story.

Later this year, we will use these insights to engage in intentional and prayerful discussion and discernment about what this might mean for how we focus our Christ-inspired energies, utilise our Spirit-given resources, and pursue our Gospel-centered goals. In doing this, we will be shaping our future together as co-creators with God and one another. This is the next step in journeying as a diocesan family of churches *Together on the Way* (Luke 24:13-35).

Our prayer is that the outcome of this process will help to guide our life and decision-making together as a diocese for at least the next five years.

Who will I be hearing from?

On behalf of the diocese, the Executive Council has engaged a consultant, Anna Bubel, of the firm Another Way, to help us thoughtfully consider our current state and position in the community and the broader world. Anna has decades of experience in supporting organisations that are adapting and innovating to respond to new realities and needs. Parishes will each have an opportunity to interact with Anna during their scheduled Engagement Session which will be described below.

Assisting Anna in this listening process is Jacqui Chesterton, a member of our diocesan family, who has great gifts in this type of work across a wide range of institutional contexts. Jacqui's main emphasis will be on research and data collection, and on setting up parish Engagement Session meetings from late April through to early June.

What form will this "listening" take?

Anna will use several key tools to help her do this important and timely work:

1. A survey of all parish members
2. A survey of all clergy in the diocese
3. Engagement Sessions with every parish in the diocese
4. One-on-one interviews with 16 diocesan leaders who represent a reasonable cross-section of perspectives

What is a Parish Engagement Session?

The Parish Engagement Session is an opportunity to look at the pieces of the story we have gathered thus far, based on quantitative data to your individual responses, to the parishioner survey and more. During this two-hour session, we will provide details around the *Listening in Spirit* process including key milestones and deliverables; we will validate the findings to date focusing on the strengths within each parish; and we will explore the opportunities facing each parish. Each parish will also be provided with a summary report of findings that includes various data collected, as well as an overview of the survey responses. All attendees will have the opportunity to expand on the findings, ask questions, provide clarifications and further build out the story of your parish, and its place in the diocese.

There are 46 parishes in the Diocese of Edmonton, so it is imperative that these sessions are booked soon. We want to engage as many people as possible, so please try to embrace this as a priority in your parish and

encourage everyone to participate as they are able, and to share openly throughout.

What is required of my parish in the Engagement Session?

We require a meeting space, presentation tools (screen, projector, flip chart, or large Post-It sheets that stick on the wall) and refreshments.

Ideally, we would like to meet in a church hall with tables and chairs arranged for small group discussions. Other seating arrangements can work depending on what works in your facility. If finding suitable space in your parish building is for some reason impossible, meeting in a neighbouring church or even renting a nearby community space may be options to explore. Talk to the Synod Office if you need support looking into such possibilities.

Please have a projector and screen set up in the space before the start of the meeting, so that Anna can show PowerPoint slides. If you do not have access to that technology or need help with it, please let the Synod Office know. Depending on the space you are meeting in, the ability to use microphones and audio equipment may enhance the experience.

Beyond these logistical needs, we also hope that everyone who participates does so with an open spirit and prayerful heart, trusting that we are all in this together and working as a team. We may have a few differences of opinion about the most appropriate ways to move, but with the Gospel at the center, we can trust that our desired destination is the same.

Can we do our Engagement Session online?

The nature of these big conversations and the methodology that Anna will employ to facilitate them, do not easily lend themselves to digital engagement. For that reason, we are strongly encouraging every parish to have their Engagement Sessions in person. We recognise that this may present obstacles to participation for some members. Arrangements for hybrid online participation for some parishioners can be accommodated when essential, but the parish would need to make arrangements to have the technology set up and for someone to act as the online host. If there are questions about this, please speak to the Synod Office contacts.

Will food and childcare be provided?

The diocese has a small amount of money budgeted to assist each parish with light snacks and refreshments that may be served during the Parish Engagement Sessions. Depending on the time of day when a parish wishes

to schedule its meeting, there may be a desire to offer additional food options. In this case, it would be up to the parish to provide a light lunch.

Parishes may wish to make childcare available to enable families to attend and participate. We understand that asking for volunteers to offer this from among the parishioners undermines the purpose. While the diocese does not have the human resources to provide external people for this service, a parish that would like to offer paid childcare, but would require financial support to do so, may speak to the Synod Office about possibilities. Safe Church policies must continue to apply whenever children are being left in care under parish supervision.

How will all this information be used?

In part, the answer to this question depends on everything else we learn as we go. But, in general, we are doing this listening and reflection to have as much information as possible about the opportunities and challenges in front of us as parishes of this diocese, and the diocese. We know that God is faithful, and that God continues to have a plan for the ministry and witness of the Anglican way of following Jesus in Edmonton and central Alberta. We have identified some core values that we believe define the kind of Church that God is calling us to be in the 2022 document [*Finding Our Way*](#). This will serve as a vision to keep in front of us. What we need to figure out together is what we need to do to move in that direction, embody those commitments, and sustain our witness and service for the long haul. That is why we need all the input we can get! We are aware this will not be straightforward or easy, and we expect it will require a lot of trust and perseverance from everyone involved. But we know we are stronger when we work together, and we are committed to not leaving anyone behind.

What does this have to do with Synod 2024?

The Diocese of Edmonton will have the next regular gathering of Synod from October 18 to 19, 2024. By this point in the year, we expect to have a mid-way report on all the information and insight we have gathered through *Listening in Spirit | Shaping Our Future Together*. Like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, we will then sit down together and seek to recognise Jesus anew amid all those wonderings, worries and words. Our Synod gathering will be shaped by reflecting on the findings of the report and focused on beginning to identify concrete plans and next steps. Again, like the early followers of Christ walking along on a new path, it is when we turn the uncertainty of our story and our journey over to God, that we begin to discern, *Hearts Burning Within Us* (Luke 24:32), not our own next steps, but a God-given way.

Who can I contact if I have other questions or concerns?

Please direct additional inquiries to the Strategic Planning Project Coordinator Greg Heaton, gheaton994@gmail.com; or to the Canon to the Ordinary, the Rev. Dr. Scott Sharman ssharman@edmonton.anglican.ca .