

The Office of Vital Congregations, PC(USA)  
Theology, Formation, and Evangelism Department  
Lake Michigan Presbytery  
September 21-22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018

**Call to Worship**

*Psalm 95*

- **Leader:** O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- **People:** O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For the Lord is our God, and we are the people of God's pasture, and the sheep of God's hand. O that today you would listen to God's voice!

**Opening Sentences of Scripture:**

- **Kathryn:** Jesus said: I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. *John 8:12*
- **All:** The king will say to those on his right hand: Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited. *Matt. 25: 34-36*
- **Presbytery Leader:** The call of Christ is to willing, dedicated discipleship. Our discipleship is a manifestation of the new life into which we enter through baptism. It is possible because in Jesus Christ we have been set free from the bondage of sin and death.

**Opening Prayer:**

*Moment of silent confession, silent reflection, silent prayer.*

**Dwelling in the Word**

**Isaiah 43:10-21**

10 You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.

11 I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior. 12 I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses, says the Lord. 13 I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it?

14 Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I will send to Babylon and break down all the bars, and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation. 15 I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King. 16 Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty

waters, 17 who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

18 Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. 19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. 20 The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

- \* What do you hear in the passage? What word(s) or phrases that speak to you?
- \* What challenges you in this passage?
- \* How does this passage speak to congregations today?
- \* What questions does this passage leave you with?

### **Prayers of the People & The Lord's Prayer**

*This time is open for pastors and church leaders to lift up specific prayers for their context, congregations, and themselves. It is an opportunity to pray for revitalization and vital life in Christ, whether silently prayed, written down, or said aloud in the prayer time. A presbytery leader will conclude the prayer time by leading all in The Lord's Prayer.*

### **Peace of Christ**

*While sharing Christ's peace, offer Christ's compassion, share Christ's mercy, extend Christ's joy. Ask one other person how you can pray for them this week, even if it an unspoken prayer request. Know that as we extend Christ's peace to others, Christ pours out peace unto us.*

## **What: Vital Congregations Presentation**

### **I. Defining Vitality**

In groups of 2-3, take a few minutes to compose a public statement that finishes the following statements:

- What defines a congregations vitality is...

## 7 Marks of Vital Congregations

1. **LIFELONG Discipleship Formation VS.** *Complacent “Christian” piety, simply teaching good morals, or offering the latest programs.*
  - “The righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God based on faith.” Phil. 3:9b
  - From the cradle to the grave seeking to be formed for right living with God and with all people.
  - Faith – seeking understanding, cultivating wisdom, and actively following Christ; 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.
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 Cor. 4:7
  - Intentionally sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, not just acts of kindness.
  - Authentically sharing Christ because it is intrinsic to self-identity; overflow of Christ in our life.
  - Relational, not programmatic or systematic
3. **Outward Incarnational Focus VS.** *Inward Institutional Survival; Closed communities of assimilation/exclusion.*
  - “The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Matt. 7:14
  - Outward exploration, awareness, and focus on neighbors and neighborhood.
  - Beyond relationship with those who are like us, the incarnate Christ dwells among the lowly & least, the stranger & the suffering, the marginalized & majority.
  - Missional focus on where Christ is already living and present, and calling us to dwell.
4. **Empower Servant Leadership VS.** *the Pastor’s job; monopolized leadership; hiring the young energetic pastor; burning out good volunteers.*
  - “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.” Matt. 9:37-38.
  - Identify, nurture, support the use of spiritual gifts of all people to serve; not monopolized cliques of power.
  - All voices and people are necessary, and it is noticeable when people are absent/missing.
  - Nurture and encourage those specifically called and gifted for pastoral ministry.
5. **Spirit-Inspired Worship VS.** *Self-gratifying worship, stale ritual divorced of meaning, or consumer entertainment worship*
  - “These people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote.” Isaiah 29:13
  - Worship is about God. We get to come on holy ground, encounter God, and experience wonder.
  - Worship is active participation in the living relationship of the triune God, thus *all* should feel welcome just as they are to come.
  - Worship challenges, teaches, transforms, encounters, convicts, and sends people out different.
6. **Caring Relationships VS.** *Any other Social Club; façades, hypocrisy, and judgment of “church” and “religion.”*
  - “By this everyone will know that you are disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35
  - Sharing in God’s true agape moves us beyond half-hearted programmatic participation, lukewarm faith, and pretending.
  - Instead of a closed, judgmental community, people find freedom to share stories, encounter the Savior, and ask for help.
  - Welcome and hospitality are not left to a committee, but, imperfectly, we strive for *all* people find identity, purpose, and belonging in the household of God.
  - Confront conflict, seek reconciliation in all divisions, find ways to embrace all diversity, seek to be peace-makers and bridge builders together.
7. **Ecclesial Health VS.** *Unhealthy dysfunction; toxic environments; obsolete and irrelevant buildings*
  - “The body does not consist of one member but of many. God has so arranged the body that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.” 1 Cor. 12:14, 24b-25
  - Understanding of: Why we are a church community? How are we a church community in practice? Prayer permeates all life together.
  - Clarity in mission, core-values to ministry, passion and joy in being the church. Our budget reflects these values, vision, and ministries.
  - Fiscally responsible- Stewardship and tithing are taught, transparency in spending, continual assessment/discernment of a sustainable budget.
  - All are aware of how decisions are made, stake-holders in the process and procedures, valued voices in the envisioning, open to changes, continual assessment of the “why” and “how” we are church together.
  - Nurturing and supporting the health of pastor(s), staff, and all called to lead; fighting against burnout.

