

## **Vital Congregations**

### **Purpose/Mission of A United Methodist Congregation**

Make new and deepen the faith of all disciples to be loyal to Christ through their prayers, presence and participation in the church, and to engage in ministries of witness, mercy and justice in the world. (Based on the membership vows of The United Methodist Church)

*A congregation builds up the body of Christ to serve in the world.*

### **What is vitality?**

Vitality is how well a congregation engages its members and new people in the life of the congregation through five vital ministries. Vitality measures how well you inspire and engage people in the ministry of growing faith, building up the congregation and engaging in community hands on mission.

### **Why is vitality important?**

The more engaged your members are, the deeper they grow in faith and purpose and the greater the opportunity for your congregation to thrive.

### **What are the key measures of vitality?**

Vital mission congregations involve people in five vital ministries that grow and engage disciples to build up the body of Christ and serve in the world (Ephesians 4:12 and Acts 2:41-47). These vital ministries also meet the mind, body and soul needs of people. Implementing the five vital ministries meets the needs of people, deepens the faith and engagement of the congregation and creates a healthier and more vital congregation.

### **What are vital activities and strategies for growing the five vital ministries?**

One of the greatest challenges is developing a comprehensive program for each vital ministry for the first time. It requires organizing a team, creating or identifying the resources and materials, recruiting and training people and supporting people as they carry out the ministries. But once leadership has done it the first time, it becomes easier and easier the successive launches of a new season of vital ministries. It is important to assess your congregation's capacity to launch more than one vital ministry at a time. For some congregations it may take 4-5 years to launch all five. For others it may take 2-3 years to launch all five ministries. The following are strategies and activities to help you plan, organize and carry out vital ministries.

### **What support is there to grow our vitality and create a vitality plan?**

Your congregation will be doing this work as a team, led by the pastor. Pathways can be self-led, and we will provide you with helpful tools to excel independently. If you desire, a facilitator/coach can support your congregation's leadership in completing and achieving your plan.

## The Five Vital Ministries

Vital Ministry	Vital Verse and Words	Vital Need	Vital Marker	Vital Outcome
Inspiring Worship	Acts 2:47 Revelation Inspiration Wonder Celebration	Transcendence - people need someone that is greater than us, the Creator	Average Worship attendance is higher than it was two years prior.	Inspired disciples who continue to praise God and grow in faith, service and giving.
Small-Group Fellowship and Learning	Acts 2:42 Formation	Relationships and Growth – people need to be in relationship with others and grow together in mind, body and soul.	The number of Disciples in small groups is equal to or more than 50% of the average worship attendance.	The congregation is deepening in faith and developing strong connections.
Hands on Mission	Acts 2:45 Activation Application	Purpose and Meaning – people’s lives are better when they experience purpose and meaning.	The number of Disciples in hands-on mission is equal to or more than 60% of the average worship attendance.	The congregation is connecting with the community through mercy, justice and witness ministries.
New Disciple	Acts 2:41 Cultivation Multiplication	Significance – because of God’s grace and Christ’s love in my heart, my life has significance to others.	The number of new professions of faith is equal to or more than 5% of the average worship attendance.	The congregation is multiplying faith and belief.
Generous Giving	Acts 2:44 Appreciation	Gratitude – people are blessed by blessing others through generosity and giving.	Mission Giving is equal to or more than 18% of the church’s expenses.	Sustainable mission.

## **Pathways Strategies**

The following are strategies and activities to help you plan, organize and carry out vital ministries.

### *Vital Ministry 1 - Strategies to Attract New Worshipers and Grow Worship Attendance*

Growing worship attendance is essential to growing vital and sustainable mission congregations. Strategies for attracting more visitors to worship include:

1. Improve the quality of preaching, worship, and other vitality ministries.
2. Improve the appearance and quality of signage, outside grounds and inside space, particularly worship area, bathrooms, and nursery.
3. Increase opportunities for potential new members to connect with the church. This may include special worship services or events, small group ministry, community mission engagement and mission trips.
4. Encourage worshipers to FRAN (invite Friends, Relatives, Associates and Neighbors).
5. Move from only greeting people to showing welcoming hospitality through conversation and invitation. Think about how your guests want to be welcomed and made to feel comfortable as they arrive.
6. Develop and carry out a multi-contact visitor follow-up program.
7. Create a communications plan that invites neighbors to attend worship and/or other church activities.

### *Vital Ministry 2 - Starting and Growing Small-Group Ministries*

Small groups deepen faith, encourage, and develop relationships among members, and offer opportunities to invite and welcome people from the community. Small groups are an entry point to faith and life in your congregation.

1. Identify leaders who have a deep and growing faith and are good at facilitating learning. They have the ability to engage others in conversation and model deep listening and reflection.
2. Equip small-group leaders by developing a congregational program or identifying a small-group ministry leadership development training.
3. Empower leaders to select material that is easily facilitated by your leaders and meets the interests and needs of your people.
4. Empower leaders to identify a realistic schedule that meets the needs of the people in your congregation. Also identify the times of the year most conducive for your people to participate in a small group. This may include 4-8 sessions at ideal times to launch small groups.
5. Promote small-group ministries. Personal invitation by small-group leaders or participants, and personal testimonies by former or current small-group participants are generally most effective. Use a variety of communication vehicles: newsletter, bulletin, social media, signs and posters, community newspapers, worship service announcements, etc., as opportunities to share the value and importance of small-group ministries.

