



Presbyterian Mission
**Theology, Formation
& Evangelism**

Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative



Developing the 7 Marks of Vital Congregations



Vital Congregations Manual

The Office of Vital Congregations

Theology, Formation & Evangelism Department

Presbyterian Mission Agency, PC(USA)

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Vision Statement for Vital
Congregations Initiative

Vital Congregations

Section

I





Vision Statement for Vital Congregations Initiative

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

ISAIAH 43:19

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16

See, the home of God is among mortals...See, I am making all things new.

REVELATION 21:3,5

Vision:

By the power of the Holy Spirit, and in authentic relationships with mid councils, we seek to equip, nurture and support church leaders to empower their congregations to renew, recover and live more fully into faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ.

Purpose:

The purpose of the Vital Congregations Initiative is to work alongside mid council leadership, and leaders of existing congregations, in a process that seeks to help assess, discern and live into transformative actions that increase vitality. Through intentional spiritual practices and relational connections, this two-year process takes us deeper into following Jesus Christ, making disciples and being the vital community of Christ throughout particular communities and the world.

Values:

- Courage, conviction, and commitment to faithful discipleship
- Prayerful discernment
- Reliance upon Scripture
- Persistence — emboldened/enacted faith
- Honest assessment
- Resilience
- Intentional pursuits of reconciliation
- Hopefulness in change

What we believe:

- This is a necessary re-turn to God and re-forming of God's people
- This is a crucial time of awakening throughout our neighborhoods, nation and world
- The Holy Spirit's power is changing, re-forming, revitalizing the Church
- This is necessary to rediscover faithful discipleship in 21st century context
- God is calling the Church to transform and transcend cultures and contexts
- We must move from inward institutions to neighborhood relationships and mission

What this initiative is:

We hope that this is the beginning of intentional, authentic relationships between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Mission Agency and mid council leaders and pastors to:

- Come together as the people of God
- Pray: re-turn to faithfulness in God
- Inspire openness to the Holy Spirit's transformation/change
- Honestly assess, discern and act
- Resource, equip and support leaders and pastors
- Practice missional evangelism and faithful discipleship
- Equip vital congregations and develop a praxis of sustainability and ongoing assessment
- Capture congregational stories and develop new measurements of vitality

What this is NOT:

- A universal program instructing churches and assuring vitality and sustainable life
- Another plan that promises an immediate fix
- A guarantee of revitalization for every congregation
- An attempt for the PC(USA) to tell churches what to do
- An institutional survival guide for membership, numbers and buildings
- An encouragement to tweak, yet remain the same
- A return to glory days gone by, nor a guidebook on calling the young pastor

Overview:

The Vital Congregations Initiative is a two-year covenant relationship between presbyteries and the PC(USA) to prayerfully walk with pastors and existing congregations in intentional efforts of revitalization.

Year 1 seeks to (re)build authentic relationships of faith. Churches will embark on an honest assessment, capturing their unique stories, confessing their realities, and discerning the Spirit's call to action. From Seven Marks of Vital Congregations, churches will determine a course within Three Actions:

- 1 **Re-forming churches** — re-envision and change how we are church together through the Seven Marks of Congregational Vitality
- 2 **Missional Clustering of churches** — revitalize by clustering congregations into new communities of worship and ministry
- 3 **Death and Resurrection of churches** — revitalize by grace and gratitude in the death and legacy of a congregation, in witness to the resurrection

Year 2 is about joining Christ in the new thing taking place, allowing the wonder of God to transform, and faithfully living into change. Through Seven Marks and Three Actions, we pray God will revitalize the church in missional action and faithful discipleship in Jesus Christ throughout our neighborhoods, our nation and the world.

• **Year 1: Relational**

• **Year 2: Incarnational**

Revitalizing Churches in Three Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection

Overview of Seven Marks
of Vital Congregations

Vital Congregations

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II





Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

1

LIFELONG Discipleship Formation vs.

Complacent “Christian” piety, simply teaching good morals, or offering the latest programs.

“The righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God based on faith.” (PHIL. 3:9B)

- From the cradle to the grave seeking to be formed for right living with God and with all people.
- Faith — seeking understanding, cultivating wisdom, and actively following Christ. It is not an extra-curricular activity nor merely head-knowledge.
- Discipleship awakened and engaged in issues facing today’s culture: injustice, inequality, divisive segregation, oppression, suffering, abuse of creation.
- Discipleship formed and strengthened in the community of Christ and permeates daily practices and daily living.

2

Intentional Authentic Evangelism vs.

“Jesus freaks”; “Christian” Hypocrisy; A committee responsibility.

“We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God.” (2 COR. 4:7)

- Intentionally sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, not just acts of kindness.
- Authentically sharing Christ because it is intrinsic to self-identity; overflow of Christ in our life.
- Relational, not programmatic or systematic.

3

Outward Incarnational Focus vs.

Inward Institutional Survival; Closed communities of assimilation/exclusion.

“The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (MATT. 7:14)

- Outward exploration, awareness, and focus on neighbors and neighborhood.
- Beyond relationship with those who are like us, the incarnate Christ dwells among the lowly & least, the stranger & the suffering, the marginalized & majority.
- Missional focus on where Christ is already living and present and calling us to dwell.

4

Empower Servant Leadership vs.

the Pastor’s job; monopolized leadership; hiring the young energetic pastor; burning out good volunteers.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.” (MATT. 9:37–38)

- Identify, nurture, support the use of spiritual gifts of all people to serve; not monopolized cliques of power.
- All voices and people are necessary, and it is noticeable when people are absent/missing.
- Nurture and encourage those specifically called and gifted for pastoral ministry.

5

Spirit-Inspired Worship vs. *Self-gratifying worship, stale ritual divorced of meaning, or consumer entertainment worship.*

“These people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote.” (ISAIAH 29:13)

- Worship is about God. We get to come on holy ground, encounter God, and experience wonder.
- Worship is active participation in the living relationship of the triune God, thus all should feel welcome just as they are to come.
- Worship challenges, teaches, transforms, encounters, convicts, and sends people out different.

6

Caring Relationships vs. *Any other Social Club; façades, hypocrisy, and judgment of “church” and “religion.”*

“By this everyone will know that you are disciples, if you have love for one another.” (JOHN 13:35)

- Sharing in God’s true agape moves us beyond half-hearted programmatic participation, lukewarm faith, and pretending.
- Instead of a closed, judgmental community, people find freedom to share stories, encounter the Savior, and ask for help.
- Welcome and hospitality are not left to a committee, but, imperfectly, we strive for all people find identity, purpose, and belonging in the household of God.
- Confront conflict, seek reconciliation in all divisions, find ways to embrace all diversity, seek to be peace-makers and bridge builders together.

7

Ecclesial Health vs. *Unhealthy dysfunction; toxic environments; obsolete and irrelevant buildings.*

“The body does not consist of one member but of many. God has so arranged the body that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.” (1 COR. 12:14, 24B–25)

- Understanding of: Why we are a church community? How are we a church community in practice? Prayer permeates all life together.
- Clarity in mission, core values to ministry, passion and joy in being the church. Our budget reflects these values, vision, and ministries.
- Fiscally responsible — stewardship and tithing are taught, transparency in spending, continual assessment/discernment of a sustainable budget.
- All are aware of how decisions are made, stake-holders in the process and procedures, valued voices in the envisioning, open to changes, continual assessment of the “why” and “how” we are church together.
- Nurturing and supporting the health of pastor(s), staff, and all called to lead; fighting against burnout.

Overview of Two-Year Vital Congregations Initiative

- Presbytery Guidelines
- Pastor & Church Guidelines
- Infographic
- Seven-Day Prayer Card

Vital Congregations

Section

III

Presbytery Guidelines Vital Congregations Initiative

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Basic Information and Presbyteries' Letters of Interest

II. Foundational Planning and Preparation

III. Year 1: Relational

Building Intentional Relationships and Honest Assessment of Congregations

A. Year 1 Objectives

B. Year 1 Description

C. Year 1 Resources

D. Year 1 Facilitator Role

IV. Year 2: Incarnational

Revitalizing Churches in Three Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection

A. Year 2 Objectives

B. Year 2 Description

C. Year 2 Resources

D. Year 2 Facilitator Role

V. Looking Ahead



The Journey Together

I. Where to Begin

Pray! This process of Vital Congregations begins with prayer and relationship together. Build a relationship with the Office of Vital Congregations. Read and share the Vital Congregations Manual and the Immediate Toolkit Resources with presbytery leadership and pastors. Finally, the process of submitting a “Letter of Interest” for your presbytery can be found in this manual. All dates and deadlines can be found by visiting the Vital Congregations webpage at pcusa.org/vitalcongregations. Click on “Basic Information Packet.”

II. Foundational Planning and Preparation

In order to discern the Spirit’s call to revitalization, we must ready ourselves as disciples of Christ Jesus so that we might truly follow where Christ is already at work and calling us to join. Therefore, prior to the Two-Year Vital Congregations Initiative, a maximum of 20 presbyteries will be selected, based upon their “Letters of Interest” for a Foundational Planning and Preparation relationship together with the Office of Vital Congregations. Likewise, each presbytery selected will be assigned one PC(USA) staff member and one Vital Congregations Team liaison. Finally, these presbyteries selected for the initiative will receive, “A Handbook to Preparation,” to help guide:

- **Prayer and faithfulness:** Centering our hearts and minds on Christ, who is the giver of all vital life together
- **Casting the vision:** Helping all to understand the two-year process
- **Re-forming intentional relationships:** Confession and reconciliation, where it is needed, and building covenant relationships together
- **Preparations:** Planning and envisioning that is inspired by the wonder of God and hope in Christ Jesus

III. Year 1: Relational

Building Intentional Relationships and Honest Assessment of Congregations

A. Year 1 Objectives:

- (Re)build genuine relationships among presbyteries, pastors and churches.
- Engage, as a presbytery and as individual churches, in confessional assessment and faithful discernment to where the Spirit is leading.
- Explore the congregational life story: who have we been, where are we now, and where is God moving us forward?

B. Year 1 Description:

1. **Pastor Cohorts** — Presbytery leaders have formed pastor cohort groups. These groups will begin to meet monthly during the two-year initiative for prayer, biblical and theological reflection, support and fellowship, case study and conversations around their particular ministry context.
 - For suggestions on forming Pastor Cohorts, see resource, “A Handbook to Preparation.”
 - PC(USA) Resource: 12 sessions will focus on the assessment of particular congregations and Seven Marks (See Year 1 Resources).

2. **Presbytery Meetings** — Presbytery leaders should plan time for debriefing, dialogue and checking in during regular scheduled presbytery meetings. Worship and prayer should invite time for the reflection of pastors' contexts.
 - Presbyteries may choose to plan workshops/seminars on the Seven Marks at each presbytery meeting.
 - Presbyteries practice and train pastors in conducting a Neighborhood Exegesis, and walking congregations through assessment and discernment.
3. **Presbytery Site Visits** — Presbytery leaders should plan a site visit to each congregation in Year 1. An intentional time of prayer should be offered with each congregation. Time for reflection, assessment, questions and sharing needs should be encouraged.
4. **Presbytery Prayer** — A time of prayer should be incorporated in the daily practices of presbytery leaders. Presbytery leadership should offer prayers for the pastors and congregations and walk through the Seven Marks Devotional.
 - This can be a ritualized practice in a particular time and space, or leaders can be assigned a list of congregations in which to pray for on their own each day.
5. **Presbytery Leaders Cohort** — Presbytery leaders are invited to attend the Evangelism Conference where time will be devoted to dialogue with other presbytery leaders and PC(USA) staff. Presbytery leaders and Vital Congregations facilitators will take part in quarterly Zoom meetings with PC(USA) staff and the other presbyteries walking through the Vital Congregations Initiative. They will participate in monthly Zoom calls with their Vital Congregations team liaison and receive quarterly calls from their PC(USA) staff liaison.
6. **Checking Our Marks** — (three months) Presbytery leaders should walk through an assessment of:
 - 1) Historical mapping
 - 2) Exploring our mission and ministry
 - 3) Identifying our congregations. Congregational assessment should be cross-referenced with congregations' own assessment from the "Show Your Marks" Campaign.
7. **"Show Your Marks" Campaign** — (two months) This campaign offers an opportunity for congregations to report their assessments and findings of Neighborhood Analysis Exercise and share their particular stories. Congregations will be asked to capture the vitality of the Seven Marks of Vital Congregations. Stories, videos and photos of existing congregations turned in to presbyteries every two years should mark a new type of denominational reporting. Beyond membership attendance, the vitality of life together should be highlighted throughout the denomination. The PC(USA) should share the stories of congregations who exist in joy and hope, in love and justice, for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This message needs to be reported more loudly than anxiety and fear over numbers and budgets.
 - Presbyteries may choose to ritualize receiving these reports in some way. For example, an Advent/Christmas worship service might invite the whole presbytery to bring their reports as an offering to God.

