

## **REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR EVANGELISM, CHURCH GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT (Revitalization & REC100)**

To the One Hundred Forty-Third Council of the Diocese of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic

As we have heard Bishop Gillin speak about on a number of occasions, the need to see parishes revitalized and new works begun in our diocese is great. This committee exists to assist in these areas but it must be said that the work of evangelism, church planting, and revitalization is not properly the work of a committee of the diocese, rather such duties belong to the clergy and laity who are in the parishes and missions of the diocese.

To put it another way, it is our conviction that *churches* plant churches, committees do not plant churches. Likewise, the work of parish revitalization is not usually accomplished through some agency outside of the parish itself. What is needed is for rectors or vicars to have a healthy (biblically informed) sense of dissatisfaction with the current condition of their parish, combined with a clear sense of where they believe God is calling them to lead their congregation (to which is then added a strategic plan). All of this is to say that *this committee* cannot revitalize or plant churches, for that is the calling of the local pastor and the leadership team that he develops around him.

What, then, is the purpose of this committee and what have we done in the past year to accomplish this purpose?

*Our Purpose.* The purpose of this committee is to assist, guide, inspire, and resource the clergy and lay leadership of our diocese in the work of church planting and parish revitalization. To that end, we are available for consultation, encouragement, and as a means of providing support to anyone in our diocese who has a vision to establish a new work and/or who desires to more intentionally pursue greater parish health.

Before moving on to describe some of the new missions and works that are currently underway, I think it important to elaborate upon that final phrase: “intentionally pursue greater parish health.” Do we desire to see our parishes grow? Yes, of course. But the worse possible strategy for those who desire growth is to *focus upon growth* itself. Our focus should instead be upon parish health. Healthy things grow. Therefore, some of the fundamental questions that every rector/vicar might ask himself is: “What are the characteristics of a healthy Reformed Episcopal parish?”, “How does my parish measure up?” and “How is God calling me to lead my parish into greater health?” If you would like help (or simply a sounding board) in answering these questions ... we are here for you! Please reach out.

*The Past Year.* I would imagine that every parish has a story to tell about how the Lord has blessed them and their ministry over the course of the past year, and thus it is dangerous to publish a list such as what follows, for it inevitably is incomplete. But that being said, we did think it wise to share a few updates as to how God’s Spirit seems to be at work, bringing revitalization and new growth in a number of our parishes. That the following is predominantly located within my deanery is simply owing to the fact that these are the stories with which I have the greatest familiarity:

**“Front Porch” Ministry: English as a Second Language at St. Luke’s/Bp. Hoffman.** We are very sorry to report that our efforts to obtain an R1 visa for The Reverend Ernest Nadeem were not successful. Fr. Nadeem is an Anglican presbyter from Pakistan, who had been working in Sri Lanka. After visiting here, he desired to join us in the diocese and lead a church planting initiative, especially among Pakistanis and South Asians.

When he asked how we thought he should begin, he was given a list of about 6 ideas, out of which he chose ESL. Chris and Naomi Morris, who had recently returned to St Mark's from teaching English in a Chinese university, volunteered to work with Fr. Nadeem. Together they planned free classes on Saturday mornings, starting in late April 2022. Fr. Nadeem and Chris placed advertisements in shops along Frankford Avenue which Fr Nadeem had already visited. But even before the first class was held, Fr. Nadeem had to return to Sri Lanka.

On opening day, we were happy to see about 6 students. A textbook was selected and resources added from the English courses in China. In 2022, our average attendance gradually grew to about 12 students. All the students were from various Latin American countries, speaking Spanish or Portuguese. Many were within walking distance from St. Luke's.



To the fall of 2023, attendance continued growing to over 20 students each week. We were able to add more teachers, and divided the students into 3 classes at different levels.

Then in late September 2023, a steady stream of new students arrived from Haiti, adding French to our languages. Some them had only arrived in America within the previous week. Our first Haitian student had opened contact with the Haitian ethnic grapevine. Then suddenly in October 2023, we were joined by about 20 Chinese students from the Chinese church plant. Now averaging over 40 students per week, a new course of grammar worksheets was created for the advanced class.

God has blessed this program with growth of seven times. Many of the Latin students have a Catholic

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Nov Term: **Nov 4 to December 16, 2023**  
New students: **10:10 am any Saturday**  
Classes: **10:30 am - 12 noon**  
Place: **St Luke's RE Church**  
**6701 Frankford Avenue,**  
**Philadelphia, PA 19135**  
Email: [vicarstlukesrec@gmail.com](mailto:vicarstlukesrec@gmail.com)

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background, and some have visited St. Luke's Sunday services. Many of the Chinese students are Christians, and are already members of the Chinese church plant. Our prayer is for more of the Latin students to join with St. Luke's, and begin a Spanish language outreach to their local community in Mayfair.