6. Launch your small-group ministry and have regular check-in times with small-group leaders. Listen to learn how it is going, and coach leaders on how to address challenges and build on opportunities.
7. Provide opportunities for participants to share their stories, evaluate their small-group experiences, and offer ideas for future small-group studies and activities.

### *Vital Ministry 3 - Starting and Growing Community Justice, Mercy, and Witness Ministries*

Engaging people in mission and ministry with neighbors in the community gives them meaning and purpose for their lives and addresses their human needs. Mercy ministries meet immediate human needs, such as hunger, education, medical aid and help with rent, transportation, and utilities. Justice ministries organize people to address and bring change to systems that perpetuate pollution, poverty, racism, abuse, classism, sexism, and anything else that prevents people from being who God fully created them to be.

1. Identify leaders of faith who have a deep commitment to serving others and an ability to lead others into the community to help start and engage in ministries of justice and mercy.
2. Learn about the community and talk with people who live in the community about what the congregation can do to serve the community.
3. Identify ministries that match the gifts, assets, and strengths of your congregation and of community residents, and that address concerns raised by people there.
4. Identify a realistic schedule to do ministries that meet the needs of the people in your congregation.
5. Identify how you will promote justice and mercy ministries and recruit people to participate in those ministries. Personal invitation by leaders or participants in the ministry, and personal testimonies by former or current ministry participants, are generally most effective. Use a variety of communication vehicles, newsletter, bulletin, social media, community newspapers, worship service announcements, word-of-mouth, etc., as opportunities to share the value and importance of small-group ministry.
6. Launch your justice and mercy ministries and have regular check-in times with your ministry leaders. Listen to learn how it is going and coach leaders on how to address challenges and build on opportunities.
7. Provide an opportunity for participants to evaluate their experiences in the small group and offer ideas for future small-group studies and activities.

### *Vital Ministry 4 - Increasing the Number of New Disciples/Professions of Faith*

New disciples indicate a congregation is able to attract new people to the faith. This indicates that the people in the congregation are passionate believers whose faith attracts new people to the faith. Reaching new disciples is the last commandment Jesus gave to his disciples (Matthew 28:18).

1. Pray as a congregation that God would open opportunities to connect your members with people who are looking or need to participate in a faith community.
2. Identify a leader with a deep and growing faith to lead a team that focuses on making new disciples.

3. Explore the community to learn of neighbors who are not participating in a faith community. Identify their interests, beliefs, values, and experiences (in other words, grow your intercultural competency by learning to see all the people who live and work in your community). You may want to use someone experienced in intercultural competence for this work. Now evaluate which of your ministries will connect with people in the community and what adaptations or new ministries the congregation may need to develop.
4. Create a discipleship path that welcomes, makes follow-up connections, and incorporates visitors with each of the discipleship (vitality) ministries. Begin with one or more of the first three: worship, small groups, or engagement in hands-on mission. Then focus on helping them to become new disciples through profession of faith, to give generously to support mission, and to invite other new disciples. This discipleship path is for both visitors and regular attendees who come to your church onsite and online.
5. Create and implement an intentional congregational care system with processes to ensure participants and members feel loved, valued, and cared for by leaders and by one another.
6. Equip and encourage disciples and leaders to share their faith with others, including offering their testimony during worship, and to invite people to church quarterly and monthly.

### *Vital Ministry 5 - Developing Generous Giving*

Generosity sustains the mission of the congregation and its witness in the community. Identify a generous giver who has a deep faith and leadership skills to lead the giving ministry of the congregation. Develop a yearlong giving/stewardship plan to increase giving that includes at least the following:

1. Implement a stewardship commitment campaign. On commitment cards have a space for people to indicate if they have included the church in their will or if they want to talk with someone about a bequest to the church.
2. Communicate and teach about giving and generosity throughout the year.
  - Prior to receiving an offering, tell a story about a person or ministry that will be helped through the congregation's giving.
  - Develop a sermon series each year approximately six months following your stewardship commitment plan that provides the biblical and theological grounding for generosity.
  - Write a monthly bulletin or newsletter article that shares a story about how the congregation's giving helped someone or a ministry.
  - Organize a yearly small-group class or webinar on budgeting or financial planning.
  - Teach about generous giving and living during the new disciples/membership classes.
  - Teach stewardship to children and adults through Sunday school and small groups.
3. Develop your website with a giving button that allows people to give online and create a giving page that shares stories and testimonies of why people give and the ministries that benefit from giving.
4. Share a detailed narrative budget and regular financial reports with members and participants at least once a year to model healthy transparency and accountability.
5. Intentional thank members and participants who give to the church, at least twice a year.