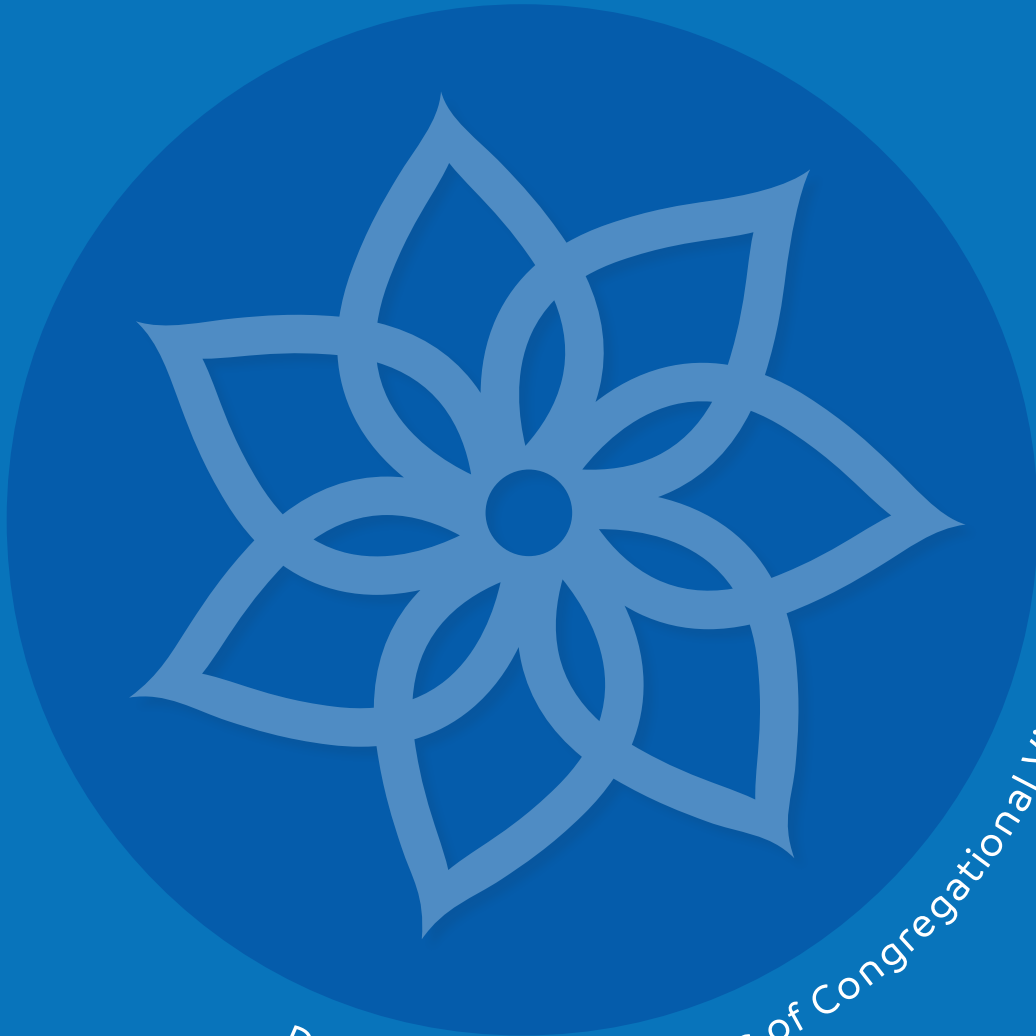




Presbyterian Mission
**Theology, Formation
& Evangelism**

Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative



Developing the 7 Marks of Congregational Vitality



Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative

Theology, Formation and Evangelism Office

Presbyterian Mission Agency

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

re-vi-tal-i-za-tion / noun

“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.” (OED) Synonyms: reanimation, rebirth, regeneration, rejuvenation, renewal, resurgence, resurrection, resuscitation, revival.