C. Year 1 Resources:

1. Vital Congregations Liturgy
2. Three-Session Congregation Assessment
3. Three-Session Presbytery Assessment
4. 12-Session Pastor Cohort Gathering
5. Seven Marks of Congregational Vitality Church-wide Study
6. "Show Your Marks" Campaign Report
7. Neighborhood Analysis Exercise
8. MissionInsite — Community Data

D. Year 1 Vital Congregations Facilitator Role:

In consultation with presbytery leadership, Vital Congregations facilitators can be consulted and/or deployed however they contractually determine and plan. Presbyteries and congregations will agree to pay

for travel expenses related to face-to-face visits from the facilitators. The PC(USA) encourages the use of the Vital Congregations facilitators during the third session of congregational assessment. Facilitators will administer gifts for:

1. Asking difficult questions for confessional discernment
2. Pastoral support and compassion in change
3. Conflict resolution within the church

IV. Year 2 Incarnational

Revitalizing Churches in Three Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection

A. Year 2 Objectives:

- Re-envisioning how we are called to be church.
- Openness to see God already at work, and courage to follow the Spirit into “new things.”
- Renewed discipleship in sharing the Good News with all people.
- Transformation in faithful actions:
 - 1) Re-forming churches --revitalize the Seven Marks of Vital Congregations
 - 2) Missional Clustering of churches -- revitalize by clustering congregations into new communities of worship and ministry
 - 3) Re-envisioning church — revitalizing by grace and gratitude in the death and legacy of a congregation, in witness to the resurrection

B. Presbytery Year 2 Description:

1. **Pastor Cohorts — Pastor cohorts will continue to meet monthly.**
 - A 13-session resource will be provided by the PC(USA). The resource, written by Dr. William P. Brown of Columbia Theological Seminary, will help pastors delve into the wonder of the Bible and theology, while encouraging pastors to consider their own sense of wonder and imagination in church revitalization today.
 - Pastor cohorts will take turns sharing the Neighborhood Analysis of their particular contexts. The PC(USA) will offer data analysis of contextual neighborhoods. (MissionInsite)
2. **Presbytery Meeting —** Presbyteries should allow time for pastors to share and pray for revitalization efforts. Seminars/workshops should be offered to help pastors move congregations into the action of:
 - 1) Re-forming church — revitalizing the Seven Marks of Congregational Vitality,
 - 2) Clustering churches — revitalizing by clustering congregations into new communities of worship and ministry,
 - 3) Re-envisioning church — revitalizing by grace and gratitude in the death and legacy of a congregation, in witness to the resurrection.
 - The PC(USA) will provide a toolkit with resources for Seven Marks and Three Actions moving forward.
 - The conclusion of Year 2 will allow presbyteries and pastors to ritualize their Vital Congregations experience in celebration and thanksgiving to God. This might be a worship service together, a time of festival sharing, storytelling or some other gathering event.
3. **Presbytery Prayer Tour —** Presbytery leaders should support and pray with each congregation as they embark on their “Action Plan” into new revitalization efforts and experiences. Leaders may choose to be present to witness new initiatives, or to pray with session as they work on mission and ministry statements.
4. **Presbytery Debriefing, Assessment and Envisioning —** Presbytery leaders gather to discern how they will continue to faithfully support congregations in their vitality. How will the presbytery continue to equip and inspire pastoral leadership? How will they continue to empower and encourage congregations? A practical way forward should be outlined and adopted by the presbytery and pastors.

- Presbytery leaders will have the opportunity to envision and share ideas with other presbytery leaders and PC(USA) staff at the annual Evangelism Conference.
5. **“Show Your Marks” Campaign** — Through joy and sorrow, success and failures, the Spirit of God will bring forth revitalization as we faithfully walk together. As Christ brings us into the story of faith, we are called to capture and tell others the story. Presbyteries should plan a way in which to share their story of the revitalization initiative. In this way, the denominational narrative shifts from anxiety to hope, and from fear to faithfulness.
- For example: Presbyteries may choose to assemble a video of congregational vitality highlighting the vital marks in different congregations. They may choose to offer a pastor retreat where pastors can share stories of vitality to be compiled and turned into a resource. Presbyteries may want to put together a digital slideshow of revitalized mission and ministries throughout their presbytery to share with people who are seeking.

C. Year 2 Resources:

1. 13-Session Pastor Cohort Gatherings
2. Rethinking Seven Marks of Vital Congregations Church-wide Study
3. Putting Together an Action Plan
4. Week of Prayer
5. Final Session and Congregation Assessment
6. Final Presbytery Assessment
7. “Show Your Marks” Campaign Report

D. Year 2 Vital Congregations Facilitator Role:

In consultation with presbytery leadership, Vital Congregations facilitators can be consulted and/or deployed however they contractually determine and plan. Presbyteries and congregations will agree to pay for travel expenses related to face-to-face visits from the facilitators. The PC(USA) encourages the use of the Vital Congregations facilitators during the third session of congregational assessment. Facilitators will administer gifts for:

1. Re-forming — Helping congregations to re-think and re-envision how to carry out vital marks in new ways.
2. Missional Clustering — Helping congregations live into new community clusters in ministries, resources and staff.
3. Death and Resurrection — Helping congregations live into death with gratitude and memorial, while preparing for resurrection and new life in various forms — through new life as a new worshiping community or thriving without a building.

V. Looking Ahead

Remember, the end of the Vital Congregations Initiative is hopefully a new beginning. In faith and hope, churches will witness seven marks of vitality coming to life, in a faithful new way of being church, and following as disciples in every aspect of our lives, communities and the world. The people of God will see re-commitment to who Christ is in our life, how God is on the move in this world, and how the Spirit beckons for us to join, and the denomination will have new reports containing new measurements and stories of our life together in Christ. Remember, God brings about revitalization, as we remain open and expectant to the wonder God longs to reveal to all. If we pray and faithfully walk in relationships together, if we seek the will of God together and rely upon the image of Christ we share, then we believe that the Spirit of God will revitalize the hearts and lives of existing congregations to new vitality and life forevermore. Revitalization is witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ! And we look forward to being in relationship with you.

• The PC(USA) will continue to walk with presbyteries by:

- Praying with, and for, you
- Creating continuing Vital Congregations resources (See Future Resources next page)
- Offering presbytery leader gatherings (during Urban Presbytery Network or PC(USA) Evangelism Conferences)

- Training opportunities for current and future church leaders
- Connecting to resources and persons who can help in revitalizing actions
- Continuing to highlight vital congregations through the sharing of “Show Your Marks” Reports

• **Future Resources: After the two-year Vital Congregations Initiative, there will be:**

- Resources for ongoing congregational revitalization
- Resources for Christian formation — particularly daily spiritual practices
- Curriculum for ongoing faith matters and discipleship equipping
- Resources for empowering congregational leaders, particularly those called to ministry
- Resources to celebrate diversity — sex, gender, age, race, etc.; curriculum that engages cultural issues in making faith applicable
- Ongoing book studies for pastors and continuing education opportunities
- A Vital Congregations Conference to gather all pastors who’ve been through the Vital Congregations Initiative to share stories and debrief together
- Resources to help existing congregations that are looking to create new worshiping communities

Pastor and Church Guidelines Vital Congregations Initiative

Overview:

I. Year 1: Relational

Building Intentional Relationships and Honest Assessment of Congregations

- A. Year 1 Objectives
- B. Year 1 Description
- C. Year 1 Resources
- D. Year 1 Facilitator Role

II. Year 2: Incarnational

Revitalizing Churches in Three Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection

- A. Year 2 Objectives
- B. Year 2 Description
- C. Year 2 Resources
- D. Year 2 Facilitator Role

III. Looking Ahead



Pastor and Church Guidelines Vital Congregations Initiative

I. Year 1: Relational

Building Intentional Relationships and Honest Assessment of Congregations

A. Year 1 Objectives:

- (Re)build genuine relationships among presbyteries, pastors and churches.
- Engage, as a presbytery and as individual churches, in confessional assessment and faithful discernment to where the Spirit is leading.
- Explore the congregational life story: who have we been, where are we now, and where is God moving us forward?
- Finally, explore beyond the walls in a Neighborhood Analysis Exercise.

B. Year 1 Description:

1. Vital Congregations Initiative Session, Staff, Pastor and Church Planning — (two months)

Like presbyteries ritualizing and preparing pastors to walk through this process, pastors will walk with church leadership to envision, imagine and plan how best to walk through the Vital Congregations Initiative.

- **Officer Preparation:** Pastors may choose to hold a session retreat in order to: covenant build, outline the initiative, set goals and plan. Pastor(s) and session should engage in a Neighborhood Exegesis experience and debrief findings.

- **Church Preparation:** Pastors should meet with officers and staff to plan how they might best walk through the initiative gathering members, including shut-ins, children, youth, college students and any others on the margin of participation. The vision and work should be shared with the congregation. (Note: Vital Congregations facilitators should be introduced to congregations at this time.)

- **Vital Congregations Kickoff:** The initiative should include an opening and closing worship service; this allows for the entire initiative to be framed in worship, prayer and renewing sacred rituals. It also enables congregations to make this commitment to one another to take part in assessing and faithfully seeking vitality together. (Note: The same worship/ liturgy used by the presbytery could also be used within congregations.)

2. Seven Marks of Vital Congregations: A Church-wide Study — (seven weeks) This is a seven-week Bible study and prayer around each of the Seven Marks of Vital Congregations. As congregations study the word of God around these Seven Marks, the hope is that the Spirit of God will lead them to wonder that transforms and courage to faithfully change and follow as disciples of Jesus Christ. (Note: Resources are provided by the PC(USA).)

3. “Checking Your Marks” Assessment — (three months) — Church assessment is both quantitative and qualitative research. It includes data/stats, surveys, labels and charting a congregation, but it is also honest reflection and prayerful discernment. This is an opportunity for members and leadership to share, address conflict, name vitality, look at history, explore practices, and focus on mission and ministry in life together.

• **Telling Your Story — (Month 1) —** Focuses on historical mapping of particular churches.

• **PC(USA) Marks of Vitality Survey — (Month 2) —** A survey taken by congregations and session members. This is based upon the Seven Marks of Vital Congregations and scored by the PC(USA)

and returned to presbyteries and pastors/session. This time will involve engaging in a Neighborhood Analysis and plotting the life cycle of the church.

- **Revitalization Assessment — (Month 3)** — With survey results in hand, Neighborhood Analysis experience and presbytery reports, congregations will explore who they have been and the necessary discernment of who they are being called to be.

Notes:

- Pastors, in consultation with the session, should prayerfully determine the best method in which to walk congregations through these assessment sessions. For example, you might break the congregation up into home groups, and determine that a pastor not attend, so that members feel free to share more openly.
- Vital Congregations facilitators, selected by the presbytery and trained by the PC(USA), are available to assist in the third session to help congregations do the honest confession and necessary discernment of the journey ahead: 1) Legacy in death in witness to the resurrection 2) Missional clustering of small church communities 3) Re-envision and re-form how we are called to be church.
- PC(USA) will provide MissionInsite information to compare findings of Neighborhood Analysis.

4. **“Show Your Marks” Campaign — (two months)** — After initial congregational assessment, pastors should work with the session in capturing their story, reporting their assessment, reporting findings of Neighborhood Analysis, and sharing their hope in journeying forward. Through video testimony, photographs, storytelling and more, the congregation should gather together to give witness to vitality and life in Christ.

Notes:

- Reports should be handed in by the new year to the presbytery, who will share them with the PC(USA) office. These stories will be used to report on churches beyond membership numbers and budgets. They will serve as future case studies, and testimony to the denomination of God’s vitality and life given to the people of God. They will bear witness to all who have not seen or heard.
- Reports are provided by the PC(USA).
- The session, in consultation with the pastor, should develop a plan for continual ongoing assessment of the congregation. This may look like continued congregational cohorts during monthly meals, or a ritual time and space in worship, or an annual congregation meeting, or quarterly open town hall forums, etc.

C. Year 1 Resources:

1. Vital Congregations Liturgy
2. Three-Session Congregation Assessment: Checking Your Marks
3. Three-Session Presbytery Assessment
4. 12 Sessions for Pastor Cohort Gathering
5. Seven Marks of Vital Congregations: A Church-wide Study
6. “Show Your Marks” Campaign
7. Neighborhood Analysis Exercise
8. MissionInsite — Community Data

D. Year 1 Vital Congregations Facilitator Role:

In consultation with presbytery leadership, and the Office of Vital Congregations in the PC(USA), Vital Congregations facilitators can be consulted and/or deployed however they contractually determine and plan. The PC(USA) encourages the use of the Vital Congregations facilitators during the third session of congregational assessment. Facilitators will administer gifts for:

1. Asking difficult questions for confessional discernment
2. Pastoral support and compassion in change
3. Conflict resolution within the church

II. Year 2: Incarnational

Revitalizing Churches in Three Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection

A. Year 2 Objectives:

- Re-envisioning how we are called to be church.
- Openness to see God already at work, and courage to follow the Spirit into “new things.”
- Renewed discipleship in sharing the Good News with all people.
- Transformation in faithful actions:
 - 1) Re-forming churches --revitalize the 7 Marks of Vital Congregations
 - 2) Missional Clustering of churches -- revitalize by clustering congregations into new communities of worship and ministry
 - 3) Re-envisioning church — revitalizing by grace and gratitude in the death and legacy of a congregation, in witness to the resurrection.

B. Year 2 Description:

1. Prayers and Planning for Vital Congregations — (Month 1)

- Officer and Staff Preparation and Planning: Pastors, in consultation with elders and deacons, should envision and plan how to implement the two-month Plotting the Course (see number three below), and all other aspects of Year 2 of the Vital Congregations Initiative. For example: a church-wide study; worship series focus; continue house gatherings from Year 1.
- Pastors and session should also be exploring and planning the way forward, gathering input from the Neighborhood Analysis, MissionInsite, Show Your Marks report, presbytery report, and congregation think-tanks. Clear goals and hopes should be adopted by church leaders in consultation with presbytery leadership and Vital Congregations facilitators (as necessary).
- Resources: Each presbytery will be given access to a full toolkit from the Office of Vital Congregations. This toolkit, centered on the Seven Marks and Three Actions, has case studies from other churches, resources from PC(USA) staff, book/video recommendations and more.

2. Re-Envisioning Your Marks — Seven-week Church-wide Study on revitalizing the Seven Marks of Vital Congregations.

- The PC(USA) will provide a seven-week resource to re-think Seven Marks, to re-envision how a congregation is being called to change or implement these seven marks of vitality, and to strategize how to practically implement these ideas. This is preparation for intentional experiential praxis; ideas leading to action.

3. Plotting the Course to Revitalizing Action Plans — (Month 1 and 2) — Time to work on the “how?” This is an intentional action plan designed to try something new. This action plan, produced by the officers, staff and pastor(s), should be based on the Year 1 assessment and discernment. The action plan will be developed during the seven-week Re-imagining Your Marks Church-wide Study. Churches should re-envision and plot practical ways to live within the Three Actions of revitalizing: re-forming, missional clustering communities, and/or death and resurrection in its various forms, as well as the Seven Marks of Vital Congregations.

Notes:

- Congregational think-tanks should allow for every idea to be heard, every voice represented, every opportunity shared. The final action plan should be shared with the whole church.
- Vital Congregations facilitators trained in the Three Actions of Revitalizing will be able to assist in walking congregations through the next steps of planning. Presbyteries will have a toolkit of resources for Three Actions.
- Resources provided from the Office of Vital Congregations are meant to help churches think through the development of their action plan. Also, review the full toolkit your presbytery leaders have been given.
- This time should be highly engaged, with faithfully bold actions. This is the “new thing” God is doing

and calling your church to join. Do not be afraid to dream! Remember that this is a process. Something may fail; transformation may take several tries; there may be many more actions that transpire, but the point is to develop a church praxis to the process of faithfully moving into revitalizing actions of the Spirit.

