

The Rev'd Nicole Critch

Nomination for Bishop of Western Newfoundland & Labrador Straits

Responses to Nomination Questions

Date: March 25th, 2026

Question 1

What would be your top priority as bishop for the Diocese of Western Newfoundland (Labrador Straits) over the first year of episcopacy?

My focus for the first year of my Episcopate will be to achieve greater trust by making the Diocese more accountable, more transparent and more secure both physically and relationally. The last year has been traumatic and extremely challenging for many within our region. Before we are in a position to plan for the future, to discuss mission, visions and growth, there is a significant amount of work that is required to address the spiritual, relational and operational hurt that has been experienced by clergy, lay leaders and parishes across the Diocese. As I reflect on the Diocese of Western NL and Labrador Straits, three words keep arising in my mind and heart. They are: Heal, Equip, Re-imagine.

1. Listening and Healing

My first reaction would be to enter into a “Season of Listening”. I would ask all parishes and their clergy, as well as lay leaders, to engage in this season with me. This would not be about rehashing old arguments but rather about acknowledging the hurt that has been done, naming the wounds, and recognizing that others have had very different experiences than our own. It is only when we have taken some steps to try to heal these wounds that we will be ready to think about our future and begin to consider and discuss developments and changes. A Church that is itself broken and wounded will not be in a position to help others discover a more whole and healthier way of spiritual life. Safe Church initiatives will be an important consideration as we plan for the future.

2. Rebuilding Healthy Governance and Communication

Clear and effective communication is at the heart of developing and maintaining trust in any relationship. As a Diocesan leader, it is important to analyze present communication procedures, provide insight into canon law in relation to the procedures and support equitable and transparent decision-making processes within the Diocese.

3. Support Clergy and Lay Leaders

Clergy and lay Leaders have carried a heavy burden. Pastoral support, spiritual refreshment, and rebuilding of collegial bonds are necessary for leaders, clergy and laity in the initial year of a new Diocesan plan. Also necessary is training for lay leaders and a call to total parish involvement.

You can't vision your way out of trauma as a diocese; you have to vision your way into healing. My first year as your Bishop, if given this opportunity, is about creating a new environment in which we, as a diocese, can start to dream of a different future – a future of hope, and of shared purpose where we can work together.

Question 2

Our Constitution requires a strategic plan for the diocese. What would be the main components of your plan?

My strategic plan has a first year focused on restoration and healing, and then multi-year goals that can be adjusted to fit the needs of our diocese. I have discerned and placed great thought into this so that it is pastoral and has a Gospel -centered focus. This plan has five interrelated elements.

1. A Clear & Shared Vision Rooted in Healing and Renewal

Our pilgrimage will begin with the formation of a diocesan vision through a period of consultation with clergy, lay leaders, and congregations. At this time, it is crucial to move to a more collaborative and Spirit – guided period of collectively discerning a vision that will help us to become more aware of our identity, values and understanding of what God is calling us to be as Christians in this particular place and time. The vision will serve to guide us as we continue to pray, listen and respond to God’s leading as we seek to carry out God’s plans for our Diocese. A shared vision becomes the compass for every decision that follows.

2. Strengthening Trust, Communication, and Safe Church

As we begin this renewal journey with the Diocese, we can start by working on trust with communication, through discernment and through Safe Church practices that are understanding, just and relationally based. A safe diocesan culture is the rich soil in which all ministries will grow and be lived. Our renewal plan will help us to determine the actions and practices needed to ensure that healthy communication, role clarity and responsibility, and a safe, dignified experience of ministry are present in our diocese.

3. Sustainable Models of Ministry for Rural and Coastal Communities

Our geography is both a blessing and a challenge. Our region is one of many small, committed churches that are deeply rooted in their communities. The plan will seek to explore several models of ministry, which will enable us to live and support the realities of our communities – alternative forms of shared ministry, lay leadership, and regional partnerships and diocesan partnerships. The goal is to bring the Gospel to life among us. We may not be able to return to the Church of 1980, but we can be the faithful people of the Church of 2026. Some ideas that may be already happening or to perhaps consider as we begin to reimagine our ministry during the season of restoration and healing are:

- smaller, spiritually deep congregations
- church as presence, not program
- fewer committees, more prayer and service
- measuring faithfulness rather than attendance

People are tired of being told they are failing because numbers are down. I recognize that.