Contents

- 1 **Revitalization Vision**
Personal Hope Statements
Revitalization Network
- 2 **Overview of the 7 Marks
of Vital Congregations**
- 3 **2-Year Revitalization Initiative**
 - Guidelines for Presbyteries
 - Guidelines for Pastors and
the People of God
- 4 **Sample Revitalization
Calendar**
- 5 **Revitalization Resources**
- 6 **Revitalization Facilitators**
- 7 **Addendum:**
 - Extended Vision Statement
 - 7 Marks of Vital Congregations

Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative





Revitalization Vision

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 Revitalization Initiative is to work alongside leaders of existing congregations continually assessing, discerning, and living into faithful actions that increase vitality through intentional spiritual practices that take them deeper into following Jesus Christ, so that their own lives are changed, congregations are transformed, and the mission of God spreads 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:

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

What this is:

The hope is 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 Revitalization 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 I builds 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 7 Marks of Congregational Vitality, churches will determine a course between 3 Actions:

- 1 **Re-forming churches** — re-envision and change how we are church together through the 7 Marks of Congregational Vitality
- 2 **Missional Clustering churches** — revitalize by clustering congregations into new communities of worship and ministry
- 3 **Death and Resurrection 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 7 Marks and 3 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**

Authentic Relationships and The Honest Assessment and Discernment of Congregations

- **Year 2: Incarnational**

Revitalizing Church in 3-Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection

Personal Hope

I care deeply 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 discover 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 in to 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

Associate Director for Evangelism

Personal Hope

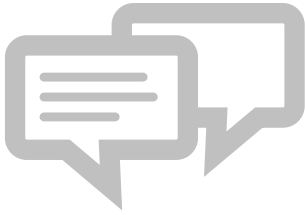
I come from nearly ten years of an associate pastor background having been raised and nurtured in the faith by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). My dad was a commissioned lay pastor to a small African American congregation in South Alabama for thirty years. As a Korean/Black child adopted by white parents in South Alabama, in a family with twelve 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 (then 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, 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 Rev. Billy McClean baptized me as an infant. At my baptism, my dad preached of my adoption into my large family and reminded all 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 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

Associate for Vital Congregations



Revitalization Network

PC(USA) Revitalization Network Members

May we provide Christ-centered encouragement along with clear tools to help congregations move from a “membership mindset” where individuals are expected to “join a church” to a “discipleship mindset” where individuals are enlivened to “join the Way of Jesus Christ.”

Rev. Debra T. Bibler (Executive Presbyterian, Flint River Presbytery)

Rev. Dr. Jerry Cannon (Senior Pastor, C.N. Jenkins Memorial Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC)

Rev. Herb Codington (Bethany Presbyterian Church, Clinton, SC)

As our congregations and presbyteries seek to follow where God is already leading us in the rapidly changing American cultural landscape, we are being called into a period of prayerful discernment. My hope is that this initiative will help us deepen our walk with Christ so that we are given minds and hearts that are open to “nothing more, nothing less, nothing else than the will of God” for the PC(USA) going forward.

Rev. Jim Kitchens (Pneumatrix and Center for Healthy Churches Consultant, Sacramento, CA)

My prayer is that together we will discern more of the new thing that God is doing and accept the invitation to join in!

Rev. Randy Lovejoy (Associate for Congregational Renewal, San Fernando Presbytery, CA)

My hope is that through the Revitalization Initiative many more of our congregational leaders will rediscover who they are and whose they are and reclaim what it really means to be The Church. In doing so, like missionaries in another culture, they will come to realize that if they are going to be faithful witnesses to what God is doing in the world, then they will need to be continually adapting to their changing contexts while constantly engaging the people living within their communities.

Rev. Danny Murphy (General Presbyterian, Trinity Presbytery, SC)

I hope we might provide the tools, the shepherding, and the resourcing to empower each congregation and mid-level council to create an environment where the work of the Holy Spirit is enhanced and facilitated so that Jesus’ statement: “I tell you, if these [people] keep silent, the stones will cry out [in praise]!” (Luke 19:40, Amplified Bible) and Matthew 28:19a “Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life” (The Message) become a life changing reality for individuals, congregations, communities, and the world.