- 4. Prayer for Revitalization — one week of prayer** — This is the end of the two-month series, after the seven-week study. Pray for the initiatives your congregation will embark upon. Pray for the leaders and all people who will offer gifts to bring about the efforts of vitality. Pray for the people God will send you forth to meet, the plans God has for Christ's church, and the ways in which you will experience the wonder of God that transforms you. Pray!

Ideas:

- Set up a weeklong prayer visual at your church; have members sign up for hours to come in and pray. Plan intentional worship opportunities to pray. Have children, youth, families, elder-adults, shut-ins, college students and all members responsible for praying throughout the week for a particular revitalization initiative.

Notes:

- The PC(USA) staff and leadership and Vital Congregations team members offer their prayers with and for your church during this time. This resource will continue to expand, as presbyteries going through the Vital Congregations Initiative are asked to offer their prayers for all churches who perceive and follow Christ into action of a more vital church.

- 5. Changing Your Marks — (six months of living into our revitalizing action plan)** — Pastor(s) and church leaders should walk with the congregation in the action plans, based on the Seven re-envisioned Marks and within the Three Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection. This is a high-energy time in the life of the church where we have courage to believe the living God of wonder is calling us to transform in faithful discipleship; to join the Spirit at work; and to live into the new thing Christ is doing. The goal is to do the necessary, hope-filled and difficult things to reform the ways we are church together, and boldly act in new practices in mission and ministry.

Notes:

- Pastor(s) and session should pray with presbytery leaders and inform them of their action plan moving forward. Presbytery leaders will plan site visits and a "prayer tour" over these initiatives with each congregation.
- Churches should creatively record/document/capture the story of Changing Marks and Vital Congregations.
- Pastor(s) and session should ensure that all new initiatives at the forefront, with transparency and updates on how things are going, and opportunities for storytelling and congregational input.
- Pastor(s) and presbytery leaders should call upon Vital Congregations facilitators when necessary.
- All things should be centered on prayer. All new initiative joys and successes should be celebrated; fellowship and play are vital parts of the body of Christ. All failures and struggles should be confessed and documented; this is life together.

- 6. Final Assessment and "Show Your Marks" Report — (final two months, Year 2)** — This is an opportunity for churches to share their re-envisioned marks of vitality, assess the process, set goals for the future, and plan for sustainability. These reports will be collected during the final assessment of the Vital Congregations Initiative and turned in to presbyteries and the PC(USA) staff to mark a new measurement of vital congregations.

- a. Session Vitality Assessment — (one month, Year 2)** — The leadership of the church, operating in healthy systems and fueled by the input and stories of the people, should be ready to debrief and assess, plan and set goals, for sustainable vitality.

Notes:

- The PC(USA) will provide final assessment tools and resources for ongoing vitality.

- The final “Show Your Marks” Report should be shared in the final worship celebration of the presbytery. Presbytery leaders will share final reports with the PC(USA) staff to measure congregational vitality in new ways beyond membership trends and budgets.
- This assessment will mark standards of measurement such as: How have we been transformed? How have we experienced God’s wonder? How will we ensure vitality moving forward? Do we have a clear vision moving forward? How will we work to continue to discern the will of God? How and when will we know if it is time to begin new worshiping communities? Going forward, how will we continue to gather congregational input? Where do we go from here? How will we remain faithful in our following of Christ and be open to the wonder of God?

b. Congregation Final Assessment — (final month, Year 2) — This will be an intentional time of reflecting, engaging in important conversations and assessments of the Vital Congregations Initiative. Instead of a time of conclusion, this time should be centered around how we continue the initiatives that brought about vitality, and how to continue prayerful discernment of new visions of faithful discipleship. Yet, it should also be a time of joy-filled celebration, storytelling, gratitude and play as we delight in all that the Lord is doing in our midst!

Notes:

- Pastor(s) and session determine how to go about Vital Congregations debriefing with the whole church.
- From this debriefing should come tangible ways forward, covenant promises to be kept, envisioning plans that will continue to discern and seek the Spirit’s leading into new vital mission and ministries.
- Plan ways to allow your congregation and hopefully new “strangers now friends” to share their stories of hospitality, yes, but namely of how God showed up in the person or people of this church and revealed God’s amazing wonder and love. These are the faithful stories that make vital congregations.
- Pastors and churches should be sure to invite presbytery leaders to see, and to hear, and to be a part of debriefing, assessment and concluding rituals/celebration of the Vital Congregations Initiative.

Ideas:

- Offer reflection assessment surveys and plan a special worship where revitalization stories can be shared and surveys/assessments can be offered. Home groups may plan presentations and share stories of revitalization and experiences of wonder, while offering a prayer to paths of sustainability moving forward, and center it around a family fun night of celebration.

c. “Show Your Marks” Campaign — (final month, Year 2) — The “Show Your Marks” Report is to help congregations capture a new and transforming story of vital congregations for the presbytery. This report will be shared with PC(USA) staff.

Notes:

- The final Show Your Marks Report should be submitted during the closing Vital Congregations celebration.
- A guide to creatively sharing these reports can be found in the Revitalization workbook.

C. Year 2 Resources:

1. 13 Sessions for Pastor Cohort Gatherings by Dr. William P. Brown
2. Full Vital Congregations Toolkit (Presbytery)
3. Rethinking Seven Marks of Vital Congregations: A Church-wide study
4. Plotting the Course – Action Plan Help
5. Week of Prayers
6. Final Debriefing and Assessment – Congregation

7. Final Debriefing and Assessment – Church Leadership
8. Final Debriefing and Assessment – Presbytery
9. “Show Your Marks” Campaign Report

D. Year 2 Vital Congregations Facilitator Role:

In consultation with presbytery leadership, Vital Congregations facilitators can be consulted and/or deployed however they contractually determine and plan. The PC(USA) encourages the use of the Vital Congregations facilitators during the third session of congregational assessment. Facilitators will administer gifts for:

1. Re-forming — Helping congregations re-think and re-envision how to carry out vital marks in new ways.
2. Missional Clustering — Helping congregations live into new community clusters in ministries, resources and staff.
3. Death and Resurrection — Helping congregations live into death with gratitude and memorial, while preparing for resurrection and new life in various forms — through new life as a new worshipping community or thriving without a building.

III. Looking Ahead

Remember, the end of the Vital Congregations Initiative is hopefully a new beginning. In faith and hope, churches will witness Seven Marks of vitality coming to life, in a faithful new way of being church, and following as disciples in every aspect of our lives, communities and the world. The people of God will see re-commitment to who Christ is in our life, how God is on the move in this world, and how the Spirit beckons for us to join, and the denomination will have new reports containing new measurements and stories of our life together in Christ. Remember, God brings about all vitality in life together, as we remain open and expectant to the wonder God longs to reveal to all. If we pray and faithfully walk in relationships together, if we seek the will of God together, and rely upon the image of Christ we share, then we believe that the Spirit of God will revitalize the hearts and lives of existing congregations to new vitality and life forevermore. Revitalization is witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ! And we look forward to being in relationship with you.

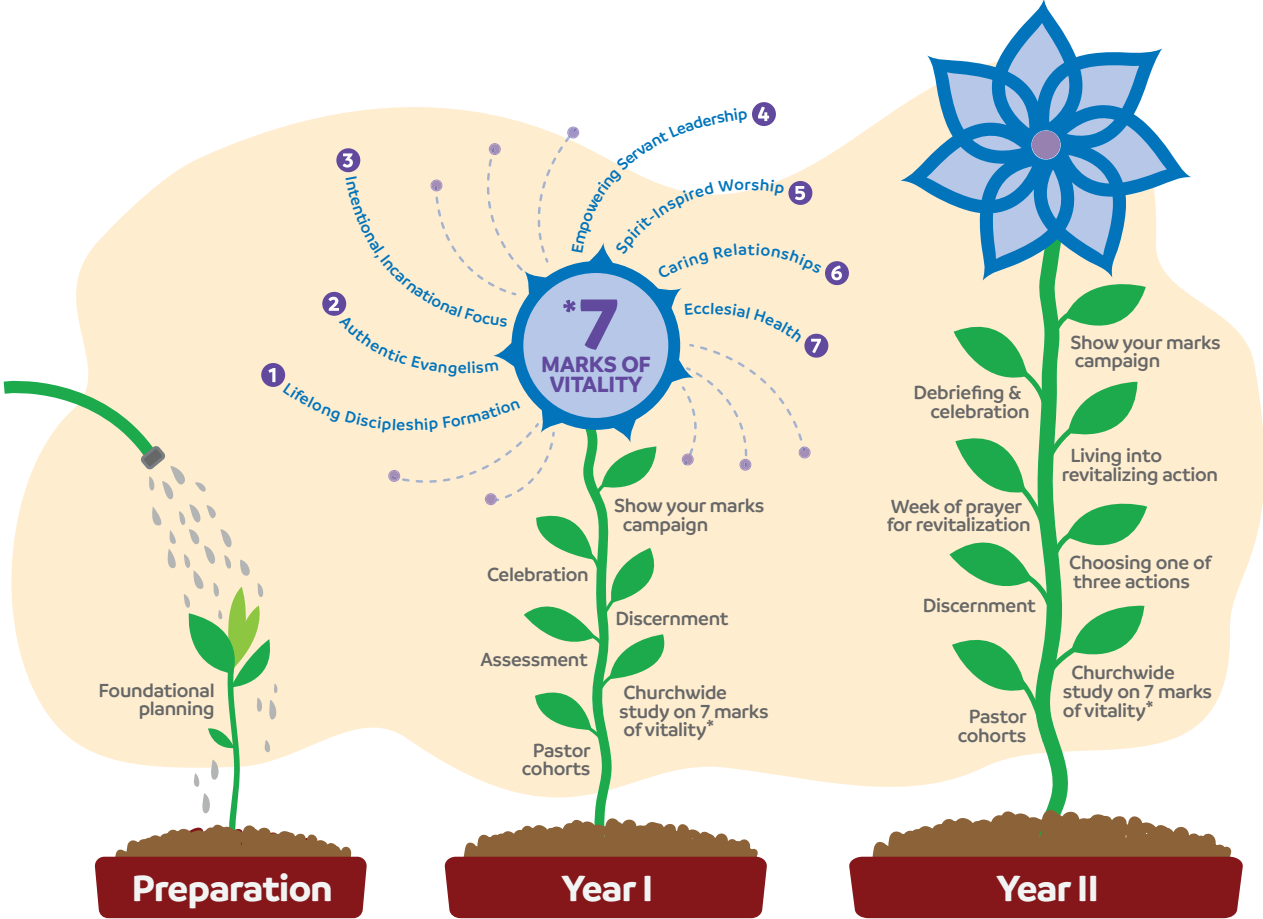
• **The PC(USA) will continue to walk with presbyteries by:**

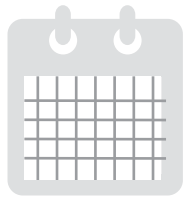
- Praying with, and for, you
- Creating continuing Vital Congregations resources (See Future Resources below)
- Offering presbytery leader gatherings (during Urban Presbyter Network or PC(USA) Evangelism Conferences)
- Training opportunities for current and future church leaders
- Connecting to resources and persons who can help in revitalizing actions
- Continuing to highlight vital congregations through the sharing of “Show Your Marks” Reports

• **Future Resources: After the two-year Vital Congregations Initiative, there will be:**

- Resources for ongoing congregational revitalization
- Resources for Christian formation — particularly daily spiritual practices
- Curriculum for ongoing faith matters and discipleship equipping
- Resources for empowering congregational leaders, particularly those called to ministry
- Resources to celebrate diversity — sex, gender, age, race, etc.; curriculum that engages cultural issues in making faith applicable
- Ongoing book studies for pastors and continuing education opportunities
- A Vital Congregations Conference to gather all pastors who’ve been through the Vital Congregations Initiative to share stories and debrief together
- Resources to help existing congregations that are looking to create new worshipping communities

Two-Year Vital Congregations Initiative Infographic





Seven-Day Prayer Card based on Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

By David Gambrell

A Seven-Day Cycle of Prayer

Based on the Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

Living God, we give you thanks and praise for the new things you are doing among us...

Sunday	for the transforming presence of Christ
Monday	for your call to follow the way of Jesus
Tuesday	for the gift of your Word made flesh
Wednesday	for the good news of your holy realm
Thursday	for Jesus' example of humble service
Friday	for your great love for all the world
Saturday	for our common ministry in Jesus' name

Other joys and thanksgivings may be added.

Living God, by the gifts of your Spirit, help us to bear witness to the risen Lord...

Sunday	proclaiming the good news of salvation
Monday	growing in the image of Christ
Tuesday	offering your grace to others
Wednesday	sharing the hope that is within us
Thursday	loving and serving one another
Friday	extending your compassion to all
Saturday	building up the body of Christ

Other concerns and petitions may be added.

