

Vital Congregations Vision

*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
See, the home of God is among mortals. ... See, I am making all things new.*

*Isaiah 43:19
1 Corinthians 3:16
Revelation 21:3-5*

Vision:

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

Purpose:

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

Values:

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

What we believe:

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

What this initiative is:

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 initiative 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**
- **A guidebook on calling the young pastor**

Overview: The Vital Congregations Initiative is a two-year covenant relationship between presbyteries and the PC(USA) to prayerfully walk with pastors and existing congregations in intentional efforts of revitalization. Year 1 seeks to (re)build authentic relationships of faith. Churches will embark on an honest assessment, capturing their unique stories, confessing their realities and discerning the Spirit's call to action. From 7 Marks of Vital Congregations, 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 — revitalization by clustering congregations into new communities of worship & ministry; 3) Death and Resurrection churches — revitalizing 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 that 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**

7 Marks of Congregational Vitality

<p>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>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>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>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.

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.

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.

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.