Rev. Deb Swift (Pastor of South Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY)

7 MARKS OF
CONGREGATIONAL
VITALITY

Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative





7 Marks of Congregational Vitality

<p>1 LIFELONG Discipleship Formation vs. complacent “Christian” piety, simply teaching good morals, or offering the latest programs</p>	<p><i>“The righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God based on faith.” (PHIL. 3:9B)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.
<p>2 Intentional, Authentic Evangelism vs. “Jesus freaks;” “Christian” hypocrisy; a committee</p>	<p><i>“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)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.
<p>3 Outward Incarnational Focus vs. inward institutional survival; closed communities of assimilation/exclusion</p>	<p><i>“The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (MATT. 7:14)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outward exploration, awareness, and focus on neighbors and neighborhood.• Beyond relationship with those of similar existence, the incarnate Christ dwells among the lowly and least, the stranger and the suffering, the marginalized and majority.• Missional focus on where Christ is already living and present, and calling us to dwell.
<p>4 Empower Servant Leadership vs. the Pastor’s job; monopolized leadership; hiring the young, energetic pastor</p>	<p><i>“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.” (MATT. 9:37–38)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.

TWO-YEAR
REVITALIZATION
INITIATIVE

Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative





I. Guidelines for Presbyteries

Year 1: Relational

Initial Covenant Visit

An intentional visit will establish a prayerful covenant relationship between presbytery leadership and PC(USA) staff. The objective of this visit will be to review, brainstorm, and plan for the two-year Revitalization Initiative. The goal is to empower mid council leadership to walk with pastors, with the support and resources of the PC(USA) staff, so that pastors are equipped to lead congregations to faithful discernment and vitality. *(Daylong planning in two sessions. Time should be offered for pastors to gather to ask questions and pray together.)*

Two Sessions:

1. Morning Session: Pray, listen, learn, pray some more

- Opening Devotion: Issues and Struggles, Vitality and Hope for Context. Revitalization Vision
- Discuss Revitalization Initiative, 7 Marks, and Revitalization Coaching Team
- Covenant-Building

2. Afternoon Session: Prayerful imagination, living in hope

- Pastor Cohort Planning: Groups and monthly meetings. Retreat.
- Plan Initiative through presbytery and with pastors.
- Resources, surveys, toolkit
- “Show Your Marks” campaign
- Q & A with presbytery leaders

Year 1 Exploration

Building intentional relationships and honest assessment of congregations

Year 1 is about genuine relationships where existing congregations engage in confessional assessment and faithful discernment in where the Spirit is leading them to follow. It will explore congregational life story of who they have been, in order to discern who they are called to be moving forward. Finally, it will explore beyond the walls in a neighborhood analysis.

Presbytery and Pastors

A. Pastor Cohorts

Presbytery leaders will form pastor cohorts to meet monthly for prayer, biblical and theological reflection, support and fellowship, case study and brainstorming for Revitalization Initiative in their particular church.

- Presbyteries should consider geographical location of pastors, as well as similarities in church communities. (Later, these pastor cohorts may consider adding ecumenical voices from the community.)
- Presbyteries may consider a retreat in order to form groups and create trust.
- PC(USA) resource: Twelve sessions will focus on assessment of particular congregations and 7 Vital Marks. *(See Resource Information.)*

B. Presbytery Meeting

Presbytery leaders should plan time for debriefing, dialogue, checking in during regular scheduled presbytery meetings. Worship and prayer should invite time for reflection of pastors’ contexts.

- Presbyteries may choose to plan workshops/ seminars on the 7 Vital Marks at each Presbytery Meeting.
- Presbyteries practice and train pastors in conducting a neighborhood exegesis and walking congregations through assessment and discernment.

C. 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.

D. 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 7 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.

E. 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.

F. Checking Our Marks

(March–May) 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.

G. "Show Your Marks" Campaign

(November–December) This campaign offers an opportunity for congregations to report their assessments, report findings of neighborhood analysis, and share their particular stories. Congregations will be asked to capture the vitality of the 7 Marks of Vital Congregations. Stories, videos, 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 louder 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 offering to God.

Year 1 Resources

1. Revitalization Liturgy
2. 3-Session Congregational Assessment
3. 3-Session Presbytery Assessment
4. 12-Session Pastor Cohort Gathering
5. 7 Marks of Congregational Vitality Church-wide Study
6. "Show Your Marks" Campaign Report
7. Community Analysis Exercise
8. Mission Insite — Community Data

Year 1 Revitalization Facilitators

In consultation with presbytery leadership, the PC(USA) revitalization facilitators team can be consulted and/or deployed however they contractually determine and plan. The PC(USA) encourages the use of the revitalization coaches during the third session of congregational assessment. Coaches should have a gift for:

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

Year 2: Incarnational

Year 2 Exploration

Revitalizing church in 3 Actions

The objective of Year 2 is Incarnational: Re-envisioning how we are called to be church. Re-forming the 7 Marks of Congregational Vitality, and living the Good News with all people. After Year 1 assessment and discernment, Year 2 is about living into a new discipleship — opening to the transforming wonder God longs to reveal, and boldly following the Holy Spirit into the new things God is doing. In courageous faith and hope, churches will live into:

- 1. Re-forming church** — revitalizing the 7 Marks of Congregational Vitality
- 2. Missional 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

Presbytery and Pastors

A. Pastor Cohorts

Pastor cohorts will continue to meet monthly.

- A 12-session resource will be provided by the PC(USA). This will be further biblical/theological discussion centered on helping pastors re-envision and re-form church in today's context and culture.
- Pastor cohorts will take turns sharing neighborhood analysis of their particular context. The PC(USA) with the help of revitalization facilitators will offer data analysis of contextual neighborhoods. (*Mission Insite*)

B. 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 3 Actions.

- The PC(USA) will provide a ToolKit with resources for all 3 Actions moving forward. Facilitators who specialize in one or more of the 3 Actions will be available for video/phone conferences and site visits.
- The conclusion of Year 2 will allow presbyteries and pastors to ritualize their revitalization experience in celebration and thanksgiving to God. This might be a worship service together, a time of sharing, storytelling, or some other gathering event.

C. Presbytery Prayer Tour

Presbytery leaders should support and pray with each congregation as they embark on 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.

D. Presbytery 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.

E. 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, from fear to faithfulness.

- For example: Presbyteries may choose to assemble a video of congregational vitality highlighting the 7 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 slide show of congregational vitality and revitalized mission and ministries throughout their presbytery to share with people who are seeking.

Year 2 Resources

1. 12 sessions, pastor cohort gatherings
2. Rethinking 7 Marks of Vital Congregations church-wide study
3. Final session and congregation assessment
4. Final presbytery assessment
5. "Show Your Marks" campaign report

Year 2 Revitalization Facilitators Team

In consultation with Presbytery leadership, the PC(USA) revitalization facilitators team can be consulted and/or deployed however they contractually determine and plan. The PC(USA) encourages the use of the revitalization facilitators during the third session of congregational assessment. Coaches with 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 worshipping community or thriving without a building

Looking Ahead

Remember, the end of the Revitalization Initiative is hopefully a new beginning. In faith and hope, churches will witness 7 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:

- Creating continuing revitalization resources (see below);
- Offering continued presbytery leaders gatherings (UPN or Evangelism Conference time);
- Offering revitalization coaches for ongoing assistance for congregations when necessary;
- Continuing to pray with and for you;
- Continue to highlight congregational vitality through the sharing of “Show Your Marks” reports

Future Resources: After the Two-year Revitalization Initiative

- Resources for ongoing congregational revitalization;
- 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
- Revitalization conference to gather all pastors who’ve been through the Revitalization Initiative to share stories and debrief together
- Resources to help existing congregations looking to create new worshipping communities



II. Guidelines for Pastors and the People of God

Year 1: Relational

Year 1 Exploration

Building intentional relationships and honest assessment of congregations

Year 1 is about genuine relationships where existing congregations engage in confessional assessment and faithful discernment in where the Spirit is leading them to follow. It will explore congregational life story of who they have been, in order to discern who they are called to be moving forward. Finally, it will explore beyond the walls in a neighborhood analysis.

Pastors and People of God

A. Congregational Revitalization Initiative

(January – February) 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 Revitalization Initiative.

- The Revitalization 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.*
- Pastor should meet with session elders and deacons 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. *Note: revitalization facilitators should be introduced to congregations at this time.*
- Pastors may choose to hold a session retreat in order to: covenant build, outline the Initiative, set goals, plan.
- Pastor(s) and session should engage in a neighborhood exegesis experience and debrief their findings.

B. 7 Marks of Congregational Vitality, Church-wide

(Lenten study) This is a seven-week Bible study and prayer around each of the 7 Marks of Congregational Vitality. As congregations study the Word of God around these 7 Marks of Vitality, 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 provided by PC(USA)*

C. Checking Our Marks

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

1. Telling Our Story (Month 1)

Focuses on historical mapping of particular churches

2. PC(USA) Marks of Vitality Survey (Month 2)

Survey taken by congregations and Session members. Based upon the 7 Marks of Vital Congregations. Scored by the PC(USA) and returned to presbyteries and pastors/session. Engage in a neighborhood analysis and plotting the life-cycle of the church.