Living God, in the great mystery of our faith receive us each night and revive us each day, that we may be dead to sin and alive to you; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

SUN = Spirit-filled worship; MON = Lifelong discipleship; TUE = Outward incarnational focus; WED = Intentional authentic evangelism; THU = Servant-leader development; FRI = Caring relationships; SAT = Ecclesial health

Sample Calendar Tracks
for the Initiative

Vital Congregations

Section
IV





January Track

Vital Congregations Sample Calendar

Year I: Relational

Building Intentional Relationships and Honest Assessment of Congregations

January	Casting vision — presbyteries with pastors and church leaders; pastors with churches.
January–February	Prayer and planning meetings, introductions of pastor cohorts and opening
March–April	Seven-week church-wide study during Lent, exploring Seven Marks of Vital Congregations
May–July	Break for summer
August	Prayer, planning and training for fall
September–November	Checking Your Marks — three-session church and presbytery assessments
November–December	Show Your Marks — report/capture congregational stories

Year II: Incarnational

Revitalizing Churches in Three Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection

January	Prayer and Planning for Vital Congregations
February–March	Plotting the Course, Seven-week Study of Rethinking 7 Marks of Vital Congregations
April	Pray (One week)
April–October	Changing Your Marks — 3 Actions of Revitalizing Churches
November–December	Final Vital Congregations Assessment and Report: Show Your Marks



Fall Track

Vital Congregations Sample Calendar

Year I: Relational

Building Intentional Relationships and Honest Assessment of Congregations

June	Casting vision — presbyteries with pastors and church leaders; pastors with churches
July–August	Prayer and planning meetings, and introductions of pastor cohorts and opening
September–October	Seven-week church-wide study, exploring Seven Marks of Vital Congregations
November–December	Advent
January	Prayer, planning and training
February–April	Checking Your Marks — three-session church and presbytery assessments
May	Show Your Marks — report/capture congregational stories

Year II: Incarnational

Revitalizing Churches in Three Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection

June–July	Prayer and planning for Vital Congregations
August–September	Plotting the Course and seven-week study of rethinking Seven Marks of Vital Congregations
October	Pray (one week)
October–March	Changing Your Marks — Three Actions of Revitalizing Churches
April–May	Final Vital Congregations Assessment and Report: Show Your Marks

Forms for
Presbytery Leaders
Letter of Interest
Estimated Budget
Grant Application

Vital Congregations

Section

V



PRESBYTERY LETTER OF INTEREST / INVITATION

This is an invitation for all presbyteries interested in engaging in covenant relationship to God and to one another, as we share in the vision for Vital Congregations:

By the power of the Holy Spirit, and in authentic relationships with mid councils, we seek to equip, nurture and support church leaders to empower their congregations to renew, recover and live more fully into faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ.

The Office of Vital Congregations for the PC(USA) invites you to share your interest in joining with other presbyteries in the Two-Year Vital Congregations Initiative.

The purpose of the Vital Congregations Initiative is to work alongside mid council leadership, and leaders of existing congregations, in a process that seeks to help assess, discern and live into transformative actions that increase vitality. Through intentional spiritual practices and relational connections, this two-year process takes us deeper into following Jesus Christ, making disciples, and being the vital community of Christ throughout particular communities and the world.

We invite you to review the information, share the vision among your presbytery leadership and pastors, and prayerfully fill out the Letter of Interest Form. All letters need to be submitted by **Nov. 1**. The office of Vital Congregations, in consultation with the PC(USA) staff team, will prayerfully discern a maximum of **20 presbyteries** to begin this journey. Please note: The maximum of 20 presbyteries ensures honoring intentional covenantal relationships and the needs of each particular presbytery. Discernment of presbytery selections will be based upon the established relationships between mid council leadership and the PC(USA) staff and/or Vital Congregations team, as well as the preparedness of each presbytery indicated in the Letter of Interest.

All presbyteries selected will be contacted by **late November**. We will begin the preparation and vision sharing year together. All important dates and special Vital Congregations events are included in this information packet. **Please note: We will inform and continue to build relationships with all presbyteries who submit a Letter of Interest, as we plan to launch a new wave through the process annually.**

We hope this process together will strengthen the people of God, in the mission of God, so that all might know vital life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We look forward to receiving your letter, and to growing in relationship together.

In Christ,

The Office of Vital Congregations (Theology, Formation & Evangelism--Presbyterian Mission Agency).

Application Checklist

- Letter of Interest, including:
 - What attracts you to this initiative?
 - What do you hope to gain out of this experience?
- Completed application

The Vital Congregations Initiative, PC(USA)
Interest Application

Name of Presbytery _____

Presbytery Leader(s) name(s): _____

Presbytery Address: _____ City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____ Office Hours: _____

Email of Contact Person: _____

Person(s) Preparing Letter of Interest: _____

No. of Congregations: _____ Pastors: _____

Please answer the following questions. Each answer should not exceed 300 words.

1. What attracts you to the Vital Congregations Initiative? What would a “vital” conclusion to the initiative look like for you?
2. What is the level of interest from church pastors, committees and congregations in participation? Describe the hopes, expectations, questions or concerns people have.
3. Is your presbytery willing to invest human and financial resources for two years in this initiative? Will you be willing/able to provide and support a minimum of two candidates to be trained as facilitators?
4. What do you consider the top two to three largest obstacles/issues in your presbytery at this time? How do you think the vision of Vital Congregations will help address these?
5. What steps have you already taken to share the vision of vitality and the work of revitalization in your presbytery?
6. What existing ways do your pastors currently gather?

Cover Letter

Please submit a cover letter with your application that includes a brief description of your presbytery: leadership; churches; mission; geographical makeup; all diversity; strengths; weaknesses; existing relationships with the Presbyterian Mission Agency; and any other information you feel is helpful.

Signature of person(s) preparing Letter of Interest application: _____

Signature of presbytery leadership: _____

Date: _____

Please visit the Vital Congregations website for deadlines for Application and Letters of Interest submissions.
<https://www.pcusa.org/vitalcongregations>.

Vital Congregations Estimated Cost Sheet

Note*** The following estimate is based on current available information and could change based on final cost for production of resources, and travel expenses at the time of events. The total estimated budget of \$13,177 is based on one (1) presbytery with two (2) facilitators, and 15 churches with 200 members.

<i>Note*** The following is an estimate based on current available information and could change based on final actual cost for production of resources, and travel expenses at the time of events.</i>			
Estimated Survey Cost:			
		No. of Participants Per Church	No. of Churches
		200	15
		Cost Per Church	Cost Per Presbytery
Cost/Survey: Printing & Scoring	\$ 3.00	\$ 600.00	\$ 9,000.00
Shipping Cost/Congregation	\$ 17.00	\$ 17.00	\$ 255.00
		\$ 617.00	\$ 9,255.00
<i>Research & Development estimated cost to print and score surveys for one (1) congregation with 200 members: \$600.00</i>			
<i>Estimated shipping cost of surveys to one (1) congregation: \$17.00</i>			
<i>Estimated total survey cost for one (1) congregation: \$617.00</i>			
Estimated total cost of surveys for 15 churches in one (1) Presbytery: \$9,255.00			
Estimated Facilitator Training Cost (Per event):			
	Facilitator Training: Only		
No. of Facilitators Per Presbytery		2	
Estimated Travel	450.00	900.00	
Estimated lodging for 2 nights	330.00	660.00	
Estimated Meals	112.00	224.00	
Strengthfinder 2.0	20.00	40.00	
	\$ 912.00	\$ 1,824.00	\$ 1,824.00
Estimated Resource Cost:			
Estimated resource cost for one (1) church - 2 items per church		31.00	465.00
Resource: Facilitator Manual - two (2) per Presbytery		12.00	24.00
Estimated resource cost for Presbytery - 1 item: Digital		-	-
		43.00	489.00
			\$ 489.00
Total estimated cost for training & resources			\$ 2,313.00
Grand Total Estimated Budget			\$ 11,568.00
NATIONAL GATHERING ATTENDANCE			
Pastors Attending National Gathering:			
Estimated Travel			450.00
Estimated lodging for 3 nights			495.00
Estimated Meals - For 3 days			168.00
			\$ 1,113.00

Per Pastor

Estimated cost per person to fly into Austin, TX.

Estimated Rate per night is \$165.00. Number of nights = 5, if facilitators stay over for the national gathering.

Current per diem is \$56.00 per day for 4 days (M-T).

Transformational Grant Application

PRESBYTERY GRANT FOR CONGREGATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Name _____ Date Prepared _____
Synod _____ Phone _____
Contact Person _____ Email _____
Presbytery _____ Phone _____
Contact Person _____ Email _____
Project Name _____
Website _____

Introduction: This grant is intended to provide funding to presbyteries in support of their efforts to develop a process for helping congregations to begin and continue a transformational way of life. Transformation is the process of intentionally moving into a new reality and way of being that helps congregations envision what God is calling them to be for their community and for the Kingdom of God. All churches are in some state of being transformed, and presbyteries must have resources available to assist them.

The readiness assessment gives the presbytery an opportunity for self-examination as it begins the challenging task of leading transformational change. Such self-assessment is critical as the presbytery develops its process for encouraging and supporting congregational transformation.

Grant Funding Amounts: Presbyteries may request a one-time grant of ordinarily up to \$50,000. The first-year lump sum payment will be for up to \$30,000 and assuming satisfactory progress has been made toward meeting stated goals, a second-year lump sum payment of up to \$20,000 will be disbursed. A dollar-for-dollar match provided through a presbytery and/or synod is required, but waivers will be considered on a case-by-case basis, upon request. This grant is not intended to provide funding for congregational-level transformation efforts.

Instructions: This application is available from the Mission Program Grants Office website. Email as an attachment the completed proposal (Parts 1 and 2) to tim.mccallister@pcusa.org at the Mission Program Grants office. Proposals will be reviewed according to the cut-off and review dates schedule contained within the Manual of Administrative Operations and on the Mission Program Grants website.

Office of Mission Program Grants

Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/1001-2/mission-program-grants/>

(888) 728-7228, Ext. 5230 / 5251

Fax: (502) 333-7251

tim.mccallister@pcusa.org

PART 1: Assessment of Presbytery Readiness to Lead Congregational Transformation

The format of this document allows the writer to add typing space as needed to fully respond to each question.

Has your presbytery clearly articulated its vision for congregational transformation?

- Yes (Please attach a copy.)
- No
- In the process of clarifying that vision

Comments regarding your process (Required):

What tools have been most helpful to you (or do you expect to use) in shaping your vision for transforming the congregations within your presbytery? (Rank in numerical order of importance, with 1 as most important and 7 as least.)

- Prayer
- Bible study
- Study of demographic and congregational trends
- Purposeful conversations with congregations and pastors
- Purposeful conversations with presbytery groups
- Guidance from a consultant
- Other (Please describe):

Transformation is a process rather than a product, a journey rather than a destination. How you will communicate that understanding of transformation to presbytery leadership and congregations? (Required):

Has your presbytery identified and recruited a representative team to lead your transformation effort?

- Yes (Please attach a copy.)
- No
- In process

Comments regarding your process (Required):

To what extent has your presbytery established congregational transformation as a priority? (Check all that apply.)

- Presbytery council has agreed.
- Committee on Ministry has indicated an understanding of the need.
- Presbytery has agreed to make transformation a priority and confirmed a leadership team.
- The presbytery budget includes significant support for transformation.

Comments (Required):

Has your presbytery considered how it will deal with the inevitable conflict that accompanies significant change?

- Yes, and we have a plan in place.
- Yes, and we are developing a plan.
- Not yet, but we are aware of the possibility of conflict.
- No, we are not anticipating major conflict.

Comments (Required):

Which of the following do you consider most critical for congregational transformation? (Rank in numerical order of importance, with 1 as most important and 9 as least.)

- Evangelism
 - Leadership development for transformation
 - Mission
 - Pastoral commitment
 - Congregational commitment
 - Strong faith component
 - Familiarity with theory of transformation
 - Outside consultant
- Other (Please describe):

Does your plan include an outside consultant? If so, identify them and the qualifications that prompted you to choose them. If your plan includes a consultant but you have not yet chosen one, what qualifications are you seeking and how do you propose to find the consultant? Comment on your presbytery's follow-up plan for continuing the transformation process after the end of the consultant's contract.

Note: While your presbytery may have the expertise to develop and implement the transformation process, if you wish to seek an outside consultant, contact the Rev. Dr. Kathryn Threadgill in the Vital Congregation Office, (800) 728-7228, Ext. 5085, or vital.congregations@pcusa.org for a listing of consultants and other related training resources.

Has your presbytery considered how it will evaluate and assess the progress toward congregational transformation?

- Yes, and we have a plan.
- Yes, and we are developing a plan.
- Not yet, but we understand the need.
- No, our priority is to get transformation happening; we will worry about evaluation later.

Comment on your plan or understanding of the need (Required):

PRESBYTERY GRANT FOR CONGREGATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

PART 2: Application for Mission Program Grant Funding

The following vision of the church in 2020 may prove helpful in determining the areas around which a transformation process might develop. It is with this future in mind that the Mission Development Resources Committee will evaluate your proposal.

Churches in the year 2020, as a result of your work with them, will:

- Have strong, competent and spiritually mature leaders whose roles are prayer and discernment for the congregations and who will lead their faith communities into deeper spiritual practices;
- Be worshipping congregations that reflect the cultures and ethnicities of their neighborhoods;
- Engage in building relationships and share their faith with others;
- Embrace their God-given missional opportunities with passion and equip people to meet those challenges in adaptive and innovative ways;
- Be places where welcoming strangers and showing hospitality is the norm;
- Accomplish great things by connecting and collaborating with partner communities.

Please answer the following questions.

1. What is your presbytery's vision for successful congregational transformation? What is the history and results of the transformation work in your presbytery?
2. Describe the strategies you will use to develop a process for promoting continual transformation. Your response should consider, but is not limited to, the following questions:
 - a) What are the needs, strengths and weaknesses of the congregations and their contexts for ministry and mission?
 - b) How will you assess the effectiveness of your pastors and sessions?
 - c) What is the vision of the presbytery for your pastors, sessions and congregations?
 - d) How will you prepare and support your pastors, sessions and congregations as they transform?
 - e) What training opportunities are needed and available?
 - f) Will you network or link congregations for mutual support during transformation?
 - g) How will you determine if your efforts are effective? How will you adapt if they're not?
3. How will this transformative work be continued beyond the life of the grant?
4. What is your plan for the education of the Committee on Ministry and the presbytery-at-large?
5. Include a balanced income and expense budget that describes how the grant will be used and how you will financially support the effort beyond the life of the grant.

SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED INCOME FOR PRESBYTERY TRANSFORMATION GRANT FUNDING

Presbytery	Synod	PMA	Other	TOTAL
\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____

The responses to the assessment and application were reviewed and approved by the appropriate mission strategy body of this presbytery and/or synod as fulfilling the policies governing Mission Program Grants. Presbyteries and synods participating as funding partners and giving oversight and assistance, date and sign below. Synod review and approval of this proposal is not required by the Mission Development Resources Committee if the synod is not providing funding.

NOTE: If any signing below is a current member of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board, please inform the Office of Mission Program Grants staff.