4. Clergy & Lay Formation, Support, and Well-Being

Fewer clergy will carry more leadership responsibilities. I do not want to burden you with more work, but to provide for the complete participation of all members of the “Body of Christ”. A healthy diocese has healthy leaders. The vision plan contains diocesan commitments to train, spiritually form and provide supportive networks of fellowship for clergy and lay ministers in the years ahead through a variety of educational, spiritual discernment, networking, and resource-

building opportunities. Invest in clergy and lay ministry, and you invest in the future of our Diocese.

5. Stewardship, Financial Clarity, and Responsible Planning

Stewardship is a serious and vital issue, requiring both honesty and creativity. There is a need for accountability, accurate planning and imaginative outreach to the community and within the stewardship structure of the Church. Stewardship is directly related to our fulfilling God's purpose in giving us what we need for ministry and for stewardship.

This is not an administrative plan. This is a pastoral and missional plan. In our initial days together, we shall be focusing on the theme of healing. If given the opportunity, as your bishop, I shall be visiting each of the parishes and deaneries to spend time with you, to continue to listen and guide your days ahead. A strategic plan is not something that is left on a shelf. It is a plan to which we shall commit ourselves as we embark on a journey of faith. A journey of faith which we shall have confidence and hope for an exciting future filled with purpose.

Question 3

How would you work to build relationships with various groups and their leadership both within our diocese and across the wider church?

Bishops are relationship builders. Our dioceses across the world are complex, fragile systems that have been stretched, pushed, divided, hurt, confused, and exhausted. Repairing and rebuilding relationships is a pastoral ministry that will require leadership, but also a willingness to be vulnerable and to work together. I promised to take on this responsibility with humility, an open heart and a listening ear.

Relationship building in our diocese begins with presence and respect for diversity within the communities among whom we live and serve. Our community is rich and complex. There are many aspects of diversity, including LGBTQ 2S plus people, Indigenous peoples, and other people and communities who may not have felt included or recognized in the past. Relationship building within our diocese and community means celebrating and honouring our diversity as a source of strength and recognizing that all people belong in our community with dignity and safety.

In the future, I plan to strengthen our relationships through mutually learning partnerships. Your first experience of me, and of a Bishop visiting your parish, will obviously be my presence in your community. Although you may be used to having the bishops celebrate Eucharist or visit your parish for special occasions, I would like to visit families so that you and I may get to know each other a little better. Some of you will feel that you have always been a part of the church, while others may never have felt a part of the church as a family. This is an area which needs much attention and care. I wish to visit the hospitals and senior homes in your communities, so that these people may be seen and supported in episcopal ministry.

Listening circles for clergy and lay leaders need to have space to be able to talk about things without fear of judgment or penalties over differing opinions. I will strive to support and accompany church leaders as they work to create safe and welcoming environments in their

churches, communities and in the world around them. A safe culture exists when people feel that they can give their opinions and have them heard.

I promised to nurture and deepen relationships within the diocese with the worldwide Anglican Communion and other ecumenical and community organizations. I hope to share models and learn from each other. I hope to celebrate achievements, as we work side by side in justice, reconciliation and inclusion. We as Anglicans worldwide can enhance our Global Witness by being good and faithful neighbours.

This will include engagement with provincial and national deaneries and organizations, deepening our connections with the Indigenous people and acknowledging and celebrating the gifts and ministries of our LGBTQ 2 S brothers and sisters in the wider world of the Anglican Communion.

I believe the church is a human institution and therefore must be a community of love. Our relationships in the church cannot be a means to an end. The end of the church is the gospel. Our relationships are ways we live out the gospel. I hope that in the future, diocesan relationships and our relationships in the larger church will be such that we shall find common ground and be effective missionaries in the world around us.