3. Revitalization Assessment (Month 3)

With survey results, neighborhood analysis experience, and presbytery reports in hand, congregations will explore who they have been and the necessary discernment of who they are being called to be.

- 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.

- Trained and specialized PC(USA) revitalization facilitators will be offered 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 mission insite information to compare findings of neighborhood analysis

D. “Show Your Marks” Campaign

- (November – December) 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.
- 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.
 - These reports should be turned in every two years. The session, in consultation with the pastor, should develop a plan for continual ongoing assessment of the congregation. For example: 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.

Year 2: Incarnational

Year 2 Exploration

Revitalizing Church in 3-Acts

The objective of Year 2 is Incarnational: Re-envisioning how we are called to be church. Re-forming the 7 Marks of Congregational Vitality, and living the Good News with all people. After Year 1 assessment and discernment, Year 2 is about living into a new discipleship — open to the transforming wonder God longs to reveal, and boldly following the Holy Spirit into the new things God is doing. In courageous faith and hope, churches will live into:

- 1. Re-forming church** — revitalizing the 7 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

Pastors and the People of God

A. Prayers and Planning for Vital Congregations

(January)

- Pastors in consultation with elders and deacons should envision and plan how to implement the two-month “Plotting the Course Think Tank” and all other aspects of the Year 2 Revitalization Initiative. For example: a church-wide study; worship series focus; continue house gatherings from Year 1.
- Pastor(s) and session should also be exploring and planning the way forward, gathering input from the neighborhood analysis, mission insite, “Show Our Marks” report, presbytery report, and congregation think-tanks. Clear goals and hopes should be adopted by church leaders in consultation with presbytery leadership and revitalization facilitators teams (as necessary).

B. Plotting the Course to Revitalizing Actions

(February – March)

- The PC(USA) revitalization facilitator teams specializing in the 3 Actions will assist in walking congregations through the next steps planning. Presbyteries will have a toolkit of resources for the 3 Actions.
- The end of seven weeks — the congregation should decide through guidance of the session which initiatives to try; goals should be set; a plan made for how and when these new Revitalization Initiatives will be launched!

Note: This time should be highly engaged and faithful as we re-turn our focus to how God is working and showing us wonder that transforms us more and more into who we are called to be and how we are joining Christ in the work of redemption in our communities and throughout the world. Do not be afraid to dream!

C. Re-Envisioning Our Marks

(February – March) Seven-week church-wide study on revitalizing the 7 Marks of Vital Congregations

- The PC(USA) will provide a seven-week resource to re-think 7 Marks, to re-envision how a congregation is being called to change or implement these 7 Marks of Vitality, and to strategize how to practically implement these ideas. This is preparation for intentional experiential praxis; ideas leading to action.

D. Prayer for Revitalization

(One week of prayer) 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!*

- Examples: Set up a week-long prayer vigil 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, all members responsible for praying throughout the week for a particular Revitalization Initiative.

E. Changing Our Marks

(After seven-week series and one week of prayer, six months of revitalizing) Pastor(s) and church leaders should walk with congregation in 3 Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering and Death and Resurrection. The 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, boldly act in new practices in mission and ministry. Note: This is not merely new programs or ministries to impact membership numbers... this is a new beginning, a new chapter of God transforming church. Transformation is for individuals, churches, communities, neighbors, and all who we are called to share the love of God.

- Pastor(s) and session should inform and pray with presbytery leaders of all actions 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, transparency and updates on how things are going, and opportunities for storytelling and congregational input.
- Pastor(s) and presbytery leaders should call upon revitalization facilitators when necessary.
- *Note: 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 confessed and documented; this is life together.*

F. Final Assessment and "Show Your Marks" Report

(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 Revitalization Initiative, and turned in to Presbyteries and the PC(USA) staff to mark a new measurement of vital congregations.

Session Vitality Assessment

(One month, Year 2) 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.

- The PC(USA) will provide final assessment tool and resources for ongoing vitality.
- The final "Show Your Marks" Reports 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.