There are about 60,000 immigrants living in lower Northeast Philadelphia, from many different countries. The potential for Christian ministry in that area is unlimited. Pray for God's anointing of people, and guidance of their work there.

(Ministries like this are called “front porch” ministries, because they're meant to be relatively non-churchy ways of establishing relationships with people who are not yet in the church, and who may not be comfortable venturing much further than the proverbial front porch.)



**Church Plant.** John and Lillian Liu are Christians of Chinese origin, whose relationship with the REC began six years ago when they enrolled their daughter in the Classical Academy of St. Mark's REC. After graduating from Westminster Theological Seminary, John served as an assistant pastor at an independent (non-denominational) Chinese church in northeast Philadelphia. His preaching, teaching, evangelism, and pastoral care helped the church to grow over a period of years. Lillian, right at his side, began a ministry to college students and young adults that grew enormously. Clearly the Lord was blessing their ministry.

In the midst of all this fruitfulness, the Lord was beginning to prepare John and Lillian for something new. John felt that God was calling him into the work of church planting, and this led him to wonder whether an independent and non-denominational church was the most biblical ecclesial expression for this new work. After a period of discernment, John and Lillian decided to step out in faith and to lead a new church planting initiative through St. Mark's Church.

Beginning in mid-August, John and his family have been worshiping at St. Mark's every Sunday and a growing number of his friends and acquaintances are joining them (52 adults and children from their group were here on 10/22/23, with a weekly average of about 30). The phrase that I have been using with John and his group is: “Before you can go out, you have to fully come in.” What I mean by this is that John and the core of what we hope will be a future church of our diocese, must be fully incorporated into the life of the REC before they are sent out to establish a new work.

What this means for John is that he will need to make application to become a postulant of our diocese, after which he will go through our entire canonical process (which is quite involved)



and following a season of training and preparation, he will be examined to determine if he can enter into holy orders within the REC. (Already John is attending the Liturgics Practicum class each week at the Reformed Episcopal Seminary).

If I had to choose a phrase to describe the approach to church planting in which we are engaging, I would call it “a church within a church” approach. For though, on the one hand, we are seeking to fully incorporate John and his team into an existing REC parish (St. Mark’s Church), the hope is that after a season of preparation, John will be sent out to establish a new church, taking with him a committed group of fellow laborers.



Part of John's preparation will include reading the Anglican Divines with Fr. Maule and the Fellows, attending classes at the Reformed Episcopal Seminary, as well as a week-long church planting intensive training course in early December, bi-monthly coaching sessions with Fr. Melton of the REC100, and regular meetings with me.

In the short term, John and his group will continue to worship with us, as the group grows and becomes catechized as to the Anglican Way of being a Christian. On Sunday afternoons (1:30) John will continue to lead a time of prayer and hymn singing in Chinese. These afternoon gatherings include an address from me, Fr. Maule, or a member of the Fellows – as we give instruction as to the doctrinal distinctives of the Reformed Episcopal Church.



We are currently preparing a group of adults and children for baptism, and will then catechize them in preparation for Confirmation.

**Taking the Church into Nursing Homes.** A third ministry initiative taking place in our diocese is through the auspices a ministry called “Heritage Mission.” From their website: “Heritage Mission brings the church to care facilities with little to no Christian presence. We do this by empowering leaders to facilitate a brief worship service and minister to and alongside of residents. We provide training and resources to support the creation of these churches and to nurture them as they grow.” Fr. Luth (Ontario) and the Fellows at St. Mark’s Church are working with Heritage Mission to establish new ministries focused upon bringing the hope of the gospel into nursing care facilities near to our parishes.

**Church Plant out of Grace REC, Scranton, Pa.** On September 7, 2023, Bishop Jenkins, Archdeacon Abboud and Bishop Gillin traveled to Tunkhannock Presbyterian Church in Tunkhannock, PA to meet with Deacon Jared Lovell and Evan Hughes and to tour this church property. They were met by Mr. John Davenport, a lifetime member of the church. The congregation of this church has dwindled and the property is up for sale for \$200,000. Several newly confirmed members of Grace Church, Scranton, who live in the Tunkhannock area, alerted Deacon Lovell about the church sale. A group of people, including the new Grace Church members, have been regularly meeting for a Bible study on Friday evenings and their homes have outgrown the capacity to host the studies. This church can provide a more spacious meeting place for the study and worship services. The Tunkhannock church has provided year-end financial reports for the past three years which show expenses for maintenance, utilities and insurance to help determine if this acquisition is feasible. Another concern is the cost of required governmental regulations that may be required upon the transfer of the deed. The building purchase is still under consideration by the vestry of Grace Church, Scranton, PA. Pray for God's wisdom and leading to help determine if the building purchase is feasible to help advance the ministry in this place.

Respectfully Submitted,

Fr. Patterson