## 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 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, & 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 21<sup>st</sup> century context
- God is calling Church to transform & transcend cultures and contexts
- Move from inward institutions to neighborhood relationships & mission

### What this is:

The hope is this is the beginning of intentional, authentic relationships between the Presbyterian Church (USA) Mission Agency and Mid-Council leaders and pastors to:

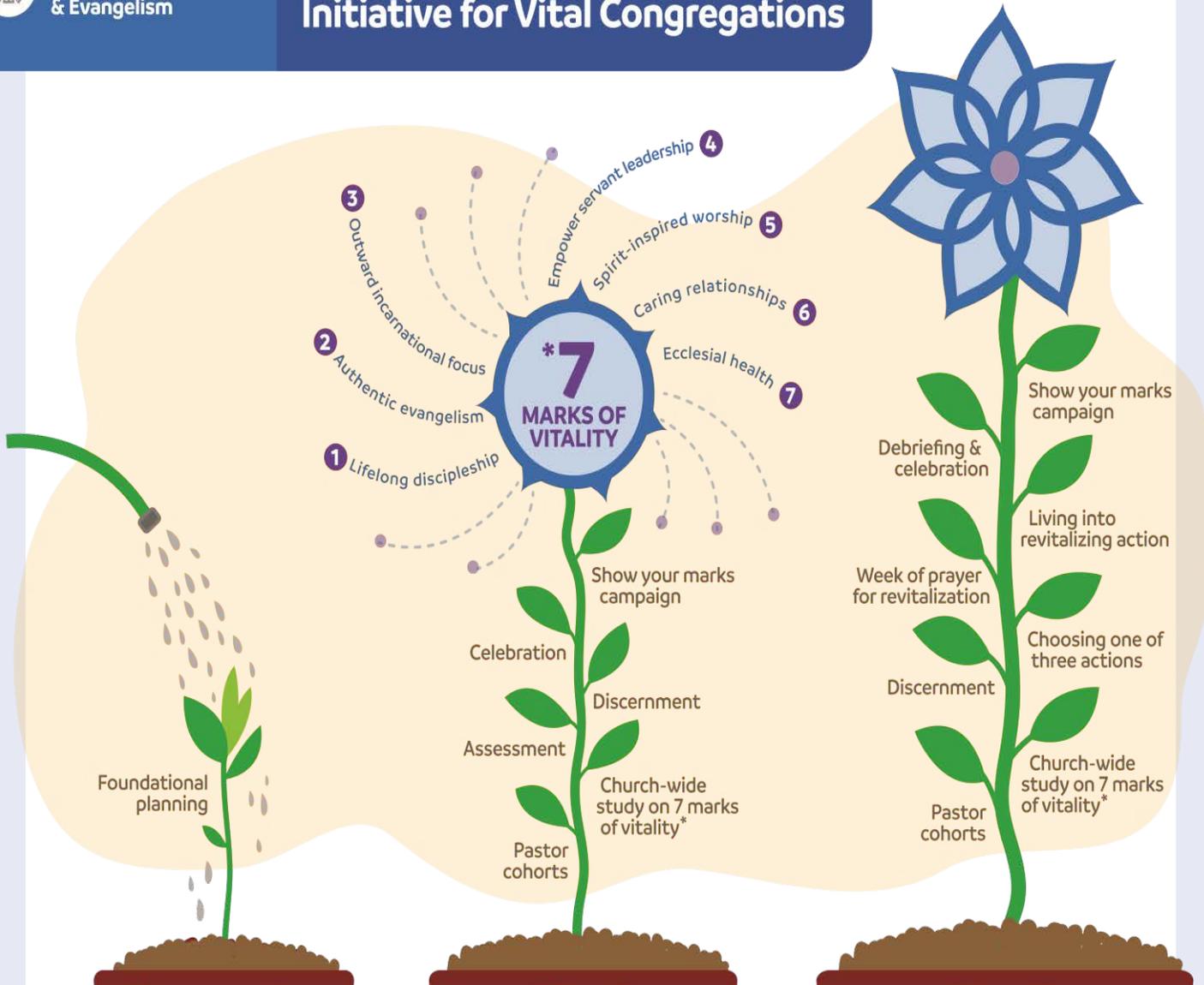
- Come together as the people of God
- Pray: re-turn to faithfulness in God
- Inspire openness to the Holy Spirit's transformation/change
- Honestly assess, discern, and act
- Resource, Equip, & Support leaders and pastors
- Practice missional evangelism & faithful discipleship
- Equip vital congregations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

