

Regional Meetings – Congregational Vitality

Table Talk for Shared Learnings

Table Question 1

Remember that we were in Arcadia for this presbytery meeting, and we heard several of our own presbytery members reflect on ways to make worship more meaningful. From the Newly Revised Directory for Worship we read, *God's gifts of Word and Sacrament establish and equip the Church as the body of Christ in the world. The mission of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church flows from Baptism, is nourished at Lord's Supper, and serves to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all. In the same way, the Church's ministry emerges from the font, arises from the table, and takes its shape from the Word of the Lord. Therefore, the worship of the triune God is the center of our common life and our primary way of witness to the faith, hope, and love we have in Jesus Christ.*

To be a Christian is to worship Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. To be a member of Christ's body, the Church, is to share through Word and Sacrament in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. W-1.0107: Worship and the Church

1. What does your congregation find especially energizing, inspiring, or nourishing in your worship services? How does the service stay with you during the week and motivate your Christian living?

Table Question 2

Remember at the regional meetings last fall, Robert Hay from the Presbyterian Foundation made a presentation on stewardship. Robert quoted Matthew 6:21 "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

He reminded us that stewardship is gratitude, spiritual growth, about making choices, caring for all that God has given us, includes time, talent, and treasure, and is a part of disciple-making. He talked about the cultures we are working within, including materialistic wants and concerns, as well as the culture of our specific community and church. And he addressed the assets and liabilities in each of our congregations as they relate to how our members see our church, its operations, and how it uses the gifts they share.

2. What steps has your church taken to increase or deepen faithful generosity of time, talent and treasurer?

Table Question 3

In November of 2017, we gathered as the Presbytery at Kirkwood Presbyterian Church and were blessed by Roger Nishioka's leadership, as together we explored spiritual growth and discipleship. In Roger's creative way of teaching, we entered the boat with the disciples who were at sea in the storm, and Jesus calmed the storm. Discipleship begins with helping those on the journey to embrace hope and calm our fears. Roger twisted the common phrase of, "I'll believe it when I see it," to understanding that discipleship is a life-long journey, where we learn to "see" as we learn to "believe." As our faith grows, we see in whole new ways. And at

the core of spiritual growth and discipleship, Roger expressed, is RELATIONSHIP – our relationship with God and one another. We are “in the boat” together, learning, deepening our commitment to Christ, and learning what it means to serve God’s people. Spiritual formation begins as we intentionally foster a sense of belonging, purpose, and relationship with those on the life-long journey of discipleship.

3. What is your church doing to encourage spiritual growth and discipleship (deepening commitment to Christ) for all ages?

Table Question 4

This past February, at our presbytery meeting at First Pres-Sarasota, the Rev. Debbie Rundlett led us through an insightful presentation about ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH. In her discussion of church life cycles (from birth to decline to rebirth), she shared the five components of congregational health: VISION (a clear sense and articulation of where GOD is leading us in the future), VALUES (the core qualities we demonstrate in living into that vision), MISSION (the ways we fulfill our vision in concrete, outward-focused service), MANAGEMENT/STRUCTURES (the hidden "bones" that support the mission), and EMOTIONAL HEALTH (the growing ability to relate to others with truth and grace, unity and peace as we fulfill our vision/mission). Congregations need to ask themselves: Which component(s) is/are dominant in our church life currently? Do that/those dominant component(s) promote our VISION and MISSION, or do they hold us back? How may we shift or re-balance our emphases to nurture greater spiritual, congregational vitality??

4. In what aspects of organizational health (vision, values, mission, structure, emotional health) is your church strong? And how can you address your weaknesses?

Table Question 5

Remember that we were at St Paul, North Port for this meeting, and we had Rev. Henry Brinton, author of the Welcoming Congregation: Roots and Fruits of Christian Hospitality, here to speak about how congregations can make it easier for first-time guests to feel more comfortable. He discussed how congregations that consider themselves friendly often have barriers to relationship-building – like cliques in coffee time and after worship. He asked us to consider what it feels like to be a guest in our own church. Are all doors open? Can people find the bathrooms, the sanctuary, the nursery? Are they greeting by people, other than the “official” greeters at the door? He also discussed the challenges of finding meaningful ways of connecting with people in your community – not if they want to find you, but that you might need to build authentic relationships in your neighborhoods and work place, before people might trust you enough to want to give your church a try. How’s your website – does it encourage people to come? Are you using social media to connect – like Facebook to tell your church’s story in ways that the community can easily see? What is the perception of your church in the local community?

5. How does your congregation welcome and build relationships with newcomers? And how does your congregation reach out to the un-churched and de-churched in the community?

We know you are involved in compassionate mission in your communities, but we are hoping to keep to the subject of reaching out with the good news and finding ways to connect with people, welcoming new people into the life of your congregation through the front door of worship or the side door of other activities.

From the Congregational Vitality Team – Elizabeth Deibert, moderator