Date

Presbytery Executive or Designee

Date

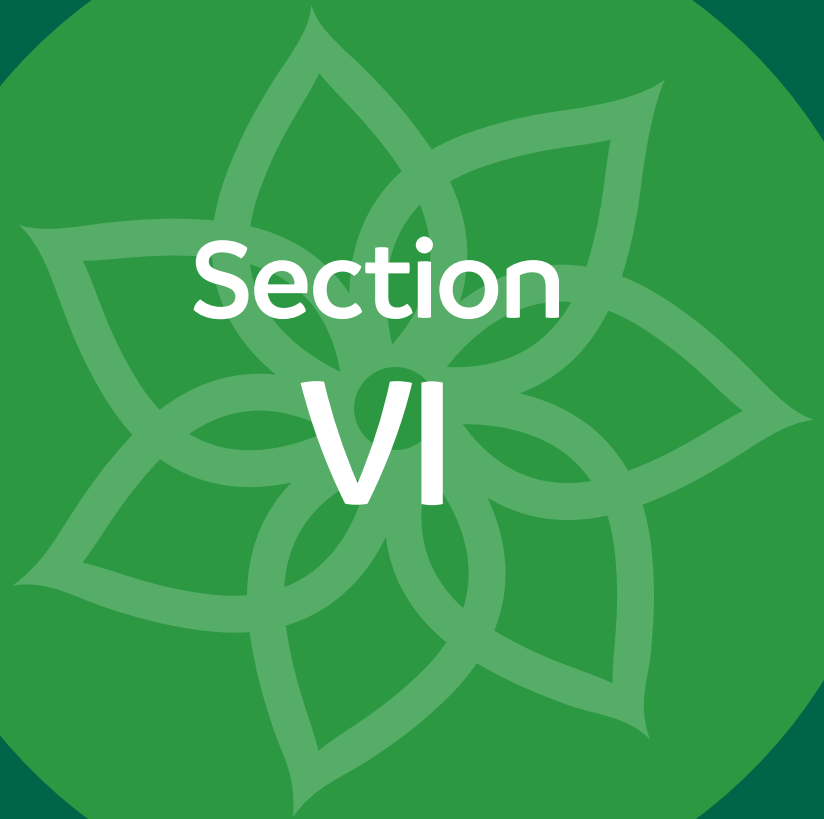
Synod Executive or Designee

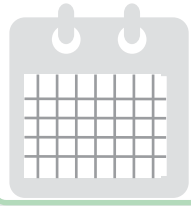
Important Dates/Deadlines
for the
Vital Congregations Initiative

Vital Congregations

Section

VI





Important Dates and Deadlines

November

Late November: Planning Year Presbyteries are announced

- Presbyteries are contacted by Vital Congregations (VC) PMA Staff and VC Team Liaison
- Letter from Office of VC with: Important dates/deadlines; Handbook of Preparation; VC Manual; VC Immediate Toolkit; Registration Information for May Gatherings & Facilitator Training all go out.
- Presbyteries will be informed when Registration for VC events are live

January

1. Facilitators

- A minimum of two Facilitators should be identified. Presbyteries will receive a Doodle Poll for quarterly meetings for Facilitators and Presbytery leaders. Facilitator Training will take place 2.5 days prior to the Vital Congregations Gathering (late April-early May). All Facilitators should register and take Strength Finders online quiz by April 1st.

2. Preparation Year Major Events Registration Live

- All presbyteries participating in the preparation year should be registering for major events.

March

Deadline to submit Facilitator Doodle Polls to VC Office

- All church pastors, one church officer and presbytery leadership are to register for Denver (West) or Atlanta (East) Gatherings.

April

1. April 1: Cut-off Deadline to Register for Facilitator Training and VC Gathering

- All church pastors, one church officer, and presbytery leadership are to register for the Vital Congregations gathering.

2. April 1: Presbytery information due to the Office of Vital Congregations.

- Working list of churches participating in the Initiative
- Names and information of Facilitators from the presbytery. Facilitator Training will take place prior to the May Vital Congregations Gathering.
- Presbyteries identify whether they plan to begin in January or Fall Track.

Late April- Early May

1. Facilitator Training

- A minimum of two Facilitators, selected by the presbytery, should register for Facilitator Training. This event will take place before the Vital Congregations Gathering. It is 2.5 days of training and preparing for their role within their particular presbytery context.

2. Vital Congregations Gathering

- Gathering for the presbyteries preparing to walk through the Initiative, Presbyteries currently walking through the Initiative, and Pilot Presbyteries. Event is for Pastors, Presbytery leadership, and Clerks of Session to: learn about the 2-year initiative, plan for their particular churches and contexts, get ideas & training on the 2-year Initiative. The theme will center around Wonder & the Word – God as the transforming refuge of the Church, and the connectional gift of the Community of faith.

Fall

1. Fall: Continue Planning Year

- All presbyteries work individually through the Planning Year Handbook in: Forming Pastor Cohorts; Sharing the Vision of Vital Congregations with Pastors, Sessions, Staff, and churches; monthly planning tips; worship liturgies and more.
- Note: Your VC PMA Staff Team and VC Team Liaisons will be in contact and available for questions.

2. October: National Vital Congregations Conference

- Location: TBA
- Dates: TBA
- Theology, Formation, and Evangelism Department hosts a Evangelism Conference or a Vital Congregations Conference every other year. This is open to all the PC(USA). Registration Information will be shared as soon as it is available. Vital Congregations will host workshops delving deeper into the 7-Marks.

3. October General Assembly Years: Evangelism Conference

4. November: Christ the King Sunday/Advent of Vital Congregations

- Individual Presbyteries are encouraged to host an event to check-in with pastors; marks the end of Planning year; pray together for the Initiative.
- VC PMA Staffer and VC Team Liaison will do a final year-end check-in with presbytery.

Launch of Initiative

Presbyteries who feel called and ready have determined and informed the Office of Vital Congregations whether they will begin the January or fall (church calendar) track, and will be officially celebrated in the initiative launch at General Assembly in June 2020 in Baltimore.



information sheet

For presbytery leaders

Congregational life is not simple. Our research demonstrates that all congregations have strengths. Further, congregations require multiple strengths to be effective. A congregation that excels in serving the community but lacks any other strength is little more than a social service agency. A congregation that excels in providing a sense of belonging where people care for one another, but lacks other strengths, is little more than a social club. Congregations must focus on multiple strengths to do all that is required of people of faith.

What is the USCVS?

The U.S. Congregational Vitality Surveys are designed to help you understand the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of worshipers and leaders in your congregations. The two surveys — one for worshipers and one for session and staff — were created through a collaboration between sociologists, theologians and Christian educators in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The surveys are designed to measure the Seven Marks of Vital Congregations — discipleship, outward focus, evangelism, servant leadership, worship, caring relationships and ecclesial health. The USCVS is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers.

How do I interpret the results?

About four weeks after a congregation returns its surveys, you will receive its Congregational Vitality Report (which will also be shared with the congregation). This report provides a congregation's scores on the Seven Marks of Vital Congregations, as well as results for all questions that measure each mark. Putting these pieces together lets the congregation see its unique strengths. It is up to you and those in the congregation to interpret the findings in light of what else you know about the congregation — where it is located, how it is changing and where it is going. We recommend that each congregation dedicate a session meeting to reviewing the results together. Try not to focus on the negative; take time to celebrate each congregation's strengths. Congregations will be using these results as you walk through the two-year initiative together.

Four weeks after the deadline for returning completed surveys, you will receive a Presbytery Vitality Report. This report shows the results for all the congregations combined (but weighted to account for congregation size). It also makes comparisons among congregations. Only the presbytery receives this report.

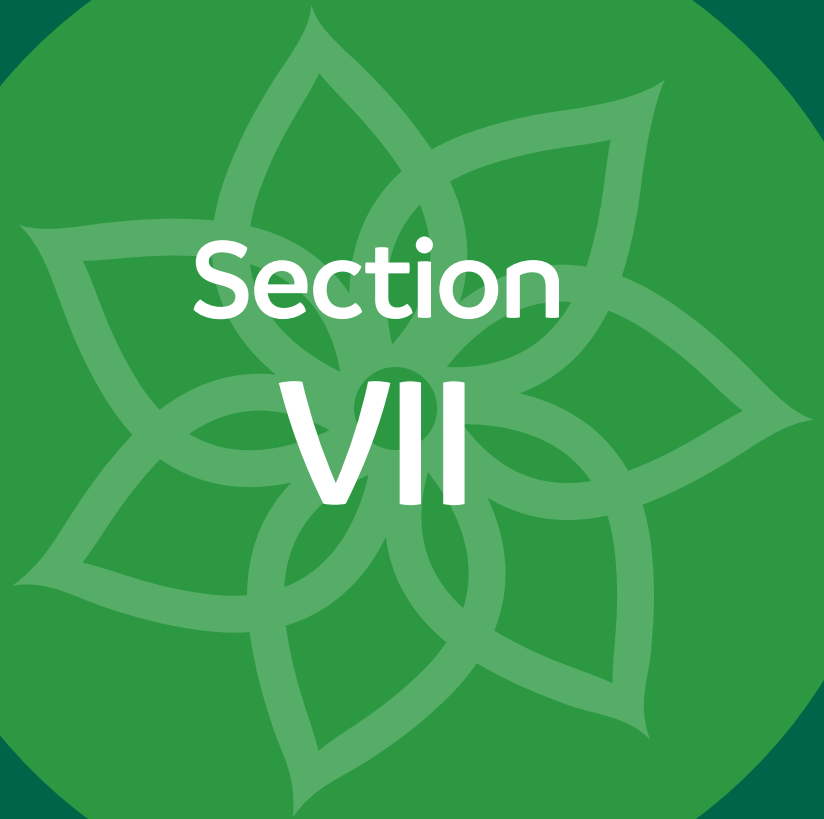
When are the important deadlines and dates for this survey?

JANUARY TRACK	FALL TRACK	
July 1	Jan 4	Presbytery provides a list of participating congregations
July 8	Jan 7	Research Services mails surveys to congregations
Oct 7	Apr 8	Congregations mail surveys back to Research Services
Nov 4	May 13	Research Services returns Congregational Vitality Reports
Nov 11	May 20	Research Services returns Presbytery Vitality Report

Vital Congregations

Section

VII



Vital Congregations Facilitators

Facilitate — "to make easy" or "ease a process." What a facilitator does is plan, guide and manage a group event to ensure that the group's objectives are met effectively, with clear thinking, good participation and full buy-in from everyone who is involved. Your key responsibility as a facilitator is to cultivate this group process and an environment in which it can flourish.

Objective:

Presbyteries should identify and elect a minimum of two members to be trained by the PC(USA) for the role of Vital Congregations facilitator. These facilitators should be trusted leaders among the presbytery with gifts for helping congregations. Facilitators should be objective — without conflict of interest in assisting churches. They will be trained by the office of Vital Congregations and utilized at the discretion of presbyteries in consultation with pastors, or a session for churches without a pastor. They will also be supported/mentored by a liaison from the PC(USA) Vital Congregations team and have quarterly video meetings with other facilitators around the country.

Rationale:

In order to support congregations who are walking through the Vital Congregations Initiative, presbyteries should have trained leaders who can help congregations in the assessment, discernment and planning stages. These leaders should not be "sent in" from the PC(USA), but should be called from the contexts in which they live. These leaders should be equipped to support congregations and pastors in faithful and difficult conversations and help them navigate the challenging and hope-filled work of being a more vital congregation. They will serve as trained support to presbyteries, pastors and congregations long after the initiative.

Facilitators should be able to help:

- Share the vision of Vital Congregations
- Assist pastors and/or session of church
- Ask good, sometimes difficult, questions
- Mediate conflict resolution and reconciliation
- Facilitate assessment dialogues for churches
- Facilitate the process of discernment and decision-making
- Engage in problem-solving, visioning and planning

Gifts:

- Faithfulness
- Positive attitude; encouraging
- Ability to lead and navigate group dynamics
- Ability to be relational and trustworthy
- Good communication skills; honesty
- Adaptive leadership, being assertive/visionary/democratic/inspiring
- Pastoral/peacemaker
- Emotional intelligence

Calling upon facilitators:

We envision that facilitators will be used for two key points in the two-year Initiative:

- 1) Year 1 — during the Assessment Review and Discernment stage for congregations
- 2) Year 2 — as congregations envision and map a plan for action.

These facilitators will be deployed at the discretion of the presbytery in consultation with pastors (if a pastor is present) and the PC(USA) office of Vital Congregations. Examples:

- Facilitators gather with pastors and session members of congregations discerning a plan to do missional clustering in various ways.
- Facilitators walk with a congregation without a pastor who need assistance with conflict resolution and reconciliation.
- Pastors and congregations want assistance from a facilitator in looking at the mark of vitality, Outward Incarnational Focus, and discern ways they can engage their neighborhoods.
- Facilitators gather with pastors and sessions of congregations faced with difficult discernment and pray together, walking them through the challenging questions and conversations.

Frequently Asked Questions:***Q: How many facilitators are needed?***

A: Presbyteries should have a minimum of two facilitators for the Vital Congregations Initiative. However, presbyteries may elect more than two, depending on presbytery size, the number of churches without pastors, ethnic-cultural diversity and languages.

Q: How much do facilitators cost?

A: Presbyteries should cover all costs associated with the Facilitator Training Conference by the PC(USA). In addition, presbyteries may elect to pay their facilitators a stipend for the two-year initiative. Finally, we encourage the reimbursement of mileage and meals as these facilitators serve.

Q: What is the time commitment of a facilitator?

A: For each presbytery, the demands of a facilitator's time will be dependent on how and when they are utilized. Facilitators will spend four days being trained by the Vital Congregations Office of the PC(USA). Facilitators will be given quarterly video meetings, lasting approximately one hour, as an opportunity to check in with facilitators around the country, to share ideas, discuss case studies and pray together.

- Extended Vision Statement
- Hopes for Vital Congregations
- Extended Description of Seven Marks
- Introduction to Vital Congregations Staff, Writing Team and PC(USA) Staff Team
- Contact Information for the Office of Vital Congregations
- Life Cycle of a Worshiping Community

Addendum

Vital Congregations

Section

VIII



Extended Vision Statement

Revitalization

“The act or an instance of bringing something back to life, public attention, or vigorous activity.” (Webster’s Dictionary)

“The action of imbuing something with new life and vitality.” (Oxford English Dictionary)

Synonyms: reanimation, rebirth, regeneration, rejuvenation, renewal, resurgence, resurrection, resuscitation, revival.