Note: 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 worshipping 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?

Congregation Vitality Assessment

(One month, Year 2) This will be an intentional time of reflecting, engaging in important conversations and assessments of the Revitalization Initiatives. 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 the Lord is doing in our midst!

- Pastor(s) and session determine how to go about revitalization debriefing. For example: offer reflection assessment surveys and plan a special worship where revitalization stories can be shared and surveys/assessments can be offered. Home groups plan presentations, story sharing 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.
- From this debriefing should come tangible ways forward, covenant promises to be kept, envisioning plan 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.

Note: Pastors and churches should be sure to invite presbytery leaders to see, and to hear, and to be a part of debriefing and assessment, and concluding rituals/celebration of the Revitalization Initiative.

"Show Your Marks" Report

(Final month, Year 2) "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 the PC(USA) staff.

- The final "Show Your Marks" report should be submitted during the closing revitalization celebration.
- A guide to creatively sharing these reports can be found in the revitalization workbook, coming in 2018.

Looking Ahead

Remember, the end of the Revitalization Initiative is hopefully a new beginning. In faith and hope, churches will witness 7 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:

- Creating continuing revitalization resources (see section 5)
- Offering continued presbytery leaders gatherings (UPN or Evangelism Conference time)
- Offering revitalization coaches for ongoing assistance for congregations when necessary
- Continuing to pray with and for you
- Continue to highlight congregational vitality through the sharing of "Show Your Marks" reports.

Future Resources: After the Two-year Revitalization Initiative

- Resources for ongoing congregational revitalization
- 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. and curriculum that engages cultural issues in making faith applicable
- Ongoing book studies for pastors and continuing education opportunities
- Revitalization conference to gather all pastors who've been through the Revitalization Initiative to share stories and debrief together
- Resources to help existing congregations looking to create new worshiping communities.

Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative

4



Sample Revitalization Calendar

Year 1: Relational

Authentic Relationships and the Honest Assessment and Discernment of Congregations

January	Initial Visit: Presbytery Leadership and PC(USA) Staff
February	Prayer and Planning Meetings, Introductions of Pastor Cohorts, Opening Celebration
March–April	(Seven-week Church-wide Study during Lent) Exploring 7 Marks of Vital Congregations
May–July	Break for Summer
August	Planning and Training for Fall
September–November	(Three months) Checking Our Marks — Three-session Congregation and Presbytery Assessment
November–December	“Show Your Marks” — Report/Capturing Congregational Stories

Year 2: Incarnational

Revitalizing Church in 3 Actions: Re-forming, Missional Clustering, Death and Resurrection

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

Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative





Revitalization Initiative Resources

I. Revitalization Manual

Given to presbyteries interested in the two-year initiative

- Vision
- Revitalization Network — Statements of Hope
- 7 Marks of Vital Congregations
- Revitalization Initiative (Presbytery and Pastor Guidelines)
- 2-Year Calendar
- Resource Overview
- Facilitator Overview
- Appendix: Full Statement of Vision, Expanded Version of 7 Marks of Vital Congregations

II. Immediate Toolkit

For presbyteries and existing congregations asking for immediate help/support

- Life Cycle
- Emoji Assessment
- 7 Marks of Vital Congregations
- Session Survey of Vital Marks
- Neighborhood Analysis
- Prayer and Devotions of 7 Marks of Vital Congregations

III. Year 1 Guide: Relational

Authentic Relationships and The Honest Assessment and Discernment of Congregations

A. Revitalization Liturgy — prayers and worship liturgy for presbyteries and congregations to use throughout the initiative that calls upon the wonder of God and the hope to faithfully follow in the newness of Christ.

