



Presbytery of Philadelphia

Where We Are (Headed)

In the language of the Vital Congregations Initiative (PCUSA), our eleven participating churches are in Year One of the Two Year venture of faith, (re)vitalization, and discernment about how God is calling each community to lean into the seven marks of vitality. The primary focus and related objectives (phases) of the first year:

Building intentional relationships and honest assessment of congregations

1. (Re)build genuine relationships among pastors and churches within the larger context of the presbytery;
2. Engage individual churches in confessional assessment and faithful discernment to where Spirit is leading;
3. Explore congregational life story: who we have been, where we are now, and where is God moving us forward?
4. Explore beyond the walls of the congregation in a neighborhood exegesis (community mapping).

How Our Churches Are Leaning into Year One:

- Introduced language of the 7 Marks of Vitality to key leaders/session of the congregation; some have launched sermon series, Bible studies, and other formational conversations related to these marks;
- Developed Vital Congregations leadership team to help shepherd this venture for the next two years so venture is not solely the work of the pastor;
- Participated in presbytery-wide and/or national conversations, gatherings, and worship services related to the vital congregations initiative and content;
- Pastoral cohorts launched monthly with the two Presbytery-appointed facilitator; Carla Jones Brown & Ryan Balsan
- Convened conversations with congregational leaders, sessions, etc. about how to best lean into this two-year initiative that contextualizes the content for their unique church, location, history, present, and budding future;
- Site visits convened alongside the assigned liaison from the Presbytery's discernment and strategy team, serving as thought partners and ideators throughout the next two years;

Possibilities Ahead

Summer 2021

- Implement opportunities to introduce and cultivate language and rhythms of the seven marks of vitality;
- Facilitate intentional opportunities for prayerful discernment for next two years;
- Convene discernment conversations with a congregational team to shepherd this venture going forward;
- Breathe. Pray. Connect. Repeat.

Fall 2021

- Discern ways to lean into and *celebrate* the story of your congregation, past and present; consider visiting your original charter as a way to reclaim the spirit of innovation from that time (*all churches were once church plants*) and consider how this has evolved over the years and what can be learned for present day;
- Facilitate *confessional* opportunities to honestly assess growing edges and where your church has not faithfully lived into its call, potentially participating in realities antithetical to gospel witness;
- Coordinate opportunities for neighborhood exegesis/community mapping for leaders and larger congregation to learn about neighborhood and neighbors they are called to love and serve alongside;
- *Checking Your Marks Campaign*: engage the congregation in honest assessment using this free survey provided by Vital Congregations: <https://uscongregations.pcusa.org/> (complete by October)
- *Showing Your Marks Campaign*: Report on results of surveys to leadership/congregation (by end of 2021)

Recommended Resources

- Telling a Church's Life Story: See Pastor and Church Resources, Section 2 of Year One
- Neighborhood Analysis Exercise: See Pastor and Church Resources, Section 2 of Year One
- Sample Congregational Survey:
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/zi6634zny08ilff/Worshiper%20Survey%20USCVS%20SAMPLE.pdf?dl=0>
- Congregational Survey Information Sheet:
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/moc9hofkcbbs7p/USCVS%20Information%20sheet%20PCUSA.pdf?dl=0>
- Neighborhood Exegesis Framed by the Beatitudes:
https://presbyphl.org/ministry-innovation-seminars-2019-resources/neighborhood-exegesis_worksheet_rev/
- Design Thinking and Other Creative Ministry Tools:
<https://presbyphl.org/creative-resources-for-ministry-in-design-and-collaboration-in-midst-of-pandemic/>

Stay tuned for a Fall Presbytery-Wide Worship Gathering with our eleven participating churches and other equipping opportunities.