“True religion must come first, to direct our minds to the living God. Thus, steeped in the knowledge of God, they may aspire to contemplate, fear, and worship his majesty; to participate in God’s blessings; to seek God’s help at all times; to recognize, and by praise to celebrate, the greatness of God’s works — as the only goal of all the activities of this life.”

John Calvin

“A post-Christian mission should leave behind all attempts to become a Christian culture again. Mission is not a project. Evangelism is not to grow the church. Conversions are not instruments to change the world, but are a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. They are good things in and of themselves: evangelism and mission. Even if they do not bring back a Christian culture, they offer beauty to our world. Mission is about the glory of God before anything else. God is simply good, not just good for something. Evangelism and serving the poor are good, not just good for something.”

Ray Jones

“Courageous faith knows there is no assurance of comfort and ease to the life of discipleship in Jesus Christ. Our Savior’s crucifixion taught us that. Yet those who boldly dare to passionately follow know that this is a living faith in a living God, a living Gospel that was always meant to be on the move! Christ’s followers are always reforming and revitalizing because they understand that is what resurrection and redemption are all about.”

Kathryn Threadgill



Vital Congregations Vision

Who are vital congregations? It is the woman who joyfully joins her church for worship, because there is a new energy and a genuine compassion present there. It is the people who do the difficult work of letting go of what they have always understood their congregation to be in order to minister to the needs of their community. It is the untrained young mother, supported by her pastor and church, who has a passion for reaching out to young African-American girls, or the earnest leader who imagines with others about how to be a living sanctuary amid gang violence outside their doors.

Everywhere you turn, God, in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is doing this new thing for the church!

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? Isaiah 43:19

Now is the time that God longs to reveal in wonder the revitalizing of the Church in our communities, our cultures, our nation and throughout the Earth! The question is — do we perceive it? Do we wait expectantly ready, hope-filled and faithful to experience the transforming wonder God has planned, or are we fearfully anxious, indifferent and paralyzed to change? Are we merely existing in “glory days” gone by, or are we courageously emboldened to live as disciples of Jesus Christ today?

By redirecting our mind to the living God, by reforming and being re-formed in Jesus Christ, and by re-investing in genuine relationships, we can faithfully follow as disciples of Jesus Christ. We can join in the revitalizing power of the Holy Spirit with existing congregations. We can be a small part of God’s redemptive plan, until we worship in the fullness of the kingdom.

The vision: *By the power of the Holy Spirit, and in authentic relationships with mid councils, we seek to equip, nurture and support church leaders to empower their congregations to renew, recover and live more fully into faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ.*

The Vital Congregations Initiative of the PC(USA) is not a quick-fix, one-size-fits-all program; it is not a guarantee that all existing congregations will survive in their current forms. It is not our aim or intent to assume we know every particular church, nor presume it is our job to tell them what to do. What we can do is humbly walk in trusting relationships grounded in love for God and for one another. We can show up and seek to faithfully discern; we can do the necessary, joyous and difficult work of change, in order to live into the will of God together. We can be the church of Jesus Christ.

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2

The triune God is the giver of vitality and life, and the Holy Spirit is powerfully working to revitalize the Church in the fullness of Christ’s resurrection and reign. The Vital Congregations Initiative of the PC(USA) seeks to discern the Spirit’s path forward for existing congregations, so that all might become faithful

disciples of Jesus Christ in word and identity, in action and in worship. Our hope is to unite the people of God, to walk together in seeking God, experiencing transforming wonder and living into faithful discipleship to our God who is not finished yet.

⁹ Then God said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹ Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord." Ezekiel 37:9-14

There is no denying that we live in critically anxious times. A nation plagued with race riots reminiscent of a scarring past never truly reconciled. Words like "Christian" and "religion" are marred for over a decade, leaving 64 percent of adolescents claiming they find no need for the church today. Mounting fear permeates an ever-growing decline in the PC(USA) and all denominations, as churches everywhere seek relevance and strive for resilience. Scholars attest that we are entering the next Great Awakening. Some say it is an uphill battle, a crisis of faith, a heart problem. Sunday worship remains the most segregated hour in America. Our churches have become inwardly focused corporate institutions of programmatic systems. Our faith has become good morals derived from a therapeutic and distant God. Our questions are about maintaining buildings, rather than addressing why no one is coming to them. Is it any wonder, as people in our culture search for meaning, they do not see the church as offering any significant help for the journey? Since many have experienced the church as being against them and too political, they have given up on the church, or feel the church has given up on them. Since they have not seen a lifestyle worthy to follow, they continue to look for a way that will satisfy their deepest desires and longings. Yet, we know the victory in Christ Jesus is sure!

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." Revelation 21: 3-6a

Christ's home is with us. Christ's life-giving Spirit is making all things new. God wants to be known. God wants to be in relationship with us from the day God walked with humanity in the garden, to the day God called Hagar by name in the wilderness, to the day God revealed the Son, Jesus Christ in human flesh. God wants to reveal the awesome mystery of God's wonder to us all. We just have to perceive it. We have to open ourselves to receive it. Therefore, we believe that if we walk together, and we look to the God who longs for us, then perhaps we might encounter the wonder of God that transforms all things and changes us forever.

Then maybe we will do church, share church and indeed be church in ways different than ever before. Maybe we will have the courage and conviction to do the necessary work to be transformed and to change, so that Christ's light shines through us and needs are met. Maybe we will have the reconciling conversations and come together in ways we have never known by the power of the Holy Spirit. Maybe we will engage again the practices that take us deeper into God's love, our love for one another and our love for the people around us. Maybe we will transcend culture and reflect the kingdom of God with rich diversity of every kind, and all who are lost and broken and searching in this world might find their place in the family of God. The boldly daring part about this initiative is the fact that we dare to dream and imag-

ine that God might allow us to be a still small part of the coming kingdom; the new thing that Christ is doing; the home that God is building among mortals. And perhaps all it takes is the people of God coming together and calling out to God. Perhaps it is as simple as loving God and loving one another, in order for us to see God's kingdom coming and God's will being done in the most wondrous ways.

It starts by showing up; by entering into relationship together and seeking the triune God revealed in wonder. The vision is simple: the denominational center leaders, showing up with mid council leaders, who show up with pastors, who show up with parishioners, and seek the will of God and the Spirit's direction in calling all disciples of Jesus Christ to follow. In relationship together, we will prayerfully discern, honestly reflect and share in the rich histories of congregations, while confronting harsh realities of brokenness and sinfulness. We will look to confess who we have been and where we are as congregations. In looking at our past and naming our present, we can more honestly discern, in spirit and in truth, where God is leading us to be in the future.

The second year of the initiative will be about living into three revitalizing actions of missional clustering, re-forming the ways we are church, or witnessing to resurrection as we experience death. We will seek to faithfully walk with courage and hope into the new thing Christ is doing. Each context is different, each church is particular, and so the PC(USA) will attempt to resource and train Vital Congregations facilitators and coaches who can help mid council leaders and pastors address the discerning needs of particular congregations and walk with them in their actions of revitalization, as they seek to follow as faithful disciples in God's plan.

We will also help to capture stories. For every church that is facing the reality of death and remembering its legacy of life, we hope to support you in capturing your story and sharing in the grace and promise of resurrection and new life in Christ. For those whose mission has become unclear and their community has changed around them, and they discern the Spirit's movement to revitalize in mission and ministry, we want to help share your story. We want to convey a church that faithfully follows the Lord in great hope, whether it is witnessing in death, changing into revitalized life, or completely transforming from all it used be into an entirely new chapter and life. Each church, each member, has a story to tell, and it is one this culture and the world needs to hear.

As we seek faithfulness and dare to imagine where God is leading us to follow, we will offer resources that will help plant new roots and build sustainable new systems to tend to the people of God and carry out mission and ministry together. We will encourage pastors in cohorts to pray and discern together, so relationships of support remind us that we are not alone. During this two-year initiative, we hope it will be a beginning, a fresh start to the denomination coming together at every level and supporting one another as a part of the Church of Jesus Christ. We will be present together as difficult realities are faced, as churches face death and begin to mourn. We will walk together with those who are doing great things and have hit the peak of growth and ministry, and those who are starting to see that taper off and decline. We will help one another dare to re-envision and reform where the Spirit is leading them, and how they are being called to be church together in their ever-changing context. Together, we will celebrate the revitalization of people and places that have truly experienced the wonder of God, and we will sit together when efforts fail and hope is wavering. Truly, we believe that the time of Great Awakening is now. Christ is doing a new thing. Do we perceive it? Are we open to it? And will we have the courage to faithfully follow as disciples of Jesus Christ? That is our prayer and our hope!

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Hopes for Vital Congregations

I deeply care about the church. Even though I grew up in a fundamentalist tradition, it was the church that revealed to me the amazing love of God in Jesus Christ. I have been living into God's love my entire life. I was so moved by this love in Christ that I made the decision to go to seminary. My home church was a huge support on this journey. I have found a home in the PC(USA) and it is a privilege to serve the denomination.

Even though I received outstanding seminary training, I was trained to be a chaplain for Christians. I was not trained to be a missionary in a rapidly changing culture. I have had to change my style of ministry to be with people in our culture who no longer see the church as offering them anything helpful for their lives. I continue to learn what it means to be a missionary in the best sense of the word.

Most churches are caught in the struggle of trying to figure out what to do in this rapidly changing culture. They are consumed with trying to figure out what they can do to make their churches more attractive, or how they can call just the right leader to bring in the people. They desire for their churches to work the way they used to work when people were waking up on Sunday and thinking about attending church. Even though we must pay attention to the internal working of the church, this attention will not bring people into our communities. The adaptive change that is required in this postmodern culture is that the church must recover again what it means to be church.

Even though this is a frightening time to be church, I believe it is also an exciting time. It is exciting because we get to recover what it means to be church again. Revitalization is the journey of seeing God at work in Jesus Christ. It is exploring again what it looks like to follow Jesus into our own lives and into the community. Personal transformation always leads to communal transformation. It is about engaging the practices that take us deeper into God's love, the lives of people in the faith community and into the lives of people in our community. Through discipleship, we equip and nurture one another, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to do justice and share the hope we have.

My hope for this initiative is for churches to uncover their missional DNA and that people will die to themselves and be raised up to new life in Christ. My hope is that churches will discover that they need one another in this journey with Christ. And my hope is that churches will see, know and understand that this journey always sends us into the community.

My ultimate hope is that through the practices of prayer, Scripture and community, churches will move from places of anxiety and activity, to disciple-making communities serving their communities in the name of Jesus.

Ray Jones

I come from nearly 10 years of an associate pastor background, having been raised and nurtured in the faith by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). My dad was a commissioned lay pastor to a small African-American congregation in South Alabama for 30 years. As a Korean/black child adopted by white parents in South Alabama, in a family with 12 siblings (11 adopted from all over the world; two biological children), I was raised and supported by the PC(USA). I was nurtured into ministry by incredible pastors and youth pastors who were mentors and friends. I had awesome youth groups that inspired me to answer a call to Montreat College [when affiliated with the PC(USA)] and receive a Bible and religion degree. There, I met professors who continued to challenge me in the faith, which led me to Columbia Theological Seminary for both my M.Div. and my Doctorate of Educational Ministry programs. With the amazing guidance of professors and peers, who are now colleagues and friends, I got to fulfill a passion to study churches in East Africa.

In case it is not yet clear: This denomination, the great cloud of witnesses, have fulfilled, in every way, the baptismal vows made as my dad and the Rev. Billy McClean baptized me as an infant. At my baptism, my dad preached of my adoption into my large family and reminded the congregation of our adoption into the family of God, and the church has not forgotten their promise before God. Of course, I have seen the sinfulness and the harsh realities of institutional church as well. I have been harmed by church, and I have unintentionally inflicted harm. This is the truth of our sinful humanity. It is not an institutional reality; it is a human condition. Yet, time and time again, I am reminded of the forgiveness of the Savior who binds us all together. Time and time again, I am reminded of the grace and love we all receive in Christ through the ways the church shows up and shines a light.

My hope is that we might return to God, who is the Savior of all, and boldly live as Christ's disciples. I hope we walk in authentic relationship, bound by Christ, so that all are free to honestly share our story, and know the story of God's redemptive love and grace. I hope we do the necessary, albeit difficult, work to surrender to God's will and open ourselves to the wonder of God that transforms our lives, our church, our communities and all creation. I hope!

Kathryn Threadgill

Extended Description of Seven Marks of Vital Congregations



1

Lifelong Discipleship Formation vs. complacent “Christian” piety; simply teaching good morals; or offering the latest programs

Lifelong Discipleship Formation is about daily life. It’s about how we claim and proclaim our identity as followers of Christ. It’s about how we practice our faith; how we grow in faith, cherish faith, and share faith in the world. Beyond mere words, how do people know we are disciples of Jesus Christ? No matter the age, it’s about daily seeking and living in relationship with the living God. We are called to be righteous, to seek justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. Thus, Lifelong Discipleship Formation is about how we live into that right relationship with God, with all God’s people, and all of creation. It’s about growing in the community of God’s grace, the church, and interpreting faith in our everyday life; confronting brokenness and sinfulness when we fall short of the glory of God and shining a bold light of Christ for all to see. Lifelong Discipleship Formation requires an awakened and engaged commitment to God, and to all people whom Christ loves. It is about the call to daily take up our cross and follow Christ.

A. Biblical References:

Acts 2:42–47; Luke 8:11–18; Philippians 3:9b; Romans 8:1–17; Matthew 5:1–16; Deuteronomy 11:13–21

B. Objectives:

- An intentional plan for discipleship formation of all ages; from the cradle to the grave theology (including, but not limited to, family systems and intergenerational discipleship where applicable).
- A regular practice of Bible Study, prayer, and other spiritual habits, inside and outside where we gather
- Church teaches rituals and faith traditions, biblical literacy and spiritual practices to all members.
- Church equips and empowers all people to interpret faith in daily life. It engages in, not hides from, difficult conversations of society and cultures today. (i.e., sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and all other “isms” that divide).
- Fostered environments of diversity which help enhance and deeply enrich Biblical study, worship, and communal life.