B. Pastor Cohorts — 12 sessions for monthly meetings

1. Personal and Contextual Introductions
2. Contextual Mapping for Revitalization
3. Vital Mark #1 — Lifelong Discipleship Formation
4. Vital Mark #2 — Intentional Authentic Evangelism
5. Vital Mark #3 — Outward Incarnational Focus
6. Vital Mark #4 — Empower Servant Leadership
7. Vital Mark #5 — Spirit-Inspired Worship
8. Vital Mark #6 — Caring Relationships
9. Vital Mark #7 — Ecclesial Health
10. Hope and Wonder of Revitalization
11. The Power of Prayer, Discernment of Spirit
12. Faithful Discipleship

C. Congregational Assessment Sessions — Three-month assessment of congregations

1. *Telling Our Story (Month 1)* Focuses on historical mapping of particular churches:
 - Memorial — from building budgets to faithful discipleship. How will we be remembered?
 - Membership — from numerical trends to how we've treated one another. Conflict and compassion stories
 - Mission and Ministry — from vitality of glory days to missed opportunities. What other communities would say about us?
2. *PC(USA) 7 Marks Survey (Month 2)* Survey taken by congregations and session members. Based upon the 7 Marks of Vital Congregations. Scored by PC(USA) and returned to presbyteries and pastors/session.
3. *Revitalization Assessment (Month 3)* With survey results in hand, story and life-cycle mapped, congregations will explore who they have been and the necessary discernment of who they are being called to be.
 - **Confession** — Exploring the life-cycle of the church allows congregations to plot their story, and to assess in honest discernment where they currently reside amidst the cycle. Acknowledging strengths and weaknesses to vital life together. Where do we need to change?
 - **Neighborhood Exegesis** — This exploration allows congregations to take a look outside the walls of a building to dwell and synthesize the neighborhood context. It seeks to explore the ethos and needs of the community to see if church is a beacon of Christ's light in the community. Does our membership match our community? Does our ministry meet people where they are and address needs of a community?
 - **Communal Discernment** — Are we dying and called to give witness to resurrection? Are we called to cluster with other existing congregations? Are we called to re-think and re-form how we are church together?

D. 7 Marks of Vital Congregations — Seven-week, church-wide study

1. Vital Mark #1 — Lifelong Discipleship Formation vs. complacent "Christian" piety, simply teaching "good morals, and offering the latest programs
2. Vital Mark #2 — Intentional Authentic Evangelism vs. "Jesus freaks," "Christian" hypocrisy, a committee
3. Vital Mark #3 — Outward Incarnational Focus vs. inward institutional survival, closed communities of assimilation/exclusion
4. Vital Mark #4 — Empower Servant Leadership vs. the pastor's job, monopolized leadership, hiring the young energetic pastor
5. Vital Mark #5 — Spirit-Inspired Worship vs. self-gratifying worship, stale ritual divorced of meaning, or consumer entertainment worship
6. Vital Mark #6 — Caring Relationships vs. any other social club, facades, hypocrisy, and judgment of "church" and "religion"
7. Vital Mark #7 — Ecclesial Health vs. unhealthy dysfunction, toxic environments, obsolete and irrelevant buildings

E. Presbytery Assessment — The same assessment congregations will be walking through, should be adapted to take place by presbytery leadership for all congregations

1. Historical mapping — leadership, structure, budget, strengths and weaknesses, conflicts and joy
2. Mission and ministry — identity, programs, equipping and supporting pastors, change
3. Congregations — identifying context of each congregation, life-cycle assessment, shifts/trends in community exegesis

F. "Show Your Marks" Campaign

1. Report on 7 Marks of Congregational Vitality assessment should focus on:
 - Our assessment — strengths and weaknesses
 - Creatively Capturing Our Story: case studies, video, art/graphics, or written reports
 - Discerning hope — where do we go from here? Where is the Spirit calling us? Our plan and hope for tomorrow

IV. Year 2 Guide: Incarnational

Revitalizing Church in 3 Actions

A. Pastor Cohorts — 12 sessions for monthly meetings

1. Prayerful Discernment: Contextual Processing
2. The Wonder of God — Transforming Church
3. The Challenges with Change
4. Life-Cycle: Next Chapter Unfolding
5. The Gifts of the Pastor: Guiding A People
6. Christ and Post-postmodern U.S. Culture
7. Discipleship: Living the Good News
8. Hope vs. Fear: The Necessary and Difficult Dialogues
9. Revitalizing 7 Marks
10. Sustaining Vitality
11. Looking Towards Tomorrow, Today
12. The Power of Prayer

B. Re-Envisioning Our Marks — Seven-week church-wide study

1. Lifelong Discipleship Formation — If Christian formation took place inside and outside the norm
2. Intentional Authentic Evangelism
3. Outward Incarnational Focus
4. Empower Servant Leadership
5. Spirit-Inspired Worship — If worship is wondrous encounter with God, not the most segregated hour
6. Caring-Relationships
7. Ecclesial Health

C. Final Vital Congregations Assessment — Seven-week church-wide study

1. Session Assessment: Debriefing the initiative, goal-setting, sustainability planning, and report — sharing marks of vitality
2. Congregation Assessment: Debriefing, dreaming, sharing marks of vitality

D. Final Presbytery Assessment — The same assessment congregations walk through should be adapted for presbytery leaders.

