

Size Matters and Small is Good!

Ponderings for Presbyterian from your Committee on Ministry

In 2023:

32/40 (80%) of our congregation are under 100 members.

24/40 (60%) of our congregation are under 50 members.

For some individuals, these statistics may be cause for alarm. For others, they may be cause for grief.

The purpose of this resource is to recognize our varied emotions (grief, fear or even anger and anxiety) so that these emotions may be dealt with courageously, openly, and honestly. When we address our emotions with clarity, can we honor them *and then move beyond them* in faithful discernment of God's call to our congregations.

The power and goodness of God is deeper and wider than any human emotion we may experience. Our emotions are finite and passing. God's presence and power is eternal and unchanging. Where will we place our focus?

We can lament the passing of an institutional church or we can give thanks for the remarkable possibilities that are before us as the church is "renewed and always renewing".

Our attention to renewal and reformation, we believe, is cause for open-eyed wonder, deep-rooted trust, and hopeful curiosity.

May we, as COM, provide a safe – and compelling – framework for dialogue so that our congregations may be encouraged and empowered and *our world transformed*. Jesus' Great Commission to "go and make disciples of all nations" (*Matthew 28: 19) is both a flashlight and a road map, providing vision and direction for our mission and ministry.

Providing a Framework

The small church is an incredible gift, able to foster intimate relationships with God and neighbor, in authentic and compelling ways.

Too often we have merged our understanding of faithfulness, success, and sustainability in our conversations around congregational revitalization. Such merging is neither helpful nor accurate.

- Our faithfulness as witnesses to Jesus Christ is not dependent upon our size.
- "Faithfulness" is not the same as "success". "Success", loosely defined often distracts us from our Christian calling when we fall under the spell that "bigger is better"
- Our aim as congregations is not "success" but "fruitfulness". Are we, in our congregations, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit? (Too often our questions revolve around "How can we grow?" rather than "How can we be fruitful witnesses to Jesus Christ in our communities, revealing the love, joy, peace, patience.... (*Galatians 5:22)
- Fruitfulness does not guarantee financial sustainability. In other words, sustainability cannot be equated with fruitfulness. (The ability to call a full-time pastor reveals sustainability. The inability to call a full-time pastor does not preclude faithfulness.)

[Recognizing the Crossroads at which We Stand](#)

Because we believe that our congregations have been called by God to offer a unique Christian witness to their communities in this particular time and place, we have both responsibilities and opportunities.

As presbytery leaders, we are responsible for acting as prophets, resource brokers, and space holders.

As prophets, we encourage congregations to move beyond “business as usual” or “status quo” and embrace new ways of being church, which may involve any of the following: changed worship times, intentional focus on those outside the church doors rather than those who are already present, renewed awareness of community needs, emphasis on hospitality and generosity.

As resource brokers, we recognize the gifts that God has given us and commit to using them with wisdom, generosity, and an unswerving commitment to “adding Light upon Light”.

As space holders, we provide an unshakeable and judgment-free network of support and prayer for those congregations who desire to dive into holy experiments as well as those who are content to “go gently into that good night”.

In these roles, we offer resources such as [The Vital Congregations Tool Kit](#) which can be found on our presbytery’s website under *Denominational Toolkits* under the PASTORS tab. This toolkit lifts up seven marks of Vital Congregations and offers much food for prayer and action if you are wondering how to discern the next steps in your congregational life.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/vital-congregations-immediate-toolkit/>

The Seven Marks of Vital Congregations are as follows:

1. Lifelong Discipleship Formation
2. Intentional Authentic Evangelism
3. Outward Incarnational Focus
4. Empower Servant Leadership
5. Spirit-Inspired Worship
6. Caring Relationships
7. Ecclesial Health

An in-depth explanation of these 7 markers along with Bible Study and discussion questions can be found by following this link.