### What this is NOT:

- This is not a universal program instructing churches and assuring vitality and sustainable life.
- Another plan that promises immediate fix.
- A guarantee of revitalization for every congregation
- An attempt for the PC(USA) to tell churches what to do
- 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



# Two-year Revitalization Initiative for Vital Congregations



## Vital Congregations Initiative

## Seven Marks of Vital Congregations – 7 Week Church-Wide Study

- |  |            |  |
|--|------------|--|
| 1. <b>Lifelong Discipleship Formation</b>  | <b>vs.</b> | Complacent “Christian” Piety, simply teaching good morals & offering latest programs |
| 2. <b>Intentional Authentic Evangelism</b> | <b>vs.</b> | “Jesus Freaks”, “Christian” hypocrisy, a committee                                   |
| 3. <b>Outward Incarnational Focus</b>      | <b>vs.</b> | Inward Institutional Survival, closed communities of assimilation/exclusion          |
| 4. <b>Empower Servant Leadership</b>       | <b>vs.</b> | the Pastor’s job, monopolized leadership, hiring the young energetic pastor          |
| 5. <b>Spirit-Inspired Worship</b>          | <b>vs.</b> | Self-gratifying worship, stale ritual divorced of meaning, or consumer entertainment |
| 6. <b>Caring Relationships</b>             | <b>vs.</b> | Any other social club, facades, hypocrisy, and judgment of “church” and “religion”   |
| 7. <b>Ecclesial Health</b>                 | <b>vs.</b> | Unhealthy dysfunction, toxic environments, obsolete and irrelevant buildings         |

## Re-Envisioning Our Marks – 7 Week Church-Wide Study

- |   |           |  |
|---|-----------|--|
| 1. <b>Lifelong Discipleship Formation</b><br>shaped by the Potter   | <b>or</b> | life-long learners, disciples in development, being continually    |
| 2. <b>Intentional Authentic Evangelism</b><br>of the good news      | <b>or</b> | real relationships, equipping all individuals, the genuine sharing |
| 3. <b>Outward Incarnational Focus</b><br>“other” centered           | <b>or</b> | partnerships with purpose, missional mindset, communally           |
| 4. <b>Empower Servant Leadership</b><br>emboldened authority of all | <b>or</b> | shared service, permission giving, diffused power, and the         |
| 5. <b>Spirit-Inspired Worship</b><br>God in all that we do          | <b>or</b> | passionate prayers, joyfully gathering, glorifying and enjoying    |
| 6. <b>Caring-Relationships</b><br>love                              | <b>or</b> | heart-felt honesty, atmosphere of grace, speaking the truth in     |
| 7. <b>Ecclesial Health</b><br>up the body                           | <b>or</b> | creative connectivity, discover that we have “enough”, building    |

# A Seven-Day Cycle of Prayer

*Based on the Seven Marks of Vital Congregations* Living God, we give you thanks and praise for the new things you are doing among us ...

**SUN** for the transforming presence of Christ  
**MON** for your call to follow the way of Jesus  
**TUE** for the gift of your Word made flesh  
**WED** for the good news of your holy realm  
**THU** for Jesus' example of humble service  
**FRI** for your great love for all the world  
**SAT** for our common ministry in Jesus' name

*Other joys and thanksgivings may be added.* Living God, by the gifts of your Spirit, help us to bear witness to the risen Lord ...

**SUN** proclaiming the good news of salvation  
**MON** growing in the image of Christ  
**TUE** offering your grace to others  
**WED** sharing the hope that is within us  
**THU** loving and serving one another  
**FRI** extending your compassion to all  
**SAT** building up the body of Christ

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

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





Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
**Presbyterian Mission**

**Rev. Dr. Kathryn Threadgill**

Associate for Vital Congregations  
100 Witherspoon Street | Louisville, KY 40202

Presbyterian Mission Agency, PC(USA)

Office: (502) 569-5085

Cell: (502) 558-1283

Kathryn.Threadgill@pcusa.org

Vital Congregations Main Page:

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

Click the green RESOURCES area on the VC main page OR search “vital congregations” “Immediate toolkit” or “revitalization” they will get a link to the toolkit here:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/vital-congregations-immediate-toolkit/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/PCUSAVitalCongregations/>



## Notes