

VITAL CONGREGATIONS INITIATIVE, PCUSA
DISCERNMENT OF VITAL CONGREGATIONS FACILITATORS

Objective

Presbyteries should identify and elect a minimum of two members to be trained by the PC(USA) for the role of Vital Congregations 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, or a session for churches without a pastor. They will also be supported/mentored by a liaison from the PC(USA) Vital Congregations Team (in our case Bryce Weibe) and have quarterly video meetings with other facilitators around the country.

Rationale

In order to support congregations who are walking through the Vital Congregations 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 being a more vital congregation. They will serve as trained support to presbyteries, pastors, and congregations long after the two-year initiative.

Facilitators should be able to help:

- Share the vision of Vital Congregations
- Assist pastors/and/or session of church
- Ask good, sometimes difficult, questions
- Mediate conflict resolution and reconciliation
- Facilitate assessment dialogues for churches
- Facilitate the process of discernment and decision-making
- Engage in problem-solving, visioning and planning

Gifts

- Faithful
- Positive attitude; encouraging
- Lead and navigate group dynamics
- Relational and trustworthy
- Good communication skills; honesty
- Adaptive leadership: Assertive/visionary/democratic/inspiring
- Pastoral/peace-maker
- Emotional intelligence

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Calling upon Facilitators

We envision that facilitators will lead two key points in the two-year initiative:
Year 1—during the Assessment Review and Discernment stage for congregations
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 needs assistance with conflict resolution and reconciliation.
- Pastors and congregations want assistance in 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; walking them through the challenging questions and conversations.

Facilitators will spend four days being trained by the Vital Congregations Office of the PC(USA). Facilitators will attend quarterly video meetings, lasting approximately one hour, as an opportunity to check in with facilitators around the country, to share ideas, discuss case studies and pray together.

Discernment

- Who in our presbytery is respected, trusted and valued by church leaders, officers and members?
- Who has the gifts to facilitate necessary conversations and help in crucial discernment?
- Who can walk with a variety of churches in particular situations and adapt her/his facilitator role accordingly?
- Who does well to solicit honest conversations, navigating between pastor and prophet when/as necessary?
- Who will serve the people of God with energy, intelligence, imagination and love?
- Who can have complicated conversations and will not shy away from conflict?
- Who can be a voice and a listening ear to people of God in particular contexts?

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Name _____

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VITAL CONGREGATIONS INITIATIVE, PCUSA
SEVEN MARKS OF CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY

1. Lifelong discipleship Formation vs: complacent "Christian" piety, simply teaching good morals, offering the latest programs.

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

Objective:

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.

2. Intentional Authentic Evangelism vs: "Jesus freaks", "Christian" hypocrisy, a committee responsibility

Biblical References:

John 4.1-41; 2 Corinthians 4.7; Galatians 2.19b-20;
Psalm 96; John 3.11-21; Romans 10.17

Objective:

To recognize that all disciples are called to evangelism, not just committees and leaders; it is an authentic part of their life...that evangelism be need-based (meets needs of un-churched/de-churched)

3. Outward Incarnational Focus vs: inward institutional survival, closed communities of assimilation/exclusion

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

Objective:

Church becomes a living being sent to follow the Spirit and join where Christ is already present; not still/static

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

Biblical References:

John 13.2-27; Ephesians 4.1-16; I Timothy 4.6-16; Matthew 9.37-38;
I Samuel 3.2; 2 Timothy 2.14-26; John 13.1-20

Objective:

The church encourages members, when appropriate, to be "ministers"
(priesthood of all believers)

5. Spirit Inspired Worship vs: self-gratifying worship, stale ritual divorced of meaning, consumer entertainment worship

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

Objective:

There should be awe, expectation and anticipation coming into the
presence of God

6. Caring Relationships vs: any other social club, facades, hypocrisy and judgments of the "church" and "religion"

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

Objective:

Cultivates an environment of true caring relationships through genuine
opportunities to share testimony

7. Ecclesiastical (Church Community) Health vs: unhealthy dysfunction, toxic environments, obsolete and irrelevant buildings

Biblical References:

2 Corinthians 5.1-11; 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

Objective:

A community life centered on prayer and discernment of God's will