

Leading with Vitality Council Reflection: Congregational Vitality

How to use the Leading with Vitality Council Reflection: Share this document with the Council members prior to the Council meeting and add 15 minutes to the beginning of the agenda for shared reflection. Prior to the meeting, invite one member of the Council to lead the discussion. Here's a simple outline for how the shared reflection might go.

First, the reflection leader reads the scripture passage aloud. Second, the reflection leader highlights one idea from the reflection that the reflection leader found meaningful or challenging. Third, the reflection leader uses one or more of the reflection questions below to encourage discussion. When the discussion draws to a close, the reflection leader closes the time with the prayer using the prayer below or another prayer they create.

Scripture Reading

Psalm 145:10-21 (ELW)

All your works shall praise you, O LORD, and your faithful ones shall bless you. They shall tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your power, that all people may know of your power and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; your dominion endures throughout all ages. You, LORD, are faithful in all your words, and loving in all your works. The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up those who are bowed down. The eyes of all wait upon you, O LORD, and you give them their food in due season. You open wide your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. You are righteous in all your ways and loving in all your works. You are near to all who call upon you, to all who call upon you faithfully. You fulfill the desire of those who fear you; you hear their cry and save them. You watch over all those who love you, but all the wicked you shall destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD; let all flesh bless God's holy name forever and ever.

Congregational Vitality

Over the last 70 years, the ways in which the health and vitality of a congregation are measured have changed dramatically.

At one point, the health and vitality of a congregation was measured by the number of baptized members. Since nearly everyone was a member of a group, the congregations with the most baptized members were considered healthy and vital.

Somewhere along the line, churches realized that not everyone who was a member participated in the life of the church, so average worship attendance became the main measure for health and vitality. Leaders assumed that large numbers of people on a Sunday morning meant greater health and vitality for the congregation.

Church leaders eventually learned that measuring average worship attendance or donation trends or volunteer hours didn't necessarily teach us much about the faithfulness and spiritual maturity of the people in the congregation.

While in most places, we haven't stopped measuring worship attendance patterns, donation trends, or volunteer hours, there is a realization that building a healthy congregation will require a new and renewed effort to develop communities of Jesus that nurture life-changing relationships

- with God,
- with one another,
- and with the community around them.

Obviously, these three characteristics aren't as easy to measure as worship attendance, donation trends, and volunteer hours, but by focusing on building relationships in these three areas, the hope is to nurture a place and a people where God's life-changing love is visibly active.

Reflection by Pastor John Wertz, Jr.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What words or phrases would you use to describe your congregation to someone who has never been there before?
2. How do those words or phrases speak to the health and vitality of the congregation?

Prayer:

God of health and hope, you are faithful and loving in all your works and your kingdom endures forever. Guide us as we seek to grow deeper in our relationships with you, with one another, and with the community around us that God's life-changing love might be visible. Amen.