

Vital Congregations



Year One - Prayer and Preparation

2022

- Presbytery-wide focus on deepening our ability to listen to God and listen to one another
- Preparing our hearts and minds to be ready for God to do a new thing in our midst, individually and as congregations
- March Presbytery retreat (March 4-5) will focus on the theme of prayer and preparation
- Sessions will be invited to join the Vital Congregations cohort that will work together across the Presbytery

Year Two - Building Faith and Honest Assessment 2023

- Participating congregations will build and renew authentic relationships of faith
- Each congregation will be invited to engage in an honest assessment of their spiritual gifts and their difficult realities
- Unique stories describing past mission and ministry will be lifted up as part of discerning the call to future mission and ministry
- Together congregations will work to hear how the Spirit is calling them to action

Year Two - Decisions at Year End

2023

- At the end of the year, congregations will be invited to make a decision about where God is calling them:
 - Re-envision and change how we are church together
 - Revitalize by joining in mission and ministry with other congregations, perhaps creating new communities of worship or new partnerships
 - Celebrate the witness of mission and ministry and give thanks for a journey that is drawing to completion

Year Three - Living into Christ's Call

2024

- Having discerned the Spirit's guidance, now the congregation takes the steps to live into their new or shifted call together
- Engage transformation and change in order to be more faithful to the renewed sense of mission and ministry
- Explore what missional action in our communities looks like through the lens of your particular call to ministry
- This is where the boots hit the ground!

Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

The Lens and Frame for Our Work Together

- Lifelong Discipleship Formation
- Intentional Authentic Evangelism
- Outward Incarnational Focus
- Empower Servant Leadership
- Spirit-Inspired Worship
- Caring Relationships
- Ecclesial Health

Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

1. Lifelong Discipleship Formation vs. Complacent “Christian” piety, simply teaching good morals, or offering the latest programs

- “The righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God based on faith.” Philippians 3:9b
- From the cradle to the grave seeking to be formed for right living with God and with all people.
- Faith – seeking understanding, cultivating wisdom and actively following Christ; not an extra-curricular or 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.

Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

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

- “We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God.” 2 Corinthians 4:7
- Intentionally sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, not just acts of kindness.
- Authentically sharing Christ because it is intrinsic to self-identity; overflow of Christ in our life.
- Relational, not programmatic or systematic.

Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

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

- “The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Matthew 7:14
- Outward exploration, awareness, and focus on neighbors and neighborhood.
- Beyond relationship with those who are like us, the incarnate Christ dwells among the lowly 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.

Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

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

- “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.” Matthew 9:37–38.
- Identify, nurture and 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.

Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

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.

Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

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 peacemakers and bridge-builders together.

Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

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 Corinthians 12:14, 24b–25
- Understanding of: Why are we 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, stakeholders 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.

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To learn more:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/theology-formation-and-evangelism/vital-congregations/>

Resources:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/theology-formation-and-evangelism/vital-congregations/resources-from-the-office-of-vital-congregations/>