E. “Show Your Marks” Campaign — The final “Show Your Marks” report should be submitted during the closing revitalization celebration. A guide to creatively sharing these reports can be found in the revitalization workbook.

Report should focus on:

- Our Assessment: Strengths and weaknesses
- Creatively Capturing Our Story: Case studies, video, art/graphics, or written reports
- Discerning Hope: Where do we go from here? Where is the Spirit calling us? Our plan and hope for tomorrow

V. Full Toolkit

Given to presbyteries interested in the two-year initiative

1. Resources for 7 Marks of Vital Congregations
2. Witness death and resurrection
3. Missional clustering congregations
4. Re-forming churches

VI. Future Resources

Revitalizing Church in 3 Actions

1. Resources for ongoing congregational revitalization;
2. Christian Formation — particularly daily spiritual practices;
3. Curriculum for ongoing faith matters and discipleship equipping;
4. Resources for empowering congregational leaders, particularly those called to ministry;
5. Resources to celebrate diversity — sex, gender, age, race, etc.; curriculum that engages cultural issues in making faith applicable;
6. Ongoing book studies for pastors and continuing education opportunities;
7. Revitalization Conference to gather all pastors who've been through the Revitalization Initiative to share stories and debrief together;
8. Resources to help existing congregations looking to create new worshipping communities.

REVITALIZATION
FACILITATORS

Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative





Revitalization Facilitators Pilot Presbyteries

Facilitator — The definition of facilitate is “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, and so help the group reach a successful decision, solution or conclusion.

Objective:

Presbyteries should identify and elect two members to be trained by the PC(USA) for the role of Revitalization 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. They will also be supported/ mentored by the PC(USA) revitalization facilitator liaisons, Danny Murphy and Randy Lovejoy.

Rationale:

In order to support congregations who are walking through the Revitalization 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 to navigate the challenging and hope-filled work of revitalization. They will serve as trained support to presbyteries, pastors, and congregations long after the initiative.

Facilitators should be able to:

- Assist pastors or walk with congregations without pastoral leadership
- Ask good, sometimes difficult, questions
- Mediate conflict resolution
- Facilitate assessment dialogues
- Engage decision-making processes
- Engage in problem-solving, visioning, planning

Gifts of facilitators:

- Faithful
- Positive attitude; encouraging
- Leading group-dynamics
- Relational
- Communication skills
- Adaptive leadership: assertive/visionary/ democratic/inspiring
- Pastoral/peacemaker
- Emotional intelligence

When to use 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, walk them through the challenging questions and conversations.

Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative



Extended 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 amidst 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 reinvesting 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 Revitalization 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.

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. 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 Revitalization 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.

Then God said to me, “Prophesy 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. I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. 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.’ 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. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 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 sixty-four 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 therapeutic and distant God. Our questions are about maintaining buildings, rather than addressing why no one is coming in 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!

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; 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. 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.” 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, 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 imagine 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 offer revitalization 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 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!

Ray G. Jones III, Associate Director for Evangelism
502-569-5280 | ray.jones@pcusa.org

Kathryn Threadgill, Associate for Vital Congregations
502-569-5085 | kathryn.threadgill@pcusa.org

“ ” “ ” “ ”

“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

“ ” “ ” “ ”

7 Marks of Vital Congregations



Lifelong Discipleship Formation vs. complacent “Christian” piety; simply teaching good morals; 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 unchurched/ dechurched)
- 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?
- Can you 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 churches 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?



Empowering Servant Leadership vs. the pastor's job; monopolized leadership; hiring the young, energetic pastor

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; Timothy 4:6-16; Matthew 9:37-38; 1 Samuel 3:2; 1 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; 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 on 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?
- Can you 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 stakeholders 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?



Presbyterian Mission

**Theology, Formation
& Evangelism**

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202