C. Potential Outcomes:

- People learn to think critically and interpret Scripture in their daily lives. They have the biblical literacy and the faith language to engage in necessary conversations.
- They practice a living relationship, to a living God, responding to the call to follow as true disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Move beyond committee meetings and program attendance, and identity in Christ becomes central to life.
- Genuine sense of joy, energy, commitment and passion to being the community of God.
- People “outside the church” glean a new understanding of what it is to follow Christ and be church.
- The church begins to transcend culture and be about God’s work of reconciliation, love, and peace.

D. Reflection Questions:

- Does Christian formation in your church lead people to change the way they live? (i.e. schedule time, spend money, give resources, see different people, serve, spend time with family, have conversations with friends)
- Are people of all ages being challenged in assumptions, growing in understanding, and learning the language of faith?
- Does the study of scripture influence the mission and ministry of your church?
- Are faithful habits being translated to daily living?
- Does the Word of God permeate all aspects of life together? Name some examples.
- Do all people feel welcome to share their voice, opinion, story without judgement or fear?
- What difficult conversations of faith and culture does your congregation need to have together? Whose voices are missing from the conversation to take place?
- As a disciple, what uncomfortable things do you need to let go of, truths do you need to be aware of, places you are afraid to follow, things you are afraid God might call you to do? (i.e. injustice, oppression, hatred, evils, suffering, inequalities to confront).
- How can faithful discipleship become our daily identity instead of just religious piety? How do others know we are disciples of Jesus Christ?

2

Intentional Authentic Evangelism vs. “Jesus freaks”; “Christian” hypocrisy; a committee responsibility

Evangelism is simply sharing the Good News. It is authentic and it is intentional, not merely expressions of kindness or good moral ethics. We all have Good News to share in our lives; it is a part of our identity. And when we share this news, it is with intentionality and with people with whom we have relationships. We don't have to be trained to share the good news of a new job, baby or puppy! We simply share what is beautiful and dear to us. Therefore, evangelism must be connected to lifelong Christian formation. It is through intentional spiritual practices in the faith community that we meld God's story with our story, and we share that story with people in our daily lives.

A. Biblical References:

John 4:1–41; 2 Corinthians 4:7; Galatians 2:19b–20; Mark 4:1–20; 1 Peter 3:13–22; Matthew 4:19–20; Psalm 96; John 3:11–21; Romans 10:1–17

B. Objectives:

- To recognize that all disciples are called to Evangelism, not just committees and leaders; it is an authentic part of their life
- To empower and equip all people to enter relationships unashamed and unafraid to share the Good News
- The church recognizes that evangelism should be need-based (meets needs of un-churched/de-churched)
- The church develops practices for people to share their story and give witness to Good News in their lives

C. Potential Outcomes

- Hospitality is not viewed as a substitute for evangelism
- Evangelism is viewed as a way of life, not as a program or function of a few
- The mission focuses on sharing the Good News
- The people of God meld and claim God's story within their lives; living unafraid to share it
- Develop authentic relationships founded in Christ; image of Christ is shared

D. Reflection Questions:

- When did the news of Christ become Good News in your life?
- Does your church authentically allow individuals to come as they are, with their particular stories, and hear the Good News? Why or why not?
- In your church, how do people share their stories and connect it to the Story of God's redeeming love?

- How is your congregation equipped, empowered, and encouraged to intentionally share the Good News in daily life?
- Do you have an evangelism committee? If so, what are they tasked to do? How do you practice sharing the good news vs. growing membership?
- What keeps us from sharing the Good News in our daily relationships?
- Can we call it “Good News” if we do not share it in our authentic relationships?
- Name a time when sharing the Good News was good for someone who needed to hear it.

3

Outward Incarnational Focus vs. inward institutional survival; closed communities of assimilation/exclusion

If discipleship formation is about learning/ understanding/living the Good News, and authentic evangelism is about intentionally sharing the Good News in relationships, then outward incarnation is about not limiting where and to whom we share the Good News. Outward incarnational focus is about being the gathered community of Christ sent out! We go not because we have a strategy for new membership; we go because we have a Savior who commanded us to be on God's mission. We go because God's saving love in Christ, cannot be inwardly contained in our buildings when we live with neighbors in need and a hurting world. The Good News is meant to transform and transcend. The church is meant to be a beacon of Christ's grace, justice, freedom, and love. Outward incarnational focus means we daily take up our cross and follow to the marginalized of society, the poor among us, the suffering and sick, the stranger and enemy, the down-trodden and “the least of these.” We do not just focus on bringing similar or like-minded people inside to assimilate to our way of doing things; nor do we just go to people and places that are familiar and comfortable. Outward incarnational focus, requires an emboldened faith, that goes because Christ is already present, and calls us to join.

A. Biblical References:

Matthew 25:31–46; Romans 12:1–21; Matthew 7:14; Luke 19:1–10; Matthew 8:18–23; Luke 6:27–36; 2 Peter 1:16–21; Luke 9:1–6, 23–27; Luke 10:1–12

B. Objectives:

- Conduct community analysis to ascertain the needs, fears, hopes, and pressure points in the community, so that the church's ministry and mission can address them.
- The church practices genuine hospitality (more than being warm and friendly, it is about attempting to

anticipate the needs of others; practicing inclusion; stepping out of the comfort zone; loving and nurturing others; it's about them, not you)

- Join on Christ's mission with the lost, weak, suffering, lowly, least, marginalized, oppressed, outcast; working towards forgiveness and reconciliation
- Faithful engagement in rich relationships of all diversity
- Church becomes a living being sent to follow the Spirit and join where Christ is already present; not still/static

C. Potential Outcomes:

- The congregation is a noted presence in the community (i.e. needs are met, people feel welcomed, reconciliation and diversity help transcend culture)
- The community is viewed as being more important than the church building; we take up God's mission
- Transformation and renewal of congregations that reflect the rich diversity of the kingdom of God
- Shifts from "bringing in young people and young families" to sending out, showing up, being present where God is already at work; many come to know Christ their Savior

D. Reflection Questions:

- Who is at the margins of your community? Your congregation?
- How does your congregation show up outside your building and share the love of Christ?
- What would your community say about your church's identity?
- Where is Christ at work and inviting you to join? Does your congregation have an emboldened spirit to follow Christ?
- What prevents you from going where God may send you? What are your fears? What leaves you focused inward?
- Does your church welcome the lost, help the doubting, sit with the grieving, lend aid to the poor, help the downtrodden, offer forgiveness to the sinner, clothe the naked, support the suffering and sick, strengthen the faint hearted, respond to the skeptic, help bind up the broken-hearted, stand up for the weak, give voice to those silenced, pray with those in pain, and otherwise live into the incarnate spirit of Christ our Savior? If so, in what ways? If not, why?
- Do you feel like your church equips you in the faith to have difficult conversations of racial oppression, social injustice, white-privilege, racial profiling, sexual and gender inequality, terrorism, and/or stereotypes and prejudices of any kind?



Empower Servant Leadership vs. The pastor's job; monopolized leadership; hiring the young energetic pastor; burning out good volunteers.

All people of God, in the image of Christ, are given fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts meant for building up the Church. In this way, we are all called to serve the Lord, to do our part in membership of the body of Christ. Every part is necessary. Every part is valuable, and every voice is important. Every person should be equipped, nurtured, and supported to use their gifts to glorify God, through servant leadership; not just cliques of powerful people or continual burnout of the same leaders. In keeping with true discipleship formation, churches are called to help all members to be empowered to use their gifts in servant leadership. And, God calls and equips some for the particular task of pastoral ministry, which must be cultivated, nurtured and trained. Ministry can never be about a single pastor, but it is about identifying, equipping and empowering those servant leaders God puts in our midst.

A. Biblical References:

John 13:2–17; Ephesians 4:1–16; 1 Timothy 4:6–16; Matthew 9:37–38; 1 Samuel 3:2 Timothy 2:14–26; John 13:1–20

B. Objectives:

- The church encourages members, when appropriate, to be "ministers" (priesthood of all believers)
- The congregation provides tools and a healthy environment to train and support leaders
- The staff and other leaders model servant leadership principles
- Develop methods in which voices, ideas, opinions are shared; people are empowered in their faith
- Congregation assists people in discerning spiritual gifts for use in service to church and community

C. Potential Outcomes:

- Shared power and fresh ideas generated in worship and ministry, not staff or program-driven
- The church has healthy expectations of leadership; nurture and support is a shared responsibility
- Empowered servant leaders committed and passionate in mission and ministry of the church
- Servant leadership is diversified by age, race, gender, etc., as all people identify spiritual gifts and are trained in their call to serve

D. Reflection Questions:

- How does your church identify, equip, train, and support its leaders?
- Who is the leadership in your church? Is leadership a shared power? Do the same people lead everything?

- Is your leadership diverse? Are different ages, genders, races, beliefs, views represented?
- What practices does your congregation have that ensure the health of your servant leadership? How are they practically supported? What do you do when someone is burned out?
- How does your church handle monopolized cliques of leadership?
- What spoken and unspoken expectations do you have for your pastor(s)?
- How does your church help members discern spiritual gifts? How are voices/ideas heard?
- How are people empowered and encouraged to serve?
- What does your church do if the wrong people are leading?



Spirit-Inspired Worship vs. *self-gratifying worship; stale ritual divorced of meaning; or consumer entertainment worship*

Spirit-Inspired worship is a gift of God's wonder! Six days we labor and toil, and on this Holy Sabbath day we get to come into the presence of God; we get to encounter the awesome mystery of the God who longs to be known in relationship with us. We worship, because through prayer and supplication, through the Word proclaimed and the sacraments celebrated, through the songs of praise and passing of peace — God meets us there. Worship is our lifeline to the Holy God. Our worship should be active participation into the living relationship with the triune God; thus, all should feel welcome and have a place. Worship should challenge, teach, transform, convict, and call us into deeper relationship with God and one another; not gratify our comforts and entertain our desires. Worship is an encounter with God that we understand and do not understand. It is an act filled with mystery and awe, but in worship we have the opportunity to express our deepest desires to God and listen for God's voice. In worship, we also experience the call to serve and be in mission.

A. Biblical References:

Isaiah 6:1–13; Isaiah 29:13; Hebrews 12:28–29; Luke 24:13–35; Exodus 3:1–6; Deuteronomy 12; Philippians 2:1–11; Hebrews 5:1–10; 1 Chronicles 16:7–36; Revelation 22:1–7; Matthew 21:12–17

B. Objectives

- Prayerful discernment of members actively participating in all aspects of planning and leading worship
- There is thoughtful and sound biblical preaching
- Intentional worship does not cling to rituals, but is open to filling sacred space with new rituals

- Engages all people, of all diversity, and enables them to be active participants in the experience
- Creates space for peoples' stories; not afraid of silence
- Communal connectivity to one another, and connection to God
- Challenges and sends the people of God beyond their pew into daily life
- There should be awe, expectation, and anticipation in coming into the presence of God

C. Potential Outcomes:

- Worship helps people deepen their relationship with God and nurtures faith
- Worship strengthens our communal ties as stories are shared and we intimately experience God
- Worship becomes an expression of relationships to God and to the household of God
- Worship opens us to experience the wonder God longs to reveal and wonder transforms our lives and ministry, never leaving us the same, but leading us to even deeper questions
- Worship enlivens us, emboldens us to be a people of God in our communities and our world
- Blessing of rich diversity as people share new rituals, traditions, ways of interpreting which challenge and enrich our wisdom in faith

D. Reflection Questions:

- What would you say are the fundamental principles to why you gather for worship?
- What would a visitor say about your worship?
- How does your congregation practice spirit-inspired worship — allowing space for lament, praise, confession, questions, wrestling contemplation with the Word?
- Is worship collaborative in your church? Are people of all ages/backgrounds included?
- Does your congregation explain, teach and educate people on the rituals and traditions?
- How does your worship challenge, ignite, educate and transform people?
- Does worship meet people where they are and allow for active participation? How do people share their stories?
- Name times when God's wonder was experienced in worship.
- How open is your congregation to change in worship? Do they seek new ways to ritualize the sacredness of worship, or do they hold on sacredly to their rituals and traditions?
- Do all cultures, races, languages, genders, ages, all diversity find a sacred place to worship? Is worship enriched by their unique traditions and styles?

6

Caring Relationships vs. any other social club; facades, hypocrisy and judgments of the “church” and “religion”

Caring relationships seems an easy mark of vitality. We all want a place to belong; people who care about us. Many congregations would argue: “this is why we come together; we welcome and care for each other.” Yet, caring relationships in Christ requires true agape love; a sacrificial, self-emptying, perfect love. Although we are imperfect, it is about striving to see all people the way Christ sees them; not from judgments or preconceived perceptions. It is about helping walk with others, responding to their needs, desiring their well-being. It is about walking with people in tragedy, and rejoicing in their triumphs. Caring relationships of God is about allowing people to be real in their stories, without hiding or holding back, and loving every imperfect part of them. Church should be the one place where the God who already knows, encounters our honest confession, and allows us to give testimony. It should be the place where conflicts are confronted, crucial conversations of forgiveness and reconciliation are had, and people of God are transformed by agape-love. Caring relationships is about vulnerability and trust. It is about meeting all people of God where they are, and sharing our One Savior, Jesus Christ. Caring relationships don’t come through hospitality and welcoming committees, they come through a carefully cultivated environment that is genuine and sincere in being the household of God.

A. Biblical References:

Acts 6:1–7; John 21:15–19; Romans 12:9–18; Galatians 6:1–10; John 13:35; Hebrews 10:24–25; John 8:1–12; Romans 15:1–6

B. Objectives:

- Cultivates an environment of true caring relationships through genuine opportunities to share testimony
- The church seeks to strengthen ties within the household of God; fostering relationships between demographics, with members on the margin, people who are missing or who have been hurt
- The church seeks to build and rebuild relationships of conflict or strain; clear process of conflict resolution
- The church develops caring relationships in the neighborhood and community (i.e. other churches, community organizations, health and human services, advocacy groups, presbytery)
- Evaluate and envision ways of sharing the love of Christ in new relationships

C. Potential Outcomes:

- The church provides lasting community of agape — a love where all people belong
- Faith is strengthened; accountability and commitment grows

- People find belonging, lay burdens down, share needs, experience Christ
- Collaboration with other churches and community organizations becomes easier
- Growing connectional relationships throughout the presbytery, the denomination, and beyond

D. Reflection Questions:

- What practices of caring relationships does your congregation cherish most?
- What would a neighbor/community visitor say about the environment of caring relationships?
- How does your congregation respond in caring for the sick, marginalized, grieving, lonely? What about the alcoholic, the racially profiled, the abused child?
- Are people free to share their story and feel comfortable being authentic?
- What stops us from truth-telling in God’s house? What are the fears?
- How might you foster a genuine environment of caring relationships and true agape?
- How does your church handle conflict?
- What relationships in the church need to be reconciled?
- How do you foster and nurture lasting relationships in your community, with your presbytery, and beyond?

