

Areas, Marks, And Characteristics Of Congregational Strength, Vitality, And Growth

Recent research in congregational life and development has yield rich learning regarding the areas, marks, and characteristics of congregational strength, vitality, and growth. Congregations of any size have strengths and can experience vitality. Leaders need to focus on the following areas

Mission Focus and Clarity - The congregation is clear about its mission and purpose and finds ways to focus on that mission. Mission identity comes first in congregational life. [you must know “what you are about”]

Experience of Spiritual Transformation - Opportunities, structures, and practices for spiritual growth and enrichment exist. People recognize that their relationship with God is strengthened through the life and program of the congregation. The congregation brings human beings closer to God.

Awareness of Context, Environment, and Congregational Dynamics - There are specific ways of dialogue with and learning about the community in which the congregation exists. Congregational leaders employ resources that provide demographic information and are conversant with major frameworks describing congregational dynamics. [know your territory]

A Learning Community - Learning is at the heart of congregational life and experience, There are learning opportunities (appropriate to congregational size and resources) for all ages with particular learning in areas of scripture, identity, and daily life. [you can’t overrate learning that relates to the life people are living]

Evangelism Plan and Action - The congregation is intentional about the invitation, recruitment and incorporation of new members. It develops a plan for evangelism and engages in real action.

Transformational Worship and Preaching - There is joyful worship and hopeful preaching that transforms people's faith and lives.

Lay and Clergy Leadership Development - Leaders are identified, recruited, and developed for congregational mission. There is a leadership development plan for the congregation.

Dealing Directly with Conflict - When conflict occurs, the congregation finds ways of negotiation and conflict resolution. [not if it will happen, but how you will handle it when it happens]

Hopeful Climate and Flexible Attitudes - The climate of the congregation is hopeful. Peoples attitudes reflect flexibility and willingness to move in new areas and directions.

Caring Community - There is a spirit of caring in the congregation and a variety of modes of pastoral care utilizing the gifts of clergy and lay people alike.

Compassionate Service - The congregation reflects the compassion of Christ and has efforts of service for those in need.

Faithful Stewardship - People exercise faithful stewardship recognizing the gifts that God has given them and responding with generosity and commitment.
[don't give people a pledge card / envelopes the first week they show up. They have to feel they fit, first]

An Exercise for Parish Councils

1. Hand out a copy of this document to each member of Council at the start of the activity.
2. Give everyone a few minutes to read it.
3. Answer a few questions if necessary, if anyone needs clarification about a particular item.
4. Ask everyone to take a few minutes and mark a + (plus sign) beside two items that they feel the parish does well at.
5. Have some discussion about what items were chosen. It might be helpful to have a flipchart sheet prepared with the all these items listed. Check off which ones are selected as you go around the table, so you'll have a tally of what items were popular.
6. Next, take another few minutes to have everyone put N.W. (needs work) beside two items that they feel need attention in the congregation.
7. Collect the information again.
8. Have some discussion about what was chosen and how this might help choose future activities / programs for the congregation.