

## Characteristics of Vital Congregations

*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*

*Ephesians 4:11-12*

### Introduction

Each congregation in our diocese has unique God-given gifts for mission and ministry that we offer together as the body of Christ. Carrying out God's mission through the church's ministries is the joint responsibility of both clergy and lay persons. The Diocesan Mission Strategy calls upon each of our parishes to consider how we are currently using or might better use our gifts to create communities of faith that are *inviting, forming, sending and serving*. We also encourage our congregations to work in partnership with one another to develop effective ministries in order to carry out their mission.

As a way of initiating a dialogue with our congregations about their participation in God's mission and ministries in the world, we offer these "Characteristics of Vital Congregations". It is our hope that from these discussions, the entire diocese--laity, clergy and bishops--will commit itself to engage in the work of mutual up-building and transformation. We are mindful that no congregation will possess all of these characteristics, and so do not intend for this document to be a yardstick by which to measure the success or failure of any congregation. What we extend is an invitation to our congregations to explore together our common calling to continue to carry out the work of Christ in the world.

***Inviting: We will bear witness to God's reconciling love across boundaries of race and class, generation and language.***

### Welcoming

- The congregation reflects the demographics (age, income, race/ethnicity) of its surrounding community.
- The congregation shows hospitality to visitors and has a process for incorporation of new members.

- The congregation has adequate signage and outdoor lighting, a regular program of advertising in local newspapers, and good relations with local reporters to insure that congregation's events/programs are reported in local newspapers.

### **Communications**

- Newsletters, website and e-mail lists are accurate, complete and timely and include contact information for church office, clergy and lay ministers, and directions to church.
- Phone messages are welcoming, timely and contain hours of worship and location of church building.
- Signage (inside and outdoors) and bulletin boards are neat, is clear, accurate, engaging and readable.

***Forming: We will work, study, pray and give for our lifelong conversion in Christ.***

### **Mission Discernment and Accountability**

- The congregation has a mission and/or vision statement which is clear, concise, broadly known and periodically reviewed by the vestry and congregation, and the ministry and mission of the congregation reflect this vision.
- The congregation has achievable and measurable goals, strategies, and objectives which members know and support.
- The vestry and clergy engage in annual mutual ministry reviews that focus on achievement of goals in the context of the congregation's participation in God's mission.

### **Education/Formation for Discipleship**

- Education and formation for discipleship opportunities are offered to children, youth, young adults, adults and elders. We understand discipleship as living our lives following the example of Jesus' life and teaching, in fulfillment of our baptismal covenant.
- There is clear designation of clergy and lay leaders responsible for planning and implementing education and formation programs.

- The curriculum or educational programs or resources offer a global perspective and celebrate ethnic diversity and gender equality.
- Lay and clergy leaders are actively encouraged to enhance their own skills for ministry at diocesan, provincial and national learning and training opportunities.

### **Fellowship**

- The congregation has opportunities outside coffee hour for fellowship (e.g. dinner groups, meals at the Parish House, discussion groups)
- The congregation uses fellowship opportunities to deepen the discipleship of its members.
- The congregation gathers to celebrate, support and care for each other in the midst of parish life.

### **Stewardship**

- Members of the congregation understand stewardship as their response to God's love and God's call to tend and care for the whole of creation, including ourselves, our possessions and "this fragile earth, our island home."
- Members of the congregation practice simplicity of life and generosity in giving as spiritual disciplines rooted in gratitude to God.
- Members of the congregation throughout the year are asked to support the ministry of the church with their time, talents and treasure, especially through the practices of proportionate giving (or tithing) and witnessing to God's work in their lives.

### **Worship**

- Worship is both **vibrant and** fresh in expression and rooted in tradition with the result that people are energized and inspired for daily life.
- The planning and leadership of worship invites participation and engages creativity of entire congregation: all ages groups, newcomers and established members.
- Worship expresses the cultural diversity of the congregation and its neighboring communities.
- The congregation considers alternative worship times, venues and liturgies.

***Sending: We will send one another in the power of the Spirit into the ministries of our daily lives.***

- We will engage in prayerful discernment and mutual support of one another's vocations.
- We will call forth and empower gifted leaders to help us meet the challenge of growth in numbers, strength and diversity.
- We will be accountable to one another in the conduct of our ministries as individuals, as congregations and a diocese.
- We will cross boundaries in a changing commonwealth and a global community in witness to God's mission of love and reconciliation.

***Serving: We will show forth the just reign of God in advocacy and action.***

**Outreach**

- At least 10% of the parish budget, excluding the assessment, is spent on outreach.
- The congregation has at least one signature effort of service, witness or advocacy that includes a broad cross-section of congregational members and has the support of the entire congregation.
- Congregation looks for opportunities to engage in collaborative ministry with other churches and faiths.

**Congregational Leadership**

- The leadership reflects the gifts and talents (including demographic considerations) of the faith community and the surrounding community.
- The leaders embody the theology of servant ministry. They delegate responsibilities and duties, encourage and empower others, and communicate openly.
- The parish budget and financial information is available and transparent to the congregation, and members have an opportunity to engage in the budget process.

## **Community Connections**

- Parish has a visible presence in the community, and clergy and lay leaders are engaged in community activities and leadership.
- People who are not members of the congregation know about the congregation and are regularly informed of the congregation's activities and offerings.
- People in the community come to the church for a variety of reasons in addition to worship, e.g. lectures, after-school programs, day care, etc.
- The congregation has engaged a community issue during the past year.