7

Ecclesial Health vs. unhealthy dysfunction; toxic environments; obsolete and irrelevant buildings

Ecclesial health is about: 1) Why we gather as a church community 2) How we practice being church together. It is about whether our mission, vision, and values match up with the ways we live together. It requires continual attentiveness, awareness, and assessment in asking “are we who we say we are?” And more importantly, “are we who God is calling us to be?” Prayer and discernment are at the heart of ecclesial health! There are several factors to ecclesial health: prayerful discernment, decision-making process, health of pastors, stewardship of budget and resources, clarity in mission and ministries. Ecclesial health is about the people of God having a clear purpose; all people are stake-holders invested in being a part of this community of faith. There are shared core values, a clear mission, and commitment and loyalty to the life we gather in as church. Yet, they also know that this is a living faith. So, they dare to dream and understand that change is inevitable. With ecclesial health, there is joy and gratitude in coming together; people, not programs or properties are valued. People gather and are sent to be Christ’s Church.

A. Biblical References:

II Corinthians 5:11–21; Matthew 15:1–9; 1 Corinthians 12:14, 24b–25; Romans 6:1–14; Luke 24:13–35; John 2:13–25; John 17; Colossians 2:1–19; 1 Timothy 6:11–21

B. Objectives:

- A communal life centered on prayer and discernment of God's will
- Clarity in Vision, Mission, Core Values; budget reflects these core principles
- Continual attentiveness, awareness and assessment to mission and practices of being church
- Pastor(s) and staff are regularly evaluated using best practices
- Pastor(s) and staff, all servant leaders, are nurtured and supported in health; clear expectations
- Stewardship and tithing are taught year-round; accountable giving in gratitude
- Transparent in spending; continual discernment of budget sustainability
- All are stakeholders, committed to fiscal responsibilities, active participation, and necessary voices in envisioning, dreaming, and decision-making

C. Potential Outcomes:

- Congregations practice a living faith, ever-changing, where prayer is central to existence
- People are the church sharing core values, mission, vision
- Authentic joy, desire, commitment in being the church
- There is a culture of accountability and risk taking, openness to new things

- Sustainable budget, tithing responsibility, stewardship center on generosity to being church
- Pastor(s) and leaders are cared for, evaluated, and supported

D. Reflection Questions:

- How would you describe the ecclesial health of your church?
- Do you feel like your church centers life with prayer at the heart of all things?
- What is the mission of your church? Who wrote it? How does your church live into its mission? How does your budget reflect your mission?
- What are the core values and vision of your church? Does everyone know and share them?
- Does your congregation do well to embrace change?
- When was the last time a dream led to incredible new vision and ministry in your church?
- Are people stakeholders in being a part of your church? Do they feel committed to values and mission? Do they feel they are necessary in dreaming, envisioning, decision-making process?
- What are the policies for pastor(s) and staff in your church? How are they evaluated? Supported?
- How does your church teach stewardship and tithing?
- Who makes decisions in your church? Are they transparent? Do all get buy-in; all opinions heard?
- Is your budget sustainable? How is it assessed? Who determines spending?

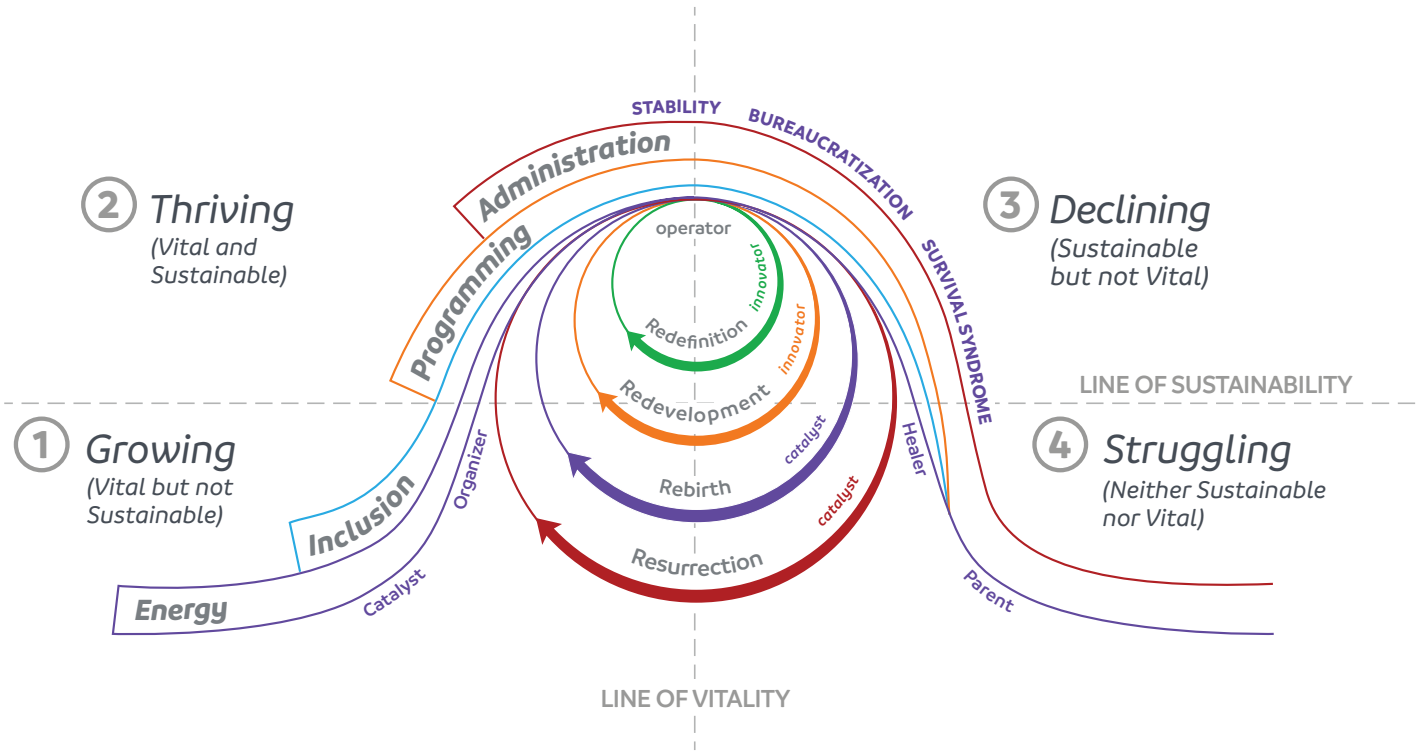
The Life Cycle of a Worshiping Community

The concept of a congregational life cycle has been around for a long time, and is typically illustrated with a diagram such as the one here, which is inspired by models developed and used by the ELCA, American Baptist Churches, the Episcopal Church, the Rothage Life Cycle, the US Congregational Life Survey, George Bullard and others. The bell-shaped curve shows the stages that a congregation can proceed through, from left to right. Note that as we move from left to right, we see the congregation growing and then eventually plateauing (the top of the curve)—but only for a short while—and then steadily declining.

But a gradual progression toward decline and even closure is not inevitable. Worshiping communities can, and often do, break out of this cycle. Note where the model shows a “circling back” toward the thriving stage. This is the result of intentional work on the part

of the worshiping community. Note that the further a worshiping community moves over the top of the curve and to the right, the more effort is required to move back to the thriving stage. The easiest, when caught early enough, is to redefine the worshiping community’s vision. But if the community has gone too far for mere redefinition to work, then they must redevelop. And finally, if it has declined too far to be redeveloped, it must birth a new community. We’ve also been experimenting with the idea of adding “resurrection” as a fourth loop at the bottom.

Using new surveys measuring components of spiritual health and financial health, we will be able to place each participating worshiping community at a location on this diagram, which will provide a basic assessment of where the community is currently located in this life cycle.



FOUR QUADRANTS:

Note that the diagram has two axes: vertical (representing the line of spiritual health) and horizontal (representing the line of financial health). A worshiping community that is located above the line of financial health exhibits traits that suggest it will be able to sustain itself for a long period of time. Below that line, it either hasn't yet achieved financial health (too new) or had it in the past but has lost it. To the left of the line of spiritual health, we have communities that are spiritually healthy; to the right, becoming less so.

Putting these two axes together suggests four different quadrants (beginning at the lower left and moving along the curved line to the right, or clockwise).

QUADRANT 1 — *Growing:* Worshiping communities in quadrant 1 are in the development stage and are new, excited and vital. They exhibit lots of energy and vision, hope and enthusiasm and a belief that the community has great potential. They are very change-oriented. However, they're not developed enough at this stage to be considered financially healthy. Perhaps there is not enough participation for financial viability, or perhaps they're just not yet organized and fully engaged in planning and strategizing. It's a good place to be, but not for very long. Without more organization and stable leadership, a worshiping community is very vulnerable at this stage. The type of leaders best suited to lead a worshiping community at this stage are catalysts (those with charismatic qualities and entrepreneurial skills, the visionaries) and organizers (those who can grab the vision and run with it, people who know how to get things done). Usually the most growth occurs while a community is in this stage. As they become more organized, newer worshiping communities in quadrant 1 tend to think a lot about inclusion: both inviting those outside of the worshiping community and intentionally including those who have started participating. They need to be thinking about how to draw people in and then how to assimilate them into the group, how to engage members in discovering and using their spiritual gifts and how to distribute and use power and authority.

QUADRANT 2 — *Thriving:* Worshiping communities in quadrant 2 have achieved financial health while remaining spiritually healthy. Although energy levels may not be as high as they were previously, energy is still there, and it may be renewed or increased by some of the worshiping community's activity. By now, it has developed a culture of mission and also some services that meet the needs of its participants, the surrounding community and beyond. Saarinen refers to this as programming, which serves specific functions such as worship, music, learning, serving, managing and witnessing. In this context, administration refers to mission statements, goals, objectives, budgets and planning. Worshiping communities in quadrant 2 tend to be higher on programming and administration, and lower on energy and inclusion than quadrant 1 communities, but all four of these "gene structures" are present. A lot of change can lead to conflict; but if well managed, small inevitable conflicts are not detrimental to the overall health of the worshiping community. At this stage, the community has developed plans for reaching people, assimilating new people and providing intentional spiritual formation. The goal is to get to this quadrant, and when the worshiping community inevitably drifts into quadrant 3 (Declining), through some redefinition of its goals, it can return to quadrant 2 without a great deal of effort. The type of leaders we typically see at this stage might still be the catalysts and/or organizers who got the worshiping community started, but they may have lost some of their enthusiasm and moved from organizers to operators. If they forget about the passion that they once had, they can lead the community into quadrant 3.

Or they may have left and been replaced with an operator type. Or a new visionary catalyst or organizer has moved in and is trying to convince the community to do some redefinition of its mission and purpose. If that doesn't happen quickly, the worshiping community may slide over the hill into quadrant 3 pretty quickly. Worshiping communities in quadrant 2 are still growing, though perhaps at a much slower pace. They are in a pattern of adding enough new members to offset annual losses that naturally occur, and until they slip over the hill, are adding more new members than they lose. Because the energy expended on growth in quadrant 1 shifts to ministry and administration as the worshiping community moves into quadrant 2, growth tends to slow. This is probably the best time for a congregation to consider birthing a new worshiping community.

QUADRANT 3 — *Declining*: Worshiping communities in this quadrant at first would argue that they have not ventured over the hill and are still in quadrant 2. Indeed, it's difficult to tell when that point happens. But at some point, a congregation moves from thriving to less thriving, and if not checked, will continue down the quadrant-3 slope towards quadrant 4 (*Struggling*). Worshiping communities located in this quadrant have typically stopped growing, and at first are in a pattern of maintaining, which slides into patterns of more losses each year than gains. The worshiping community may become bureaucratized to the point where some people begin questioning whether it's lost its sense of vision or purpose. The people and leaders may have lost their sense of urgency to be on mission, and yet may maintain financial stability due to a large endowment, or by keeping a large enough member base to be able to maintain for years, maybe even decades. Note in the diagram that some redefinition, if it occurs early in the community's time in quadrant 3, (requiring the leadership of an innovator, who is often not the "operator" leader who brought them here in the first place) the community can return to quadrant 2 without a lot of effort and monumental changes. If not, the community is at risk of catching "survival syndrome," which is characterized by some of the following: fundraising efforts to keep the doors open, letting staff go to keep functioning with a steadily decreasing budget, developing an attitude of scarcity thinking that replaces abundance thinking, as well as conflict and blame. A worshiping community at this stage needs a healer to lead them. The further the community continues sliding down the hill toward quadrant 4, the more work will be needed to redevelop the community back into a quadrant 3 community. Such work requires the leadership of an innovator who can help the community through the conflict that will inevitably come to move into healthier patterns.

QUADRANT 4 — *Struggling*: Worshiping communities in this quadrant generally know that they are in trouble, because, at some point, they recognized that they were in quadrant 3 and tried to do something about it. They may have been engaged in major conflict, have developed unhealthy responses to conflict and no longer have healthy systems in place. They may have slowly aged as a community, with their younger generations growing up and moving out. They are usually more engaged in maintenance than in mission at this stage. They are becoming less financially healthy, and as they move toward the end of the cycle, they may come to realize that they are no longer healthy, either spiritually or financially. Quadrant 4 worshiping communities are at a crossroads where they have to choose between doing nothing and inevitably closing their doors, intentionally closing their doors and using any remaining funds to help fund something else, merging with another congregation in a union or federated relationship, or completely rebirthing as something new.

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PDS 22316-18-001