



THRIVING CONGREGATIONS

A VIBRANT FAITH INITIATIVE

A Vision of Thriving Congregations

Vibrant Faith’s Thriving Congregations Project seeks to equip churches to help congregations thrive by strengthening ministries that help churches deepen their relationships with God, enhance their connections with each other, and contribute to the flourishing of their communities and the world.

This work is guided by a vision of vital and vibrant congregations congregation that is grounded in the Christian tradition and contemporary research on congregational vitality. The following 23 statements comprise the vision that Vibrant Faith hopes bring to reality through its work – training, coaching, resourcing, and designing innovative projects – with the churches participating in the Thriving Congregations Initiative.

1. **We believe the local congregation is where the Church lives—where the gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where God’s people meet Jesus in word and sacrament and come in touch with the source of the Church’s life, and where believers are formed and sent to renew the earth.**
2. **We believe the Church is a hybrid Christian community that lives in both physical and virtual spaces, embodying God’s love and good news, carrying out its mission, engaging in conversation and relationship building, and cultivating and living Christian practices. (See Paul’s description of the “body of Christ” in 1 Cor 12:14-27, Romans 12:1-8, Ephesians 4:1-16.)**
3. **We believe there are five essential biblically-mandated, time-honored, Spirit-infused practices that guide a congregation in living it’s mission: *koinonia* (belonging, hospitality, community life), *mathetes* (discipling, lifelong faith formation, wisdom), *martyria* (witnessing, testimony, vocations), *diakonia* (serving, compassion, justice), and *leiturgia* (worshipping, sacraments, prayer). These five practices are rooted in the experience of the early Church as recorded in the Book of Acts, especially Acts 2:43-47, Acts 4:32-35, and Acts 5:12-16.**
4. **We believe these five faithful practices are connected and interdependent, illuminating and nourishing each other; and need to be fully operative if congregations are to flourish and fully live out their mission.**

5. We believe these five faithful practices require leaders to become bilingual: interpreting the language of biblical world where the gospel originated and the idioms of contemporary cultures.
6. We believe spiritually vital congregations are places where people come together for a common purpose of divine origin; that people experience the divine in ways that are transformative; and the common divine purpose and transformative experience compel the people to authentically engage both within the congregation and the world around them.
7. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when churches have a clear identity – who they are, where they have come from, and where they are going – and are focused on living a shared mission in their specific time, place, and situation.
8. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when churches are willing to adapt and innovate to meet new challenges in living their mission.
9. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when the church engages in lifelong faith formation and spiritual growth to help people of all ages grow in their relationship with God, learn how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, grow in faith for a lifetime, and live their Christian faith in daily life.
10. We believe vibrant lifelong faith formation can renew and revitalize the faith life of all ages, and that how and what a congregation is learning is critical to building a vital congregation.
11. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when the church intentionally engages in living Christian practices within and outside the congregation; and that the church will find new vitality—visibility, spiritual depth, renewed identity and mission, and often, numerical growth— through an intentional and reflexive engagement with Christian tradition as embodied in the practices of faith.
12. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened through the individual, familial, and communal practice of historic Christian practices: discernment, hospitality, worship, theological reflection, healing, forming diverse communities, testimony, contemplative devotional disciplines, social justice and peacemaking, and beauty (art, music, drama, poetry).
13. We believe that people come to faith and grow in faith and in the life of faith by participating in the practices of the Christian community, by learning the practices of the Christian faith, by participating actively in these practices, and by living these practices in the context of their daily lives and their community.
14. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when the church community experiences God’s presence, joy, inspiration, and awe at worship, and when worship and preaching connects Scripture to daily life and inspires Christian living.

15. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when a church cultivates a caring, hospitable, welcoming, and safe community where people of all ages, generations, and diversities can experience belonging and acceptance.
16. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when a church has a strong apostolic culture with a passion to reach uninvolved and unaffiliated people where they live, welcoming and incorporating them into the congregation's life, and helping them to come to know Jesus and hear the Good News.
17. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when the church is engaged in outreach and service to those in need, locally and globally; addresses the spiritual, human and emotional needs of those who are marginalized, hungry, homeless, hurting, or in need; works and advocates for social justice; and cares for creation.
18. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when the church communicates its identity, mission, and ministries through digital technologies and platforms (website, social media, e-mail, texts); and provides virtual spaces that are interactive and inclusive of all people—involved and uninvolved in the church community.
19. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when pastors and church leadership lead from a clear set of core values and personal principles; and possess a profound sense of being called by God and called to ministry, that is manifested as a deep trust in God and the willingness to act boldly and to take risks.
20. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when pastors and church leadership have the ability to cast a vision, and mobilize and empower people to work toward it—influencing people in ways that will help them achieve their goals.
21. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when pastors and church leadership demonstrate adaptive skill to frame or reframe a congregation's vision for ministry, and develop innovative ways of giving expression to the vision in the face of the particular challenges the congregation is facing.
22. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when pastors and church leadership create a team approach—investing time and energy in building and sustaining capable teams; and demonstrating skills to work collaboratively and co-responsibly with leaders.
23. We believe spiritual vitality is strengthened when pastors and church leadership help people in the congregation discover and utilize their gifts for ministry in the church and world; and engage the gifts of the laity in leadership within the church community.